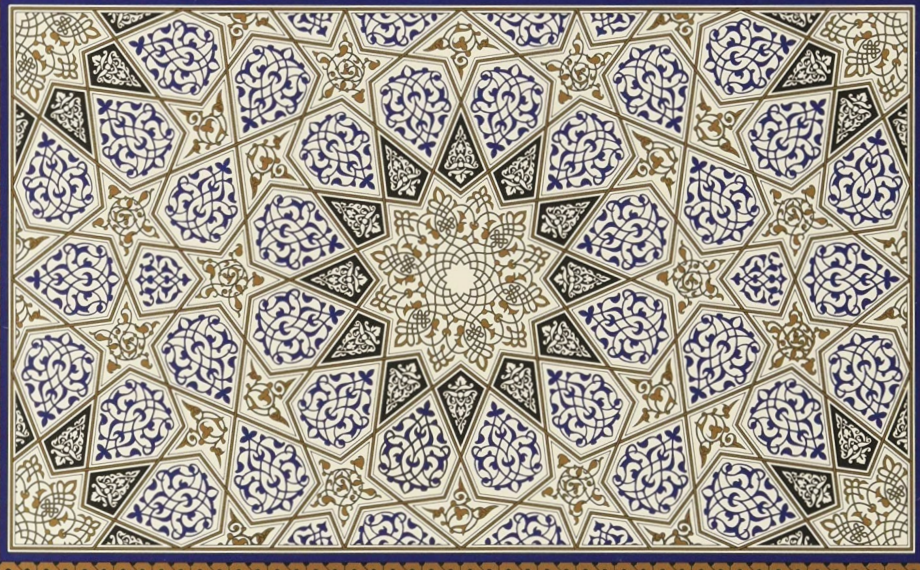
# THE STUDY QURAN

A NEW TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY




SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

CANER K. DAGLI MARIA MASSI DAKAKE JOSEPH E. B. LUMBARD
GENERAL EDITORS

MOHAMMED RUSTOM
ASSISTANT EDITOR

archegos

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# ABBREVIATIONS*

| | |
|---|---|
| AD | Common Era year, *Anno Domini* |
| AH | Islamic year, *Anno Hegirae* |
| c | commentary of *The Study Quran* |
| ca. | circa |
| cf. | compare |
| chap. | chapter |
| d. | death date |
| ed. | editor |
| passim | throughout |
| pl. | plural |
| sing. | singular |
| v. | verse |
| vv. | verses |

*Note: A list of abbreviations for the commentators cited in this work is to be found on pages lvii–lix.

# ARABIC TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION

Arabic sounds resemble corresponding English sounds unless otherwise noted.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ء | ʾ | *hamzah* or glottal stop, marking a shift in vowel, as in the middle of the colloquial *uh-oh* |
| ب | *b* | |
| ت | *t* | |
| ث | *th* | like the *th* in *thin* |
| ج | *j* | |
| ح | *ḥ* | a heavy *h,* with the throat constricted |
| خ | *kh* | like the *ch* in the Scottish *loch* or German *Macht* |
| د | *d* | |
| ذ | *dh* | like the *th* in *that* |
| ر | *r* | like a Spanish rolled *r* |
| ز | *z* | |
| س | *s* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ش | *sh* | |
| ص | *ṣ* | a heavy *s,* with the back of the tongue raised |
| ض | *ḍ* | a heavy *d,* with the back of the tongue raised |
| ط | *ṭ* | a heavy *t,* with the back of the tongue raised |
| ظ | *ẓ* | more a heavy *dh* than *z,* with the back of the tongue raised |
| ع | *ʿ* | voiced sound formed by constriction of air in the throat, commonly elided into the following vowel |
| غ | *gh* | like the French *r,* at the back of the tongue |
| ف | *f* | |
| ق | *q* | a heavy *k,* back in the throat |
| ك | *k* | |
| ل | *l* | |
| م | *m* | |
| ن | *n* | |
| ه | *h* | |
| ة | *-h, -t* | *tāʾ marbūṭah,* appears at the end of some words and is written and pronounced *h* when not in construct with the following word, e.g., *zakāh,* and as *t* when it is, e.g., *zakāt al-fiṭr* |

The letters ا, ي, and و can function either as consonants or long vowels:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ا | *ʾ* | when used as an initial *hamzah* |
| ا | *ā* | when used as a long vowel |
| ي | *y* | when used as a consonant |
| ي | *ī* | when used as a long vowel |
| و | *w* | when used as a consonant |
| و | *ū* | when used as a long vowel |

## Short Vowels

*a* like the vowel in *son* when vowelizing heavier consonants (*kh, r, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ, gh, q*), and like the vowel in *set* for lighter consonants (*ʾ, b, t, th, j, ḥ, d, dh, z, s, sh, ʿ, f, k, l, m, n, h, w, y*)

*i* like the vowel in *sit*

*u* like the vowel in *soot*

## Long Vowels

*ā* like the vowel in *sob* for heavier consonants (*kh, r, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ, gh, q*) and like the vowel in *sat* for lighter consonants (*ʾ, b, t, th, j, ḥ, d, dh, z, s, sh, ʿ, f, k, l, m, n, h, w, y*), but pronounced slightly longer

*ī* like the vowel in *seen*

*ū* like the vowel in *soon*

## The *Hamzah*

In transliteration, the *hamzah* (ء, see above) is not represented at the start of a word, but is elided into the following vowel, e.g., *iḥsān,* not *ʾiḥsān.* An initial "discontinuous" *hamzah* or *hamzat qaṭʿ* (أ or إ) is always pronounced fully regardless of what precedes it, but a "connecting" *hamzah* or *hamzat waṣl,* usually represented by an *alif* (ا) at the start of a word but sometimes as an *alif* with a *waṣlah* sign (آ), is elided into the vowel that precedes it. The most common connecting *hamzah* is the first letter of the definite article *al-,* and the elision of the *a* is shown by the replacement of the connecting *hamzah* with an apostrophe. For example, when *dhū* is attached to *al-qurbā,* it is written as *dhu'l-qurbā,* not *dhū al-qurbā.* This elision and connection also has the effect of shortening any long vowel that immediately precedes the *hamzah;* thus one writes *dhu'l-qurbā,* not *dhū'l-qurbā,* and one pronounces it *dhul-qur-ba,* not *dhool-qur-ba.*

Another important instance of the connecting *hamzah* is the first letter of the Divine Name *Allāh.* For example, one writes *lā ilāha illa'Llāh,* not *lā ilāha illā Allāh,* with the capital "L" taking the place of the first letter of the Divine Name. However, in some cases, as in names such as ʿAbd Allāh and phrases such as *subḥān Allāh,* the Divine Name is written without the elision.

## Sun and Moon Letters

When spoken or recited, the *l* in the definite article *al-* takes on the sound that follows it in the case of certain consonants, traditionally called "sun letters": *t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ, l, n*. For example, *al-nūr* is pronounced *an-noor,* not *al-noor*. For the other consonants, traditionally called "moon letters" (*ʾ, b, j, ḥ, kh, ʿ, gh, f, q, k, m, h, w, y*), the *l* in the definite article *al-* remains pronounced; for example, *al-kitāb* is pronounced *al-ki-taab*. This pronunciation difference is not represented in the transliteration or the original Arabic script.

# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*Bi'smi'Llāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*

The Quran is for Muslims the verbatim Word of God, revealed during the twenty-three-year period of the prophetic mission of the Prophet Muhammad through the agency of the Archangel Gabriel (Jibrīl or Jabra'īl). The meaning, the language, and every word and letter in the Quran, its sound when recited, and its text written upon various physical surfaces are all considered sacred. The Quran was an oral revelation in Arabic first heard by the Prophet and later written down in the Arabic alphabet in a book consisting of 114 *sūrah*s (chapters) and over 6,200 verses (*āyāt*), arranged according to an order that was also revealed. Considered *the Book* (*al-Kitāb*) by all Muslims, it has many names, such as *al-Furqān* ("the Criterion") and *al-Hudā* ("the Guide"), but its most commonly used name is *al-Qur'ān,* which means "the Recitation." In the same way that Christians refer to their sacred scripture as the Holy Bible, Muslims usually refer to theirs as *al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* ("the Glorious Quran"; 50:1; 85:21) or *al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* ("the Noble Quran"; 56:77). Known in English as the Quran (also Koran), it is the central theophany of Islam and the basic source and root of all that is authentically Islamic, from metaphysics, angelology, and cosmology to law and ethics, from the various arts and sciences to social structures, economics, and even political thought.

The Quran is the constant companion of Muslims in the journey of life. Its verses are the first sounds recited into the ear of the newborn child. It is recited during the

marriage ceremony, and its verses are usually the last words that a Muslim hears upon the approach of death. In traditional Islamic society, the sound of the recitation of the Quran was ubiquitous, and it determined the space in which men and women lived their daily lives; this is still true to a large extent in many places even today. As for the Quran as a book, it is found in nearly every Muslim home and is carried or worn in various forms and sizes by men and women for protection as they go about their daily activities. In many parts of the Islamic world it is held up for one to pass under when beginning a journey, and there are still today traditional Islamic cities whose gates contain the Quran, under which everyone entering or exiting the city passes. The Quran is an ever present source of blessing or grace (*barakah*) deeply experienced by Muslims as permeating all of life.

Inasmuch as the Quran is the central, sacred, revealed reality for Muslims, *The Study Quran* addresses it as such and does not limit it to a work of merely historical, social, or linguistic interest divorced from its sacred and revealed character. To this end, the focus of *The Study Quran* is on the Quran's reception and interpretation within the Muslim intellectual and spiritual tradition, although this does not mean that Muslims are the only intended audience, since the work is meant to be of use to various scholars, teachers, students, and general readers. It is with this *Book,* whose recitation brings Muslims from Sumatra to Senegal to tears, and not simply with a text important for the study of Semitic philology or the social conditions of first/seventh-century Arabia, that this study deals.

This *Book,* according to Islam, was revealed by Gabriel to the Prophet during the twenty-three years of his prophetic mission on different occasions during night and day, in both Makkah and Madinah, in such a manner that, although the words of the Quran came out of his mouth, its Author is God. The Prophet was the instrument through which the reality of the Quran, which existed with God on a level of reality beyond time, in what Muslims call the *Preserved Tablet* (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ;* 85:22), was revealed to men and women in this world. That is why revelation itself is often described as "descent" (*tanzīl*), which means that the Quran was a reality before its revelation or descent to the Prophet and therefore not his own words, as claimed by those who have denied the revealed nature of the Quran over the ages.

And yet something of the reality of the Prophet's soul is present in the Quran, and that is why, when asked about his character, his wife ʿĀʾishah replied, "His character was the Quran." Shortly before his departure from the earthly plane, the Prophet said in a famous tradition, or *ḥadīth,* "I leave among you something which is very important and should be followed; you will not go astray if you take hold of it after I am gone, one part of it being more important than the other: God's Book, which is a rope stretched from Heaven to earth, and my close relatives, who belong to my household. These two will not separate from one another till they come down to the pool [in the Hereafter]; so consider how you act regarding them after my departure."

## The Message of the Quran

What are the grand themes with which this sacred scripture deals? The Quran contains above all a doctrine about the nature of reality on all its levels, from Absolute Reality Itself, that is, the One God, to the reality of creation both macrocosmic and microcosmic. It provides the full revelation of Allāh, or God, as the supreme Reality Whose Oneness is at the center of the Islamic message. God is One, at once impersonal and personal, transcendent and immanent, majestic and beautiful, beyond all that we can conceive and yet nearer to us than our jugular vein, as the Quran itself asserts so poetically (50:16).

The Quran also reveals a galaxy of Divine Names and Qualities, which by virtue of being revealed are sacred and provide the means of not only knowing God, but also of returning to Him. They thus play a central role not only in Islamic metaphysics and theology, but also in the practical and ritual aspects of Islamic religious and spiritual life. As the Quran itself states, *Unto God belong the Most Beautiful Names* (7:180; cf. 17:110; 20:8; 59:24); it then commands the believers to call upon Him through these Names (7:180). Islamic doctrine based upon the Quran distinguishes between the Divine Essence, which is beyond all names, qualities, attributes, and descriptions; His Names, Qualities, and Attributes; and His Acts, which include the creation and sustenance of all the worlds and all creatures within them and the constant operations of His Will in His creation, especially the human order, in which His Love and Mercy as well as Justice and Judgment are ever present.

The testimony of faith in Islam, that is, the first *shahādah, lā ilāha illa'Llāh* ("There is no god but God"), a phrase that was revealed in the Quran itself (37:35; 47:19), is not only the supreme statement concerning Divine Unity and Transcendence, but also the means of reintegrating all positive qualities back into the One. The *shahādah* also means that there is ultimately no beauty but the Divine Beauty, no goodness but the Divine Goodness, no power but the Divine Power, and so on. Metaphysically it means that there is ultimately no reality but the Divine Reality.

The Quran also deals fully with the nature of human beings. It teaches us who we are, why we were created and placed here on earth, what our goal in life is, what our responsibilities and rights are according to the Divine Law, what we need to know about the immortality of the human soul and its posthumous states, and the consequences of how we live in this world for our state of being after death. Although it addresses both men and women in most of its verses, it also deals explicitly in some places with the meaning of the creation of human beings as male and female or in pairs (*zawj*), the sacredness of sexuality, the importance of the family, and the responsibilities of each gender toward the other in marriage. Also treated is the correct relationship between the individual, society, and the rest of God's creation.

No sacred scripture of which we have knowledge speaks more about the cosmos and the world of nature than does the Quran, where one finds extensive teachings about cosmogenesis, cosmic history, eschatological events marking the end of the cosmic order as it now exists, and the phenomena of nature as revealing Divine Wisdom. In fact, the Quran refers to these phenomena as *āyāt* ("signs," or symbols), employing the same word that is used for the verses of the Sacred Book. The Quran also speaks of life and its origin and of the relation of all beings, animate as well as inanimate, from animals and plants, to mountains, seas, and stars, to God. In a sense the Quran was revealed to a whole cosmic sector as well as to humanity, and many Muslim sages over the ages have referred to the cosmos itself as a revelation, in fact the primordial revelation. That is why they have so often referred to the cosmos as "the cosmic Quran" (*al-qurʾān al-takwīnī*), the meaning of whose "verses" can only be understood by means of "the written Quran" (*al-qurʾān al-tadwīnī*), that is, the book of the Quran, which is Islam's sacred scripture.

Of course, as many traditions of the Prophet (*aḥādīth,* sing. *ḥadīth*) have indicated, the Quran possesses an outward meaning (*ẓāhir*) and an inward meaning (*bāṭin*), in fact several inner meanings, the most inward of which is said, according to tradition, to be known only to God. Grasping the multiple levels of meaning of the Quranic text is essential for learning to "read" the cosmic book and for the full understanding of all of its teachings, including the metaphysics, cosmology, science of the human state, eschatology, and spiritual life of which the Quran speaks.

To return to the central subjects and themes mentioned in the Quran, it is important to emphasize that the Quran is the fundamental source of Islamic Law (*al-Sharīʿah*) and that, although historically the Prophet has been called, like Moses, a legislator, the ultimate legislator is considered in Islam to be God Himself, who is often called *al-Shāriʿ*, "the Legislator." A few hundred Quranic verses deal in a concrete manner with law, while others deal with principles upon which revealed laws are based. In fact, for Muslims the Islamic *Sharīʿah*, or Divine Law, is the concrete embodiment of the Divine Will as elaborated in the Quran for the followers of Islam; and from the Islamic point of view the scriptures of all divinely revealed religions, each of which possesses its own *sharīʿah* (see 5:48), have the same function in those religions. For Muslims, who accept the Quran as the Word of God, therefore, following the Divine Law is basic and foundational for the practice of their religion.

The Quran is also a book of ethics. It provides the criteria for discernment between not only truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, but also good and evil. Although it emphasizes that human beings should use their God-given gift of intelligence (*al-ʿaql*) to discern what is true, beautiful, and good, it also insists that it is necessary to have faith in the revelation that provides the final judgment as to what is true and good and in fact allows human intelligence to be fully operative rather than becoming atrophied by human passions. Moreover, the ethical teachings of the Quran concern both the cultivation of virtues that pertain specifically to individuals, and of social

ethical qualities, such as justice and generosity, that are basic for any society that could be called properly Islamic. Furthermore, from a Quranic perspective the rights of the individual and those of society are not in tension or opposition with each other, as they are sometimes perceived to be in modern Western societies.

As the fundamental source of the Islamic religion, the Quran contains teachings, including economic and political ones, that pertain to both individual believers and Islamic society as a whole. It also contains instructions for various individual religious practices and especially rites, whose details were provided by the *sunnah* ("wont") and *aḥādīth* (sayings, actions, and tacit approvals) of the Prophet. But the Quran also establishes communal religious practices and institutions that are basic to Islamic society as a whole.

Many are aware that the Quran is concerned with religious life as well as matters related to both individual salvation and the social order, but fewer realize that the Quran is also a guide for the inner spiritual life. Paying attention to the inner meaning of the Quran results in the realization that not only does it contain teachings about creating a just social order and leading a virtuous life that results in a return to God after death in a felicitous state; it also provides the means of returning to God here and now while still in this world. The Quran is therefore also a sapiential and spiritual guide for the attainment of the truth, a guide for the attainment of beatitude even in this world.

Another theme that runs throughout many of the *sūrah*s of the Quran is sacred history and narratives that pertain to prophets of old and their peoples. This sacred history confines itself almost completely to the Abrahamic tradition and the Israelite prophets, although some Arab prophets not found in the Bible are also mentioned. The import of this sacred history is meant, however, to be universal, since the Islamic revelation is addressed to all of humanity rather than to a particular people, as is the case with Judaism. For Muslims, the sacred history narrated in the Quran was revealed by God to the Prophet; it is not simply a compilation of reports heard from Jewish or Christian sources. There is in fact a subtle difference between Biblical and Quranic accounts of sacred history. While the Biblical accounts have a more historical nature, Quranic sacred history is more ahistorical and is revealed primarily to teach ethical and spiritual lessons. Quranic sacred history is seen more as events within the human soul rather than as just historical events in the world. All human beings possess within their being, for example, the qualities of Moses and those of Pharaoh, the beauty of Joseph and the conniving of his brothers; this sacred history is a means of teaching Muslims about their own souls as well as about good and evil and the ultimate triumph of good over evil, if one takes recourse in God, seeks His Help, and has confidence in Him throughout the trials of life, as did prophets of old.

Traditional views of religious history are usually concerned with eschatology, and Islam's are no exception in this regard. The Quran looks upon history as a finite reality that begins with God's creation of the present humanity and ends with His bringing

human and cosmic history to its eschatological end. The Quranic conception of the march of time is in a sense cyclical: each cycle is marked by the descent of a message from God through a prophet, the gradual forgetting of that message by the particular people to whom it was sent, and usually the occurrence of a Divinely willed calamity, followed by the coming of a new prophet. But these cycles of prophecy are not endless. Rather, the Quran announces that the Prophet of Islam is *the Seal of prophets* (33:40) in the chain of prophecy and that after him will come not another prophet, but eschatological events that mark the end of this world and present-day humanity. The Quran also hints at the possibility after the destruction of this world of a new creation by God, an issue, which is, however, beyond the concerns of present humanity, to which the Quran is addressed (see 14:19, 48; 35:15).

Descriptions of eschatological events related to both individuals and human society as well as to the cosmos are central to the Quranic message. Numerous passages throughout the Sacred Text speak about death, Resurrection, Divine Judgment, Paradise, Hell, and by implication Purgatory as well as human beings' final end. The Quran expresses these eschatological realities in a most powerful, concrete, and at the same time highly symbolic language. The Hereafter is presented in such a manner that it remains a constant reality in the consciousness of Muslims throughout their lives here in this lower world (*al-dunyā*). The delights of Paradise as well as the terrible punishments of Hell are described in such a way as to leave an indelible effect upon the mind and soul of believers, profoundly affecting their actions and thoughts in this world. Moreover, Quranic language is at once concrete and sensuous, to be understood by the simplest believers, and symbolic and metaphysical, to satisfy the needs of sages and saints. The paradisal delights described in the Quran are not sublimations of earthly delights, as some have claimed; but earthly delights, both those that are permissible to Muslims in this life and those, such as wine, that are not, are presented as earthly reflections of paradisal realities.

The Quran is also a book of knowledge, and for Muslims it contains the roots of all authentic knowledge as traditionally understood, not as seen by some modern scientistic commentators who seek to identify various verses of the Noble Book with this or that recent scientific theory or discovery. In traditional Islamic civilization, all the Islamic sciences, from jurisprudence to astronomy, from theology to medicine, were considered to have their root in the Quran; in fact, all Islamic thought and art can be viewed as commentaries on it. The fact that the descent of the Quran led not only to the foundation of one of the world's great civilizations, but also to the creation of one of the major scientific, philosophical, and artistic traditions in global history was not accidental. Without the advent of the Quran, there would have been no Islamic sciences as we know them, sciences that were brought later to the West and we therefore would not have words such as "algebra," "algorithm," and many other scientific terms of Arabic origin in English. Nor would there be the *Summa*s of St. Thomas Aquinas, at least in their existing form, since these *Summa*s contain so many ideas drawn from Islamic sources.

Not only was the Quranic message foundational for the development of the Islamic sciences, but it was and remains the essential reality in the creation of the Islamic arts, whose principles derive from the *ḥaqīqah,* or inner truth, of the Quran. The Islamic holy book has provided over the ages the principles as well as the inspiration for the sacred Islamic arts from calligraphy to architecture. Its teachings have also channeled Muslim artistic creativity in certain directions and provided the social context for the creation of works of Islamic art. The fact that Islamic civilization has produced so much outstanding poetry, but practically no sculpture of consequence, and the fact that calligraphy is so central to Muslim life, are directly related to the Quranic message, in both its form and content. Also stemming from the Quran are the determination of what constitutes sacred art, what domains are of significance in the traditional arts, and what the hierarchy of the arts must be in Islamic civilization.

The message of the Quran concerning religion is universal. Even when it speaks of *islām,* it refers not only to the religion revealed through the Prophet of Islam, but to submission to God in general. Therefore, in the Quran Abraham and Jesus are also called *muslim* in the sense of "submitter." The Quranic message is based on the universality of revelation, and the Sacred Text states explicitly that there are *no* people to whom God has not sent a messenger, as in 16:36: *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community, "Worship God, and shun false deities!"*

This universalist perspective has had the greatest effect upon the relation between Muslims and followers of other religions, both practically and intellectually, throughout Islamic history. It is because of the message of the Quran that before modern times Muslims were the first people to develop what has come to be known as the science of religions, or *Religionswissenschaft,* and to write in a scholarly fashion about other religions, including non-Abrahamic ones, as we see in the *Indica* of Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 442/1048), written a thousand years ago. It is for the same reason that over seven centuries ago such Muslim seers and sages as Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273) wrote about the inner unity of religions, and somewhat later Sufis in India carried out religious dialogue based on mutual understanding with Hindu authorities and translated sacred texts of Hinduism from Sanskrit to Persian, and some in China created a body of works that can be called "Islamic Neo-Confucian."

The message of the Quran is at once sapiential and practical, legal and moral, concerned with everyday problems as well as the spiritual and intellectual life. The Sacred Text deals with every aspect of human concern, from the deepest intellectual questions and the most lofty spiritual issues to the mundane matters of ordinary life. It is at once therapeutic and didactic. It is a message of glad tidings (*bishārah*) and also of warning (*nadhr*). That is why it calls the prophets, including the Prophet of Islam, both harbingers or bearers of glad tidings (*bashīr*) and warners unto humanity (*nadhīr*). It is a guide for every conceivable aspect of human life, action, and thought and yet also a comfort for the soul of believers. As the central theophany of Islam, a

theophany whose every aspect is considered sacred, the Quran is the source of all that is properly speaking Islamic. As the living Word of God, it is the ubiquitous companion of Muslims from the cradle to the grave and provides the spiritual and religious space within which they are born, breathe, live, and die.

## The Language, Structure, and Recitation of the Quran

The Quran was revealed in the Arabic language and refers to itself as an *Arabic Quran* (12:2; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3). The Quranic revelation in a sense "shattered" the Arabic language and transformed it into the sacred language that it is for Muslims. It created a work whose language is inimitable and considered miraculous, a book that is believed to be untranslatable. The sacred presence and theophanic reality of the Quran as well as the levels of meaning contained in its verses cannot be rendered into another language, even Persian and other Islamic languages that were themselves deeply influenced by Quranic Arabic. In this context it is essential to remember that in various religions where the revelation is considered by believers to be the directly revealed Word of God, the language in which it was revealed is a sacred language, as is the case of Hebrew in Judaism or Sanskrit in Hinduism; in religions where the founder himself is considered to be the Word or the Message, the language of the message does not play the same role.

For example, in Christianity Christ himself is considered to be the Word of God or the Logos, and in a sense the New Testament is the word of the Word of God. For two millennia traditional and Orthodox Christians have conducted the Mass in Greek, Latin, Slavonic, and, in the smaller Eastern churches, Aramaic, Coptic, and even Arabic itself. But for Christianity these languages are liturgical and not sacred. The celebration of the Eucharist is valid according to the traditional churches no matter which accepted liturgical language is used. But in Islam the daily prayers, the central rite that could be said to correspond to the celebration of the Eucharist in Christianity, are not valid if not performed in Arabic, whether the worshipper is Arab or non-Arab. One might say that, just as in the Eucharist worshippers become "attached" to the Word, that is, Christ, by eating the bread and drinking the wine, which are transformed through the rite into his flesh and blood, in Islamic rites worshippers "devour" the Word of God through the enunciation of verses in Quranic Arabic. For Muslims, Quranic Arabic is therefore, in the deepest sense, like bread and wine in the Eucharist or the body of Christ in traditional Christianity. Both are embodiments of the Word of God and therefore sacred. For Christians or those from a Christian background who wish to understand the full religious and spiritual significance of Quranic Arabic, it is not enough to compare it to Aramaic, which was the language of Christ, or the Latin of the Vulgate. It must be compared to the role of the body of Christ in the Christian tradition.

Arabic was the last Semitic language to enter into the general arena of history compared to other languages in this family such as Hebrew, Coptic, the Babylonian languages, Aramaic, and Syriac. For many philologists, Arabic is considered the closest to what German philologists call *Ursemitisch,* the original and primordial Semitic language. The fact that this language, Arabic, was chosen by God for the Quranic revelation is very much related to the nature of Islam as a reassertion of the primordial religion, where the last and the first revelations are united, where the omega reconfirms the alpha, where the alpha of the prophetic chain manifests itself in the omega point in the vast history of prophecy.

The revelation of the Quran in Arabic lifted this language out of time and created a work that stands above and beyond historical change. Arabic as a human language used for daily discourse of course continued and in fact spread far beyond Arabia, thanks to the Quran itself. This daily language has undergone some changes over the centuries, but even those transformations have been influenced by the immutable presence of the Quran. The language of the Quran has been "dead" to the changes of this world, but has remained most alive as the embodiment of the ever living Word of God. For every generation of Muslims, Arab and non-Arab alike, the Quran as revealed in Arabic has been and remains today an ever living presence beyond the changes of the human condition, immutable and filled with the abiding life of the Spirit and constantly affecting and guiding human life. It speaks directly to Muslims today as it did to the Companions who first heard it from the mouth of the Prophet. It remains the supreme guide of Muslims, no matter in which point of space or moment of time they find themselves in this world.

The Arabic of the Quran is in places didactic and matter-of-fact and in other places allegorical, anagogical, symbolic, and highly poetic. It is true that in some places, such as *Sūrah* 26, "The Poets," the Quran castigates poets and that some of the early detractors of the Prophet accused him of being just a poet in a pejorative sense. The reason for such criticisms is that in pre-Islamic Arabia poets were often paid panegyrists and soothsayers with little concern for the truth or for spiritual realities. During the rise of Islam, poets were also employed by the Prophet's opponents to compose verses denigrating him and the religion of Islam. According to many Muslim authorities, the prominence of the linguistic arts in pre-Islamic Arabia was among the reasons that the language of the Quran was chosen by God to be miraculous and that the Quran itself challenges anyone to produce its like (see 2:23; 10:38; 11:13). The eloquence (*balāghah*) of the Quran is in fact considered to be miraculous (*muʿjizah*) and beyond the possibility of imitation by any human being. But if we use the term "poetry" in its universal sense, then the Quran, especially its last part, but also many other sections, is a work of the highest poetic quality and power that has never been matched in any work of even the greatest Muslim poets. It has also influenced profoundly the poetry created in various Islamic languages and is, moreover, the direct cause of the privileged position of poetry in Islamic civilization and in everyday Muslim life in many Islamic communities.

The Quran speaks of itself as a *clear Book* (e.g., 12:1; 26:2; 27:1), but this characteristic does not only indicate literal and outward clarity, for there are verses whose clarity becomes known only when levels of meaning beyond the outward are considered. Since God is both *the Outward* (*al-Ẓāhir*) and *the Inward* (*al-Bāṭin*), as the Quran states (57:3), so does His Word have outward and inward levels of meaning. And since God is the Creator of both the apparent or visible (*al-shahādah*) and the absent or Unseen (*al-ghayb*), in His Word the Unseen often manifests itself mysteriously in the visible and apparent words and phrases that constitute its recited and heard sounds. Because of the multiple levels of meaning, the language of the Noble book is sometimes literal, sometimes allegorical, sometimes anagogical, and yet at other times simultaneously anagogical and symbolic. The Quran is like an ocean into which Muslims plunge, but whose depth can never be fully reached. If we remember the original meaning of the Latin verb *comprehendere,* which is "to encompass," then it can be said that it is the Quran that encompasses or "comprehends" the reader, while the reader can never fully encompass the Quran. The Quran is like a net cast into the world of multiplicity in order to bring us back to the world of Unity, which is infinite. As finite beings, we cannot encompass the Infinite, but we can and should be drawn to and ultimately immersed in It.

One cannot discuss the language of the Quran without saying something about the remarkable mathematical structure that undergirds the Quranic text based on the mathematical symbolism of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. The traditional esoteric Islamic science known as *al-jafr,* whose origin is attributed traditionally to ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, who became the first Shiite Imam and the fourth Sunni Caliph), deals with the numerical values of the letters of the Arabic alphabet and their symbolic significance. It is similar to the science of *gematria,* which, based on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, is significant in Jewish Kabbalah and in those schools of Christian mysticism usually known as Christian Kabbalah. In *The Study Quran* we have not considered commentaries and separate Quranic studies based on *al-jafr,* but it is important to mention here their existence.

The science of *al-jafr* brings out remarkable aspects of the inner teachings of the Quran, including the meaning of the mysterious separated letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaᶜah*) that appear at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s, and elucidates many basic doctrines. For example, according to Islamic metaphysics, all beings reflect certain Divine Names and Qualities, but man (*homo* or *insān*), meaning both male and female, is the only being in this world who in his or her full reality as the Universal or Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is the mirror that reflects all of the Divine Names. Now, the Name Allāh contains all the Divine Names, and that is why one of the names of the Prophet, as the Universal Man par excellence, was ᶜAbd Allāh and not, for example, ᶜAbd al-Karīm, *ᶜabd* here meaning the recipient and reflection of any of His Names. According to the science of *al-jafr,* the numerical value of Allāh is 66, and so is the numerical value of *Ādam wa Ḥawwāᵓ,* that is, Adam and Eve, who in their

androgynous union constitute the state of *insān*. Thus, the science of *al-jafr* helps one to grasp immediately and intuit this profound doctrine concerning the human state in relation to God.

The orthography of the alphabet in which Quranic Arabic is written also possesses a symbolic significance that is brought out in certain traditional studies of the inner meaning of the Quran. For example, in Arabic, as in English, the first two letters of the alphabet are *a* and *b,* or *alif* and *bāʾ* in Arabic. In Arabic orthography *alif* is written as a straight vertical line (ا) and *bāʾ* as a horizontal line with a dot under it (ب). Now, *alif* is the first letter of the Divine Name *Allāh,* and *bāʾ* the first letter of the first word of the Quran, that is, *Bi'smi'Llāh* ("In the Name of God"), the full text of which is known as the *basmalah*. According to the science of the symbolism of Arabic orthography, the *alif* symbolizes the descent of the Divine Word from the world of Divine Transcendence, and *bāʾ* its reception in the human world and in human language, which is thereby sanctified. The point under the *bāʾ* symbolizes the meeting place of the two letters, of the vertical and the horizontal, and therefore constitutes the essence of all the letters of Arabic, hence of the Quran. In traditional Arabic calligraphy the lines are constituted by the harmonious repetition of the single point or dot.

There is an enigmatic saying attributed to ʿAlī whose meaning can only be understood by having recourse to this science of the symbolic form of the letters of the Arabic alphabet when written in Arabic script. ʿAlī is reported to have said: "The whole of the Quran is contained in *al-Fātiḥah* ("The Opening"). The whole of *al-Fātiḥah* is contained in *Bi'smi'Llāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* ("In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful") [this formula in Arabic begins with the letter *bāʾ*]. The whole of the *Bi'smi'Llāh* is contained in the letter *bāʾ*. The whole of the letter *bāʾ* is contained in the dot (*nuqṭah*) underneath the *bāʾ*. And I am that dot." ʿAlī was alluding here to his inner state of "supreme identity" or "supreme union," to the full realization of unity (*al-tawḥīd*). This account illustrates the significance of the science of symbolism of the forms of the alphabet used in Quranic Arabic, a science that needs to be mentioned, even if it has not been considered in the commentary because of the audience for which this study is meant.

Turning to the formal structure of the Quran, it bears repetition that it is constituted of 114 *sūrah*s, which some translate as "chapters," starting with *al-Fātiḥah,* "The Opening," which consists of seven verses (*āyāt*), followed by *al-Baqarah* ("The Cow"), which is the longest *sūrah* of the Quran. Then the *sūrah*s as a general rule gradually become shorter as one proceeds through the text, although there are exceptions. The last part of the Quran contains the shortest *sūrah*s, but the last *sūrah* is not the shortest in number of verses or words. It is important to note, for those not familiar with the Quran, that the *sūrah*s are not ordered chronologically according to when they were revealed. Often parts of a *sūrah* were revealed, followed by parts or the whole of another *sūrah,* and then certain verses belonging to the earlier revealed *sūrah* descended. The order of the *sūrah*s itself is considered a matter of revelation, as

the Prophet himself specified the location of verses in *sūrah*s and the order of *sūrah*s in relation to one another as they were revealed to him.

Each *sūrah* has a name, and in some cases more than one. Muslims believe that some of these names were also revealed to the Prophet along with the command concerning which verses belonged to which *sūrah*s, no matter when they were revealed, and the order of the verses within the *sūrah*s. During the twenty-three-year prophetic career of the Prophet, when the whole of the Quran was revealed, many memorized it, and it was also written down on parchment, shoulder bones of camels, sheepskin, and other surfaces. According to tradition, Zayd ibn Thābit compiled it, and this text was given to the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, after which it was left with the second Caliph, ᶜUmar, and upon his death it was placed in the custody of his daughter Ḥafṣah, one of the widows of the Prophet. After consultation with those who knew the Sacred Text by heart, a second collection was ordered by ᶜUthmān, the third Caliph, again under the direction of Zayd ibn Thābit. This text, which is known as the ᶜUthmānic codex, came to constitute what ᶜUthmān had scribes copy; copies were then sent to the four major cities of the Islamic world of that time, Makkah, Kufa, Basra, and Damascus, and ᶜUthmān kept one copy for himself. These five texts then became the basis of the written Quran that we have today.

There was some discussion among the Companions concerning the numbering of some of the verses, and traditionally several schools of *iḥṣāʾ*, the Quranic science dealing with the enumeration of the verses, have been recognized. With regard to the recitation of the Quran, there are also variants in the declensions and different traditionally transmitted styles of psalmody. Some morphological variations are traditionally seen as something that testifies to the very polyvalence of the Quranic text. The structure of the Quran is for all practical purposes one and immutable. It has undergone no changes over the ages, and Sunnis, Shiites, and Kharijites all accept the same text as the final revelation of God to humanity.

Shiites and some Sunnis believe that ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib also wrote down the Quran and therefore that there was a second original written copy of it; we know that ᶜUthmān also had Zayd ibn Thābit consult with ᶜAlī in assembling the definitive text of the Sacred Book. It is also reported in Sunni sources that other Companions, chief among them ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Masᶜūd, Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, and Salīm, had also collected copies of the Quran before the ᶜUthmānic codex was established. Polemical accounts in some apocryphal sources state that the Quran written down by ᶜAlī possessed certain *sūrah*s that were deleted in the ᶜUthmānic text, but this view is not accepted by mainstream Shiism or Sunnism, and the Quran used by Shiites today contains the same *sūrah*s and *āyāt* as the Quran found in the Sunni world except for a slight difference in the enumeration of a few verses. There is but a single Quran, with fewer variations of any kind than are found in any other sacred scripture.

In addition to being divided into *sūrah*s and *āyāt*, the Quran was also divided later into thirty parts (*ajzāʾ*, sing. *juzʾ*). Each *juzʾ* is also divided in two, creating sixty

*aḥzāb* (sing. *ḥizb*), which are themselves divided into halves and quarters to facilitate reading and memorization. In some parts of the Islamic world, one *ḥizb* will be read, either communally or privately, in the early morning prayer and another in the sunset prayer. The text is also divided into sevenths, known as *manāzil* (sing. *manzil*), which allow devotees to complete the recitation of the entire text in one week. Sometimes the thirty *ajzāʾ* or the seven *manāzil* are bound separately, so that one may carry only those volumes one wishes to read while on a journey. During the month of Ramadan, when the Quran was first revealed, it is customary for many devout Muslims to read the Quran more than at other times of the year; some read one *juzʾ* each day and thus complete the reading of the whole of the Quran during the thirty days of the holy month. When Ramadan is twenty-nine days, they usually recite the last two *ajzāʾ* on the last day or night of that month.

Recitation of the Quran is an essential part of Muslim piety. Many read the Sacred Book from beginning to end not only during Ramadan, but also during other periods of the year. However, most Muslims turn over and over again to certain of the *sūrahs* with which they have particular affinity. In the same way that many pious Jews and Christians continue to read the Psalms, such *sūrahs* as *Yā Sīn* ("Yā Sīn," 36), *al-Raḥmān* ("The Compassionate," 55), *al-Wāqiʿah* ("The Event," 56), *al-Mulk* ("Sovereignty," 67), and many of the shorter *sūrahs* at the end of the Quran are recited often and in many cases on a regular basis by numerous Muslims. Besides the recitation of the whole of the Quran, which terminates with a joyous celebration known as "sealing the Quran" (*khatm al-Qurʾān*), ordinary recitation usually involves reading and meditating on a small section at a time (a practice recommended for newcomers to the Noble Book as well).

Of course all practicing Muslims, Arab and non-Arab alike, recite certain parts of the Quran in their daily canonical prayers, a ritual recitation that must be in Arabic. But other than during prayers, the Quran is often also read by many Muslims in the language of non-Arab believers, whether they are from larger groups who speak Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, Bengali, Swahili, English, French, or Spanish or from smaller groups who speak Yoruba, Fulani, Somali, Albanian, Bosnian, Gujarati, Tamil, or Malayalam. There is practically no language spoken by Muslims in which a translation of the Quran does not exist, and in many cases there are numerous translations. There are, however, a few exceptional cases that should be mentioned. Although the Berbers were among the first non-Arab people to embrace Islam fourteen centuries ago, because of special social and cultural circumstances, a Berber translation of the Quran has been made available only recently for the first time. And in China for twelve centuries Chinese Muslims did not want or allow a Chinese translation to be made of the Quran; such a translation appeared for the first time only in the nineteenth century. In any case when speaking of the recitation and reading of the Quran, it is important to recall the vast number of languages in which it is read and studied, but also the fact that no translation can take the

place of the Arabic Quran in the ritual and liturgical life of all Muslims, whatever their mother tongue might be.

The recitation of the Quran in Arabic is based on certain rules, and there is both an art and a science connected with it. It can be read by individual Muslims silently or recited aloud, but not excessively loud. Moreover, the recitation should not be too fast or too slow. There is an art to the recitation of the Quran that must be mastered, and Quranic psalmody, when performed according to traditional norms, is considered the highest sonoral art in Islam, at the peak of the hierarchy of Islamic arts. It is, along with Quranic calligraphy and sacred architecture, the latter of which creates spaces in which the sound of the Quran reverberates, Islamic sacred art par excellence.

Outside of the daily prayers, the experience of the recitation of the Quran for most Muslims is passive rather than active; that is, most listen to the recitation rather than recite themselves. That is why those who are professional reciters of the Quran, or *qurrāʾ* (sing. *qārīʾ*), play such an important role in Islamic society. There is no part of the Islamic world in which *qurrāʾ* are not present, and most Muslims experience the Quran through their voices. This art is so important that, in order to encourage it, international contests are held annually in many parts of the Islamic world, contests in which both male and female *qurrāʾ* participate. And although the Arab country of Egypt has been blessed over the ages with so many remarkable *qurrāʾ*, some of whom are known throughout the Islamic world, sometimes non-Arab *qurrāʾ* win those international contests. Some non-Arab countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia produce a greater number of female *qurrāʾ* than Arab nations.

Many who do not even know the full meaning of the Arabic are trained in the art of recitation. Most Muslims thus experience the Quran as the oral revelation that it in fact is and as it was experienced by many of the Companions who first heard it from the mouth of the Prophet. Many *qurrāʾ* know the Quran by heart and recite from memory. Those who have memorized the entire Sacred Text hold the title of *ḥāfiẓ*, or memorizer of the Quran. The poet whom many, including myself, consider to be the greatest poet of the Persian language, that is, Shams al-Dīn Ḥāfiẓ (d. 793/1391), bore this name because he was a *ḥāfiẓ* of the Quran. A *ḥāfiẓ* can usually be found in a village in the forest of Sumatra or in the desert of the Sahara, not only in Makkah and other major Islamic cities such as Cairo, Isfahan, and Istanbul. Wherever *ḥuffāẓ* (pl. of *ḥāfiẓ*) are, they recite the Quran in beautiful psalmody and thus transmit the grace, or *barakah*, of the sound of the Sacred Text to those around them. The ubiquitous presence of *ḥuffāẓ* is considered one of the miracles of the Quran, because in a mysterious way it facilitates memorization even by those whose mother tongue is not Arabic. In this vein, the Quran says of itself: *Indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember* (54:17, 22, 32, 40). There is probably no sacred scripture in any religion that is memorized by so many people as is the Quran.

## The Role and Function of the Quran in Muslim Life

Much of what has already been said deals with the reality of the Quran in the life of Muslims, but it is necessary to portray the full range of its importance and its effect on the lives of believers. As the central theophany of the Islamic religion, everything related to the Quran, the verbatim revelation of the Divine Word, is sacred—from the ideas, injunctions, laws, and other aspects of its message; to the physical presence of the Sacred Text, which Muslims read and carry with them or keep in a place of honor in their homes; to the sound of its recitation, which accompanies them throughout their lives. The two testimonies (*shahādatān*), one bearing witness to the Oneness of God and the other to the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam, both verses from the Quran, are the first words uttered into the ears of a newborn child and in most cases the last words uttered by a Muslim in the last moments of consciousness before death. Between these two moments marking the alpha and omega of earthly human existence, the life of the Muslim is replete with the presence of the Quran. The sound of its recitation is nearly always present in Islamic cities, towns, and even villages, and in an inner manner it determines the qualitative experience of the space in which traditional Muslims live.

Every positive act, from starting a meal, to leaving the house for work, to welcoming a guest to one's house, to starting a letter, a book, or any other task legitimate in the Eyes of God, begins with the formula of consecration (the *basmalah*), that is, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," with which the Quran itself begins; and these events usually end with another Quranic phrase, *al-ḥamdu li'Llāh,* that is, "Praise be to God." What has already taken place is mentioned using another Quranic phrase, *mā shā'a'Llāh,* "As God has willed," to reassure the believers that nothing has taken place without His Will; and events that one hopes to occur in the future are referred to with *in shā'a'Llāh,* another verse drawn from the Quran meaning, "If God wills," thus confirming that the future also belongs to God and all events in it are determined by the Divine Will. The Quran is recited on occasions of both joy and sorrow, at weddings and at funerals, in individual circumstances as well as in communal events. It is recited often by individuals during private moments when they are alone with their Creator as well as at the opening of conferences or parliaments, the investiture of political authorities, or even sports events.

It can be said that the substance of the soul of a Muslim, whether male or female, is like a mosaic made up of the imprint of verses of the Quran upon that human substance. Not only are the laws by which Muslims live, the ethical norms that are to be followed in life, the root of all authentic knowledge, and the principle and spirit of all forms of art that can be called truly Islamic based on the Quran, but the Quran is present in the soul and mind of believers during every moment of life, whether one is engaged in lovemaking, fighting a battle in the middle of war, or busy in economic

activity. No matter how much one writes about the role of the Quran in Muslim life, it is impossible to exhaust the subject, for the Quran affects every aspect of a Muslim's existence, from the body, to the psyche and the inner faculties, to the mind, the intellect, and spirit.

The Quran, complemented by the Prophetic wont (*Sunnah*), even affects in a subtle manner all aspects of comportment (*adab*), which includes not only thoughts, speech, and actions, but also bodily postures and physical faculties—how traditional Muslims carry themselves while walking or talking, entering the mosque, sitting in an assembly, or greeting others. The Quran also transforms the inner faculties, especially the memory, and affects even the dreams of believers.

As far as memory is concerned, there is no practicing Muslim who does not know some of the Quran by heart. The Quran itself strengthens the memory, and traditional Islamic pedagogy places a great deal of emphasis upon memorization. The traditional education system begins with Quranic schools for the very young, where their memory becomes imprinted with Quranic verses that will serve them the whole of their lives. Later, whether students continue on to higher education or enter the workforce, their memory remains a treasury of Quranic verses from which they continue to draw guidance, protection, and sustenance. Needless to say, this is also true for all those Muslims who have gone on to produce intellectual or artistic works on the highest level. When Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), the greatest Muslim philosopher-scientist, was writing his *al-Qānūn fi'l-ṭibb* (*The Canon of Medicine*), which is the single most influential medical work in the history of medicine, his memory was as much filled with Quranic verses, which affected his whole attitude toward knowledge and science, as when he was writing his own Quranic commentaries.

The most outstanding Muslim spiritual poets, such as Ḥallāj, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Ibn ʿArabī, ʿAṭṭār, Rūmī, and Ḥāfiẓ, did not compose their great poetic masterpieces by forcing themselves to focus on the verses of the Quran. The Quran was already present in their memory and had transformed their souls, so that during the artistic process of creating their beautiful poetry the Quran was already functioning as the central reality of their creative power. Those familiar with the history of German literature know that Goethe and Rückert were influenced by the Quran. They can surmise how much greater this influence must have been in the literatures of the Islamic peoples themselves.

The same can be said for the Islamic arts and sciences in general. In the field of the arts that affect directly everyday life, the Quran both provided the spirit, the principles, and in many ways the forms of these arts and determined the direction that these arts would take. It is the Quran that made calligraphy, architecture, and Quranic psalmody the central sacred arts of Islam, and it is also the teachings of the Quran that prevented the development in Islam of iconic sacred art, which is so central to Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It is the Quran that led to the development of the aniconic sacred art of Islam.

In everyday Muslim life, one practical aspect of the Quran is its role in the protection of Muslims. It is said in the Quran that God is its protector, and in turn His Word provides protection for believers. Its message, if heeded, protects Muslim men and women from sin and error, while its physical presence is considered protection from various external dangers. That is why many Muslims carry the Quran or some of its verses on their bodies, why they pass under it when embarking upon a journey, and why in days of old even the armor worn by soldiers in battle was inscribed with Quranic verses. That is also why the Quran is not only recited, but also physically placed near the head of a dying person as protection for the journey to the afterlife.

Muslims also turn to the Quran for its therapeutic effect upon illnesses of both body and soul. There is a whole traditional science dealing with the therapeutic power of certain Quranic verses, and countless anecdotal accounts in all Islamic societies maintain the miraculous efficacy of these verses. This aspect of the Quran is also the source of such practices in folk medicine as immersing particular verses of the Quran in water and then drinking it.

Finally, the Quran also plays a role in helping decide future actions. The traditional Quranic art called *al-istikhārah,* which some have translated as "bibliomancy," though this only captures one dimension of the practice, involves performing voluntary supererogatory prayers and then consulting the Quran for guidance or asking God for other forms of guidance, usually by means of a dream. On important occasions where human intelligence and revealed religious injunctions are not sufficient criteria for deciding to perform or not perform a particular action of consequence, believers often have recourse to *istikhārah,* sometimes carried out by those who possess a gift for this art and other times by themselves. Many people, when they want to marry, first make an *istikhārah* before making their final decision. The same holds true for those who are not certain of, for example, migrating to another place, choosing a particular physician in case of serious illness, changing jobs, or deciding on a course of study and lifelong profession. Some believers overdo this practice by using an *istikhārah* to determine whether they should eat a particular dish for lunch, but this is a distortion of the function of *istikhārah* and is discouraged by most religious authorities. According to a famous dictum, there is no need for *istikhārah* when there is clear *istishārah,* that is, indication based on religious injunctions and/or God-given intelligence.

The Quran, then, is the foundation of Muslim life and of Islamic civilization in all its aspects. It is a sacred reality that accompanies Muslims throughout their lives. It is at once the means of discernment between truth and error, the criterion of judgment of their actions, and their protector and source of grace and comfort. It is both their judge and their friend; it inculcates in the soul both the love and fear of God. For believers the Quran is not an inanimate book, but the living Word of God. Its verses, words, and even letters are living beings that speak to believers and also mysteriously "hear" them. The Sacred Text is the Muslim's constant companion from the

beginning to the end of life and even beyond earthly life on the journey to that Reality from which the Quran descended.

## *The Study Quran*

The history of the composition of *The Study Quran* began some nine years ago when the publisher HarperSanFrancisco (now HarperOne) approached me and asked me to become the chief editor for a volume that would be called *The Study Quran* and complement *The HarperCollins Study Bible,* which this firm had already published. I was humbled by the enormity of the task and first balked at accepting such a monumental undertaking. But after much soul searching and prayer, I came to the conclusion that this was a responsibility that God was putting on my shoulders, one I could not refuse, especially when I discovered that the project might not be realized if I did not agree.

I therefore accepted with humility on the condition that this would be a *Muslim* effort and that, although the book would be contemporary in language and based on the highest level of scholarship, it would *not* be determined or guided by assertions presented in studies by non-Muslim Western scholars and orientalists who have studied the Quran profusely as a historical, linguistic, or sociological document, or even a text of religious significance, but do not accept it as the Word of God and an authentic revelation. Rather, it would be grounded in the classic Islamic tradition in order to provide readers access to the many ways in which the Quran has been understood and explained by Muslims for over fourteen centuries. I also set the condition that I would have complete freedom in choosing the editors and other collaborators. All my conditions were accepted, and so the project began.

For the reasons mentioned above, I chose only Muslim scholars to collaborate with me in this task. At the same time, I did not want the work to be confined or limited confessionally, ethnically, or geographically. It was to be universal and at the same time traditional, that is, expressing traditional Islamic views and therefore excluding modernistic or fundamentalist interpretations that have appeared in parts of the Islamic world during the past two centuries. I set out to produce a text that reflects how Muslims have understood the Quran during their long history and how those Muslims who remain traditional, which means most of them, do so today.

To this end I chose three editors, all American, all with doctorates in Islamic studies from leading American universities, and all with direct experience of the Islamic world, familiarity with the traditional Islamic sciences, and mastery of classical Arabic. To preserve diversity, I chose two men and one woman, two of whom, Joseph Lumbard and Maria Dakake, are American Muslims of Christian background, and one of whom, Caner Dagli, was born, in America, into a Muslim family of Circassian origin. Later in the project, after the translation had been made and the essays edited, I added an assistant editor, Mohammed Rustom, who was born as a Muslim into a

Canadian family of South Asian origin and who has a doctorate in Islamic studies from a major Canadian university.

Since this collaborative effort also required the preservation of the unity of the work, I chose these four from among those who had studied with me in one way or another in years past. There exists, therefore, a unity of intellectual vision, spiritual perspective, and scholarly attitude between us that has made it possible to produce a unified work. This unity in the translation and commentary has come about not because of my coercion, but because of the presence of a common vision among us. We have consulted each other at every turn, and in cases of scholarly disagreement between the editors, I have been the final judge and arbiter. But in fact it is remarkable how harmonious our collaboration has been, which might be surprising to some in this age of individualism.

Even so, it is appropriate to say a few words about the division of responsibility. Each editor had primary responsibility for the translation, research, and composition of commentary for different sections of the Quran. When the first draft of a section of translation or commentary was completed, each editor would consult with the others, who would make comments and suggestions. Then it would come to me, and I would make my final additions and edits. The primary contribution for the translation is as follows, by *sūrah:* Caner Dagli: 2–3, 8–9, 22–28; Maria Dakake: 4–7, 10–12, 14–21; Joseph Lumbard: 1, 13, 29–114. The primary authorship of the commentary, which also includes a great degree of collaboration among all of the editors, is as follows, by *sūrah:* Caner Dagli: 2–3, 8–9, 21–28; Maria Dakake: 4–7, 16–19; Joseph Lumbard: 1, 29–114; Mohammed Rustom: 10–15, 20.

As for the essays, I drew up the list of the subjects to be treated in consultation with the editors, and then I chose the authors for the essays, again in consultation with them. In making these choices, I wanted to be as global and universal as possible within the framework of traditional Islamic scholarship. I therefore chose scholars from different schools of Islamic thought and different schools of Islamic Law, Muslims who hailed from diverse parts of the Islamic world as well as those living in the West. Some of these writers are world-famous Muslim authorities; others, young gifted scholars just beginning to make their mark. They include all the way from the grand Shaykh of the most important seat of Sunni learning, al-Azhar University, and one of the leading Shiite ayatollahs of Iran to young professors at Western universities. I took the final responsibility for editing the essays, going over translations when it was called for, and translating into English one of the essays that was written originally in Persian.

## *Translation*

The translation of the Quran into a Western language has a nearly thousand-year history going back to its translation into Latin ordered by Peter the Venerable in the

eleventh century. The earliest translation in English appeared in the seventeenth century. Since then numerous translations have appeared in English as well as in other European languages, and in fact the number of translations in English has increased almost exponentially in recent decades. Most of the earlier translations were made by non-Muslims, many in order to refute Islam. In more recent decades, however, many translations have been made by Muslims themselves. Among these many translations, some are more accurate than others, some more eloquent and poetic, but there has never been nor can there ever be a single "official" or perfect translation of the Quran, even one approved by Muslim authorities, such as the religious authorities (*ʿulamāʾ*) of al-Azhar University.

In our translation we have often consulted some of the best-known English translations such as those of Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, A. J. Arberry, ʿAlī Qūlī Qarāʾī, and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, but our rendition is based on the Arabic text itself and not on any previous translation. Furthermore, we have sought to be extremely vigilant in translating the Quranic Arabic itself and not later interpretations of the Arabic. And the fact that ours was a collaborative effort by several scholars has helped us to eschew the personal predilections that can often influence the translation process.

Our aim in the translation has been, first of all, to be as accurate and consistent as we could within the possibilities of the English language and with full consideration of the different "fields of meaning" that many words, both Arabic and English, possess, fields that often overlap only partially, and are not completely equivalent. In fact, a huge effort and many countless hours have been expended to ensure that the translation is internally consistent in matters of both style and content. This effort included the creation of hundreds of secondary indexing documents and an enormous spreadsheet to track the use of individual words, phrases, and roots appearing in the translation. Considering the nature of the sacred language of the Quran, we have sought to make use of the full possibilities of the English language without the pretext of wanting to be so up-to-date in word usage that our rendition would soon become out-of-date.

We have also sought to be as eloquent as possible, in an effort to reflect something of the inimitable eloquence of Quranic Arabic, which Muslims consider a miracle that no human being can ever duplicate. We have sought to produce the best translation possible, and only God knows to what extent we have succeeded.

Since we had the opportunity to explain in the commentary unfamiliar idioms or turns of phrase in the Quranic text as well as to expand upon the broader ranges of meaning that are alluded to in its verses, we could provide more literal translations in many instances. Moreover, literal translation of certain Quranic verses or phrases is often necessary to make sense of the traditional commentaries on these verses, many of which offer substantial spiritual interpretations based upon philological or grammatical analyses of the verses. A literal style of translation is also especially important

when trying to represent adequately the complex intertextuality that is a hallmark of the Quranic style.

## *Commentary*

Numerous commentaries have been written on the Quran over the ages not only in Arabic, but also in many other languages. Among the traditional commentaries some have been primarily grammatical and linguistic, and some historical, mostly in the sense of sacred history. Others have been legal, theological, philosophical, cosmological, scientific, metaphysical, esoteric, or mystical, and some several of these at once. In a sense the whole of the Islamic intellectual tradition is a commentary upon the Quran. Moreover, the *sīrah* literature (works dealing with the life of the Prophet), his *Sunnah* (or wont), and the *Ḥadīth* (traditions) are the first commentaries upon the Quran. Even the great works of Islamic architecture from the Dome of the Rock to the Taj Mahal may be said to be commentaries upon the Quran in stone. And lest one forget, the greatest mystical poem produced in Islamic civilization, the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, has been called "the Quran in the Pahlavi [i.e., Persian] language."

We have benefitted in the composition of our commentary from all these sources as well as of course from works known specifically as *tafsīr,* or commentary, upon many of which we have based our commentary without attempting to be exhaustive. We selected the most authoritative and widely read and accepted traditional commentaries as well as specialized commentaries that offered important information not always available in those commentaries that are more widely read; all of these are listed in the "Commentator Key." When necessary we also drew from the *sīrah* literature and from Sunni and Shiite *Ḥadīth* literature.

As far as our own commentary is concerned, it is not meant to be nor can it be exhaustive in a work confined to a single volume. After all, there are well-known commentaries in Arabic, Persian, and other Islamic languages that extend to numerous hefty tomes, some running to twenty or thirty volumes, and even they are not exhaustive. Our commentary is meant to take readers beyond the literal meaning of the text when necessary, to clarify difficult passages, to reveal the inner meanings of verses when called for, and to provide a reasonable account of the diversity of views and interpretations in matters of law, theology, spirituality, and sacred history put forth by various traditional Islamic authorities. Our hope is that this exposition will enable readers to interact on various levels with the Quran and remove the erroneous view, held in some non-Muslim quarters, that because Muslims consider the Quran to be the Word of God, they do not think about it or interact intellectually with it, whereas the Quran itself invites its readers to meditate upon and think about its teachings.

Our commentary, while based on the traditional commentaries, is not simply a collage of selections drawn from these books, but a new work. Our text has required making choices about both inclusion and exclusion of earlier texts in addition to

providing in some places our own commentary, which is not found, at least in the same way, in the earlier sources.

Ours is therefore a new commentary that is nonetheless based completely on traditional Islamic thought and the earlier commentary traditions. We, and not earlier commentators, are therefore fully responsible for its content, which nevertheless contains numerous citations from the earlier traditional commentaries that we have consulted. These citations are not exhaustive; rather, they provide references for those who wish to pursue these citations further. In all instances we have sought to make the source and origin of our commentary transparent and to make clear when it is we who are expressing our voice. Traditional commentators have often given multiple conflicting opinions regarding particular verses. It should therefore be noted that when a particular traditional commentary conveys an interpretation, this does not mean that the commentator subscribed to that particular interpretation, only that this interpretation was mentioned in the commentary on that verse. For guidance regarding our citation methodology, see "Understanding the Citations in the Commentary."

The sheer size of the commentary literature has forced us to exclude some materials that might be of interest to certain readers concerned with some particular issue. Moreover, we have tended to omit from the commentary purely conjectural and fanciful interpretations or legendary and folkloric accounts, particularly if they are not widely attested in the traditional sources or offer little in the way of a meaningful interpretation. In cases where such material has been included, we have tried to be clear about our assessment of its questionable origin or authority and the extent to which it is consistent or inconsistent with other passages of the Quran or with ideas found in the *Ḥadīth*.

Although we have relied heavily upon traditional sources, which are the mainstay of our translation and commentary, we have also consulted reliable sources based on both previous and recent academic scholarship in Quranic studies. We have, moreover, carried out this task with constant awareness of the biases and fashions present in both historical and contemporary writings about the Quran. We have been fully aware that many of these resources suffer, from the Islamic point of view, from the fact that they do not accept the Quran as revelation, they have a truncated view of the Islamic intellectual tradition, or they reject the Islamic worldview as a whole. In some extreme cases, such sources are based on either thinly veiled or sometimes outright hostility toward Islam and are often grounded in very questionable theories and published for the sake of worldly ends, such as gaining fame or furthering academic careers.

Coming back to traditional commentaries, it is important to mention for those not familiar with them that technically *tafsīr* refers to a commentary on a part or the whole text of the Quran organized according to the order of the Quranic verses and written to clarify and bring out its range of meaning and implications. As already mentioned, in a sense all works on law, theology, metaphysics, cosmology, the sciences, spirituality,

esoterism, mysticism, and other forms of knowledge developed in the Islamic intellectual tradition are also commentaries upon the Quran, but are not, strictly speaking, included according to the Islamic division of the sciences in the *tafsīr* category. In our commentary we have made use primarily of *tafsīr*s, but also when necessary works from the second category.

The traditional commentators were usually men of great erudition, with profound knowledge not only of the Quran, but also of the different Islamic religious and intellectual disciplines. Their works therefore usually provide a vivid picture of the lively Islamic intellectual scene of their time. They often cite opposing opinions and views concerning various theological, ethical, or legal issues, but treat their opponents with confidence in their own position and usually with the courtesy and respect that is characteristic of disputations in the Islamic intellectual tradition as a whole. One needs only to thumb through the *tafsīr* of al-Rāzī or of al-Qurṭubī to see the lively intellectual ambience in which they flourished and the courteous tone of their disputations. Even a cursory study of these *tafsīr*s should dispel the notion that Muslims had or have a rigid and indiscriminate understanding of the text of the Quran. To the extent possible, we have sought to preserve these characteristics in our commentary.

## *Essays*

Since this work is meant to be an aid in the study of the Quran, we have included a large number of essays at the suggestion of the publisher to deal separately with various major themes contained in the Quran. Because of the space allotted to us, again we could not be exhaustive. During Islamic history thousands upon thousands of works have been written on aspects of the Quran by Muslim scholars, from the language, grammar, and recitation of the Sacred Text to its metaphysical meaning, from the history of the compilation of the Quranic text to the sacred history contained in it, from Quranic legal injunctions to the most esoteric meaning of some of its verses. Traditional Quranic studies include numerous Quranic sciences, not all of which we have been able to include as separate subjects in the essays.

We therefore had to select what we consider the most central issues for the contemporary audience. As already mentioned, the choice of the topics for the essays has been primarily mine, just as the choice of content has been up to the individual essay authors, but I always made the topic choices in consultation with the other editors; and of course other determining factors included the availability of scholars and their willingness to collaborate with us on this project. In any case, utmost care has been taken in the choice of both the topics of the essays and their authors. The essays are in a sense a separate book within this book and can be read either as a supplement to our translation and commentary or as an independent work on Quranic studies written by some of the most competent Muslim scholars of today.

## *Audience*

The commentary we have provided has been composed with the aim of creating a work that is accessible to the general English-reading public, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, and that can also be of use to scholars and serious students of the Quran, again Muslim or otherwise. No previous knowledge of Arabic or the technical vocabulary of the Quran is necessary in order to understand our commentary, although we have included transliterations of Arabic terms whenever we deemed them valuable for those who have some knowledge of Arabic.

*The Study Quran* is meant to be a resource both for those who wish to study the Quran in its entirety and for those who are interested in a particular subject or topic. We have provided indexes and internal citations and designed the work with red *sūrah* and verse numberings in the header, the translation, and the commentary in order to facilitate easy navigation and enable readers to reference quickly what they are seeking. Reading the translation does not require reading the accompanying commentary or the essays. The essays, as already mentioned, constitute a supplementary and independent section.

## *How to Read* The Study Quran

As noted above, for Muslims the Quran is the Word of God; it is sacred scripture, not a work of "literature," a manual of law, or a text of theology, philosophy, or history, although it is of incomparable literary quality, contains many injunctions about Sacred Law, is replete with verses of metaphysical, theological, and philosophical significance, and contains many accounts of sacred history. The unique structure of the Quran and the flow of its content constitute a particular challenge to most modern readers. For traditional Muslims the Quran is not a typical "read" or a manual to be studied. For most of them, the most fruitful way of interacting with the Quran is not to sit down and read the Sacred Text from cover to cover (although there are exceptions, such as completing the whole text during Ramadan). It is, rather, to recite a section with full awareness of it as the Word of God and to meditate upon it as one whose soul is being directly addressed, as the Prophet's soul was addressed during its revelation. Newcomers to Islam's Sacred Scripture may, however, wish to read the whole text at least once initially, but then subsequent study should take the form of returning to sections of it in the manner just mentioned.

In this context it must be remembered that the Quran itself speaks constantly of the Origin and the Return, of all things coming from God and returning to Him, who Himself has no origin or end. As the Word of God, the Quran also seems to have no beginning and no end. Certain turns of phrase and teachings about the Divine Reality, the human condition, the life of this world, and the Hereafter are often repeated, but they are not mere repetitions. Rather, each iteration of a particular word, phrase,

or verse opens the door of a hidden passage to other parts of the Quran. Each coda is always a prelude to an as yet undiscovered truth. These characteristics of the Sacred Text must be remembered in reading *The Study Quran* in order to draw greater benefit from the encounter with it.

As for the commentary, many Quranic passages are cited in it, because these citations play a major role in understanding the manner in which particular Quranic passages are related to and elucidate one another. These citations often include passages from other parts of the Quran whose very citation clarifies the meaning of a particular word, phrase, or verse under consideration. The use of this method is itself traditional, and many commentators over the ages have composed works based on commenting upon the Quran through the use of the Quranic text itself. In contrast to the Bible, which is more like a library than a book with a single voice, the Quran has a single voice, the Voice of God as spoken to a single prophet, and in a sense is itself a commentary upon itself. This characteristic of the Quran was evident to the traditional commentators, who usually had remarkable mastery of the whole text, but it is not known to most contemporary readers, and we have therefore found it necessary to bring it out in our commentary.

Technical Quranic terms can be found in the index with references to the Quranic text and the commentary passages where the terms in question are discussed. Often a turn of phrase or the relation between a family of concepts is best brought out by pointing to similar Quranic passages; we have therefore provided them in our commentary. Moreover, the multiple levels of meaning of Quranic passages are usually brought out by citing other passages. Although each word and even letter of the Quran is like a living being unto itself, on another level it can be said that each part exists in relation to other parts and together they function as a light that illuminates an object in such a way that we can see it from many different angles.

To try to provide a translation and commentary of the Quran in English authentically poses major challenges that readers of *The Study Quran* need to be aware of. When one reads the King James Version of the Bible, one is not only reading an expression of the English language, but also a text that has itself been a major factor in the formation of modern English as far as symbols, metaphors, proverbs, turns of phrase, and certain styles are concerned, not to mention religious ideas and their formulations. This situation also holds true for such Islamic languages as Persian and Turkish, which themselves already contain many Quranic words, phrases, and ideas. Such of course is not as yet the case for English as far as the Quran is concerned. The composition of *The Study Quran* in English therefore posed for us a much greater challenge than if we had produced this work in Persian or Turkish, into the fabric of whose language the Quran is already woven. One of the goals of *The Study Quran* is to help close this gap and to take a step toward transforming English into "an Islamic language," of course not in an exclusive manner, but like Bengali, which is both a Hindu and an Islamic language. Readers of *The Study Quran* should view the language that

we have used in this light. It is meant to both reach the modern audience and convey the timeless nature of the text.

## *Various Stylistic and Technical Points*

In dealing with the commentary tradition, it is not always easy to separate glosses that explain the language of the text from those that explain its meaning. This difference is not always clear in traditional *tafsīr*s. In our commentary, therefore, we have endeavored to render the Arabic without importing a particular interpretation of its meaning into the text, that is, insisting that a word or phrase that is allusive in its meaning and full of different implications in Arabic be made explicit and unequivocal in English. As for alternative orthography and pronunciation of words in Arabic, they are discussed in the commentary in those cases where some significant differences of opinion or interpretation are at stake. The commonly accepted "readings" and "recitations" (*qirā'ah*) are thus not foregrounded in our commentary, although they inform it. They are, however, discussed in the essay "The Islamic View of the Quran."

Quranic Arabic does not use the punctuation marks that exist in English except for the one that corresponds to the period. In fact, it has been said quite rightly that the whole of a traditional book in classical Arabic is in a sense one long sentence. But the structure of the Arabic sentences implies what would correspond to commas, semicolons, colons, and so forth in English. In both our translation and commentary we have made full use of punctuation marks according to the rules of the English language, while seeking to be as faithful as possible to the flow of the original Arabic.

Also there is no capitalization in Arabic; again in this case we have remained faithful to the rules of English in capitalizing all proper names. Moreover, not only all the Names of God, but also all pronouns pertaining to Him as well as all His Qualities, Attributes, and direct Acts have been capitalized. In the latter case we have sought to distinguish between His direct and universal Attributes and Acts, which are always capitalized, and those that concern a delimited and particular manifestation of these Attributes and Acts in the created order. A particularly difficult case in this category is the word "sign," or *āyah,* which strictly speaking should sometimes be capitalized and sometimes not. But to preserve consistency and avoid any confusion for readers we decided to lowercase "sign" in all instances.

## *Design*

As the art of Quranic calligraphy and later illumination developed, texts of the Quran became often also works of art. In fact, some texts of the Quran, such as a number of Mamlūk, Īl-Khānid, Tīmūrid, and Maghribī Qurans, using different styles of calligraphy, are among the greatest works of sacred art created in any civilization and are

recognized by experts as such. Of course because *The Study Quran* is in English, it cannot in any way reflect this art in the whole text, but we have sought to incorporate as much of this art as possible in this book. The *basmalah* was calligraphed especially for this book by the greatest living American master of Arabic calligraphy, Mohamed Zakariya. Our custom numbering medallions, created by Caner Dagli for this volume, have an eight-sided stylized flower design that is typical of many such medallions in traditional Quranic manuscripts and some printed versions and were designed to suit the Latin letters of the typeface carefully chosen for the English text.

The layout of the text itself, which was conceived and supervised by Caner Dagli, reflects to the extent possible traditional presentations of the Quran. In the oldest manuscripts the text is often a continuous block in which the verses are separated by a small above-line or online symbol, which is often something as simple as a triangle consisting of three dots. During later centuries these markers appeared in a great variety of forms, from a simple flower shape with petals to elaborate medallions, each of which was itself a work of art. There also developed the practice of writing the number of a verse beside the verse usually by creating a medallion with the number inside it, so that each verse became clearly delineated. Almost all Qurans printed today follow this practice, and so have we in *The Study Quran*. One important difference is that we have placed the verse number notation *before* the corresponding verse, whereas in Arabic copies of the Quran the verse number appears at the end of the verse. All these features, combined with the two-color design, have been used both to provide a text where the *sūrah*s and verses are clearly delineated and to re-create to the extent possible a work that reflects something of the artistic beauty of traditional Qurans.

## A Final Prayer

Usually the Quran that Muslims read in Arabic or other Islamic languages concludes with a prayer composed by a traditional authority, the calligrapher, or the commentator, the prayer usually possessing great literary quality. We wanted to continue this traditional practice to the extent of our ability, and therefore as the chief editor of this work I conclude the general introduction with a prayer offered by not only myself, but all the editors:

> O Author of the book of existence and of the Divine Word that is the Quran, we thank Thee for having given us the opportunity to live day and night for all these years with Thy Word and to be transformed by this indescribable experience. Whatever we have been able to achieve is the result of Thy Succor, and for whatever imperfection exists in our work we take full responsibility, asking Thy Forgiveness before the Throne of Thy Mercy. Absolute Perfection belongs to Thee and to Thy revealed Word alone, and

no translation or commentary on Thy Word by human beings can share in a Quality that is Thine alone. Nevertheless, we pray that our efforts be acceptable in Thy sight and that this work becomes a guide for those who wish to navigate upon the ocean of Thy Word, which, although in human language, opens inwardly unto the infinite expanses of Thy Reality. Thou art the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward. Amen.

And God knows best
*wa'Llāhᵘ aᶜlamᵘ bi'l-ṣawāb*

—Seyyed Hossein Nasr
Rajab 1436
April 2015

# APPROACHING *THE STUDY QURAN*

One may approach the translation and commentary in *The Study Quran* in several different ways. Readers may:

1. Read the translation alone, in a linear fashion.
2. Read the translation in a linear fashion along with the commentary.
3. Read the translation along with the commentary, but allow the citations and cross-references in the commentary to take them to other parts of the Quran.
4. Use the index and key passages of commentary to search for specific subjects of interest.

One function of the commentary is to explain the text or to point readers to a different section of the commentary that addresses more fully the particular subject. Another function is to direct readers to similar or related passages in the Quran. Often an idea or theme can be better understood in light of the same or a related concept as it appears elsewhere in the Quran. Even in those cases where the index provides the necessary information, from within the translation readers will not necessarily know what to check in order to explore interconnections and relevant ideas. Moreover, simply pointing out that an idea or concept appears in several other places in the Quran is itself a valuable form of commentary.

One way of reading the translation and commentary is to follow it linearly: to read straight through the translation along with its corresponding commentary. But readers are also encouraged to follow the leads that are to be found in the commentary. The citations in one note about a related concept or verse will bring readers to another relevant passage, which will itself open out to other parts of the commentary, which will cite more verses in turn. By following these leads, readers will begin to get a sense of the inner architecture of the Quran, the internal resonances between ideas, and the shades of meaning of various concepts that come to light as readers see them in more than one passage.

## Navigating the Text

The numbers that appear in red at the far right and far left of the header correspond to the commentary, and designate the range of commentary that appears on two facing pages. This is so because the red verse number medallions are already prominent near the top of the page, and some pages contain only commentary and no translation.

# UNDERSTANDING THE CITATIONS IN THE COMMENTARY

## Passages from the Quran

When a passage from this translation of the Quran is quoted in the commentary, it appears in *italics*. For example, in the following sentence from the commentary on 3:18, the italicized words come from the translation of 3:18:

> *Upholding justice* is thought by most to refer to *God* or *He,* but grammatically it could refer to the *angels* and *possessors of knowledge* as well.

Longer Quranic quotations in the commentary are italicized as well. Alternate translations or variant readings appear in standard quotation marks. Thus, all italicized words in English in the commentary are words or passages from this translation. Transliterated Arabic words, such as *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr,* also appear in italics.

Unless otherwise identified, all references in the form of two numbers separated by a colon denote Quranic passages. For example, 12:34 refers to the 34th verse (or *āyah*) of the 12th chapter (or *sūrah*) of the Quran. When verses within the same *sūrah* are cited, the *sūrah* number is omitted and only the verse number is given. For example, the commentary on *sūrah* 2 would cite 2:45 as "v. 45." The numbering of the verses matches that of the standard Egyptian edition, which is found in other widely distributed editions such as the *Muṣḥaf al-Madīnah.* Other translations, such as those of Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, number verses somewhat differently in a few cases. This difference exists because traditionally scholars, while agreeing

on the text, have disagreed about where some verses end and others begin. The most famous example of this is in the *Fātiḥah,* the first *sūrah* of the Quran. According to some scholars, its first verse is *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,* while others say it begins with *Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds.*

## References to the Sayings of the Prophet

Rather than appearing in the commentary text, full citations for the sayings of the Prophet (sing. *ḥadīth,* pl. *aḥādīth*) are located in Appendix A, in the sequence they appear in the commentary. Sayings of the Prophet are cited in the text using standard quotation marks.

## References to the Traditional Commentators on the Quran

Throughout the commentary, capital letters in parentheses follow immediately after various opinions or interpretations. These letters correspond to the commentators listed in the "Commentator Key," whose biographies are provided in Appendix C. For example, when one reads in the commentary on 12:34 the phrase, "Some interpret *x* to mean *y* (Ṭ)," this means that the opinion is to be found mentioned in al-Ṭabarī's commentary on 12:34. This does not mean that it is al-Ṭabarī's personal opinion, only that the argument or interpretation in question can be found discussed or recorded by al-Ṭabarī, whether he accepts or rejects it. By extension "(Q, R, Ṭ)" means that some interpretations can be found in multiple sources. These citations are not meant to be exhaustive; very often a given opinion will be found in dozens of commentaries, though only one is cited. We have generally preferred to mention those that are the most widely available and universally recognized.

At other times the individual opinions of these commentators are cited, as are those of other Islamic scholars such as al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111). For example, "According to al-Rāzī . . ." signifies the personal opinion of al-Rāzī, not only an opinion that he records in his commentary from his contemporaries or earlier sources. Opinions other than al-Rāzī's own but discussed by him would be cited using "(R)."

Full scholarly citations of all the interpretations and opinions in this commentary would have been impractical for a work of this kind. However, writing a commentary without any citations, although it would have saved space and smoothed the style, would have severed a crucial and fruitful connection to the tradition and left our commentary unmoored and ambiguous in its sourcing. Since the traditional commentaries are also histories of the intellectual activity of interpreting the Quran, and since they are arranged verse by verse in sequence like the present work, citing them in the commentary

maintains transparency without weighing down the text with innumerable book titles and page numbers. All of the commentaries we cite exist in print and are also available from various dependable online resources, such as altafsir.org.

These citations serve several functions. First, they make clear which elements in the commentary come directly from the traditional commentaries and which parts constitute analysis and contributions by the editors. Second, they provide a research tool for further scholarly investigation. Third, since the traditional commentaries are slowly becoming available in English, these citations will allow English readers easier access to the traditional scholarship on the Quran.

## Commentary Cross-References

Cross-references in the commentary text use a lowercase *c* appended to a verse number to indicate a cross-reference to another portion of the commentary. For example, "See also 24:35c" means "See also the commentary on 24:35." As with the citations of passages from the Quran, when the commentary from within the same *sūrah* is cited, the *sūrah* number is omitted. For example, from within the commentary on *sūrah* 2, the commentary on 2:45 would be cited as "v. 45c."

# COMMENTATOR KEY

AF Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ᶜAlī al-Rāzī (d. 525/1131), *Rawḥ al-jinān wa rūḥ al-janān*

Aj Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjībah (d. 1224/1809), *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd*

Āl Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), *Rūḥ al-maᶜānī fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ᶜaẓīm waʾl-sabᶜ al-mathānī*

Ās Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ᶜĀshūr (d. 1393/1973), *al-Taḥrīr waʾl-tanwīr*

Bḍ ᶜAbd Allāh ibn ᶜUmar ibn Muḥammad al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-taʾwīl*

Bg Al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Farrāʾ al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), *Maᶜālim al-tanzīl*

Bq Burhān al-Dīn Abu'l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm al-Biqāᶜī (d. 885/1480), *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt waʾl-suwar*

IA Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 543/1148), *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*

IḤ Ismāᶜīl Ḥaqqī al-Burūsawī (d. 1137/1725), *Rūḥ al-bayān*

IJ Abu'l-Faraj ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ᶜAlī ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), *Zād al-masīr fī ᶜilm al-tafsīr*

IK ʿImād al-Dīn Abu'l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*

Iṣ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108), *Mufradāt alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*

Iṭ Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq ibn ʿAṭiyyah al-Andalusī (d. 541/1147), *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-ʿazīz*

JJ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*

K ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1336), *Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, known by many as *Tafsīr ibn ʿArabī*

Kā Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), *Tafsīr al-ṣāfī*

Kl Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (d. 741/1340), *al-Tashīl li-ʿulūm al-tanzīl*

M Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunnah*

MṢ Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā; d. 1050/1640), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm*

Mu Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*

Mw ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), *al-Nukat waʾl-ʿuyūn fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

My Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (d. ca. 520/1126), *Kashf al-asrār wa ʿuddat al-abrār*

N ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), *Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl*

Ni Niẓām al-Dīn Ḥasan al-Nīsābūrī (or al-Nayshābūrī; d. 728/1328), *Tafsīr gharāʾib al-Qurʾān wa raghāʾib al-furqān*

Q Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*

Qm ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 328/939), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

Qu Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*

| | |
|---|---|
| R | Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* also known as *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* |
| Rb | Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209), *ʿArāʾis al-bayān fī ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān* |
| Sa | Naṣr ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), *Baḥr al-ʿulūm* |
| Sh | Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250–55/1834–39), *Fatḥ al-qadīr* |
| ST | Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* |
| Su | ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* |
| Sy | Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Durr al-manthūr fī tafsīr al-maʾthūr* |
| Ṭ | Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* |
| Ṭb | Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1401/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* |
| Th | Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), *al-Kashf waʾl-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān* |
| Ṭs | Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (or al-Ṭabarsī; d. 548/1153–54), *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* |
| Ṭū | Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* |
| W | Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076), *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qurʾān* |
| Z | Abu'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *al-Kashshāf ʿan ghawāmiḍ ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl* |

# THE QURAN

*Translation and Commentary*

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 1

# The Opening

## *al-Fātiḥah*

*Al-Fātiḥah* is considered by the vast majority of scholars to be among the first *sūrah*s to have been revealed in Makkah. According to Mujāhid (d. 104/722–23), one of the leading scholars among the second generation of Muslims, this *sūrah* was revealed in Madinah (W). Most scholars claim that this is impossible, however, as the Muslims would not have been able to perform their required prayers without it (Q, Ṭ, W). The primary meaning of *al-Fātiḥah* is "The Opening," which indicates the *sūrah*'s function as "the opening of the Book" (*Fātiḥat al-kitāb*) and as the first *sūrah* to be recited in each cycle (*rak'ah*) of all the canonical prayers as well as the manner in which it serves as an opening for many functions in everyday Islamic life. It can also be taken as a reference to this *sūrah*'s ability to open one's breast to faith in God.

The *Fātiḥah* is often believed to be a synthesis of the Quran's message and to be its most important *sūrah*. Hence it has been given the title *Umm al-kitāb,* "Mother of the Book," a term also applied to other aspects of the Quran (3:7) and to the celestial archetype of the Quran and in fact all sacred scripture (see 13:39; 43:4). It is also known as "The Mother of the Quran" (IK, Ṭ), a reference to its containing the meaning of the entire Quran (IK). Other titles are "The Seven Oft-Repeated" (*al-Sab' al-mathānī,* 15:87); "The Cure" (*al-Shifā'*), because it is said to have healing powers for both body and soul; and "The Foundation" (*al-Asās*), because it serves as a foundation for the whole of the Quran. Also known as *Sūrat al-Ḥamd,* "The Chapter of Praise," and *Sūrat al-Ṣalāh,* "The Chapter of the Prayer," the *Fātiḥah* is recited at the beginning of each cycle of prayer by all Sunnis and many Shiites. In Shiite law one is allowed to recite the *Fātiḥah* in the third and fourth cycles or to recite, "Glory be to God, and praise be to God. There is no god but God, and God is great." It is also recited by Muslims on occasions as diverse as a funeral, a wedding, the birth of a child, the inauguration of an official event, the signing of contracts, and the commencement of an individual endeavor, such as the beginning of a journey. In some lands, funeral services are referred to as *fātiḥah,* because they mark an opening from one life to another.

Many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad attribute an exalted status to the *Fātiḥah*. In one, the Prophet told a man that he would teach him the greatest *sūrah;* when asked what it was, the Prophet responded, "It is *Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds,* the *seven oft-repeated, and the Mighty Quran* [15:87] that I was given" (IK, W). A famous *ḥadīth qudsī*—that is, a non-Quranic saying of God reported by the Prophet—states, "I have divided the prayer between Myself and My servant, and My servant shall have that for which he prays. When the servant says, '*Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,*' God says, 'My servant has praised Me.' When the servant says, '*The Compassionate, the Merciful,*' God says, 'My servant has magnified Me.' When the servant says, '*Master of the Day of Judgment,*' God says, 'My servant has glorified Me. . . . This is My portion and to him belongs what remains'" (Ṭ, Ṭs). Seen in this light, the *Fātiḥah* is more than the confessional prayer of Muslims. It is a prayer that encapsulates all the metaphysical and eschatological realities of which human beings must remain conscious; God asks human beings to recite it because it contains in principle the nature of God and the disposition God wishes them to have toward Him. The *Fātiḥah* thus has a threefold structure: the first three verses deal with the nature of God, the middle verse deals with the relationship between God and human beings, and the last three verses deal with the various states of human beings.

Many other reports from the Prophet and his Companions indicate the great power that Muslims associate with this *sūrah*. In one the Prophet says, "By Him in Whose Hand lies my soul, in neither the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, nor the Quran was the like of it revealed" (IK, Sh). According to another saying attributed by some to Mujāhid (Q) and by others to the Prophet himself (Sh), "Satan was frightened four times: when he was cursed by God; when he was expelled from the Garden; when Muhammad was sent [as a messenger]; and when the *Fātiḥah* was revealed."

The exalted status of the *Fātiḥah* has resulted in numerous independent commentaries upon it, some numbering hundreds of pages. Such commentaries, which could be said to constitute a subgenre of Quranic exegesis, often attempt to illustrate the manner in which the whole of the Quran is contained in this *sūrah*. According to a famous saying attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, who became the first Imam of Shiite Islam (632–61) and the fourth Caliph of Sunni Islam (656–61), "The whole of the Quran is contained in the *Fātiḥah,* the whole of the *Fātiḥah* in the *basmalah* ['In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'], the whole of the *basmalah* in the *bāʾ* [the opening letter], and the whole of the *bāʾ* in the diacritical point under the *bāʾ*." This point can be understood to represent the first drop of ink from the Divine Pen (*al-qalam;* see 68:1c; 96:4c) with which God wrote the archetypes of all things upon the *Preserved Tablet* (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ;* see 85:22c) before their descent into the realm of creation. In this sense, just as the *basmalah* marks the beginning of the Quran, so too does it mark the beginning of creation.

(1) In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. (2) Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, (3) the Compassionate, the Merciful, (4) Master of the Day of Judgment. (5) Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help. (6) Guide us upon the straight path, (7) the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray.

1 All but one of the 114 *sūrah*s of the Quran begin with *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,* known as the *basmalah* in Arabic, which also appears in 27:30. There is a debate as to whether the *basmalah* is a verse of each *sūrah* or an indication of the beginning of a new *sūrah*. Whether or not it is considered a numbered verse, in most schools of Islamic Law, with the exception of the Shāfiᶜī and Jaᶜfarī schools, the *basmalah* is not recited with any of the *sūrah*s during the daily prayers. In this regard, Anas ibn Mālik (d. 91/709), a close Companion of the Prophet, is reported to have said, "I have prayed behind the Prophet, Abū Bakr, ᶜUmar, and ᶜUthmān [the first three Caliphs of Islam], and they each began their recitation with *Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,* without mentioning *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*" (IK, Q, Sh, Z). But in another tradition, Abū Hurayrah (d. 61/681), another of the Prophet's Companions, is reported to have recited the *basmalah* while leading the prayer and to have then said, "Among you I perform the prayer that is closest to the prayer of the Messenger of God" (IK). Based upon a saying of Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), the sixth Shiite Imam, who was also a pivotal intellectual figure in the Sunni tradition, which states that the *basmalah* is "the greatest verse in the Book of God," Shiite scholars all maintain that the *basmalah* is a verse of the *Fātiḥah* and of every other *sūrah* that begins with it (Ṭb, Ṭs). Others say that it is a verse, though separate from the *sūrah*s that begin with it (IK). In this regard, Ibn ᶜAbbās (d. 68/687), a cousin of the Prophet who was among the most important scholars of the Quran in the first generation of Muslims, is reported to have said that the Prophet did not know the point at which to separate one *sūrah* from the next until God revealed *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful* (Sh).

The *basmalah,* or its shortened form, *In the Name of God,* is employed by pious Muslims to consecrate all licit actions, since from a Quranic perspective all things should be performed for the sake of God and in His Name. In this vein the Prophet said, "Any important matter not begun with the Name of God shall be cut off" (Ṭb). The preposition *in* (*bi*) could imply a verb at the beginning of the sentence, such as "I begin" or "I seek help" *in the Name of God* (R, Ṭb), or a noun, such as "The beginning of the discussion is *in the Name of God*" (R). Alternately, these same phrases could be seen as following the verse, for example, "*In the Name of God* I begin" (R). *In the Name of God* is also understood to mean, "I began *in the Name of God,* so you too begin," as if God were saying, "I began through My Name, was united with My Name, and have commenced in My Name, so begin through My Name, unite with My Name, and commence in My Name" (My).

*God* renders *Allāh,* which according to some is a unique word with no root and according to others derives from the word *al-Ilāh,* or "the Divine" (Ṭb). The Quranic usage of *Allāh* indicates that it was already known to the pre-Islamic Arabs, as in 43:87, which says of the pagan Arabs, *Wert thou to ask them, "Who created you?" they would surely say, "God* (Allāh)*"* (cf. 29:61, 63; 31:25; 39:38). Nonetheless, the supreme sovereignty of *Allāh* was not accepted by the vast majority of those who worshipped idols in a period referred to in the Quran as the *Age of Ignorance* (*jāhiliyyah;* 3:154; 5:50; 33:33; 48:26). *Allāh* is not only the most universal and all-embracing Name, but also the most specific of the Divine Names in that it cannot be used to describe any being other than God, whereas some other Divine Names may (al-Ghazzālī, *Divine Names*). Some refer to *Allāh* as the All-Encompassing Name, which comprises all of the Names and Attributes of God (Bq); see 112:1c. The ordering of the three Divine Names in the *basmalah* can be seen as an allusion to the levels of Divinity in relation to the created order: *God* (*Allāh*) refers to the Divine Essence,

Principle, or Self; *the Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān*) refers to the unity of God's Attributes; and *the Merciful* (*al-Raḥīm*) to the unity of God's acts (K).

2 *Praise* translates *al-ḥamd,* which indicates extolling the Praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*) and giving thanks to Him for all of the favors He has bestowed in this world and for the reward that will be given in the next world. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "When you say, *'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,'* you will have thanked God and He will increase your bounty" (Ṭ). But whereas thanks (*shukr*) is given for what one has already received, praise is given for the qualities the One Who is praised possesses prior to having bestowed anything and is thus more universal (Q). *Praise* (*al-ḥamd*) is rendered in the definite rather than the indefinite to indicate that all forms of praise and all gratitude belong to God (Ṭ). It is said that God has praised Himself in this opening address so that human beings can praise God in the speech of God, since God knows that they cannot praise Him fully in their own words (Qu). Regarding the inability of human beings to praise God fully, the Prophet is reported to have addressed God, saying, "There is no way to enumerate the praise due to Thee; Thou art as Thou hast praised Thyself" (Qu).

Similar to the *basmalah, Praise be to God* is a frequently repeated formula recited by Muslims on many occasions throughout their daily lives. But whereas the *basmalah* is employed to consecrate a deed at its beginning, *Praise be to God* is employed to thank God for an act or event upon its completion. According to traditional Islamic etiquette, whenever one is asked how one is feeling, the correct response should be *Praise be to God,* no matter one's condition.

Reference is made to God as *Lord* throughout the Quran and as *Lord of the worlds* some forty-two times. *Lord* renders *rabb,* which refers to a master who is obeyed (*sayyid*), to one who puts matters in their proper order, and to one who possesses something. In reference to God it thus means that He is the Master without peer, Who arranges the affairs of all His creatures and to Whom all of creation belongs (Ṭ). Some also relate *Lord* (*rabb*) to "cultivation" (*tarbiyah*), since God is the Caretaker (*murabbī*) of all things as well as the Trainer and Caretaker of our souls, hearts, and spirits (Qu).

*The worlds* refers to various levels of cosmic existence and the communities of beings within each level. Some say it refers to four communities: human beings, jinn, angels, and satans (Q), while others say it refers only to human beings and jinn, since the Prophet is referred to as *a warner unto the worlds* (25:1), and only jinn and human beings are in need of a warner (Q). It may also refer to the different generations of human beings, to all of the species in creation (Q, Ṭ), or to God's being the Sovereign over every level of creation from the earth through the seven heavens, as in those verses that refer to God as *Lord of the heavens and the earth* (13:16; 17:102; 18:14; 19:65; 21:56; 26:24; 37:5; 38:66; 43:82; 44:7; 78:37). Thus some say that in the most universal sense *the worlds* refers to all existent things other than God (IK, Q). In this vein, the commentator Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī notes that there is infinite space beyond this world and that God can actualize all possibilities, even worlds and universes of which we have no knowledge. The verse thus refers to God being the Lord of all that can be seen or imagined and of all that cannot be seen or imagined by human beings. In this sense, the verse conveys that God is Lord of all "space," not only physical space, and therefore of all that exists, no matter what the nature of that existence may be. For this reason, *there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise* (17:44).

3 This verse repeats the two Divine Names, *the Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān*) and *the Merciful* (*al-Raḥīm*), that are recited in the *basmalah* at the opening of each *sūrah,* except for *Sūrah* 9, "Repentance" (*al-Tawbah*). Both Names are intensifications of the word *raḥmah,* meaning "Mercy" or "Loving-Mercy." *Al-Raḥmān,* which is also the title of *Sūrah* 55, is considered to be more emphatic, embracing, and encompassing than *al-Raḥīm* (IK, Qu, Ṭ). It is one of the Divine Names that cannot be applied to anything other than God, either literally or figuratively, since it connotes the Loving-Mercy by which God brings forth existence. *Al-Raḥīm* indicates the blessing of nourishment (*rizq*) by which God sustains each particular existent thing. Thus it may apply figuratively to creatures, and the adjective *raḥīm* is in fact used to describe the Prophet in 9:128. As *al-Raḥmān* is more encompassing, it is closer to the highest Name of God, *Allāh;* 17:110 enjoins the Prophet to say, *Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate. Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.* The relationship between them is thus presented as that of different levels or de-

grees of light: *al-Raḥmān* is like the light of the sun that illuminates the whole sky, and *al-Raḥīm* is like the particular ray of sunlight that touches a creature. In Islamic metaphysics and cosmology it is stated that it was by God breathing "the Breath of the Compassionate" (*Nafas al-Raḥmān*) upon the immutable essences (*al-aʿyān al-thābitah*), which are the archetypes of all things in Divine Knowledge, that the world was brought into being. From this perspective, the very existence of the world is in essence nothing but the breath of Divine Compassion.

Together these two Names refer to two aspects of the Divine Mercy (*raḥmah*): one essential and universal, the other attributive and particular. The first is that by which creation is brought forth, while the second is that by which God shows Mercy to those whom He will, as in 33:43: *And He is Merciful (raḥīm) unto the believers.* The essential and universal Mercy is that of *the Compassionate,* which God bestows upon all things through their very existence and is the Divine aspect referred to in 20:5: *The Compassionate mounted the Throne;* and 25:59: *Then mounted the Throne, the Compassionate [is He].* The particular Mercy is that of *the Merciful,* through which each creature that exists is sustained and which varies in mode according to the manner in which this Divine Name or Attribute has become manifest. It is evident that Divine Names of beauty, such as "the Kind" (*al-Laṭīf*), "the Clement" (*al-Ḥalīm*), and "the Beautiful" (*al-Jamīl*), are manifestations of Mercy. But in Divine Names of rigor, such as "the Powerful" (*al-Qādir*), "the Avenger" (*al-Muntaqim*), and "the Abaser" (*al-Mudhill*), the manifestation of Divine Mercy is veiled by the inseparability of God's Kindness from His Majesty and determinative power (*qadar*). God is thus said to be Compassionate toward all of creation and Merciful toward the believers (Ṭb).

Positioned between v. 2, which alludes to God being the Sovereign over all dimensions of space, both seen and unseen, and v. 4, which alludes to God being the Master of all time, since all things end on the *Day of Judgment,* this verse indicates that God's Mercy encompasses and interpenetrates all time and all space, as in 7:156: *My Mercy encompasses all things.*

4 *Master* renders *mālik,* which can also mean "owner." It is also sometimes read *malik,* meaning "king" or "sovereign," and both variants can be traced to the Prophet (Q). *Malik* ("king") is understood to be more intensive than *mālik* ("master"), since every king is a master, but not every master is a king (Q, Ṭ, Z), though others maintain that *malik* is more comprehensive, since it indicates God's Power of disposal over all things (Q). That God is *Master of the Day of Judgment* indicates that He alone has sovereignty over the Day of Reckoning and that all those who seek to contend with His Absolute Sovereignty will be brought low on that Day, as in 40:16, where it is described as *the Day when they come forth with naught concerning them hidden from God. Whose is the sovereignty this Day? It is God's, the One, the Paramount* (IK, Ṭ). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "On the Day of Judgment, God will grasp the earth, fold up the sky with His Right Hand [see 39:67], and proclaim, 'I am the King, where are the kings of the earth? Where are the tyrants?'" (IK).

*The Day of Judgment* is the day on which the account of jinn and human beings comes due. That God is *Master* of this day alludes to the inevitability of the meeting with God, since all are returning to Him (see, e.g., 2:156, 245, 281; 3:55, 83; 5:48, 105; 6:36, 61–62, 108, 164; 7:29; 21:93). *Judgment* renders *dīn,* which is etymologically related to "obedience" and to "custom," "way," or "affair." It is, however, most often rendered "religion." *Dīn* is also closely related to the word "debt" (*dayn*), found in 2:282: *When you contract a debt (dayn) with one another for a term appointed, write it down.* While *dayn* refers to a debt, *dīn* refers to the repayment of our debt to God, and God is also known as *al-Dayyān,* meaning "The One Who Repays" (Q). The Day of *dīn* can thus be understood as the day of the requital and reckoning for actions performed in this world (IK, Q, Ṭ), as in 24:25: *On that Day God will pay them their just due in full;* and 40:17: *On that Day every soul shall be recompensed for that which it has earned* (cf. 45:28; IK, Q). This day is also referred to as the Day of Reckoning, since all of one's good and bad deeds will be weighed and one will be taken to account for all that transpired during the life of this world, as in 7:8–9: *And the weighing on that Day is true. So those whose balance is heavy, it is they who shall prosper. And as for those whose balance is light, it is they who have ruined their souls by having treated Our signs wrongfully* (see also 21:47c; 101:6–9c). Given the importance and finality of

this accounting, when asked, "Who is the most intelligent of believers?" the Prophet replied, "The most frequent in recalling death, and the best prepared for what follows it, they are the most intelligent." Following upon the Prophet's advice, the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 22/644), is reported to have said, "Bring yourself to account before you are brought to account. And weigh your deeds before your deeds are weighed" (IK).

From one perspective, in the progression of Divine Names from *Allāh* to *al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥīm,* and *al-Mālik* (or *al-Malik*) there is a descent from the highest level of the Divine Essence down to those levels that are in direct relation to the created order, *al-Raḥmān* denoting the general mercy that encompasses all things, and *al-Raḥīm* denoting the particular mercy that God bestows upon those whom He chooses. Then God's function as *al-Malik* or *al-Mālik* pertains to His management of all affairs in the created order. It is in a sense a "lower" Divine Name, because the existence of an "other" is necessary for this aspect of God to become fully manifest. Thus, like the name *al-Raḥīm* it pertains to the Divine acts. In this sense, the progression of Names in vv. 1–4 reflects the descent of the created order from the Divine Principle. The second half of the *Fātiḥah* then pertains to the ascent from the created order back to the Divine Principle.

5 In v. 5 begins the direct address of God in the second person, a marked change from the praise and description of God in vv. 1–4 (IK, Q). Human beings speak here in the first-person plural, hence not only as individuals, but also as vicegerents of God (see 6:165c), supplicating God on behalf of all creation. To speak to God in the first-person plural rather than the singular also implies humility before the Divine (Ṭb), both because one is not focused solely upon oneself and because one acknowledges that ultimately only God has the right to say "I."

*We worship* renders the verb *naʿbudu,* which also indicates servitude, obedience, and adoration. The first phrase thus indicates standing before God as a humble adoring servant or as a slave (*ʿabd*), the state that in reality all created beings are in before God, as in 19:93: *There is none in the heavens and on the earth, but that it comes unto the Compassionate as a servant* (*ʿabd*). In the context of the previous verses, which recognize that God is *Lord of the worlds,* or all "space," and Master of all time, this verse recognizes the state of complete servitude before God, as reflected by the construction of the sentence in which the direct object is placed before the verb (Ṭb).

Addressing God in the second person rather than the third person indicates a direct I-Thou relationship in which God is worshipped as one who is present before the worshipper and whom the worshipper thus addresses directly (Ṭb), a privilege given in Islam to all human beings, who are not in need of a distinct priestly class to function as intermediaries between human beings and God. Correspondingly, worshippers should be fully present before their Lord. Their attention should not be divided between God and something else, either openly, as in idol worship, or secretly, as in the case of those who worship God distracted by thoughts and subjective desires or intent upon personal reward. Rather, one should *worship God, devoting religion entirely to Him* (39:2; Ṭb). In this vein, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, "Worship is of three kinds: some people worship God out of fear, and that is the worship of slaves; other people worship God seeking reward, and that is the worship of hirelings; and some people worship God out of love, and that is the worship of those who are free, and that is the most excellent worship" (Ṭb).

True worship or servitude (*ʿibādah*) is understood by some to constitute the greatest degree of humility and self-effacement before God (Aj), which is necessary in order to recognize one's complete reliance upon Him, since *God is the Rich, and you are the poor* (47:38). The expression of servitude necessarily precedes the statement that one "seeks help" from God, since one does not seek help from a king without first acknowledging the king's power and sovereignty (Aj). The request for God's help can thus be seen as a request for further aid in worshipping and serving Him and in all of one's affairs (Aj, IK), a request founded upon the acknowledgment that one is never independent of God (Ṭb) and that it is only through His assistance that one can worship Him, not through one's own power and strength (Bq).

6 Following upon the previous phrase, in which one asks for God's help in servitude and obedience, *guide us* can be understood as a prayer for perseverance in following *the straight path* and thus for continued aid (Ṭ) and for being

made firm in following the way of truth (Ṭs), since for *those who believe and perform righteous deeds, their Lord guides them by their faith* (10:9; Ṭs). The request for guidance also implies seeking to be led to God Himself and thus a desire for intimacy with Him, nearness to Him (Q), knowledge of Him, and love for Him. In this sense, it is also understood to mean, "Make our hearts incline unto Thee; direct our aspirations unto Thee; and be our guide from Thee, unto Thee, in order that we not be cut off by Thee from that which is Thine" (Bq, Su). On the intellectual level, following *the straight path* can be understood to mean using one's God-given intelligence correctly in order to reach the truth, rather than deviating from *the straight path* of thinking and intellection and thus thinking in a manner that will lead to error.

*The straight path* indicates a clear road with no crookedness or deviation (Ṭ). From a religious perspective, it is a middle way that avoids worldliness, on the one hand, and extreme asceticism, on the other. It thus connotes a way of life that combines the outward way of the Law with the inward way of spirituality, or the exoteric with the esoteric, so that one's outward nature is in servitude, while one's inner nature is free (Aj). The Prophet is said to guide his community upon this path (42:52–53c). The Islamic community (*ummah*) is thus described as *a middle community* (2:143) that follows a middle way in action, ethics, thought, and all aspects of life. In describing *the straight path,* the Prophet is reported to have said, "God has set forth a parable: a straight path that is surrounded by two walls on both sides, with several open doors within the walls covered by curtains. A caller on the gate of the path calls out, 'O people! Stay on the path and do not deviate from it.' Meanwhile, a caller from above the path is also warning any person who wants to open any of these doors, 'Woe unto you! Do not open it, for if you open it you will fall through.' *The straight path* is Islam, the two walls are the limits set by God, while the doors refer to what God has prohibited. The caller on the gate of the path is the Book of God, while the caller above the path is God's admonishment present in the heart of every Muslim" (IK).

Some see *the straight path* as a reference to the Quran itself (Ṭ, Ṭū, Ṭs), while others say that it refers to Islam (Bq, Ṭū, Ṭs) or to the Prophet (Q). According to many Shiite commentaries, *the straight path* refers to the first Shiite Imam, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Qm, Ṭs), or to the Prophet and the Imams (Ṭū, Ṭs). In contrast, several Sunni commentaries say that it refers to the Prophet and his two Companions (Q, Ṭ), meaning the first two Caliphs, Abū Bakr (r. 10–12/632–634) and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 12–22/634–644). Each of these interpretations indicates something that different groups of Muslims believe will assure one of being *upon the straight path,* as long as one follows it. To be on *the straight path,* or *a straight path* as it is usually presented in the Quran, can also be understood as walking with God to God; to God because God guides the believers *unto Himself upon a straight path* (4:175), and with God because God Himself is *upon a straight path,* as when the Prophet Hūd says, *Truly I trust in God, my Lord and your Lord. There is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock. Truly my Lord is upon a straight path* (11:56).

*The straight path* is also understood as a reference to the traverse that human beings and jinn must cross as the final stage of Judgment before entering Paradise or the Garden. According to the Prophet, this traverse is "finer than a hair and sharper than a sword"; some will pass over it like wind, and some will fly across it like birds; others will trot over it like camels. Yet others will only be able to crawl, and some will be cast from it into Hellfire; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

7 According to some accounts, this verse is in fact two verses, the first of which ends with *hast blessed* (Ṭ). The first part offers clarification regarding those who will be guided upon *the straight path,* which is further elaborated in 4:69: *Whosoever obeys God and the Messenger, they are with those whom God has blessed, the prophets, the truthful ones, the witnesses, and the righteous. What beautiful companions are they!* (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Those who are blessed by God are also said to be those whom God has purified, so that they are able to attain unto Him (Qu), and those whom He has blessed by causing them to be mindful of the observance of the Law and its decrees; the latter experience the realization of spiritual realities, but do not go beyond the limits of knowledge or violate any of the decrees of the Law (Qu).

*Not of* renders the exceptive particle *ghayr,* which is understood as being attached to *the path.*

It could also be read as being attached to *them,* in which case it would mean, "The path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not those who incur wrath" (Ṭ, Ṭs). Nonetheless, both readings yield the same essential meaning (Ṭ). According to some, *those who incur wrath* are the idolaters, and *those who are astray* are the hypocrites (Q). Others relate the terms to two categories of sin in which disbelief incurs wrath and lesser sin results from being astray (M). Still others relate the terms to those who exhibit various moral shortcomings, such as those who are heedless and those who are profligate (Ni). In this sense, the two terms together can be understood as a reference to all the various degrees of those who are spiritually debased and lost and preoccupied with procuring some share of the fortunes of this world (Qu).

Regarding *those who incur wrath,* 16:106 says, *Whosoever opens his breast unto disbelief, upon them shall be the Wrath of God,* and 42:16 says of those who argue about God after having responded to Him, *their argument is baseless in the eyes of their Lord. Wrath shall be upon them, and theirs shall be a severe punishment.* In addition, 48:6 says of the hypocrites and the idolaters, *God is wroth with them, curses them, and prepares Hell for them.* God's Wrath is also said to be upon those who murder believers (see 4:93). Regarding *those who are astray,* a far more prevalent Quranic concept, 3:90 states, *Truly those who disbelieve after having believed, then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and they are the ones astray;* 2:108 states, *Whosoever exchanges belief for disbelief has gone astray from the right way;* and 4:136 declares, *Whosoever does not believe in God and His angels and His Books and His messengers and the Last Day has wandered far astray* (cf. 4:167). Addressing the psychology of being astray, 28:50 asks rhetorically, *Who is more astray than one who follows his caprice without guidance from God?*

Read in light of the many verses that refer to incurring wrath and being astray, the final verse of this *sūrah* can be understood as a prayer (1) to follow the way of those whom God raises in degrees (see 6:83c; 58:11c), meaning those *who believe and those who have been given knowledge* (58:11) and *those who believe and who do not obscure their belief through wrongdoing* (6:82), and (2) to avoid the way of the disbelievers, some of whom are astray and with some of whom God is wroth. From one perspective, vv. 6–7 refer to the manner in which all human beings are moving toward their Lord (Ṭb), as in 84:6: *O mankind! Truly thou art laboring unto thy Lord laboriously, and shall meet Him!;* and 5:18: *and unto Him is the journey's end* (cf. 2:285; 3:28; 24:42; 31:14; 35:18; 40:3; 42:15; 50:43; 60:4; 64:3). All things eventually return to God, but in various ways and by various means, as in 67:22: *Is one who walks with his face stooped down more guided, or one who walks upright upon a straight path?* (see also 3:83; 13:15). This verse is thus a request to be among those who proceed toward God with honor and dignity rather than with shame and disgrace.

The different qualities of the paths followed by the three categories mentioned in this verse are revealed by the different ways in which they are presented. *Those whom Thou hast blessed* conveys an action performed by God in the past tense, thus giving a sense of finality and certitude in that God's blessings and favor upon them have already occurred. *Those who incur wrath* does not name an active agent or say definitively that the outcome has occurred, only that they are subject to wrath. This indicates that although they have already acted in a manner that may warrant Divine Punishment and Retribution, God's Wrath has not yet come upon them and the door of repentance remains open, since God *guides to Himself whosoever turns in repentance* (13:27). The absence of an active agent in this phrase also reflects the general Quranic principle that *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44).

Being astray can result from something intentional or something done by mistake (Aj). Thus *those who are astray* may not have committed actions that merit Divine Retribution, as is made clear when Moses says that he was *one of those who are astray* (26:20) before the beginning of his mission as one of God's messengers, and when God (using the third person instead of the first) asks the Prophet Muhammad, *Did He not . . . find thee astray and guide?* (93:7). In this sense, being astray describes all those who do not actively live in accord with Revelation. Given the various degrees of being astray, from those who exchange *belief for disbelief* (2:108) to prophets who have not yet been guided in their prophetic mission, the request to not be among those who are astray can be seen as a request for

help in remembering God at all times and never acting in a manner that would be contrary to the injunctions of the Revelation.

When *the straight path* is understood as the vertical path of ascent toward God, *those who incur wrath* can be understood as a reference to those upon a path of descent away from God, while *those who are astray* meander horizontally away from the path that leads toward the Transcendent. These three possibilities then correspond to the three dimensions of space and symbolize all the possibilities of the human state.

Based upon a saying attributed to the Prophet, considered good (*ḥasan*) by some and sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by others, one interpretation given by a number of commentators is that *those who incur wrath* and *those who are astray* refer to Jews and Christians, respectively (IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ, Z). In this vein, *those who incur wrath* is often connected with verses such as 2:61; 2:90; 3:112; 5:60, which speak of God's Wrath and Anger coming upon the Children of Israel or upon the Jews. Likewise, *those who are astray* is often read in connection with 5:77, which warns, *Follow not the caprices of a people who went astray before, and led many astray, and strayed from the right way*, and is understood as a reference to Christians (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

According to a *ḥadīth*, "When the prayer leader says, *Not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray,* you must say, *Āmīn,* for if one's utterance of *āmīn* coincides with that of the angels, his past sins will be forgiven" (IK, Q). Upon the completion of the *Fātiḥah,* it is thus customary among Sunni Muslims to say *Āmīn* after a brief moment of silence, which serves to distinguish this utterance from the Quran itself (Q). It is not considered obligatory, but is reported to have been the custom of the Prophet and is strongly recommended by Sunni scholars (IK). Some advocate saying it aloud, while others recommend saying it under one's breath (Q). Most understand *āmīn* to mean, "O God! Answer us," which functions as a supplication (IK, Q). Others say that it is one of the Names of God (Q), while others say it means, "Thus shall it be" (Q). This last meaning is closest to the meaning of the Hebrew cognate "Amen." In this sense, it is a declaration of affirmation and is understood as the seal upon one's prayers (Q).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 2

# The Cow

## *al-Baqarah*

*Al-Baqarah* is from the Madinan period. It is named *al-Baqarah,* or "The Cow," because of the cow mentioned in v. 67. It is the longest *sūrah* of the Quran, comprising one-twelfth of the entire text. In most illuminated manuscripts and printed editions of the Quran, the first seven verses of *al-Baqarah* appear on an illuminated page opposite another illuminated page containing the seven verses of the *Fātiḥah,* or "Opening," the first chapter of the Quran. These two pages together form for most readers the first visual experience of the Quran as a physical book.

Few subjects discussed in the Quran do not find some mention in *al-Baqarah;* topics include matters of theology, law, sacred history, metaphysics, cosmology, and the spiritual life. The *sūrah* opens with a general description of belief in the seen and Unseen, the multiplicity of prophets, and the imperative to give from what we possess, whether spiritual or material. After a section addressing the hypocrisy of the protestations and claims of those who disbelieve in God, the *sūrah* turns to an account of the creation of Adam and the fall from the Garden, including the status of the angels in relation to human beings and the role of Satan in Adam's fall.

The history of the Children of Israel figures prominently in this *sūrah.* Stressed are the blessings of God upon the Israelites throughout their history, beginning with one of the several accounts provided by the Quran describing the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh as well as the events at Mt. Sinai and the parable of the sacrificial cow (*baqarah*), to which the *sūrah* owes its name. This history is interwoven with theological questions debated between Jews and Muslims, such as the duration of one's stay in Hell, the status of the Archangel Gabriel, and other accusations and challenges exchanged between the two communities.

*Al-Baqarah* is one of the most important *sūrah*s as far as the question of the status of other religions is concerned, addressing this matter from a theological and legal perspective and also as a question of sacred history. Abraham is discussed as

a prophet who predated Judaism and Christianity, who established the Kaʿbah as a temple of worship, and who was a *ḥanīf,* or primordial monotheist.

Important rituals and acts of worship are legislated in this *sūrah,* including the pilgrimage, the required fast during the month of Ramadan, and other matters such as the direction (*qiblah*) one should face while reciting the canonical prayers. Other legal matters discussed are economic contracts, usury, marriage and divorce, the status of orphans, the causes and conduct of war, inheritance, alcohol consumption and gambling, and punishment for capital crimes. Some of the Quran's most famous and most recited verses are found in this *sūrah,* including v. 255, called the Pedestal Verse (*Āyat al-Kursī*), and the final two verses, which are important in Muslim devotional life.

Concerning this *sūrah* the Prophet is reported to have said, "Everything has a zenith, and the zenith of the Quran is *Sūrat al-Baqarah,* and it has a verse which is the lord of the verses of the Quran, the Pedestal Verse [v. 255]"; "Truly Satan leaves a house when he hears *Sūrat al-Baqarah* recited in it"; and "Learn *al-Baqarah.* Holding to it is a blessing, leaving it is an affliction, and falsehood has no power over it."

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Mīm.* (2) This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent, (3) who believe in the Unseen and perform the prayer and spend from that which We have provided them, (4) and who believe in what

1 Of the 114 *sūrah*s of the Quran, 29 begin with individual letters of the Arabic alphabet. In this translation these letters are transliterated as recited (e.g., *alif* is the name of the first letter of the Arabic alphabet), although in other translations the corresponding Latin letters are used (e.g., A, L, M, which correspond phonetically to *alif, lām, mīm*). In recitation the names of the letters are used, not their sounds. Also, some letter names have two forms, e.g., *rā* and *rāʾ*. The Quran uses the former, the commentary, the latter.

The individual letters are one of the most enigmatic features of the Quran and have been a subject of debate and speculation among Muslims since the revelation of the Quran. It is reported by many Quran commentators that Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, said, "Every book has a mystery (*sirr*), and the mystery of the Quran is the beginnings of the *sūrah*s." ʿAlī, the fourth Caliph, is reported to have said, "Every book has a quintessence (*ṣafwah*), and the quintessence of this Book is the spelled-out letters." Al-Rāzī discusses the metaphor of a great sea, which leads to a river, which leads to streams, which lead to rivulets; if the rivulet was made to carry all the water of the stream or the riverbed the entire contents of the sea, it would be overwhelmed and destroyed. He mentions the verse *He sends down water from the sky, so that the riverbeds flow according to their measure* (13:17). He further reports the saying: "The learned have a secret, the vicegerents (*khulafāʾ*) have a secret, the prophets have a secret, the angels have a secret, and beyond all of that God has a secret. If the ignorant came to know the secret of the learned, they would destroy them. If the learned came to know the secret of the vicegerents, they would break away from them. If the vicegerents came to know the secret of the prophets, they would

oppose them. If the prophets came to know the secret of the angels, they would indict them. If the angels knew the secret of God they would fall down in bewilderment and pass away into ruin." The commentator Ibn ʿAjībah is of the opinion that "only the elite of the greatest Friends of God (*awliyāʾ*) know the secrets of these letters."

These sayings speak to the position that there are ineffable realities known only to some, and that the individual letters may be one of those mysteries whose true meaning is largely hidden, but not entirely so. Many theologians have objected to the notion that any part of the Quran is unknowable to people, adducing verses that describe the Quran as a *clear Book* (5:15) or *Wise Book* (10:1) and as a *guidance* (2:2) in *clear, Arabic tongue* (16:103). Moreover, if there were no way to gain knowledge of the Book, it would be as if one addressed Arabs in a language incomprehensible to them (R). The question of knowing the inner meaning of the Quran is discussed in detail in 3:7c.

Al-Rāzī tries for a compromise position by noting that, although we can know the wisdom in certain kinds of legislation, such as the prohibitions against alcohol and gambling, there are other actions required by religion whose wisdom we do not know, such as some of the rituals of the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage; see 2:196c). The part of the Quran that we cannot understand is analogous to those actions whose underlying wisdom we do not know; we perform them with trust and faithfulness, but without the transparency available to us in other aspects of religious practice. We allow them to remain mysteries, and al-Rāzī argues that this can have the positive effect of keeping one's heart oriented beyond the world and beyond what one already knows.

Many of the interpretations see the letters as abbreviations that may represent Names or Qualities of God, phrases, or names of other objects. In this *sūrah,* some offer the interpretation that the *alif* stands for *Allāh, lām* for *Jibrīl* (Gabriel), and *mīm* for *Muḥammad,* symbolizing the descent of revelation from God through Gabriel to the Prophet. Another interpretation states that the *alif* represents the origin of sound, the *lām* represents the middle of it, since it is produced in the mouth, and the *mīm* represents the consummation of sound, since it is produced on the lips. Others see the individual letters as representing the names of *sūrahs,* as is recognized universally in the case of *Yā Sīn, Ṣād, Nūn,* and *Qāf,* although other *sūrahs* with individual letters bear other names, such as *al-Baqarah* and *Āl ʿImrān.* Still others, like followers of the Islamic science called *al-jafr* (a kind of esoteric commentary akin to gematria in Hebrew), base interpretations on the numerical symbolism and value of the letters, since each Arabic letter has a corresponding numerical value (e.g., *alif* is 1, *lām* is 30, and *mīm* is 40).

Some have seen the letters as signals that the Book is made up of these letters and that they can be seen as an oath, as is so common in the Quran, such as in *Sūrah* 91, whose first seven verses start with God swearing an oath by created things. In the case of the letters, God would thus be swearing by the letters that make up the Quran, just as He swears by some objects of the world of creation. At a deeper level of meaning, the letters, in their multifarious forms, sounds, and loci of pronunciation in the mouth and throat, symbolize God's Creative Act. In the same way that the letters and sounds make up words that make up the Book, the manifestation and interplay of God's Names and Qualities make up creation. In this vein many Sufis have spoken of creation as "the Breath of the Compassionate" manifesting God's Names and Qualities.

2 This verse could also be read, "This is the Book, without doubt containing a guidance for the reverent." One can pause after *Book* or *doubt,* but not both. Though usually understood as *This,* the initial pronoun could also be read as "That" ("That is the Book"), which would be correct in referring to the known portion of the Quran (R). Since *al-Baqarah* was revealed in Madinah, a good deal of the Quran would have been revealed already, even though in the order of the text only the *Fātiḥah* precedes it. Alternately, some have mentioned the possibility that "That" refers to the Quran inscribed on the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22). *The Book* is used as a proper name for the Quran, among others such as *the Criterion* (*al-Furqān;* see 25:1).

*Reverent* translates *muttaqīn,* which comes from the central Quranic concept of *taqwā,* rendered in this translation as *reverence. Taqwā* comes from the root *w-q-y,* which evokes the sense of wariness, care, and protection. As it concerns the attitude of human beings toward God, *taqwā*

was sent down unto thee, and what was sent down before thee, and who are certain of the Hereafter. ۵ It is they who act upon guidance from their Lord, and it is they who shall prosper. ۶ Truly it is the same for the disbelievers

conveys the sense of fear, mindfulness, and a constant awareness of God's Presence and Power. As evidenced in this verse and many others (such as 49:13: *Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you*), reverence is a central spiritual virtue in the Quran along with such other qualities as trust (*tawakkul*), hope (*rajāʾ*), piety (*birr*), fear (*khawf*), and contentment (*riḍā*).

3 *Unseen* (*ghayb,* lit. "absent") refers to realities absent from the perception of the ordinary senses, such realities as God, Paradise, Hell, and the Day of Judgment. These include realities that are invisible in principle because they are beyond ordinary sense perception, such as God, as well as those that are part of the Unseen because they cannot be known except by God, such as the time of the Day of Judgment.

*Perform* in *perform the prayer* can also be read as "institute," "establish," or "maintain." In the Quran the word for "prayer," *ṣalāh,* is used in at least two ways, one referring to what believers offer to God and the other to the invocation of blessing, as in 33:56, where believers are commanded to make *ṣalāh* (*invoke blessings*) upon the Prophet. *Ṣalāh* has taken on a technical sense when used for the recitations and movements proper to the five daily canonical prayers, but it also refers to prayer more generally, as in 19:31, where Jesus says that God has *enjoined upon* him *prayer,* or 20:14, where Moses is also commanded to *perform the prayer.*

*Spend* (*infāq*) means to "expend," but also carries the sense of giving charitably and is used throughout the Quran for those who give in the way of God (for similar wording, see 8:3; 14:31; 22:35; 28:54; 32:16). This parallels the even more frequent pairing of the prayer (*ṣalāh*) and alms (*zakāh*). The passage can be seen as moving from an inward act whose object is invisible and hidden (faith in the Unseen), to an act that is both visible and invisible (prayer) but whose object is invisible (God), to an outward act whose object is visible (giving from what one has been given), thereby establishing principles for both the inner and the outer life as well as their source and connection. There is thus in this verse a gradation from the inward to the outward.

4 In this verse it is the Prophet who is addressed in the second-person singular, always rendered *thou* or *thee* in this translation. A question arises: does the *and* at the start of the verse continue the description of the believers from v. 3, or does v. 4 refer to a different group of people, requiring a translation of "And those who believe . . ." such that v. 5 then describes the status of the believers of v, 4, not v. 3? One understanding of this passage is that v. 3 refers to the believers among the Arabs (presumably specifically Muslim believers who are neither Christian nor Jewish), while v. 4 refers to the believers among the People of the Book who had previously believed in earlier revelations and now believe in the Prophet (Ṭ; see also 98:1–8, where a similar distinction is made). But v. 3 and v. 4 can also be understood more generally as two descriptions of one group; namely, *the reverent.* See also 3:199, which mentions People of the Book who believe in what was sent down to them and to the Prophet.

For a discussion of the Islamic view of different revelations, see 2:62c, 5:69c, and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." For the Hereafter, see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

5 The term rendered *they who shall prosper* (*mufliḥūn*) is related to *falāḥ,* meaning prosperity, thriving, or success, and is etymologically linked to "cultivation." Though sometimes rendered "salvation," *falāḥ* is generally not the concept used to differentiate between the "saved" and "unsaved" or "damned" as typically understood in Christianity. It is an idea that appears in the call to prayer (*adhān*), where the caller recites, after the *takbīr* (*Allāhᵘ akbar*) and the *shahādah,* "Come to *ṣalāh* (prayer), come to *falāḥ* (prosperity or salvation)."

6 Grammatically *they do not believe* could also be read "they will not believe." The reference to prophets as warners (*nadhīr*) is an important motif in the Quran. For similar verses where warnings and guidance are said to be of no avail to disbelievers, see 7:193; 26:136; 36:10; 63:6.

whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe. (7) God has sealed their hearts and their hearing. Upon their eyes is a covering, and theirs is a great punishment. (8) Among mankind are those who say, "We believe in God and in the Last Day," though they do not believe. (9) They would deceive God and the believers; yet they deceive none but themselves, though they are unaware. (10) In their hearts is a disease, and God has increased them in disease. Theirs is a painful punishment for having lied. (11) And when it is said unto them, "Do not work corruption upon the earth," they say, "We are only working righteousness." (12) Nay, it is they who are the workers of corruption,

7 In the Quran the heart (*qalb*) is the organ associated not only with sentiment, but also with consciousness, knowledge, and faith (48:4). For example, the heart is the locus of the Divine Revelation to the Prophet (2:97); it can be veiled to prevent understanding (6:25; 17:46), covered with rust (83:14), or hardened (2:74); it can fail to understand (7:179; 22:46), be confounded along with sight (6:110), or go blind (22:46). For other verses mentioning hearts being sealed, see 6:46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 18:57.

This verse explicitly states that God seals unbelievers' hearts and hearing and covers their sight, preventing them from believing despite the Prophet's warnings and overall message. This is related to 2:10, where God *increased them in disease* in their hearts. This can be possibly understood in a predestinarian sense, according to which one's faith or lack thereof is not a product of one's human will, but of God's prior Command. But it can also be understood as spiritual reward or punishment, making the seal a consequence rather than a cause. *And whosoever is granted wisdom has been granted much good* (2:269) shows that spiritual understanding is a good in its own right and lack of understanding is an evil in its own right; hence the exhortation in 20:114: *Say, "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!"*

8 *Those* in this verse are the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*), referring originally to a group of people in and around Madinah who pretended to be Muslims, but at times collaborated with the disbelievers, or who were lukewarm in their faith to the point of inaction. But it also refers to such people in general wherever and whenever they might live. For a discussion of the hypocrites, see commentary on 63:1–8.

9 For a similar attempt to deceive God, see 4:142: *Verily the hypocrites seek to deceive God, but it is God Who deceives them.* The idea of God's "plotting" or "scheming" overcoming the plotting and scheming of the disbelievers and hypocrites appears in several places in the Quran (e.g., 10:21; 13:42; 14:46; 16:26; 27:50).

10 The *disease* is usually understood to refer to doubt, hence a spiritual sickness (see 2:7; 24:50). Although some read *having lied* (*yakdhibūn*) as "having denied" (*yukadhdhibūn*), 63:1, which rebukes the hypocrites for lying, lends support to the former (Ṭ).

11–12 To spread or create *corruption* (*fasād*) is a major theme in the Quran, the opposite of which is often "setting things aright" or "making amends" (*iṣlāḥ*); see 30:41c. The identity of the speaker of *Do not work corruption . . .* is open and could be the Prophet himself, a group of believers, or perhaps even some victim of corruption who says this phrase to the corrupters in rebuke (R). Ibn ʿAbbās and others state that *corruption upon the earth* (or alternately "corruption in the land") refers to open disobedience against God. It can also be seen as the result of such disobedience (47:22). One interpretation, attributed to the prominent Companion Salmān al-Fārsī, states that the people to whom this passage refers have not yet come (Ṭ), an explanation that the commentators accept (Ṭ, IK) in the sense that this verse does not restrict the descriptions of hypocrisy and iniquity to the Prophet's contemporaries. Some contemporary Muslims interpret the

though they are unaware. (13) When it is said unto them, "Believe as the people believe," they say, "Shall we believe as fools believe?" Nay, it is they who are the fools, though they know not. (14) And when they meet those who believe they say, "We believe," but when they are alone with their satans they say, "We are with you. We were only mocking." (15) God mocks them, and leaves them to wander confused in their rebellion. (16) It is they who have purchased error at the price of guidance. Their commerce has not brought them profit, and they are not rightly guided. (17) Their parable is that of one who kindled a fire, and when it lit up what was around him, God took away their light, and left them in

destruction of the natural environment to be one of the central meanings of these verses.

To work *righteousness* (*muṣliḥ*) means to set things right or put them in a state of righteousness, but is not to be confused with "reform" in the modern sense. The response *we are only working righteousness* can mean either that they believed that they were actually doing so and their own practice of religion was correct, or that they were acting in their self-interest in trying to bridge the gap between believers and the disbelievers (R). According to this latter interpretation, their lukewarm (at best) commitment, rather than being a fault, makes them peacemakers between the two warring sides, offering compromise rather than conflict.

13 By *fools* the speakers are referring to the Companions of the Prophet, but the more universal interpretation applied to 2:11 sees this as a general attitude of rejection of faith. Some commentators have said that the ignorant knew that the believers were those of intelligence, but called them fools to attempt to show themselves to be more knowledgeable.

14 The occasion given for this revelation involves a hypocrite who boasted to his companions, "Watch how I divert these fools from you." After having heaped praise upon some Companions of the Prophet, he returned to his own companions and said, "When you see them, do as I do." When the Companions returned to the Prophet to tell him, this verse was revealed, exposing the intentions of the hypocrites (IK).

*Satans* (*shayāṭīn*) is the plural of *shayṭān*, which in the singular usually refers to Satan. Here it is usually understood to mean the hypocrites' leaders, fellow hypocrites, disbelievers, or inner demons. At times in the Quran *shayāṭīn* refers not only to otherworldly creatures, but also to human beings, as in 6:112: *Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn.*

15 The issue of whether mockery or ridicule (cf. 9:79) is properly attributable to God is addressed by commentators. Some point out that the disbelievers bring ridicule upon themselves as recompense, not that it originates in God (Q, Ṭ); others say that the disgrace and ignominy with which God afflicts disbelievers and in which He leaves them to continue for a long time is tantamount to mockery (R). *Wander confused in their rebellion* also appears in 6:110; 7:186; 10:11; 23:75. *Rebellion* (*ṭughyān*) is related to the verb *ṭaghā*, which has the sense of trespassing beyond a limit, and is attributed to disbelievers in general and to Pharaoh in particular (20:24; 79:17).

16 Here *purchased* can be understood as "preferred," as in 41:17, *they preferred blindness to guidance* (Ṭ, R, Q), which conforms to an Arabic usage of *shirā'* (usually "purchasing"), though this reading is made less likely by the mention of *commerce* (*tijārah*). Such language relating buying and selling to spiritual matters is also found in 2:86; 2:175; 3:177.

17 For the spiritual dimensions of light and light symbolism in the Quran, see 24:35c. On a worldly level and in relation to the hypocrites, the light is understood by some to refer to the *shahādah*, the declaration of faith that provides the hypocrite "light" by which to eat, marry, and find

darkness, unseeing. (18) Deaf, dumb, and blind, they return not. (19) Or a cloudburst from the sky, in which there is darkness, thunder, and lightning. They put their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps, fearing death. And God encompasses the disbelievers. (20) The lightning all but snatches away their sight. Whenever it shines for them, they walk therein, and when darkness comes over them, they halt. Had God willed, He would have taken away their hearing and their sight. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (21) O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who created you, and those who were before you, that haply you may be reverent: (22) He Who made for you the earth a place of repose and the sky a canopy, and sent water from the sky by which He brought forth fruits for your provision. So do not set up equals unto God, knowingly. (23) If you are in

protection, since membership in the Islamic community grants one certain legal and social rights and protections. But this "light" is taken away at death when the hypocrisy is unmasked (Ṭ).

18 When recited aloud in Arabic, *deaf, dumb, and blind* (*ṣummun bukmun ʿumyun*) is startlingly evocative, in its very sound, of this deafness, dumbness, and blindness (cf. 2:171; 17:97). Deafness and blindness are mentioned frequently in the Quran (e.g., 5:71; 6:25; 6:39; 10:42–43) and refer to spiritual insensibility. The commentators mention the good, the truth, and guidance as realities lost to those so described (Ṭ). They *return not* to guidance (2:16) or to Islam, as this likely refers to the hypocrites; or they do not repent and take heed.

19 *Or* indicates a continuation from *their parable* in v. 17. Some commentators (Ṭ) mention a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās that the Prophet, when asked, said that *al-raʿd* (*thunder*) is the name of an angel in the clouds, while others see this as an invalid and gratuitous attribution, since the word *raʿd* as "thunder" was well known to Arabs (cf. 13:13; Q). *Samāʾ* (pl. *samāwāt*), here *sky*, is also translated "Heaven," "firmament," or even "ceiling" depending on its context.

20 See 2:17c.

21 *That haply* (*laʿalla*) occurs frequently in the Quran and is sometimes rendered "that perchance" or "that someone might." It can be seen to present a theological problem, as it implies anxiety or hope, qualities usually associated only with creatures. Some solve this matter by saying that the hope of God is tantamount to a promise, as nothing could stand in its way (Z), or that the hope is connected to the subject of the statement, not to God.

22 It is reported that the Prophet was asked, "O Messenger of God, what is the greatest sin in the Sight of God?" and he replied, "To set up equals to God, though He created you." *Fruits* (*thamarāt*) here is understood in both the most general sense of natural produce that can be used for food and the symbolic sense of spiritual sustenance for the soul. Earth and sky imagery similar to that mentioned in this verse can be found in 21:31–32; 50:6–7; 79:27–31.

23 *Our servant* refers to the Prophet. The *iʿjāz* ("inimitability" or "power to incapacitate [arguments against it]") of the Quran (a term not used in reference to the Quran in the text itself) stems from its intrinsic beauty, clarity, eloquence, and levels of meaning. Similar challenges to produce something like the Quran are made in 10:38; 11:13; 17:88. The Quran is the central miracle (*muʿjizah*, from *iʿjāz*) of Islam in that it "incapacitates" challengers' arguments against it, as miracles do in general. That the Prophet was "unlettered" (see 7:157c) forms the background of this challenge. This verse is Madinan, though other similar challenges had been revealed in Makkah. See the essay "The Quran in Translation."

24 The *stones* are usually taken to be sulfur

doubt concerning what We have sent down unto Our servant, then bring a *sūrah* like it, and call your witnesses apart from God if you are truthful. (24) And if you do not, and you will not, then be mindful of the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, which is prepared for the disbelievers. (25) And give glad tidings to those who believe and perform righteous deeds that theirs are Gardens with rivers running below. Whensoever they are given a fruit therefrom as provision, they say, "This is the provision we received aforetime," and they were given a likeness

or the idols (2:22) worshipped by the polytheists (IK; cf. 22:6). The structure (*if you do not, and you will not*) shows that the conditional *if* is not an expression of uncertainty in the case of God, any more than *laʿalla* expresses anxiety (see 2:21c). It conveys a certainty rather than a contingency.

25 *With rivers running below* does not mean that the water is underground (as such a translation might suggest), but simply that the water flows lower than the vegetation of the Garden (Ṭ), which contrasts sharply with water in a desert, which is typically not above ground and almost never flows along the ground. Others understand it to mean that that rivers run "through" (*min khilāl*) such Gardens (Z) or simply that such Gardens have water in them, similar to the way one says a garden has grapes or olives (R). Such paradisal descriptions depict the joys of the Garden in concrete terms that reflect the ecstatic and rapturous joys experienced on a much lower level in the blessings given to human beings on earth. Far from being nonspiritual, they express in vivid and concrete terms the highest spiritual realities.

*Aforetime* refers to this world (*dunyā*) as opposed to the Hereafter (*ākhirah*). The usual question of how earthly creatures can conceive of heavenly rewards is turned around, and this verse speaks from the point of view of a dweller of Paradise who is remembering the world, though some mention the possibility that this refers to fruits tasted in the Garden after death, not before in this world (Āl, Q, Z). Most think that *This is the provision* refers to an identity in kind, rather than the very same objects. Some think the *likeness* (*mutashābih*) means similarity in appearance with a difference in taste; or that all the fruit of Paradise is of the choicest kind, with none of inferior quality; or that rather than being a comparison, the statement of the dweller of Paradise is an expression of wonderment, since there is nothing in common between this world and the Hereafter besides the names of things (IK). The commentators note the wisdom, from the point of view of someone in this life, in the fact that Paradise contains familiar objects. But this verse also adds the perspective of the dweller of Paradise, showing that the life of this world is not forgotten in the Hereafter, though its bitterness is gone, as evidenced by the frequent description in the Quran of those in Paradise: *No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve* (2:62). For a more far-reaching sense of *mutashābih*, see 3:7c.

The *spouses made pure* mentioned here are said to be free from injury as well as from menstruation, excreta, and bodily functions considered distasteful and unpleasant, and though reproductive functions are mentioned in the commentaries, sexual purity or virginity is not associated with this verse by the major commentators.

*Therein they shall abide* and variants of it are a common refrain in the Quran, describing the inhabitants of both Paradise and Hell. Lexically *khālid* ("abiding") has the sense of something that stays, which as a promise from God is equivalent to an enduring or everlasting presence. However, sometimes *khālid* is supplemented with phrases such as *forever* (4:57; 4:122; 4:169; 5:119; 9:100; 72:23; 98:8) and *save as thy Lord wills* (11:108; cf. 6:128). For the perpetuity and/or eternity of the posthumous states, see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

of it. Therein they have spouses made pure, and therein they shall abide. (26) Truly God is not ashamed to set forth a parable of a gnat or something smaller. As for those who believe, they know it is the truth from their Lord, and as for those who disbelieve, they say, "What did God mean by this parable?" He misleads many by it, and He guides many by it, and He misleads none but the iniquitous. (27) Those who break God's Pact after accepting His Covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, it is they who are the losers. (28) How can you disbelieve in God, seeing

26 It is said that this verse was revealed either when the hypocrites objected that God would not employ such parables—namely, those directed against them in vv. 17–20; or when a group of Jews scoffed at the notion that God would use a fly (22:73) or spider (29:41) in a parable; or when idolaters brought these same objections. *Or something smaller* (*fawqahā*), which is often understood literally to mean "above that," can also be understood as "something beyond that" in its lowliness (R).

The verse implies that the very same message can both guide and mislead, which is something rather different from simply being ignored. According to this understanding, by being denied the parable (and presumably other Divine teachings) is not neutralized for disbelievers, but places them farther astray. This echoes the previous verses in which God seals the hearts and perception of disbelievers. Being *iniquitous* (*fāsiq*) makes the truth for the denier into something other than the truth, which is to say that one's moral quality decides, at least in part, one's level of understanding. Those who are misled and labeled *the iniquitous* here are generally considered to be the hypocrites (Ṭ).

27 The *Covenant* mentioned in this verse is understood as the general obligation of human beings to acknowledge God's Oneness and worship Him (IK) as understood in the pre-eternal covenant between God and human beings (7:172); or it refers to *And they swore by God their most solemn oaths that, were a warner to come unto them, they would be more rightly guided than any of the communities* (35:42), which means the Arabs before the coming of the Prophet (R); or it refers to a specific covenant made with the People of the Book. See the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." Some say that *what God has commanded be joined* refers to blood ties, whose importance and maintenance as commanded by God appears elsewhere in the Quran: *Reverence . . . family relations* (*arḥām;* 4:1); *But family relations have the strongest claim on one another in the Book of God* (8:75); *Family relations are closer to one another, according to the Book of God* (33:6); *Were you to turn away, would you perchance work corruption upon the earth and break your family relations?* (47:22). Others consider it to include any such Divine Command to keep things joined (IK). Some mention in this context that not only the Arabs had blood ties to the Prophet; the Jews did also, since Isaac and Ishmael (the progenitor of the Arabs) were brothers. The *losers* are such in the sense of being bereft of something; *khāsir* can also denote "being lost" in the sense of losing one's way or losing one's self.

28 The four stages mentioned here are before birth, during earthly life, earthly death, and resurrection. (See also 40:11: *They will say, "Our Lord, Thou hast caused us to die twice over, and given us life twice over."*) The initial lifelessness (lit. "dead") is understood either as one's "existence" in the material stuff of the body, literally in the loins of one's parents or the dust of the earth, or as the state of being *a thing unremembered* (76:1) or "unknown" in that a thing is called "dead" among the Arabs when its traces are effaced and it is not "mentioned" or "remembered" (*madhkūr*, Ṭ). In either case, it refers to our "nonexistence" before our life in this world. Someone like the Sufi mystic Ibn ʿArabī

that you were dead and He gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned? (29) He it is Who created for you all that is on the earth. Then He turned to Heaven and fashioned it into seven heavens, and He is Knower of all things. (30) And when thy Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth," they said, "Wilt Thou

(d. 638/1240) would understand the "lifelessness" of our pre-earthly condition to be a state of nonmanifestation within God's Knowledge as opposed to nothingness in the ordinary sense of this term. That to which life is first given would thus be that form (*ṣūrah*) in God's eternal Knowledge.

29 For God's creation of things *for* human beings, see also 16:5; 16:13; 26:166. This idea also relates to God's making creation subservient to human beings as in 22:65; 31:20; 45:13. *Turned to* translates the verb *istawā,* which is also rendered "mounted" in other contexts; see also 7:54; 10:3; 20:5; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4. For the seven heavens, also see 41:12, where the context is the six days of creation; 67:3, in which they are *one upon another;* 65:12, which also mentions the creation *from the earth the like thereof*—that is, earths upon earths; the early Quran commentator Mujāhid (d. 104/722–23) mentions "heavens above one other" and "earths above one another"; and 71:15, which also mentions the "levels" of heavens.

30 *Vicegerent* renders *khalīfah,* a word that can also mean "successor" or "deputy," hence *khalīfat rasūl Allāh,* or "successor/steward of God's Messenger," shortened to *khalifah* (anglicized as "caliph"). In some verses, such as here and 6:165, *khalīfah* appears to denote a universal human inheritance and responsibility, since all human beings are in their inner reality the *khalīfah* of God. In others, the sense of "successor" comes to the fore (e.g., 7:69, which refers to *vicegerents after the people of Noah*). See also 7:74; 10:14; 10:73; 27:62; 35:39. At another level of interpretation, some commentators say that *khalīfah* comes from *khalafa* ("to come after") and means that human beings come after all creatures and all grades of being are summarized in the human state.

Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have said that Iblīs was a member of a tribe of angels called *al-ḥinn* (a word related to *jinn*), was named al-Ḥārith, and was a custodian of Paradise. All the angels were created from light, except this tribe, which was created from "smokeless fire" (cf. 55:15). The first to inhabit the earth were the jinn, who caused corruption there and spilled blood. Then God sent Iblīs among that host of angels called *al-ḥinn.* Iblīs and his compatriots killed them and sent them off to the islands of the sea and the edges of the mountains. He was filled with pride for accomplishing something no one else had done. After Adam's body was created from clay, it remained a lifeless form for forty years, during which Iblīs taunted it by flying in and out of it, saying, "You are nothing! If I come to power over you, I will destroy you, and if you come to power over me, I will defy you." Then it was said to those angels who were with Iblīs (not all the angels) that they should prostrate before Adam. Iblīs said, "No, I will not prostrate before him. I am better than him, older, and greater. You created me from fire, while you created him from clay" (cf. 7:12; Ṭ). The only other indication in the Quran of such an order of creation is found in 15:26–27: *And We indeed created man from dried clay, made of molded mud, and the jinn We created earlier from scorching fire.*

That jinn inhabited the earth before human beings is accepted by many commentators. But al-Rāzī prefers the opinion that God spoke to all the angels, not only those who warred alongside Iblīs. Nevertheless, some specifics of the story, such as that Iblīs was a member of a tribe of angels, can hardly be counted as reliable and are certainly from popular narratives, since an authority such as Ibn ʿAbbās would have known that the Quran in 18:50 identifies Iblīs as a jinn, not an angel.

It does, however, provide one possible explanation for the angels' question, *Wilt Thou place therein . . . ,* namely, that they had previous experience with the blood and corruption of the earth's

place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy?" He said, "Truly I know what you know not." (31) And He taught Adam the names, all of them. Then He laid them before the angels and said, "Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful." (32) They said, "Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge save what Thou hast taught us. Truly Thou art the Knower, the Wise." (33) He said, "Adam, tell them

previous inhabitants. However, many commentators explain the angels' apparently audacious question as an expression of wonder on their part, rather than doubt or concern (R). They marvel at God's Wisdom, but are not alarmed by it. It is thought that disobedience or any brand of rebelliousness is impossible for angels, though al-Rāzī notes that the Muʿtazilites believed that angels could be disobedient.

*Hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy* can also be read, "We glorify Thee while praising Thee" (Z); cf. 32:15; 39:75; 42:5. *I know what you know not* is generally understood to mean that, despite the inevitability of bloodletting and corruption, good things will come of the creation of human beings, but only God knows what they are (R). As mentioned in 2:11–12c, such corruption can also refer to the degradation of the natural environment.

31 Some derive *Adam* from *adīm,* meaning the surface of the earth, in keeping with the *ḥadīth,* "Truly God created Adam from a handful taken from the entire earth. The Children of Adam thus correspond to the earth, some being red or black or white, or in between, and [they experience] ease and sorrow, bad and good."

The *names* Adam is taught are considered by some, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, to be those that people use in discourse with one another, such as "man," "sea," "mountain," and even "kettle." To others, such as Mujāhid, they are "the names of everything." Still others say he was taught the names of angels; or that he was taught the names of all his progeny, which the commentator al-Ṭabarī prefers, in part because the pronoun *hum* is used rather than *hā,* indicating human or angelic named objects. The plural of persons (human beings and angels) is the masculine plural, but the plural of other things (animals, inanimate objects) is usually expressed by the feminine singular pronoun, though this rule does not always hold (e.g., 24:45, where *hum* refers to *beasts*). For al-Rāzī, this means that Adam indeed was taught all the languages of the earth, and his descendants came to prefer one over the others in the course of time. The commentator al-Ṭabrisī adds that a similar process would have taken place after the flood. *Laid them before* refers either to the names themselves or to the objects named.

For some, to be taught the names of things means to be given knowledge of all things. Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of this passage begins by pointing out that in relation to the world angels "are like the spiritual and sensory faculties" in human beings. As the faculties of men and women are diverse, so are the angels in their myriad functions arrayed in a hierarchy. Each human faculty or power is by definition limited to what it is in itself, and each angel, by Ibn ʿArabī's analogy, is limited to what it is; that is, in its knowledge and function. Thus each of these faculties "is veiled and cannot see anything superior to itself." Adam was capable of knowing all the Divine Names, unlike the angels who "did not possess the synthesis possessed by Adam, and were not aware of the Divine Names by which it [namely, Adam's synthetic reality] is set apart such that they could glorify the Real and proclaim Him holy through them. Nor did they know that God possesses Names to whose knowledge they did not attain, therefore not glorifying Him with them nor proclaiming Him holy as did Adam." Thus, Adam could know God in ways the angels could not.

32 This verse indicates the limitation of the knowledge of God by angels as far as the universal comprehensive nature of this knowledge is concerned.

33 For the *Unseen of the heavens and the earth,* see also 35:38; 49:18; and for *Knower of the Unseen*

their names." And when he had told them their names He said, "Did I not say to you that I know the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you disclose and what you used to conceal?" (34) And when We said to the angels, "Prostrate unto Adam," they prostrated, save Iblīs. He refused and waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers. (35) We said, "O Adam, dwell

more generally, see, e.g., 13:9; 23:92 64:18. *What you used to conceal* could refer to Iblīs' pride or to the belief attributed to the angels that "God never creates a thing except that we are more noble than it" (Ṭ). But with this interpretation, the angels would have accepted Adam's excellence without objection, and what they concealed would have been virtue, not the pride one might gather from their judgment of their own nobility.

34 For the account and meaning of the prostration before Adam, see 7:11–27; 15:31–40; 17:61–65; 18:50.

35 The story of the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise appears here and in 7:19–25 and 20:120–23. Relative to Genesis 2–3, the Quranic account gives fewer details. Some commentators mention an array of details about Adam, Eve, the Garden, and the fall, many of which find their origin in Jewish and Christian, and perhaps even Arab, oral traditions. Many of these traditions describe Eve (Ḥawwāʾ), who is referred to as Adam's wife rather than Eve in the Quran; the kind of tree or plant from which Adam and Eve ate (apple vs. some type of grain); what form Iblīs took; and even where they were first exiled. But some of these details are not attested to very strongly in the *Ḥadīth,* and some (such as some registered by al-Ṭabarī) do not rise above the level of folklore. The Quran itself provides the foundation and details of the story of Adam and Eve, which has a different meaning in Islam than in Judaism or Christianity.

The Garden in which Adam and Eve dwelled is indeed paradisal; they would *neither hunger therein, nor go naked, . . . neither thirst therein, nor suffer from the heat of the sun* (20:118–19), in addition to experiencing the unconstrained enjoyment of the Garden's fruits, as mentioned in this verse. Eating from the *tree,* according to Iblīs, would have made them angels, or able to live forever (7:20), and in 20:120 he promises them *the Tree of Everlastingness and a kingdom that never decays.* Among the possibilities offered for the type of tree are grain, grapevine, and fig. (The Quran never uses the word "fruit" in this context, but says only that they ate from the *shajarah,* a word that can include also vegetative growth such as trees, shrubs, and bushes.)

One view (R) has it that the promise of eternal life mentioned in 7:20 and 20:120 would have had no attraction if Adam were already dwelling in the "Garden of Rewards," which the Quran promises to believers. The command to *get . . . down* (v. 36) is the same verb used in v. 61 (*Go down to a town . . .*), where it does not imply a vertical descent, but a change in location. Moreover, those who enter the Garden will not be *expelled therefrom* (15:48). Also, if Adam were created from earth, then where is the ascent from earth to Heaven in this account? The commentator al-Qurṭubī (who is not of this opinion) also mentions that the Quran says of the Garden, *They hear therein neither idle talk nor lying* (78:35), and yet Iblīs did lie to them, which is indeed how he caused them to be expelled from it. These considerations would seem to indicate that this is a different Garden from the "Garden of Rewards."

The consensus view, though, is that the Garden of Adam and the promised Garden are the very same (R, Q). It is not "a" garden, but "the" Garden (*al-jannah*), "well known" as the eternal Garden promised to believers. Some respond to the opinion that Iblīs could not have lied in the Garden by arguing that he could have whispered to them from somewhere outside the Garden, and that the promise never to be expelled applies only to those granted entry to Paradise after their sojourn on earth as a reward for their good deeds (Ṭs).

Surveying these options, al-Rāzī offers this final possibility: "These are all possible, and the textual proofs are weak and contradictory; so one

thou and thy wife in the Garden and eat freely thereof, wheresoever you will. But approach not this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." (36) Then Satan made them stumble therefrom, and expelled them from that wherein they were, and We said, "Get you down, each of you an enemy to the other. On the earth a dwelling place shall be yours, and enjoyment for a while." (37) Then Adam received words from his Lord, and He relented unto him. Indeed, He is the Relenting, the Merciful. (38) We said, "Get down from it, all of you. If guidance should come to you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve." (39) But those who disbelieve

should cease, and refrain from being categorical. And God knows best." On this and similar issues (such as Eve's creation and entry in the Garden) he takes a similar attitude, that one cannot know for sure, and one does not need to know, as this is not central to the Quranic telling of the account.

36 The metaphorical meaning of *made them stumble* is the same in both Arabic and English: a falling into sin or error. The command *get you down* is in the second-person plural, which grammatically can apply to Adam and Eve or to Iblīs as well. The interpretation most in keeping with the Quranic text understands the addressees to be Adam and Eve and all their progeny, sometimes including Iblīs and his progeny, with Adam and Eve representing humanity as a whole.

The *dwelling place* (*mustaqarr*) has been understood as a place to live, as in *the earth as an abode* (40:64, using *qarār*, a word of similar derivation) or as a reference to earthly graves, although other uses of *mustaqarr* in the Quran (e.g., 6:98; 25:24; 36:38) indicate the former.

*For a while* (lit. "until a moment") can signify either earthly death, the Day of Resurrection (which is the end of the world and humanity's dwelling on earth), or "an appointed time" (*ajal*). It should be noted that this "fall" is not tied to the idea of "original sin," which Islam does not accept.

37 Some understand *words* as a reference to the supplication of Adam and Eve: *Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou dost not forgive us and have Mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers* (7:23). Another account mentions that Adam beseeched God, "Did you not make me vicegerent? Did you not breathe into me of Thy Spirit? Does Thy Compassion not outstrip Thy Wrath?" God's response of "Yea" to each of these questions and His informing Adam that he was forgiven constitute the words that Adam received. Others say that God taught Adam and Eve the pilgrimage, and the pilgrimage was the words. Still others claim it was a prayer (presumably given to Adam by God to recite), "There is no god but Thee! Glorified be Thee, praised be Thee! Thou knowest evil, and I have wronged myself. So forgive me! Thou art the best of forgivers!" This is repeated again, substituting "mercy" and "repentance" for "forgiveness" in the formulation (R).

In Arabic the verb for "repent" and "relent" (*tāba/yatūbu*) is the same; its meaning changes only with the addition of a preposition. *Tawbah*, the noun derived from the verb, means literally a "turning" or a "return": we turn or return to God in repentance, and He turns or returns to us. Similar passages in the Bible (Jonah 3:9; Jeremiah 15:6; Genesis 6:6) predicate a kind of "repentance" of God. *Al-Tawwāb* (the Relenting) is the intensive participle of *tawbah*, meaning "repentance"; see also 4:17–18c; 4:147c.

38–39 The opinion that the progeny of Adam are addressed here assumes that the guidance is the prophets and teachings (*bayān*) and is of course in keeping with a major theme of the Quran; namely, that God is ever guiding humanity. Others have limited the address to Adam, Eve, and Satan.

According to an account by the early religious scholar Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), when Adam descended to the earth, God revealed to

and deny Our signs, it is they who are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. (40) O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill My covenant, and I shall fulfill your covenant, and be in awe of Me. (41) And believe in that which I have sent down, confirming that which you have with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it. And sell not My signs for a paltry price, and reverence Me. (42) And confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth. (43) And perform the prayer, and give the alms,

him, "O Adam, there are four acts containing all things for thee and thy children: one is for Me, one is for thee, one is between thee and Me, and one is between thee and mankind. As for the one which is Mine, thou shalt worship Me and not associate aught with Me. As for that which is thine, thou shalt attain the reward of that which thou doest. As for that between thee and Me, thou must supplicate, and I must respond. As for that between thee and mankind, should thou befriend them with that which thou lovest, they shall befriend thee likewise" (R). In this sense, prophecy and revelation begin with the earthly history of humanity.

40 The *Blessing* (*niʿmah;* see also vv. 47, 122) is usually understood to be the deliverance from Pharaoh (vv. 49–50) and the subsequent heavenly gifts of manna, quails, and the promised land; or that God placed prophets among them and sent them Divine books; or the coming of Islam, since this verse addresses the Jews in and around Madinah. *Niʿmah* is understood in the most general sense as well, beginning with the gift of creation, in keeping with the universal commands of the following verses. A range of possible meaning exists for the *covenant* (*ʿahd*), which is understood broadly as people's gratitude, on the one hand, and God's Forgiveness and Reward, on the other. Another interpretation is that it refers to the *mīthāq* ("covenant" or "pact") of 5:12: *God had made a covenant with the Children of Israel, and We raised among them twelve chieftains.* Some interpret it to mean that they should be true to the predicted coming of the Prophet, *whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them* (7:157; Q).

41 That the Quran confirms *that which you have with you,* usually understood to be the Torah and the Gospel, can mean either that it supports the validity and teachings of those books or that it is a fulfillment of the foretelling of the Prophet Muhammad's mission within those books (see v. 40; 7:157). This latter interpretation would turn the verse into a kind of imperative, as it implies that the Torah and Gospel demand faith in the Prophet.

Being *the first* is not necessarily the start of a sequence, but an expression of the quality or priority of one's conviction. See also 6:14: *I was commanded to be the first of those who submit;* 6:163: *I am the first of those who submit;* and 7:143: *I am the first of the believers.*

On selling *for a paltry price,* also see 2:174; 3:187; 16:95. In other places, the language of buying and selling is positive, as when God asks believers, *Who is it that will lend unto God a goodly loan? He will multiply it for him, and his shall be a generous reward* (57:11); and when 61:10 speaks of *a commerce that shall save you.*

42 *Confound* renders the verb *labisa,* which also has the sense of "to clothe" and therefore "to hide" and consequently "to obscure," thus including the idea of veiling as well as confusion (cf. 3:71; 6:65; 6:82; 6:137), although the subsequent command to not conceal the truth suggests the reading of *confound.*

43 If this were a command to perform the specific Islamic prayer (*ṣalāh*) and give the alms (*zakāh*), as some understand it, it would be tantamount to a command to become Muslim. But passages such as 19:31; 19:55 (where we are told Ishmael commanded his people to pray and give alms); and 20:14 show that the canonical prayer and alms are not exclusive to Islam as understood to mean the religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Other verses related to bowing include 3:43; 5:55;

and bow with those who bow. (44) Will you enjoin piety upon mankind, and forget yourselves, while you recite the Book? Do you not understand? (45) Seek help in patience and prayer, and this indeed is difficult except for the humble, (46) who reckon that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return unto Him. (47) O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and that I favored you above the worlds. (48) And be mindful of a day when no soul will avail another soul in any way, and no intercession shall be accepted

9:112; 38:24. Again, bowing is a universal movement of worship and reverence, but it has a specific definition in the Islamic context as a particular movement in the canonical prayer.

44 Depending on context, the term rendered *piety* (*birr*) has the sense of goodness, kindness, loyalty, sincerity, or obedience. For *piety,* see also 2:177, 189; 3:92. The "pious" (*abrār*) are often mentioned in connection with heavenly rewards (3:193; 76:5; 82:13). *Piety* in this verse can mean obedience to God as well as prayer and alms. Some mention that it could refer to acknowledgment of the Prophet's mission or to the previous warning to the Arabs that a prophet would be sent among them (R). *Recite* here can also mean "study" (Ṭ).

45 Cf. 2:153. For *patience* (*ṣabr*), see also, for example, 12:18; 16:127; 23:111; 70:5; 90:17; 103:3. *Ṣabr,* like "patience," means both the endurance of hardship and steadfastness in good. *This*—translating a pronoun denoting *prayer* or the admonition as a whole (IK)—is *difficult* (*kabīrah,* lit. "a tremendous or momentous thing") because of the demands it places on us by day and by night (IA). Indeed, one can be patient through the commonplace discipline of deferred gratification, whereas prayer always demands, in some measure, a retreat from the world and a diminution of the ego.

46 *Reckon* renders the verb *ẓanna,* which, paradoxically, can mean "to conjecture" (6:116), "to be certain" (as here), or simply "to think" (48:6) or "to believe." A similar polyvalence between uncertainty and conviction can be seen in the use of *rajā',* usually "hope," but also with the sense of expectation or belief, as in 2:75; 71:13; and a verse similar to this one, 18:110. The Quran repeatedly mentions that we shall return and be returned to God (e.g., 2:28, 156; 23:60; 29:57).

47 Cf. 2:122; similar language is found in 6:86: *And Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot—each We favored above the worlds.* Some commentators understand this preeminence to be something confined to the past, in light of the fact that in 3:110 it is the Prophet Muhammad's community that is described in the Quran itself as *the best community brought forth unto mankind.* They thus view the special favor in light of the Divine blessings mentioned in 5:20: *And when Moses said unto his people, "O my people! Remember God's Blessing upon you, when He appointed prophets among you, and appointed you kings, and gave you that which He gave unto no other in all the worlds."* The verb translated *favored* (*faḍḍala*) carries the sense of causing one thing to excel over another. *Worlds* (*ʿālamīn,* often in the construction "Lord of the worlds") can also mean "peoples" or "nations" in context, as in 21:71, *the land that We have blessed for all peoples.* This meaning can also apply in this verse, though the more universal sense is not incorrect.

48 *Be mindful* renders *ittaqā,* which is usually translated as a variant of "reverence," but it also has the sense of being careful, aware, or on guard. This verse closely resembles v. 123, and the futility of another soul's help is described in 82:19 in similar terms. Elsewhere the Quran lists wealth and children (3:10, 116) among those things that will not avail any soul in the Hereafter.

The concept of intercession (*shafāʿah*) is related to similar concepts in the Quran such as *istighfār,* meaning the seeking of forgiveness for oneself or for another, as in 40:7, where angels *seek forgiveness for those who believe.* Another example is *ṣalāh* (usually "prayer"), not as worship of God, but in the sense of blessing someone, as in 9:103, where God says to the Prophet, *Bless them. Truly thy blessings are a comfort for them.*

from it, nor ransom taken from it; nor shall they be helped. (49) And [remember] when We delivered you from the House of Pharaoh, who inflicted a terrible punishment upon you, slaying your sons and sparing your women. And in that

Intercession and the giving of ransom or compensation were common practices in the tribal society of Arabia and indeed in most traditional societies. Islamic Law itself contains provisions for ransoming or compensation, such as feeding a poor person when one is unable to fast (2:184). Earthly intercession and ransom are aspects of human social and legal transactions, but intercession before God in the Hereafter is a theological issue touching on God's Authority, the danger of idolatry, and the efficacy of prayer.

For some mystics, such as Ibn ᶜArabī, supplicatory prayer brings into being possibilities that would not have been manifested but for that prayer. God's compassionate Love (*raḥmah*) encompasses all things (7:156), and included in that infinite range of love is the love that responds only when a request is made, as in 2:152: *Remember Me, and I shall remember you;* this does not nullify the prior love, which is a purely unasked-for gift. Ultimately, the "request" for love is itself a manifestation of God's Love, in that we cannot remember God unless He "remembers" us first. According to this interpretation, God is the mysterious author of all prayer: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* (50:16); *God comes between a man and his heart* (8:24); *And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing, Wise* (76:30); *And you do not will but that God, the Lord of the worlds, wills* (81:29); *When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they may be led aright* (2:186).

Seen in this way, all intercession is God's—*Unto God belongs intercession altogether* (39:44)—since no plea for intercession can be made without love and remembrance on the part of the intercessor, which itself is a manifestation of God's own Will and Mercy, as mentioned in 20:109: *On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose word He is content.* One could understand the Quranic statements about intercession to deny the kind of worldly bargaining or status-driven intercession that would have been of some avail on earth, but not in the Hereafter.

If one can object that intercession diminishes God's Mercy and Wisdom, one can respond that the intercession itself is a Gift of God. All that the angels, prophets, saints, and believers who are granted intercession have to offer is their goodness and faith and nearness to God, all of which come from God's Wisdom for creatures and their relationship with one another. Seen in this way, passages that deny the efficacy intercession (as in 32:4; 39:44; 74:48) do not contradict those that affirm its possibility (as in 21:28; 34:23; 53:26). For a further discussion of intercession, see 2:255c.

The *ransom* (here *ᶜadl,* lit. "substitution," but usually *fidyah*) can include anything one would seek to give in exchange for deliverance from punishment, including *an earth full of gold* (3:91), twice as much as all the things on the earth (5:36; 13:18), and even one's own children (70:11).

49 The use of *when* (*idh*) links this and subsequent verses to v. 47 in the sense of "remember when," as *idh* can mean "remember when" independently of the explicit use of a word such as *udhkur* ("remember"). *Idh* can also carry the sense of "Lo!" or "See!" or "Behold!"

The *house* (*āl*) refers to the family or people of Pharaoh (which term itself means "great house"). Other than describing it as a punishment or suffering (*ᶜadhāb*), the Quran does not give a specific reason for the killing mentioned in this verse. In light of the fact that Pharaoh repeats the same threat later when Moses is an adult (7:127; 40:25), it would indicate that the murder of males was a form of collective punishment or control (R; cf. Exodus 1), rather than the result of a foretelling of future events, as is sometimes mentioned in the commentaries (Ṭ, R, IK), by soothsayers or astrologers (or even through a dream of Pharaoh) warning that a child would be born to the Israelites who would rise up and destroy Pharaoh's kingdom; see 20:25–28c. See also 28:4.

The *trial* (*balāʾ*) is lexically a testing or finding out, here usually connected to the sufferings, but

was a great trial from your Lord. (50) And when We parted the sea for you and so delivered you, and drowned the House of Pharaoh as you looked on. (51) And when We appointed forty nights for Moses, and you took up the calf while he was away, while you were wrongdoers. (52) Then We pardoned you after that, that haply you may give thanks. (53) And when We gave unto Moses the Book and the Criterion, that haply you may be guided. (54) And when Moses said to his people, "O my people! You have wronged yourselves by taking up the calf. So repent unto your Maker and slay your own. That is better for you in the sight of your Maker." Then He relented unto you. Indeed, He is the Relenting, the Merciful. (55) And when you said, "O Moses, we will not believe thee till we

understood by some to be a *niʿmah,* or blessing, which appears in 2:47 (Ṭ). In the Quran a good can also be a trial, as in 21:35: *We try you with evil and with good;* and 7:168: *And We tried them with good things and with evil things.*

50 *We parted the sea for you* is literally "We parted the sea by means of you," where the Israelites would be the agent, as it were, of the parting. The unnamed *sea* (*baḥr*) refers to a body of saltwater (Q), identified by most authorities as the Red Sea. The drowning of the Egyptians is mentioned in 7:136; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 20:77–79; 26:65–66 (cf. Exodus 14–15). In addition to in the story of Noah (11:36–48 passim) drowning is also mentioned as a punishment in 17:69 and 36:43.

51 For the *forty nights,* see also 7:142. For the *calf,* see also 7:148–54; it is also mentioned in 2:92–93; 4:153; 20:88. *We appointed . . . for Moses* (lit. "We made an appointment with Moses" or, according to another reading, "We promised Moses") refers to Moses' seclusion on Mt. Sinai away from the Israelites. *You took up* refers to their worship of the calf.

52 See also 4:153, where this pardon is mentioned, a verse that also indicates the mercy and power of the Pardon and Forgiveness of God, which are beyond human understanding.

53 The *Book* can be all of, part of, or separate from the Torah. The *Criterion* (*furqān*) is either a description of the Book as something that separates truth from falsehood or a reference to a power of discrimination given to Moses and Aaron (21:48). See also 8:41, where the "day of the *furqān*" is rendered as the *Day of Discrimination.* Elsewhere the Prophet is given the Book and Wisdom (2:151; 3:164; 4:54), which suggests that *furqān,* like wisdom, can be an attribute bestowed upon a prophet, rather than a revealed book, and so supports the reading of *furqān* as a power of discrimination. For *furqān,* which is also a name of the Quran, see also 25:1.

54 Cf. Exodus 32:27. *Slay your own,* in light of similar language elsewhere (cf. 2:85; 4:29), is best understood as the killing of the guilty among the Israelites by their fellow Israelites, in which case the severity of the punishment would have been all the more terrible. Some commentators add that the killed were martyrs, and the killers had their repentance accepted by them, meaning all were forgiven, so that the episode of killing their own would have been, according to this interpretation, a kind of collective punishment in itself rather than a punishment of the guilty by the innocent. *Slay your own* is literally "slay yourselves," and indeed some view the inward meaning to be that the Israelites should slay their own egos in the spiritual sense of opposing their passions (IA, Iṣ).

55 Cf. 4:153. The *thunderbolt,* related etymologically to Moses' *swoon* (7:143) and the "swoon" of the heavens and earth at the blowing of the trumpet (e.g., 39:68) on the Day of Judgment, is also a punishment for the ʿĀd and the Thamūd (41:13). The Thamūd's thunderbolt also seized them *as they looked on.* It can also refer more generally to a great calamity or destruction, or a great cry or noise, a fire, or an earthquake (Ṭ).

see God openly," and the thunderbolt seized you as you looked on. (56) Then We raised you up after your death, that haply you may give thanks. (57) And We shaded you with clouds, and sent down manna and quails upon you, "Eat of the good things We have provided you." They wronged Us not, but themselves did they wrong. (58) And when We said, "Enter this town, and eat freely of that which is therein wheresoever you will, and enter the gate prostrating, and say, 'Remove the burden!' that We may forgive you your sins. And We shall increase the virtuous." (59) But those who did wrong substituted a word other than that

Some commentators (IK, R) identify this verse with the incident described in 7:155, which would mean that after the destruction of the calf, Moses went up the mountain with seventy of the choicest Israelites among those who worshipped the calf. Upon their request to see God, a *thunderbolt* (*ṣāʿiqah*) struck them dead, after which Moses prayed for their revival, which God granted. Others (JJ) consider 2:55 and 7:155 as separate incidents, and some take no firm position (R). The word rendered *thunderbolt* (*ṣāʿiqah*) has a broader range of meaning than *rajfah* (the word used for the "calamity" mentioned in 7:155), but they could also refer to the same event. To see *openly* (*jahratᵃⁿ*), which is also used with reference to speech (e.g., 21:110), means to see with one's eyes, or simply "publicly."

56 The primary understanding of the first part of this verse is that it speaks of a resurrection back to life, though some interpret it as referring to the sending of prophets among the Israelites, since the verb *baʿatha* ("raise up" or "be resurrected") has the root meaning of "rouse" or "stimulate," but can also refer to the sending of prophets (e.g., 2:213). For example, the day when the Prophet was chosen as a prophet is celebrated by many Muslims as *ʿĪd al-mabʿath,* from the same root *b-ʿ-th.*

57 Cf. Exodus 16. The *clouds* (*ghamām;* cf. 7:160) also *split* the heavens (25:25), and God and the angels come *in the shadows of clouds* (v. 210). *Manna* is not described in the Quran except as coming from Heaven and is always mentioned together with *quails,* though some commentators say that it came from tamarisk or even ginger or that it was a honeylike substance or a delicate bread that fell from Heaven like snow (cf. Exodus 16:31). The *good things* (*ṭayyibāt*) are the wholesome, beneficial, and lawful things of the earth. The Quran often chastises those who would forbid partaking of them (4:160; 5:87; 7:32), in particular the Children of Israel.

58 The *town* is thought to be Jerusalem or Jericho, although other cities in Syria or Jordan are mentioned as well. The command to *eat freely* echoes a similar command given to Adam in Paradise (v. 35). Whether this passage refers to Moses or Joshua bears on the identity of the city, as Moses never entered the Holy Land. Al-Rāzī mentions the possibility that this *town* is Egypt itself. He reasons that v. 59 is temporally subsequent and implies that the plague preceded any entrance into Jerusalem and thus took place during the life of Moses. Others see this passage as referring to the entrance into Jericho after its conquest (IK).

*Say, "Remove the burden!"* is literally "Say *ḥiṭṭah.*" The commentator al-Zamakhsharī understands this word in the sense of "unburden us an unburdening," a common stylistic structure in Arabic. It would thus mean something like, "Say, 'Unburden us an unburdening,'" though the word *ḥiṭṭah* ("unburdening") does not explicitly appear as the grammatical object of any verb. Some understand *prostrating* (*sujjadᵃⁿ*) to mean bowing, since "prostrating" is usually more specifically associated in Islamic rites with placing one's forehead on the ground, though lexically it carries a broader meaning than this.

59 Cf. 7:162. According to some, rather than saying *ḥiṭṭah* and *prostrating* (v. 58), they said *ḥinṭah* ("wheat") and entered upon their backsides,

which had been said unto them. So We sent down a torment from Heaven upon those who did wrong for the iniquity they committed. (60) And when Moses sought water for his people, We said, "Strike the rock with thy staff." Then twelve springs gushed forth from it; each people knew their drinking place. "Eat and drink of God's provision, and behave not wickedly upon the earth, working corruption." (61) And when you said, "O Moses, we shall not endure one food, so call upon your Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us some of what the earth grows: its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions." He said, "Would you substitute what is lesser for what is better? Go down to a town, and you will have what you ask for." So they were struck with abasement and poverty, and earned a burden of wrath from God. That is because they disbelieved in the signs of God, and killed the prophets without

in mockery (Z). Since these words would not have been spoken in Arabic, however, the wordplay does not make for a convincing interpretation. The *torment* (*rijz*) is understood here as a punishment or act of wrath; see also 7:134–35; 8:11; 29:34; 34:5.

60 Cf. 7:160. The Quran provides few details here, and the commentators have little that is certain to say about the rock or springs, though it is generally assumed to be an incident in the wilderness. Some mention a stone, connected with Mt. Sinai or even the Edenic Garden, that the Israelites carried with them, described as being cubical or in the shape of a human head; when Moses struck the four sides, each then produced three streams of water, totaling twelve. The commentators generally assume that each knowing its place means that each of the twelve tribes had a fountain from which to drink. Some mention that each knew its drinking place, because each stream touched a member of each tribe (IK). Cf. Exodus 17:1–7, where Moses produces water for his people by striking a rock at Horeb (possibly Sinai). *Eat and drink* is spoken by either God or Moses.

Interpreted spiritually by Ibn ʿAjībah, the stone is considered to be the heart from which spiritual life flows, and the staff is the spiritual will (*himmah*), which "strikes" the egotistical soul and produces blessings of wisdom and unveilings. See v. 74, where hearts are compared to stones *from which streams gush forth.*

61 A Biblical parallel to this verse's content is found in Numbers 11:4–5, where the Israelites crave meat and wish for the "fish . . . the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic" they knew in Egypt. In Numbers 11:31–35, they are given quails, only to have those who craved them struck down for their greediness in relation to God's provision. Here *garlic* (*fūm*) may also mean "wheat."

*Go down* (*habaṭa*) need not be a change in elevation; analogously, in English one might say that one "descends" upon a place; one can "go down" (*habaṭa*) into or out of a valley, for example (Z). *Better* is usually understood here to refer to the manna and quails, while the *lesser* refers to the other foods they were requesting. *A town* renders *miṣr,* which can also mean a city, and used as a proper name or foreign word it means "Egypt." The orthography (which requires it be read as *miṣr*$^{an}$ and not *miṣr*$^{a}$) indicates that it could not refer to Egypt itself (Ṭ), though some mention is made of early commentators understanding this to be the "*miṣr* of Pharaoh." The killing of the prophets (2:61, 87, 91; 3:21, 112, 181; 4:155; 5:70) is also mentioned several times in the Bible (Luke 13:34; Matthew 23:37; Romans 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15; 1 Kings 19:10).

right. That is because they disobeyed, and were transgressors. (62) Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they

62 Cf. 5:69. *Sabeans* renders *ṣābiʾ*, which some derive from the verb *ṣabaʾa* insofar as it can be used to mean "to go from one religion to another." It also means "to rise," as in the case of stars, or "to come upon," "to emerge," or "to arise." Others read it as coming from *ṣabā,* meaning "to incline," as in from one religion to another (Ṭ). The pagan Arabs used to call the Prophet Muhammad a *ṣābiʾ* in this sense, in that he had left the religion of his forefathers (R). According to the commentators the *ṣābiʿ* could be: (1) people who have no recognizable religion; according to some accounts, there were people who declared, "There is no god but God," but had no rites or books or prophet, and did not accept the Prophet Muhammad; (2) people who worshipped angels and faced the *qiblah,* reciting the Psalms; (3) a group of the People of the Book who left their religion; (4) people who think they are following the religion of Noah; or (5) monotheists who believe in the effects of the planets, and hence are unbelievers (Q, R, Ṭ). In the early centuries of Islamic history, the people of Ḥarrān in Syria who followed a religion deeply influenced by esoteric elements in earlier Greek and Near Eastern religions called themselves Ṣabeans to enjoy the status given to the *ṣābiʾūn* in the Quran. Members of the present-day Mandaean sect in southern Iraq and Iran are also called *ṣābiʾ*. They are monotheists and consider John the Baptist to be their prophet; their main ritual is baptism, and many believe that they migrated to their present site from the Jordan Valley.

*Christians* renders *naṣārā* (sing. *naṣrān* or *naṣrānī*), which most plausibly derives from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth (al-Nāṣirah), but several other etymologies are also given. Acts 24:5 describes an accuser who speaks pejoratively of Paul as "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," which is the only time this term appears in the Bible. This pejorative use continued in the early centuries of Christianity, but later developed, in some quarters, as a way of labeling "Jewish Christians" as distinct from "Pauline Christians," and other terms, such as the Middle Persian *tarsāg* and of course *kristiyān,* came into use as labels for the followers of Christ. The precise origin of *naṣārā* has, for some, some bearing on whether certain beliefs mentioned in the Quran, such as the worship of Mary and Jesus (5:116) or God's taking a consort (72:3), stem from a local sect of Christians with beliefs different from mainstream Chalcedonian Christianity. Using etymologies in this way, although often interesting, can be misleading, since the origin of a word often has scant connection with its later use; for further discussion of these issues, see 3:3–4c; 4:171c; 5:17c; 5:73c.

*Those who are Jews* makes use of the verb *hādᵃ/yahūdᵘ,* which is very likely derived from the noun *yahūd,* or "Jew," and is literally something like "those who *hād,*" where *hād* is a verb. Among the etymologies given are that *hād* means "to be repentant," "to incline" toward one other, or "to move" (as when one recites the Torah; Th).

Concerning this verse the commentator al-Qushayrī writes, "The differences in paths, with the oneness of the origin, does not hinder the beauty of acceptance. Whosoever affirms [God] the Real in His signs, and believes in the truth and His Qualities of which He informs them—namely, the Truth and His Qualities—then the differences in religious paths [or laws, *sharᶜ*] and the differences in the appellation of names do not impinge on the realization of the good pleasure [of God]."

The theologian and mystic Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), in his famous work *Fayṣal al-tafriqah,* argues that the "Christians of Byzantium" and the "Turks" (still outside the Islamic world at that time) would come under God's Mercy. Those who know the teachings and virtues of the Prophet and yet still deny him deserve to be called disbelievers, but al-Ghazzālī gives wide latitude in recognizing the obstacles to this knowledge. How could a Turk who had never heard of Muhammad be faulted? Moreover,

why should a person who grows up hearing the Prophet Muhammad referred to as "the great liar" investigate his truth claims, since one would not expect the same from a Muslim who hears of someone accused of being a false prophet? Hearing the name Muhammad means nothing if one learns only of the opposite of his true attributes. One could extend this reasoning to point out that one is unlikely to deem a religion good or desire to learn about it, if the only followers one meets are bad. Such mitigating circumstances, namely, that birthplace, upbringing, and social experience mediate one's knowledge of religion, provide ample space for God's Mercy to encompass those who believe in Him and in the Hereafter and act righteously.

Some argue that the verse refers to certain Jews, Christians, and Sabeans who adhered to these faiths before the Prophet's mission, but who then acknowledged him when he came—people such as Salmān al-Fārsī, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, and the monks Waraqah ibn Nawfal and Baḥīrā (R); others have understood it to include Zoroastrians as well.

Al-Zamakhsharī and some others argue that *those who believe* refers to the hypocrites, because they affirm belief outwardly, and lump them together with Jews, Christians, and Sabeans to form a first group, which is then juxtaposed with those mentioned in the second part of the verse, the true believers in the Prophet and Islam. If this interpretation is accepted, this would be the only instance in the Qurʾān when "those who believe" was used ironically or with the implication of referring to the hypocrites. Al-Rāzī mentions the double usage of "believe" in 4:136, *O you who believe! Believe in God and His Messenger,* as an example where one can be called a "believer" in two senses, necessitating the command to believe, though this is not the interpretation given to that particular verse when it is discussed on its own. Indeed, in 4:136, al-Rāzī seems to approve of the opinion that the use of *muʾmin* ("believer") without any qualifier is reserved solely for Muslims.

Some argue that these other groups are believers simply insofar as they affirm the truth of the Prophet Muhammad (Ṭ). However, Christians who affirm the message of Muhammad would no longer be Christian at all, just as those who practice idolatry would no longer be idolaters if they accept Muhammad. Still, it is not uncommon for commentators to insert the phrase "and follows Muhammad and acts according to his Law" as a gloss on *whosoever believes in God* (Aj)

Al-Qurṭubī mentions an opinion, attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, that 3:85 (*Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission, it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers*) abrogates this verse. But a widely accepted principle of abrogation is that only legal rulings or commands can be abrogated, not descriptive statements, especially as regards one's status in the Hereafter.

For the commentator al-Bayḍāwī, this verse refers to those who fulfilled their obligations before their religions were abrogated by Islam, or it means that these various kinds of disbelievers are saved when they believe sincerely (since he interprets the first reference to be to hypocrites).

Many commentators on this verse disallow those who deny Islam and the Prophet to be included among those who are saved from eternal fear and grief, but as al-Ghazzālī's position makes clear, such denial is hard to verify, especially since one's rejection of Islam in later times might simply be a verdict pronounced upon Muslims and not upon the Prophet himself. Moreover, the plain sense of the verse cannot be denied without introducing inconsistencies: in no other instance is a "believer" used as a name for a hypocrite, and in no sense does a Jew or Christian following the religion of Muhammad continue to be called a Jew or Christian. Moreover, the affirmation of the belief of Jews and Christians is reinforced elsewhere in the Quran, including 3:110; 5:48; 22:67–69; for a fuller discussion, see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." Also see commentary on 3:110–15 for similar issues relating to religious communities.

*No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve* is a description of one's life after death, the equivalent of what might be called salvation. It describes the reward of those who follow God's Guidance (v. 38), those who submit with faith (2:112), whoever believes and is righteous (6:48), the friend of God (10:62), and *those who say, "Our Lord is God"* (46:13).

63–64 Cf. v. 93; 4:154. *Mount* renders *ṭūr,* which commentators point out is a word of Syriac origin for "mountain" (*jabal;* Ṭ), but is nevertheless an Arabic word. There is general agreement among the interpreters that this verse literally

grieve. (63) And when We made a covenant with you, and raised the Mount over you, "Take hold of what We have given you with strength, and remember what is in it, that haply you may be reverent." (64) Then you turned away thereafter, and were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy, you would have been among the losers. (65) And you have indeed known those among you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath, and so We said to them, "Be you apes, outcast." (66) So We made it an exemplary punishment for their time and for times to come, and an admonition for the reverent. (67) And when Moses said to

means that a mountain, either Sinai or a mountain from Palestine, was uprooted and made to physically move and float over the Israelites, in order to frighten them (Ṭ, R, IK). However, it seems just as likely that the phrasing here, *raised the Mount over you,* parallels the English construction "the mountain loomed above them." Exodus 19 mentions "a thick cloud on the mountain" and that "Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in a fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently" (vv. 16, 18). Before this, the Israelites were commanded, "Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death" (v. 12). Since the Quran does not describe the mountain as floating, but only as "rising" above the Israelites, one can understand that it loomed over them in a terrifying and meaningful way, an interpretation that is all the more plausible in light of the descriptions from Exodus 19. To *take hold . . . with strength* is understood to mean doing so "earnestly" and "obediently" and resolving to act upon it (Ṭ, IK, R). *In it* means in the Torah given to Moses (IK).

65 *Outcast* can also mean "lowly" (R). This is understood by some to refer to the people described in 7:163, who were tried by God when fish would come to them only on the Sabbath. Others interpret it to mean that all previous prophets taught that Friday was the most excellent day, that the Day of Judgment would come to pass on a Friday, and that it is celebrated by the angels in Heaven. The Jews preferred Saturday as the day of God's rest, and because of their disobedience they were punished by God by being prohibited from engaging in their normal activities on that day. The Christians preferred Sunday, noting its excellence as the first day (Ṭ).

Other instances in which human beings are likened to animals include the following: *The parable of those [who were] made to bear the Torah, then did not bear it, is that of an ass bearing books* (62:5); *And be moderate in thy pace and lower thy voice. Truly the vilest of voices are those of asses* (31:19); *The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a house* (29:41); *Thus his parable is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, and if you leave him alone, he lolls out his tongue* (7:176). Also, many *aḥādīth* speak of people resurrected in the form of various animals, according to their inner nature.

Al-Qurṭubī interprets it as being akin to the command of 17:50, which literally reads *Be you of stone, or of iron,* making it rhetorical. One can read this as, "As you wish then, be apes, as you have chosen to be." Mujāhid says, "Their hearts were transformed, but they did not transform into apes," comparing it to the ass carrying books of 62:5 (IK).

66 The *it* can refer to the transformation/punishment of the community or the fish of 7:163 (Ṭ, R). *For their time and for times to come* can refer to those who were present and those who would come after, those who were in the environs of the place at that time (lit. "in front of and behind"), or previous and subsequent sins. *Admonition* renders *mawʿiẓah,* which can have a positive or a negative meaning, indicating either counsel and exhortation (as in 2:275; 3:138; 5:46) or reprimand and admonition.

67–71 These verses contain an account of an encounter between Moses and the Jews that is

his people, "God commands you to slaughter a cow," they said, "Do you take us in mockery?" He said, "I seek refuge in God from being among the ignorant." (68) They said, "Call upon your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what she is." He said, "He says she is a cow neither old nor without calf, middling between them: so do what you are commanded." (69) They said, "Call upon your Lord for us, that He may clarify for us what her color is." He said, "He says she is a yellow cow. Bright is her color, pleasing the onlookers." (70) They said, "Pray for us to your Lord, that He may clarify for us what she is. Cows are much alike to us, and if God will we will surely be guided." (71) He said, "He says she is a cow not broken to plow the earth or to water the tillage, sound and without blemish." They said, "Now you have brought the truth." So they slaughtered her,

rather detailed in comparison to other Quranic accounts. First the Israelites balk at God's Command, then interrogate Moses on its particulars, and finally obey it. Cf. Numbers 19, where a ceremony involving a red cow is mentioned. The instructions given the Israelites there, similar to those given in 2:71, are that it is to be a cow "without defect, in which there is no blemish and on which no yoke has been laid" (19:2). The seemingly impertinent questioning of the Israelites is not part of the Biblical account.

One account of the background story (Ṭ, IK) is that a rich man was secretly murdered by his heir. Moses, as the prophet of God, was asked to learn the identity of the killer. After the debate over the cow, the people finally slaughtered it, took a limb from it, and struck the corpse, which then quickened and identified the killer. This would continue the story of the cow up to v. 73.

To be *ignorant* (*jāhil*) in the Quran is more than to have a lack of knowledge; it is a disposition against it, a kind of pathological adherence to one's own way and one's ignorance. The term could also be rendered "ignoramus." Unlike the case of the blind man seeking knowledge from the Prophet (see 80:1–4), the ignoramus is deliberately ignorant and in the dark. Similar instances in the Quran show the enmity or vice inherent in the Quranic concept of ignorance: *Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance—so be not among the ignorant* (6:35); *I exhort thee, lest thou be among the ignorant* (11:46); *If Thou dost not turn their scheming away from me, I shall incline toward them and be among the ignorant* (12:33). It is also related to the concept of the pre-Islamic "Days of Ignorance," called the *jāhiliyyah*.

*Now you have brought the truth* means "now you have made it clear to us" (Ṭ). That *they almost did not* was because the cow was so costly (according to the story recounted by al-Ṭabarī, there was only one such cow, and it was owned by an old woman who was asking a very high price for it); or because they did not want the identity of the killer to come to light because of the potential scandal (Ṭ, R). The Prophet said, "Had they taken the nearest cow and sacrificed it, it would have been enough for them."

In Ibn ʿAjībah's esoteric commentary on this verse, the egotistical soul must be killed in order for the spiritual soul to live. The best time for a soul to inflict the knife of asceticism and poverty upon itself is when it is neither too old, when its habits are ingrained and change becomes more difficult, nor too young (v. 68), when it feels immortal and sees no need to change. It is a soul that does not desire the world (*not broken to plow the earth*) and is pure of the blemishes that bind it to the world (v. 71). The soul is beautiful if it is good (v. 69). It is only when the soul has been purified and made beautiful and severed its inner

but they almost did not. (72) And when you slew a soul and cast the blame upon one another regarding it—and God is the discloser of what you were concealing— (73) We said, "Strike him with part of it." Thus does God give life to the dead and show you His signs, that haply you may understand. (74) Then your hearts hardened thereafter, being like stones or harder still. For indeed among stones are those from which streams gush forth, and indeed among them are those that split and water issues from them, and indeed among them are those

attachment to the world that it is worthy to be sacrificed to God.

72–73 On the murder, also see 2:67–71c. With some variations, the commentators relate the story that the Israelites, after searching for a long time, find the cow described by Moses, purchase it for a high price, and sacrifice it. Then they take a part of the cow's body and strike the corpse of the murder victim, which is then briefly animated, long enough to answer the question of who the killer was, after which the body reverts to its previous state (IK). Thus, most commentators understand the command in v. 73 to mean, "Strike him [the corpse] with part of it [the slaughtered cow]." Assuming this is the correct interpretation, it would not be the only instance of reanimation in the Quran; others include Abraham and the birds (2:260); Jesus and the clay bird (3:49); the unnamed man thought by some to be Ezra, who died and was revived after a hundred years (2:259); and an allusion to this is when dust touched by a messenger (usually thought to be Gabriel) is used to animate the golden calf (20:96).

In a related *ḥadīth,* a man asked, "O Messenger of God, how does God revive the dead?" "Have you ever passed by a barren valley, and then passed by it again and it was verdant?" "Yes." "Even so is the Resurrection." In another version he replied, "Even so does God revive the dead." Sufi commentators have seen in this passage a message that one whose heart has been "slain" by worldliness must sacrifice the egotistical soul in order to give life to the heart through the remembrance of God (Ni, Su, Qu). Al-Qushayrī states, "Whoever desires that his heart be given life must sacrifice his soul. So whoever sacrifices his soul with effort gives life to his heart and the lights of vision."

In Deuteronomy 21:1–9 the Israelites are commanded to sacrifice a cow in the event that a person is found slain and the murderer remains unknown, after which the elders of the town nearest to the victim wash their hands over the cow and disavow any guilt for the crime. But the two accounts are different; one is the narration of an event, and the other, the prescription of a general law, even though there are similarities between them.

74 This verse can be understood to describe those present at the incident of the cow or the Jewish contemporaries of the Prophet insofar as they were members of the same group by affiliation and descent (R). In the first case they are rebuked for being unmoved by so obvious a sign as the raising of the dead, and in the latter case for turning away from the Quranic teaching about this incident. Even rock can be worn down and split open by the force of water. For the symbolism of water, also see 2:60. Water is a symbol of life and that by which life is made possible, whether it comes from the sky (22:63) or comes from beneath the ground (39:21) or is figured in our creation (21:30); here the image of the rock from which water comes forth is powerfully contrasted to the lifelessness of the hardened heart.

Stones crashing down from the fear of God is connected by some commentators with the incident of God's disclosing Himself to the mountain in the presence of Moses, on the occasion of which the mountain crumbled (7:143), and with 59:21: *Had We made this Quran descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God.* Some commentators think that all the types of rock in this verse behave as they do because of the fear of God (Ṭ). The living

that crash down from the fear of God. And God is not heedless of what you do.
(75) Do you hope, then, that they will believe you, seeing that a party of them would hear the Word of God and then distort it after they had understood it,

consciousness of God by all creation is also mentioned in 17:44: *And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise;* and 34:10: *O you mountains! Echo God's praises with him, likewise you birds!*

Some *aḥādīth* mentioned in connection with this verse describe the Prophet as saying, "I know a stone in Makkah that used to greet me before I was made a prophet, and I know it even now." Regarding Mt. Uḥud, he said, "This is a mountain that loves us, and we love it." In another related *ḥadīth* that describes the behavior of apparently insensate objects, the Companions made a pulpit for the Prophet, but when he ascended it, the palm-tree stump beside which he used to deliver his sermons began to cry, at which the Prophet descended, embraced it, and said, "It weeps for the remembrance it used to hear." In one interpretation, the three kind of stones refer, respectively, to those human beings who weep much, those who weep little, and those who weep in their hearts without showing it outwardly (IK).

75 This verse is addressed, using the plural *you*, to the Muslim community; *they* refers to the Children of Israel. It is one of a handful of verses that mention the "distortion" (*taḥrīf*) of scriptures by the People of the Book (see also 2:59; 3:78; 4:46; 5:13, 41). According to one interpretation, the *party* mentioned here are the seventy chosen Israelites (see 2:55c) who were said to have joined Moses on the Mount and directly heard the *Word of God*. When they returned, Moses said, "God commands thus and thus," but this group would say, "No, God commands thus and thus," misrepresenting what they had just heard (IK), or they said, "If you are able to do these things, then do them, and if you wish, then do not; there is no harm in it" (Th). One argument for this interpretation is that they "heard" the Word of God along with Moses, which is to say they did not "read" it, but the Quran speaks of those who hear God's Word indirectly, as in 9:6 (IK). Other commentators believe that this verse describes the Jewish contemporaries of the Prophet.

Although lexically *taḥrīf* seems to be related to "letter" (*ḥarf*), its meaning is to "slant," "be oblique," "twist," or "deviate" and is often connected by the commentators with the etymologically related *inḥirāf*, usually understood as "deviation." Whether the Jews and Christians actually altered their transmitted books or instead skewed their interpretations while retaining a faithful text is a subject of debate in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Although later Islamic commentators and theologians often held a view that the Jews and Christians actually changed the text of the Bible, as epitomized in the work of the fifth-/eleventh-century scholar Ibn Ḥazm, the earlier commentators were not as eager to dispute the text of the Bible and preferred to view the "distortion" as an act of faulty and even malicious interpretation.

In his remarks on 3:78 al-Rāzī, for example, doubts that the prophecies pertaining to the Prophet Muhammad (see 7:157) were physically removed, since that would have required collusion on a grand scale with a well-known text. (In his commentary on 2:75, however, he states that with a less widely distributed text such an alteration would not be impossible.) He prefers to think that the prophecies required "careful thinking and contemplation in the heart" and that those texts, over time, took on a normative interpretation that drifted away from the original intent. This required a certain amount of speculation and assumption on al-Rāzī's part regarding how widespread such texts were, since it is doubtful that he had detailed knowledge of the recording and transmission of the Bible.

Often mentioned in this connection with this verse is the thesis that the scholars and jurists of the Children of Israel would make lawful what was forbidden and forbid what was lawful, in accord with their own desires (Q, R). *After they had understood it* also supports the idea that the meaning was distorted, not the text (Ṭ).

Other instances in which the Prophet is admonished not to hope too much that his contemporaries will believe in him include 35:8: *Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides*

knowingly? (76) And when they meet those who believe they say, "We believe," and when they are alone with one another they say, "Do you speak to them of what God has unveiled to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord? Do you not understand?" (77) Do they not know that God knows what they hide and what they disclose? (78) And among them are the illiterate

*whomsoever He will; so let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them;* and 18:6: *Yet perhaps thou wouldst torment thyself with grief for their sake, should they believe not in this account.* This can be read on a spiritual level as a rebuke to those who, after having experienced visions and openings of spiritual truth, revert to formality and lore and forget the subtle knowledge they once had; or to those who act hypocritically and with bad manners with the sages and the saints and stop keeping company with companions of a spiritual nature (Aj).

76 This verse refers to a group of Jewish hypocrites (see *Sūrah* 63) in Madinah (Ṭ, Th). They said *We believe,* but according to some commentators they really meant only that they acknowledged that Muhammad was a prophet, but not a prophet to the Jews (Ṭ). *What God has unveiled to you* can mean "what God has commanded you" or "what God has decided for you" (Ṭ) or "what knowledge God has given you or made easy for you to obtain" (R). Another opinion is that the phrase refers to the prophecies foretelling the coming of the Prophet, so that the first question in this verse would mean, "Do you affirm that he is a prophet, which he can then use to argue against you?" (Ṭ).

*Before your Lord* (*ʿinda rabbikum*) is understood to mean that on the Day of Judgment there will be a mutual questioning or interrogation before God. According to some exegetes it can also be read, "concerning" or "with regard to" *your Lord.* Others see a similarity in usage between "in the sight of your Lord" (which is another possible translation of *ʿinda rabbikum*) and "in the Book of God." It is argued that these two phrases are often used equivalently, the way "God commands us" and "God commands us in the Quran" are (R, Z). Other exegetes mention that a group of Jews were believers, but then became hypocrites, and this verse describes how their leaders rebuked them for telling the Muslims about the punishments they had endured, because then the Muslims would revile them and say that they were more noble than the Jews in the Sight of God (Th). For a similar exposure of secret behavior among the Prophet's antagonists, see 2:14; 3:119.

77 The theme of God's knowing all things out in the open or hidden is ubiquitous in the Quran, as in 21:110; 24:29; 27:74; 28:69; 33:54; 36:76, and here connects to the conduct exposed in the previous verse (IK).

78 The *illiterate* (*ummiyyūn*) are those Jews who could not read and write (Ṭ). In an opinion attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, however, they are a people who accept no prophet or revealed book and who write a book themselves and say that it is from God; they were called *ummiyyūn* because of their opposition to the Books of God (Ṭ). But most do not consider this opinion to be correct, since among the Arabs *ummī* means someone who cannot write or write well (Ṭ). The commentators often mention here the *ḥadīth,* "We are an *ummī* people; we do not write and we do not calculate the months." This would support the interpretation that *ummī* means one who cannot read and write well (Th), since neither the Jews nor the Arabs of Arabia were wholly illiterate; some could read and write well, while some could do so in only a very rudimentary fashion. That the Arabs were not entirely illiterate is clear from the Islamic tradition's proven assertion that the Quran was written down during the lifetime of the Prophet, though the literate could have been a relatively small number in relation to the whole. For further discussion of the concept of *ummī,* or "unlettered," see 7:157–58c; 62:2c.

*Hearsay* (*amānī*) means that they know only what their scholars tell them (Th); or it means things they invented, such as that the Fire will not touch them except for a certain number of days

who know nothing of the Book but hearsay, and they only conjecture. (79) So woe unto those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a paltry price. So woe unto them for what their hands have written and woe unto them for what they earn. (80) And they say, "The Fire will not touch us save for days numbered." Say, "Have you made a covenant with God? For God shall not fail to keep His Covenant. Or do you

(see v. 80) or that none will enter Paradise who is not a Jew (2:111). *Amānī* can also be rendered "hope" or "desire" (see also 2:111; 4:123; 22:52; 57:14). *They only conjecture* is usually glossed as "they lie [about God]" or "they think/deem false things [about God]" (IK).

79 Although *woe* (*wayl*) is an ordinary Arabic word used throughout the Quran as a cry of distress, it is also interpreted here by some as a proper name for an infernal valley in Hell based on the following *ḥadīth* (disputed by some, such as the commentator Ibn Kathīr): "*Wayl* is a valley in Hell into which the disbeliever will fall for forty autumns before reaching its bottom." Or it is a mountain in Hell of blood and pus, in which case *So woe unto those/them* could be read, "For them there will be *wayl*." For others, it is the word that will be uttered by the punished, and it will be the cry of the disbelievers in Hell (Th). The exegetes give an account of some Jews who wrote something down and pawned it off on the ignorant Arabs for a small profit; another account links this verse with the alteration of the prophecies foretelling the coming of Muhammad (see 7:157), meaning that the descriptions of the Prophet in their book were altered so that they would describe something else (Ṭ, Th).

80 This verse should be read together with the subsequent two verses. This claim of limited punishment is repeated in 3:24. Some commentators mention that the Jews claimed that they would suffer torment for only forty nights, corresponding to the time spent worshipping the calf, after which they would be succeeded by another people (according to some, they claimed that these inheritors of punishment would be the followers of Muhammad); others say it would be forty years; still others, only seven days, one day for each thousand years of the world's existence (IK). A *covenant* is often mentioned in connection with the Israelites (e.g., 2:40, 100) and more generally elsewhere between God and humanity (3:77, 81; 7:172; 13:25; 33:7; 36:60). Here it is invoked against the claims that Hell would be experienced by the Jews only for a specific number of days, which the commentators point out are claims made without any warrant from scripture.

The question of a limited sojourn in Hell is extremely significant, as the main body of Islamic theology accepts the possibility of believers being removed from Hell (see 4:40c; 78:23c), a position adduced from passages such as 6:128; 11:107; and 78:23, but also from *aḥādīth* that describe intercession on behalf of the denizens of Hell that would allow them to leave it after a period of time (see 2:255c; 57:13c).

Al-Rāzī makes an argument regarding limited punishment in Hell based on three main points: First, he argues that v. 80 is not necessarily a denial that souls might reside in Hell only temporarily, but may be seen as a rebuke against the claim of such an exceedingly small number of days coupled with the impudent confidence in that figure in the absence of an explicit promise from God. Second, one cannot assume such forgiveness for all, but this does not prevent the possibility that an individual person may be forgiven after a time in Hell. Third, there is a difference between saying that God will not remove a believer from Hell and saying that God never promised (or made a Covenant) to remove a believer from Hell, since God can do something without having explicitly promised to do so. The absence of such a promise does not prevent God from in fact removing a person from Hell after a period of time. For more on the question of the perpetuity or eternity of Hell, see 11:106–8c; 78:23c; and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

say of God that which you know not?" (81) Nay, whosoever earns evil and is surrounded by his sins, it is they who are the inhabitants of the Fire, therein to abide. (82) And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, it is they who

81 *Evil* here is most commonly understood by commentators to mean "idolatry," the setting up of "partners" to God (or the setting up of other things as equals to God) as objects of worship (see also 4:48c). To be *surrounded by his sins* means to be a persistent sinner, to be one who dies in sin before repenting of it, or to commit major sins as opposed to minor ones and die in that state unrepentant (Ṭ). The distinction between major and minor sin (corresponding roughly, but not exactly, to mortal sin and venial sin in the Christian tradition) is universal in Islam, although historically there have been many different lists of major and minor sins. Some are based on certain *aḥādīth* of the Prophet listing grave sins, while others identify major sins as those connected to *ḥadd* punishments (e.g., murder and adultery) in the Quran or those specifically mentioned in connection with Hell or the curse of God. Major and minor sins are not strictly divided: one can repent and be forgiven for major sins, but even a minor sin can become major through obstinacy and repetition (also see 4:31c).

*Surrounded* renders *aḥāṭa,* which can mean to "encircle," "enclose," or "comprehend." In a sense, one's sin overwhelms one's good actions, as one object encircles another (R), so that the decisive character of the soul is evil rather than good and the heart is what is encircled and overwhelmed (IK). In a way, only idolatry deserves eternity in Hell, as it manifests a decisive orientation of the heart (Ṭs). When God says He forgives all sins except *shirk;* idolatry (4:48; 4:116), this means that He forgives gratuitously all sins other than *shirk,* not that *shirk* is unforgivable, since *God forgives all sins* (39:53; R). On the question of forgiveness for *shirk,* see 4:48c. See also 4:123, which says of the Hereafter, *It will not be in accordance with your desires nor the desires of the People of the Book. Whosoever does evil shall be requited for it.* The commentators connect these verses to the Jewish claim of limited days of punishment, indicating that God does not punish or withhold punishment on the basis of one's membership in a particular religious community, but on the basis of individual right or wrong actions.

The identification of major sin and its consequences became entangled politically in early Islamic history, which is why many of the creeds of the classical period discuss the status of the Companions alongside questions of God's Attributes and eschatology. The internal conflicts of the early period made the Prophet's Companions subjects in the theology of sin and error, in light of the civil wars involving major Companions and even wives of the Prophet on opposing sides, culminating in the assassination of the two Caliphs ᶜUthmān and ᶜAlī by extremist elements who labeled them as grave sinners, hence, according to their belief, no longer believers and therefore illegitimate. The status of individual Companions (especially the early Caliphs) became a charged issue in intercommunity politics, in which sin became both a theological and political question pertaining to both religious and temporal authority.

82 According to some theologians, the people described in this verse could also be perpetrators of major sins, because the commission of such sin does not erase their faith and other good works. The mainstream majority opinion in Islam, both Sunni (e.g., Ashᶜarite and Māturīdite) and Shiite, is that the believer who commits a grave sin is still a believer. However, although we know that God forgives sin, we cannot know which sins are forgiven and for which person; those who are punished may be punished for a period, perhaps a very long period, but then that punishment will come to an end (R). To one side of this mainstream position are theological schools and groups who have believed that the grave sinner goes to Hell forever. The Muᶜtazilites espoused this view because, in their opinion, grave sin rendered one a *fāsiq* ("reprobate" or "iniquitous"), which was for them a technical term denoting an intermediate state between believer and disbeliever, which nevertheless merited Hell. The Khawārij also believed in the damnation of the grave sinner, because

are the inhabitants of the Garden, therein to abide. (83) And [remember] when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel, "Worship none but God; be virtuous toward parents, kinsfolk, orphans, and the indigent; speak to people in a goodly way; and perform the prayer and give the alms." Then you turned

committing a grave sin was tantamount to a loss of faith, meaning that a grave sinner had no faith by definition and was no longer a believer.

On the other side of the mainstream position were the Murji'ah, who disassociated the negative effects of sin from faith far more than the mainstream position would allow, in some cases disentangling faith and action as starkly as the Khawārij had fused them. They are said to have espoused a belief that sin does not impinge on faith and that as long as individuals had faith they would go to Paradise. For the mainstream theologians, evil actions did not invalidate faith, yet faith did not preclude punishment for evil actions. In the broader Islamic tradition, the relationship between faith and action was examined much more profoundly within Sufism than in most of the dogmatic theological schools mentioned above. One's degree of love, insight, wisdom, gnosis (spiritual knowledge), and vision of inward and outward truths as were all taken into account when thinking about the many dimensions of *īmān* ("faith/belief") and *kufr* ("unbelief/denial"). Moreover, the Quran itself hardly presents the Hereafter as a binary reality. See the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." The relationship of major sin to faith/belief is only one dimension of the multifaceted issue of faith or belief (*īmān*).

83 Here *when* can be read as "[remember] when," in connection with the previous passages recalling the history of the Israelites. This verse resembles other passages that contain universal commandments regarding truth and virtuous action, such as 6:151–53 and 17:23–39, considered by some to be among the *muḥkam* verses of the Quran (on this term, see 3:7c). An alternate reading has the pronoun in the third person, so that it might be rendered "We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: they worship none but God." In this case there would be a shift from the third-person nominative to the second-person imperative beginning with *be virtuous* in the middle of the verse, a grammatical shift not uncommon in the Quran (see the essay "Quranic Arabic: Its Characteristics and Impact on Arabic Language and Literature and the Languages and Literatures of Other Islamic peoples"). *Be virtuous toward parents* does not have an explicit verb in Arabic, but reads literally "and toward parents virtue," where the verb "to be" or "to act" is understood (R, Ṭ); also, when the first phrase above is read in the third person, this phrase can also be read in the third person (R).

Parents are especially honored in the Quran (see 4:36; 6:151; 17:23; 29:8; 31:14; 46:15) and the *Ḥadīth* (see the essay "Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society). These injunctions apply whether the parent is a believer or not, and the commentators often point to the example of Abraham and his restraint with his disbelieving father (19:42–48). The *Ḥadīth* often bestows special honor upon mothers, as in the Prophetic saying, "Paradise is at the feet of mothers." For regard for one's parents, see 29:8c; 31:13–14c.

*Kinsfolk* (*dhu'l-qurbā*, lit. "possessors of nearness") refers to blood relations, and their good treatment is mentioned often (2:177; 4:8; 4:36; 8:41; 17:26), as are one's responsibilities toward orphans (2:220; 4:3–10; 4:127; 6:152; 17:34; 107:2) and the poor, very often listed in the same passages as relatives and orphans. An orphan (*yatīm*) was generally considered to be any minor whose father had died, as the father would have been the primary provider and protector of the child, but some considered those whose mothers had died also to be orphans.

To *speak to people in a goodly way* includes, according to the exegetes, calling them to monotheism, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (see 3:104c); and this command to speak *in a goodly way* applies to all people (Ṭ). Those who *turned away, save a few* were the Children of Israel (Ṭ).

away, save a few of you, swerving aside. (84) And when We made a covenant with you, "Do not shed the blood of your own, and do not expel your own from your homes." Then you ratified it, bearing witness. (85) And yet it is you, the very same, who kill your own and expel a party of you from their homes, conspiring against them in sin and enmity. And if they come to you as captives you ransom them, though their expulsion was forbidden to you. Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part? And what is the recompense of those who do so but disgrace in the life of this world? And on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most severe punishment. And God is not heedless of what you do. (86) It is they who have purchased the world

84 For most commentators this verse continues the descriptions of previous Israelites (R, Ṭ). The *you* in *Then you ratified it* could refer to the contemporary Israelites or to their forefathers. *Bearing witness* can mean a direct attestation or simply being present at the event as a group (R). In Madinah there were three Jewish tribes, Naḍīr, Qurayẓah, and Qaynuqāʿ, and two main Arab tribes, Aws and Khazraj. When war broke out between Aws and Khazraj, the Jewish tribes would fight on both sides of the battle, so that Jew would be fighting Jew, and they would drive one another out of their homes and take prisoners (IK, Ṭ).

These verses also touch on the question of communal versus individual responsibility. One can be passively implicated in the crimes of one's community, as when children suffer because of their parents' crimes. But one can also take an active part in a community's past crimes and be held responsible for them, such that the "sins of the fathers" are justly passed on to later generations. Insofar as individuals are willing to glory in a group identity and accept its accomplishments as an extension of the self, they expose themselves to the crimes associated with that group identity as well. From another point of view, individual human beings suffer from the crimes of their forbears insofar as they inherit the traits of those they imitate through sheer worldly ignorance (the Quran often chides people for pointing to the practices of their fathers as a moral argument). If people of a certain generation are malicious, their children will tend to inherit and copy those traits, because human beings tend to conform to the norms of their society. In this respect, the sins of the parents are passed on to the children: imitating the good and being raised in an environment of virtue and beauty are better than imitating evil and being raised among liars and thieves, if only because such environments enshrine and transmit truth and compassion to later generations.

A culture or civilization can be rescued from its moral darkness by an infusion of virtue from saints or sages and, in earlier times, prophets, but on average a community will retain the qualities of its progenitors rather than discard them. One can overcome this weight through repenting of one's own sins and living a life of active virtue, and even though one identifies oneself as a member of a group, one should deplore its crimes. But even then one might not necessarily escape the effects of communal sin, any more than an individual might escape the fire burning a neighbor's house. This is one way of interpreting the Quran's use of *you* in the present tense even when talking about past and also future generations.

85–86 According to some, *believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part* refers to the contradiction between the initial expulsion, which would be a violation of the Book, and the ransom, which would be in accord with the Book (Ṭ). Others connect the disbelief in this verse with the

at the price of the Hereafter; for them the punishment shall not be lightened, nor will they be helped. (87) And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book and caused a succession of messengers to follow him. And We gave Jesus son of Mary clear proofs, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Is it not so that whenever a messenger brought you something your souls did not desire, you waxed arrogant, and some you denied and some you slew? (88) And they say,

prophecies foretelling the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, though this is not implied by the context (R). Here the wider sense of *kufr,* or "disbelief," as rejection and denial of certain truths comes to the fore, as the lack of belief and faith *in part* is not a direct disbelief in God's existence. Rather, the expulsion and taking of ransom are acts of hypocrisy and immorality, which are not separable from a certain degree of *kufr.*

87 Here *the Book* refers to the Torah. The *succession of messengers* refers to those Biblical figures mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel whom the Quran considers to have been prophets sent to the Children of Israel, including David, Solomon, Elias, John, and others (R). They were sent by God to preach the Oneness of God, but in accordance with the religious law of Moses and not to bring a new religion. *Clear proofs* renders *bayyināt,* meaning something that makes plain, shows clearly, or demonstrates (see also the introduction to *Sūrah* 98). In the case of Jesus, *clear proofs* may consist of the Gospel (Ṭ) or may be a reference to his miracles, such as healing the sick and raising the dead, giving life to the figure of a bird (3:49), and telling of realities from the unseen world, though some say it can include both the miracles and the Gospel (R).

The *Holy Spirit* in the present verse is usually identified as the Archangel Gabriel (IK); others have said it was a name by which Jesus revived the dead or that it refers to the Gospel itself (Ṭ), although this latter opinion goes against the juxtaposition of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit in 5:110. The interpretations have in common the sense of "giving life," whether it is bodily quickening or the nourishment of the heart and intelligence (R). The place of the spirit in Islamic metaphysics and epistemology is essential and profound and is, in a sense, inexhaustible as a theological category; see 17:85c; 78:38c, where the spirit is discussed further. The word *Holy, qudus,* is defined by some as "blessing" (*barakah*) or "purity" (*ṭuhr*), while others say *qudus* is synonymous with the Divine Name *al-Quddūs* (*the Holy;* see 59:23; 62:1). In this latter sense *the Holy Spirit* means "the spirit of (God) the Holy" and refers then to the same Spirit that was breathed into Adam in 15:29: *I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit.* Jesus was *strengthened* in the sense of being supported, helped, and reinforced.

For most Sufis, what this passage says outwardly to the Jews it communicates inwardly to the Muslims: God caused a succession of saints and sages to show right from wrong and guide them to the straight path, but these luminaries are often called liars or are opposed because their accusers are ruled by their passions (K). In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "You will follow the ways of those who went before you, span by span, cubit by cubit, so much so that, were they to enter a lizard's hole, you too would enter it."

88 In *Our hearts are uncircumcised, uncircumcised* renders *ghulf* (see also 4:155c), which means "covered" and can mean "sheathed" (as with a sword), but whose semantic range also allows the reading, "Our hearts are vessels," meaning their hearts contain all knowledge and stand in no need of any other, or they are empty vessels in the sense that nothing of what others say resonates with them as being true (IK, R, Th). A similarly phrased passage, *Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us* (41:5), raises the question, in the minds of some commentators, of individual moral responsibility for one's state of faith: if one's organ of faith and understanding is covered, is one responsible?

Although here God seems to dismiss and rebuke the notion of hearts being covered, in 4:155 the claim *Our hearts are uncircumcised* is followed immediately by *Nay! Rather, God has set*

"Our hearts are uncircumcised." Rather, God has cursed them for their disbelief, for little do they believe. (89) And when there came to them a Book from God, confirming that which they had with them—and aforetime they used to ask for victory over those who disbelieve—so when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it. So may the curse of God be upon the disbelievers. (90) Evil is that for which they sold their souls, that they should disbelieve in what God sent down, out of envy that God should send down His Grace unto whomsoever He will among His servants. They earn a burden of

*a seal upon them for their disbelief, so they believe not, save a few.* The dismissal of the Jews' claim that their hearts are enwrapped (both here and in 4:155) is thus juxtaposed with the affirmation that they are sealed from faith. But the question need not be whether God seals hearts; indeed, a sealed heart would not be able to see that it is sealed. A soul that laments its being sealed is not completely sealed, since one cannot be aware of or believe in God unless God allows it. "My heart is covered" can be uttered cynically but has a different meaning when expressed by a person longing for God, but dismayed by the distance from Him. See also 2:7c, which addresses the question of sealing hearts and its significance for questions of predestination and responsibility based on free will.

89 Here the *Book* refers to the Quran, which in several verses is described as confirming the previous scriptures (e.g., 3:3; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31). *To ask for victory* has the sense of asking for help. It is related that before the advent of the prophethood of Muhammad, the Jewish tribes of Madinah used to tell the idolatrous Arabs that a prophet would come who would grant the Jews victory over them (IK, Ṭ). Some commentators relate that the Jews previously prayed, "O God send this prophet we find written of in our [book], so that we can punish the idolaters and slay them," but they then rejected him—that is, Muhammad—because he was not of the Israelites (see v. 90; IK). Some traditions relate that some Arab Muslims, who were formerly idolaters, would remind the Jews by saying, "Reverence God and embrace Islam. You used to ask for victory over us by means of Muhammad while we were people of idolatry, telling us that he was being sent, and describing his attributes to us" (Ṭ). Some commentators believe that *that which they recognized* could also be understood to mean "that which they knew" or "that which they were acquainted with" and did not stem from a detailed description of the Prophet, but rather from an understanding of the general attributes of prophethood and truth that he displayed (R).

90 Cf. v. 102, where *evil is that for which they sold their souls* is repeated as a conclusion to the verse. The attitude criticized here is based on the Jews' reported belief that a prophet should come only from the Children of Israel. According to the commentators, because they were jealous that this dignity should pass to the Arabs, they purchased the false comfort of tribal pride at the price of faith in the Prophet Muhammad (IK, R, Ṭ). Here again a sense of rejection and lack of gratitude should be recalled in the multifaceted concept of "disbelief" (*kufr*), which in this case brings out the sense of *kufr* as "covering over (the blessings one receives)," which is not unrelated to *ghulf,* or "enwrapped," as discussed in 2:88c. *Grace* renders *faḍl,* which can also mean "bounty," "favor," "kindness," or "superiority" depending on the context.

*His servants* may refer to all human beings who worship God, but also to all human beings and indeed to creation as a whole. In the Quran as in Islam in general, *servant* is often used as a term of praise (2:186, 207; 14:31; 15:42; 21:105; 25:63; 89:29) unless qualified (7:194; 36:30). *They earn a burden* (*bā'a*) can also be rendered "they became deserving." Some commentators interpret *wrath upon wrath* as two instances of Divine Wrath, identifying the causes variously as the worship of the calf, the failure to uphold certain parts of the Torah, the rejection of Jesus, or the rejection of Muhammad (IK, R, Ṭ).

wrath upon wrath, and the disbelievers shall have a humiliating punishment. (91) And when it is said unto them, "Believe in what God has sent down," they say, "We believe in what was sent down to us," and they disbelieve in what is beyond it, although it is the truth, confirming what is with them. Say, "Then why did you slay the prophets of God aforetime, if you were believers?" (92) And indeed Moses brought you clear proofs, but then you took up the calf while he was away, and you were wrongdoers. (93) And when We made a covenant with you, and raised the Mount over you, "Take hold of what We have given you with strength, and listen!" They said, "We hear, and disobey," and they were made to drink the calf into their hearts because of their disbelief. Say, "Evil is that which your belief enjoins upon you, if you are believers." (94) Say, "If the Abode of the Hereafter with God is yours alone to the exclusion of other people, then long for death, if you are truthful." (95) But they will never long for it,

91 *Beyond it* is interpreted as "after" or "other than" (Ṭ). The question is a rebuke in light of the Jews' claim that *We believe in what was sent down to us,* meaning the Torah, because those slain prophets were Israelites who only commanded their people to follow the Torah (IK). That they slew even them shows that their refusal to follow the Prophet stemmed from something other than faith in the Torah, since those prophets also confirmed the truth of what was *with them,* and their murder was forbidden in any case (IK, Ṭ). See also 4:136c; 4:150–51c. The following verses continue the theme of faithlessness and rejection (*kufr*) in the face of the revelation of the Truth.

92 Here *clear proofs* refer to signs such as Moses' staff turning into a serpent, Moses' hand turning white, his parting of the waters, and the provision of manna and quails (IK). On taking the calf for worship while Moses was away on Sinai, see the more detailed telling of the story in 7:148–55, and also 2:51.

93 Regarding the raising of the Mount, see 2:63, where a similar command to take hold of the Torah and earnestly follow it is mentioned. Explaining *drink the calf,* the commentators understand the drinking to mean that they were made to drink "the love of" the calf (R, Ṭ), meaning that they directed their love to it due to their disbelief (*kufr*), which here as elsewhere can also mean "denial" and "ingratitude." A *ḥadīth* that similarly uses the metaphor of drinking states, "Trials and temptations come upon hearts unrelentingly like a woven mat. Any heart that is made to drink of them has a black spot placed upon it, and any heart that denies them has a white spot placed upon it. Thus two kinds of hearts arise: the white are pure and no trial can harm them so long as the heavens and the earth endure, and the others are black and ashen . . . who do not recognize what is right or deplore what is wrong except as they are made to drink from their passions."

What their *belief enjoins* is condemned insofar as they affirm and embrace evils such as the worship of the calf, the slaying of the prophets, and other actions denounced in connection with the Israelites (cf. 4:153–61). Their *belief* (*īmān*) here is an orientation of the heart that allows it to be satiated by worldly pleasures and ambitions and is symbolic of the soul that is filled with the world and abandons guidance (Aj).

94–95 See also 62:6: *Say, "O you who are Jews! If you claim that you are friends unto God apart from [other] people, then long for death if you are truthful."* To long for death is a command seemingly at odds with the Islamic tradition, as in a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "Let none of you long for

because of what their hands have sent forth, and God knows the wrongdoers. (96) You will find them the most covetous of people for life, [even] more than those who are idolaters. Each one of them would wish to live a thousand years, although that would not remove him from the punishment. And God sees whatsoever they do. (97) Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel: he it is who sent it

death because of an evil that befalls you. If one must do something, let him say, 'O God, give me life so long as life is good for me, and make me pass away if passing away is good for me.'" The reasoning behind this challenge made to the Jews (R, Th) is that death is the only way to the felicity that they here claim is theirs alone in the Hereafter, so that it is therefore a gate through which they should wish to pass with all due haste. The conditional supplication for life and death mentioned by the Prophet reflects, by contrast, the uncertainty of one's status in the Hereafter according to Islam. Like the presumption regarding the limited sojourn in Hell in v. 80 and 3:24, this belief in a guaranteed and exclusive entry into Paradise displays an excess of confidence. Those who truly expect no possible destination but Paradise should long for death, but their awareness of their own sins (75:14–15), however deep or undetected, stops them. According to some, this challenge could refer to a kind of *mubāhalah,* a practice where two sides come together to decide the truth of an issue, each declaring a certain position and each invoking something terrible on themselves if they are wrong. In this case, it would mean that death is invoked upon whomever is lying, the Muslims or the Jews (IK, Ṭ).

96 *Each one of them* could grammatically refer to either the Jews who are described in the beginning of the verse or the polytheists, meaning that the Jews are more covetous even than people who wish to live a thousand years because they have no belief in a Hereafter. Another possible understanding of the grammar of this verse yields the translation "You will find them the most covetous of people for life; and among the polytheists are those who would like to live a thousand years . . .," although this latter reading is considered unlikely (R) and not idiomatic in Arabic. Some commentators mention that this phrase refers to the Zoroastrians or Persians in general, going so far as to quote a Persian phrase, "[May you have] ten thousand years!" spoken when someone sneezes. Others, such as al-Rāzī, prefer to see "thousand" as an idiomatic way of saying "many" and dismiss the connection of it to the Zoroastrians as a specific group.

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is reported to have said, "A hypocrite is more covetous of the world than an idolater" (IK), perhaps because of the gnawing awareness of the consequences of one's actions (Aj). On this aspect of hypocrisy, see 4:143c; 4:145c. The hypocrites' certainty in salvation is thus a delusion whose underlying truth, that their actions preclude such certitude, is not completely hidden from them. Or perhaps any hypocrites with a belief in their own special status before God will also believe that they are owed much in this world, and their hypocrisy, clouding their judgment, forces them to prefer the nearer pleasure of this life, whose conditions seem certain. The *punishment* is that of the Hereafter. Some commentators suggest that *him* in *remove him* refers to the enemy of Gabriel mentioned in the next verse (IK, Ṭ).

97 Two accounts, similar in their import, give the background for this verse. One describes the Prophet being questioned by a group of Jews who ask him questions only a true prophet could answer, among which is a question about who brought Muhammad the message from God. When he answers that it was Gabriel, they say they would have followed him if he had said Michael, who is an agent of mercy in their eyes, but Gabriel is a bringer of war, death, and destruction (IK). In the second account, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is visiting the Jews while they are studying the Torah, saying he does so because he enjoys experiencing the mutual confirmation of the Torah and the Quran. They tell ʿUmar that they believe that Muhammad is a prophet, but they do not follow him because they are "at peace" with some angels

down upon thy heart by God's Leave, confirming that which was there before, and as a guidance and glad tiding for the believers. (98) Whosoever is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael: God is indeed the enemy of the disbelievers. (99) We did indeed send down to you clear signs, and only the iniquitous disbelieve in them. (100) Is it not so that, whenever they make a covenant, a group of them cast it aside? Indeed, most of them do

but not with others, and Gabriel belongs to the latter group. This statement astounds ʿUmar, who balks at the notion that one angel could be a friend and the other a foe while both sit on either side of God according to the Jews themselves. Upon returning to speak to the Prophet, he is informed that this verse has already been revealed (IK).

Michael is the preeminent angel in the Jewish tradition; he is mentioned in the book of Daniel (10:13–21) as Israel's prince and in later Jewish literature as Israel's advocate and the teacher of Moses. In other Jewish literature Gabriel and Michael appear with often complementary qualities and functions: Michael is snow, and Gabriel fire; Michael is called the merciful, while Gabriel is set over "the powers"; and attributes of gentleness are assigned to Michael and those of severity to Gabriel. The book of *Enoch,* for example, discusses the concept of fallen angels in addition to the distribution of angelic functions and attributes. In the context of a literature that exalts Michael to the rank of foremost protector and advocate of the Children of Israel and assigns to Gabriel functions such as destruction and death (e.g., the *midrash* describes Gabriel as the destroyer of Sodom), it is not surprising that for some Jews a tradition arose that made Gabriel an enemy to the Jews insofar as he was regarded in some rabbinic and other literature as a bringer of death and destruction, while Michael was Israel's special patron and an embodiment of mercy. In Jewish literature as a whole, however, Gabriel, though not possessing the stature of Michael, is seen in a positive light.

For Muslim commentators such as al-Rāzī, at least part of the Jews' apparent enmity toward Gabriel stemmed from the fact that Muhammad was not of Israel, in which case the invocation of Gabriel's severity would be an excuse masking their displeasure that an Arab would be chosen as a prophet and the agent of the revelation being Gabriel. For Muslims, to fault Gabriel is to fault God, who sent him. Al-Rāzī also points out that Jews deny having such a belief, but responds by noting that their deviations of the past, such as the worship of the calf, are not always reflective of their later practice.

God's message is sent down upon the Prophet's *heart* (cf. 26:194; 53:10–11), since the heart is the seat of knowledge and understanding, not only sentiment. See 2:7c, which discusses the dimensions of the heart in the Quran.

98 The structure of this verse does not mean that Gabriel and Michael are other than angels; for example, 55:68 mentions dates and pomegranates after mentioning fruit. Moreover, angels are sometimes referred to as messengers as well (e.g., 10:21; 11:77). In connection with the warning in this verse, commentators often mention *ḥadīth* narratives with similar import, such as "Whoever is an enemy of God's friend (*walī*), God makes war on him."

99 The *clear signs* are signs of Muhammad's prophethood, his personal qualities and the knowledge he possessed, which the commentators say should have been apparent to any believing Jew (IK, Ṭ).

100 Many commentators mention that the Jews of Madinah said, "We did not make a pact or covenant regarding Muhammad," upon which this verse was revealed, which evidently means that they did not pledge to follow him specifically. Others indicate that this refers to a promise the Jews had made previously that they would follow the prophet who was to come and give them victory over the idolatrous Arabs (Ṭ, Th). (See v. 89.) Others mention that it can refer to their betraying the Prophet by breaking their alliance with him and siding with the Quraysh (see also 4:51–52c), though the meaning is not restricted to any particular incident (R).

not believe. (101) And when there came to them a messenger from God, confirming that which is with them, a group of those who have been given the Book cast the Book of God behind their backs, as if they know not. (102) And they followed what the satans recited against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon

101 Some commentators restrict *those who have been given the Book* to the learned Jews (T), but it can apply to all those who take the Torah as their book and who disregard what it says (Q, R), which is what is meant by casting *the Book of God* (the Torah) *behind their backs*. Though *the Book of God* could also refer to the Quran, the mention of a group of those who were given the Book would indicate that it is indeed the Torah that is meant, and specifically its confirmation of the prophethood of Muhammad, for which the Quran asserts that there were clear signs and proofs in the Torah, as mentioned in v. 99.

102 Some commentators read *recited against* as "recited regarding" or "recited in" and understand *the kingdom of Solomon* to mean "the time of the kingdom of Solomon" (Th). Some commentaries one encounters on this verse—perhaps more so than on any other in the Quran—contain elements startlingly incongruous with traditional Quranic commentary as a whole, but like other accounts connected with sacred history, the commentary here reflects a similar willingness to include a large spectrum of material of varying levels of reliability. The commentators recount several versions of a story about some teachings of Solomon or writings collected by Solomon describing the magic by which he was able to rule. These writings, buried under his pedestal, were dug up after his death and misused or tampered with. Given over to their passions, people made free use of these documents until the time of Muhammad. Other stories recount that the angels Hārūt and Mārūt were sent down to earth, because they thought themselves above human beings because of human sin. God told them that, were they to possess the same lusts and potential receptivity to Satan as human beings, they too would disobey God. When the two angels were sent down to earth, they were tempted by Venus, who, appearing as a beautiful woman, got them drunk and induced them to commit all manner of sin. Most or all of these legends are rejected by some of the major classical commentators such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Rāzī, but they nevertheless appear in some works of Quranic commentary.

*Sorcery* (*siḥr*) is of several kinds, and the Arabic term can include what in English is denoted by sorcery and witchcraft, including sleight of hand (R). When it is not straightforward illusion, magic can be seen as the manipulation of hidden cosmic forces to produce a desired effect or as the attainment of knowledge of things unseen (whether they are removed in space or time) through hidden means. *Siḥr* can also refer to a kind of persuasive eloquence; hence the disbelievers' accusation that the Quranic recitations of Muhammad were nothing but *manifest sorcery* (*siḥr mubīn;* see, e.g., 10:2).

The verse can be well interpreted without recourse to the wildly speculative sources mentioned above. (It is indeed astounding that the notion of Venus taking on human form and seducing angels is even present in any Quranic commentary.) Solomon, despite the powers granted to him by God to command the wind and the jinn who would serve him (21:81–82), was not a denier of the true source of these powers and did not use them for evil purposes such as separating a man from his wife (a common aim of magic in premodern societies, among other venial purposes; see the introduction on *Sūrah* 113). To the degree that the two angels (sometimes identified as Michael and Gabriel by commentators such as al-Rāzī) taught people how to read and manipulate the hidden dimensions of the cosmos, it would have been for the sake of wisdom, healing, and goodness. Being a double-edged sword, such knowledge would have been a potentially dangerous instrument for causing harm and evil; hence the angels' warning against making a bargain for such powers. This sort of bargainer would become well known in the West in the character of Faust, namely, one who sells his soul for unworthy worldly gain (note the reference to the selling of souls at the end of this verse). Spiritually,

did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But they would not teach anyone until they had said, "We are only a trial, so do not disbelieve." Then they would learn from them that by which they could cause separation between a man and his wife. But they did not harm anyone with it, save by God's Leave. And they would learn that which harmed them and brought them no benefit, knowing that whosoever purchases it has no share in the Hereafter. Evil is that for which they sold their souls, had they but known. (103) And had they believed and been reverent, a recompense from God would be better, if they but knew. (104) O you who believe! Do not say, "Attend to us," but say, "Regard us," and listen! And the disbelievers shall have a painful punishment. (105) Neither the disbelievers among the People of the Book nor the polytheists wish that any good be sent down to you from your Lord, but God singles out for His Mercy whomsoever He will, and God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. (106) No sign

this verse can be read as describing a turning away from the heart and spirit toward the lower aspects of the ego (Aj), away from the "Solomon of the spirit" to the satans of the soul (K).

In some currents of Islamic esoteric tradition, the sorcery or magic that is mentioned here is considered to be astrology, which in its traditional form originated in Babylon and reached the West via Alexandria and the Islamic world. It is based upon a cosmological vision of correspondences between the heavens and the earth and between the objects of this world. These correspondences—between stars, minerals, plants, animals, human faculties, relationships, and so forth—are seen as the basis for astrology, alchemy, magic, and divination.

103 God's Recompense is *better* than what they purchased with their souls (see v. 102).

104 *Attend to us* renders *rāʿinā* (also see 4:46c). The term comes from an idiomatic usage of *rāʿinā samʿak* or *arʿinā samʿak* (meaning something like "lend me your ear"), which was considered demeaning and mocking among people of the region of Makkah and Madinah (Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī considers this together with other commands from the Prophet to call things and people by more noble-sounding names, but he dismisses the idea that it could have been a Hebrew wordplay, since it is the believers themselves who were commanded to stop saying it, and they would not have uncritically taken up calling the Prophet with a phrase they did not understand. It can also be understood in connection with 24:63, *Do not deem the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling to one another,* which admonishes against addressing the Prophet with too much familiarity (R). *Regard us* can also have the meaning "wait for us," as in 57:13, but here has the sense only of desiring the Prophet's attention in a respectful way, followed by *listen,* which here is understood as also meaning "obey" (Th).

105 *His Mercy* is understood to indicate the revelation and its wisdom bestowed through the prophethood of Muhammad (R, Ṭ, Th). The "singling" out thus refers to the giving of the office of prophet to Muhammad rather than to someone from another group more agreeable to the idolaters or People of the Book (see also 3:179; 16:2; 40:15).

106 *Naskh,* usually translated "abrogation," has the meaning of conveyance or copying from an original, which could extend to the notion that the entire Quran is a *naskh,* or "copy" in relation to its origin in the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Th), or something as simple as a written copy of a text. The more relevant sense in this context is "to erase" or "to obliterate," often described as the action that the sun performs on a shadow, the wind upon dust, or even old age upon youth. The root *n-s-kh* appears four times in the Quran: in this verse; in 7:154, referring to the *inscription* of the tablets of Moses; in 22:52, where God *effaces* the work of Satan; and in 45:29, in regard to the *recording* of human actions.

*Naskh* ("abrogation") as a technical term is a key concept in the fully developed form of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Quranic commentary, and is a major conceptual tool for understanding the relationship between different commands and prohibitions in the Quran and the *Sunnah.* It is a crucial concept for understanding how the Quran is actually used as a source of Islamic Law and practice, and thus many of the classical commentators devote considerable attention to this particular verse. Other verses often mentioned in this connection are *God effaces what He will and establishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book* (13:39); *And when We replace one sign with another* (16:101); and *And if We willed, We could take away that which We revealed unto thee* (17:86).

In its mainstream interpretation, *naskh* refers to the replacement of one legal ruling (*ḥukm*) by another one that is instituted or revealed later in time, in which case the original text remains in the Quran, but is no longer binding as a matter of law or practice. As widely understood in the Islamic religious sciences, *naskh* can occur only in matters of commands and prohibitions, not in descriptive passages relating to metaphysics, ethics, history, the nature of God, or the Hereafter; a ruling (*ḥukm*) is a determination of legal status, not doctrine. Thus there can be no abrogation of a passage such as *God has power over all things* (2:259) or *Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve* (2:62); or accounts of previous prophets found throughout the Quran. *Naskh* would not apply to commandments so universal as to be irrevocable, such as the prohibitions against murder, theft, and adultery and the command to be kind to one's parents.

Other kinds of *naskh* have also been posited by some, such as the *naskh* of both text and ruling. A report attributed to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, for example, states that there were commands in the Quran relating to suckling that are now neither acted upon nor part of the Quran (see 4:23c). Another type is *naskh* of the text despite a continuation of its ruling, and the example most often cited here is the punishment of adultery by stoning. In a report attributed to ʿUmar, a verse commanding stoning was part of the Quran, but now is not, even though the command of stoning for adultery remains in effect (according to many, if not most, jurists; IK, R, Ṭ). On the question of the "stoning verse," see 24:2c.

Although it is generally agreed that one Quranic ruling may abrogate another Quranic ruling revealed earlier in time, there has been considerable difference of opinion about other kinds of *naskh,* for example, whether Prophetic practice (*Sunnah*) can abrogate the Quran or vice versa, and whether the consensus of the learned community (*ijmāʿ*) can abrogate a ruling from the Quran or a *ḥadīth.* Moreover, although there has been near universal agreement among the majority of jurists that *naskh* exists, there has been considerable variation on which verses of the Quran and aspects of *Sunnah* are abrogated. Scholars such as the famous Islamic thinker and reformer Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi (d. 1176/1762) placed the number of abrogated verses at 5; the commentator Ibn al-Jawzī named no less than 247; many other lists exist in between, such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's list of 21 instances. A minority of scholars, such as Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (d. 934/1527), have gone so far as to say that abrogation, as a technical concept defined by the mainstream legal tradition, does not actually exist and that the apparently conflicting rulings can be reconciled.

Even among the mainstream upholders of *naskh,* abrogation must be distinguished from (1) specification, where a verse does not contradict but provides specification regarding the general ruling of another verse; (2) the simple accumulation of law, which may or may not amount to an abrogation; and (3) the disappearance of the circumstances or causes behind the ruling, its *sabab* or *ʿillah* ("effective legal cause"). In all cases the question of *naskh* comes into play as a practical

do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but that We bring that which is better than it or like unto it. Dost thou not know that God is Powerful over all things? (107) Dost thou not know that unto God belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and that you have neither protector nor helper apart from God? (108) Or do you wish to question your messenger as Moses was questioned

matter only when the verses are considered to be irreconcilable as legal rulings.

A small minority of scholars, such as Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, reject altogether the mainstream definition of *naskh* and employ the same passages to make their case either that *naskh* takes place between religions (e.g., Islam in relation to Judaism and Christianity), meaning that God replaces one religion with another, or that *sign* (*āyah*) in this verse means "miracle." In the Quran many things are called a *sign:* the she-camel of the Thamūd (17:59); the day and the night (17:12); the Companions of the Cave (18:9); Zachariah's lack of speech for three days (19:10); Jesus (19:21); the white hand of Moses (20:22); Mary and Jesus (21:91); the destruction of Noah's people (25:37); the growth of vegetation (26:8); the drowning of the Egyptians (26:67); the destruction of the people of Lot (26:174); the miracles of Moses (28:36); the creation of the heavens and the earth (29:44); the request by the disbelievers for a miracle (29:50); our creation from dust (30:20); a series of items in 30:21–25, none of which refer to the verses of the Quran, thus bearing significantly on the nature of the "abrogation" mentioned in the present verse.

*Cause to be forgotten* (*nunsihā*) can also be understood in the sense of "abandoning," as in 9:67, *They forgot God; so He forgot them,* where it means to "forsake" or "spurn," since God could not actually fail to remember something. With different voweling (*nansaʾahā* ), this verb can mean literally "defer/delay," in which case the phrase would denote those signs or verses (*āyāt*) that were abrogated and those that were left unchanged. Ibn Kathīr and others mention a *ḥadīth* about two men who used to recite a *sūrah* that the Prophet had taught them. Then one day they tried to recite it, but they could not manage even a letter. They asked the Prophet about this inability, to which he replied, "It is one of those that has been abrogated and forgotten, so leave it." This would support a reading of "forgetting" over "deferment."

In trying to make sense of how one verse of the Word of God could be "better" than another, some interpret *better than it* as an alleviation when it comes to matters of this world and an intensification when it comes to matters of the next world (Q, Ṭ). For example, when the night prayer was no longer an imperative of the community (73:1, abrogated by 73:20), that was a change toward ease in this world, but when the fast of Ramadan was imposed (2:185, abrogating 2:184, according to this interpretation), it afforded a greater opportunity for reward in the Hereafter. Thus, for some commentators the verse must mean "No [ruling from a] sign do We abrogate . . . ," so that it is the ruling, not the sign, that is called "better." Al-Ṭabarī, for example, compares this implied phrase to the missing phrase "the love of" in the verse *they were made to drink* [the love of] *the calf into their hearts* (v. 93), since they did not literally drink the calf. Others mention an interpretation that *better than it* means "a good from it" or "a good on account of it," since the Arabic word for *better* (*khayr*) can also mean "a good," depending on the context (Q).

107 This verse begins by addressing the Prophet and then expands to address human beings in general (Ṭ); similar shifts in addressee occur elsewhere, as in, for example, 33:1–2.

108 The questioning of Moses and related issues are discussed also in 4:153. The Quraysh would challenge the Prophet to bring a Book with the power to create flowing rivers or demand that he turn Ṣafā (a hill outside Makkah) into gold (Ṭ) or give them a tree upon which to hang ritual items (R). This last is compared with the Israelites' demand to Moses: *Make for us a god as they have gods* (7:138).

aforetime? Whosoever exchanges belief for disbelief has gone astray from the right way. (109) Many of the People of the Book wish to turn you back into disbelievers after your having believed, out of envy in their souls, even after the truth has become clear to them. So pardon and forbear, until God comes with His

Another pitfall related to questioning prophets is mentioned in 5:101: *O you who believe! Ask not about things which, if they were disclosed to you, would trouble you.* The Prophet said, "That Muslim commits the greatest crime who asks about a thing that is not forbidden, and which then becomes forbidden because of his asking." In another *ḥadīth* he said, "Those who came before you were ruined only through the multiplication of their questions and their differences with their prophets. So if I bid you do a thing, do what you can of it. And if I forbid you a thing, avoid it." Alternately, one finds praise for the Companions in the commentaries for asking the right kinds of questions, about matters such as orphans and charitable giving (e.g., 2:219–20; IK), and indeed many verses are said to have come down after questions posed by the Companions to the Prophet (e.g., 4:127; 33:35; 58:1–4).

*The right way* renders *sawāʾ al-sabīl; sawāʾ* can also mean "middle," "level," or "straight" (see also 3:64c for other uses of *sawāʾ*).

109 Some connect this verse with formerly Jewish Companions who, after the Battle of Uḥud, were taunted by their former coreligionists about their condition, which turned them away from Islam and back to Judaism (IK, R, Ṭ). Cf. 3:186: *You will surely be tried in your wealth and your souls, and you shall hear much hurt from those who were given the Book before you, and from those who are idolaters. But if you are patient and reverent, then that is indeed a course worthy of resolve.*

On the question of *envy*, in a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "Let there be no envy except in two things: a man who has been given wealth by God and then spends it in the way of God, and a man who has been given knowledge by God and acts in accord with it and imparts it to people." The notion of envy after exposure to the truth is discussed in 3:19; envy is also mentioned in 2:213; 4:54; 10:90; 42:14; 45:17. The great sin of Satan is often understood to be envy, as shown in 38:76, where Iblīs says of Adam, *I am better than him.* Some understand the *truth* that was *clear to them* to be the fact that Muḥammad was a true prophet (IK, Ṭ), although in 3:19 the truth that causes dissension among the People of the Book is understood as revelation considered more broadly.

In legal terms, it is thought that this verse's command to pardon and forbear was abrogated by 9:29, which addresses the question of *jizyah,* or "indemnity" paid by the People of the Book: *Fight those who believe not in God and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and who follow not the Religion of Truth among those who were given the Book, till they pay the* jizyah *with a willing hand, being humbled* (IK, R, Th). However, as al-Rāzī argues, if this verse is interpreted as a command to perform a certain kind of virtuous behavior, then it is not subject to abrogation, as it is not a legal ruling (*ḥukm*).

Some argue that the first verse to permit fighting (and by implication to abrogate 2:109) was 22:39: *Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged.* Others believe 9:5 first allowed fighting. The range of opinion on abrogation is perhaps no more relevant than in the matter of war. An expansive view of legal abrogation allows for the many verses dealing with peace and forbearance to be "abrogated" by those authorizing fighting, which leads to dozens of verses being summarily abrogated. However, as al-Rāzī points out, at least in this particular case, the question of abrogation need not arise; this verse commanding forbearance and tolerance does not contradict the kind of just-war commands related to fighting elsewhere, since even in fighting Muslims are commanded to practice similar virtues, as vv. 190–94 demonstrate. For a fuller discussion of such matters, see commentary on 9:1–5; and the essays "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions" and "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

*Until God comes with His Command* could also be rendered "until God brings His Command." The *Command* could indicate the military defeat of either the Quraysh or those Jews who

Command. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (110) And perform the prayer and give the alms. Whatever good you send forth for your souls, you will find it with God. Truly God sees whatsoever you do. (111) And they said, "None will enter the Garden unless he be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their hopes. Say, "Bring your proof, if you are truthful." (112) Nay, whosoever submits his face to God, while being virtuous, shall have his reward with his Lord. No fear shall

opposed the Prophet or refer to the legal status afforded the People of the Book in 9:29, mentioned above (Q, IK, Ṭ).

110 Here and in 73:20, which is similarly phrased, the *good* that the believers perform and find with God is connected with prayer and charity. It is understood to mean that the fruits of one's actions are reaped on the Day of Judgment, a promise in the form of a description (IK). One Companion said that when he heard the Prophet recite this verse, after it the Prophet would say, "He sees all things." (It is said that the Prophet would often pause in the midst of his recitation in order to pray or supplicate in accord with the content of a verse, for example, glorifying God in a verse about glorification or actually prostrating in a verse mentioning prostration, which is discussed in 96:19c.)

111 The theme of God restricting His Favor to one group is repeated in v. 113, where Jews and Christians each believe that the other does not stand on firm ground; v. 135, where right guidance means following only their own religions; 5:18, where the Jews and Christians call themselves the beloved children of God; and 62:6, where Jews claim to be God's friends apart from all others. See also 4:123–24c. The *proof* (*burhān*) is a "demonstration" or "evidence" (IK) and is used similarly in 21:24; 23:117; 27:64; 28:75.

112 For *submits his face,* see also 4:125; 31:22. Here "to submit" means to be sincere, and the metaphor is powerful because the face is the noblest part of one's body (Ṭ), and in a sense the most profound action in the prayer is the prostration, where one's face (the forehead and the nose) touches the ground (R). See also 3:20 and commentary. Although some commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī, understand this to mean submitting one's body and actions, which is how they understand the use of "face," others, such as Ibn Kathīr, add to this and say that the twin conditions of one's actions being acceptable to God are sincerity and conformity to the *Sharīʿah* (Islamic Law). This latter view would exclude hypocrites because of their lack of sincerity, but would also rule out Christian monks for their lack of conformity to the *Sharīʿah.* Al-Rāzī, in the same way, leaves out Hindus, who, whatever their intentions, display in his view "repugnant" actions. The condition of physical conformity allows the exclusion of other religions, although the plain sense of the passage and those like it does not necessitate such exclusion as asserted by other authorities.

113 This verse may have been revealed after a group of Jews argued with the Christian delegation from Najrān (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 3; IK, Ṭ), though other commentators think that it can apply to Jews and Christians generally and does not require them to be present before each other or even to be contemporaries of the Prophet. *Stand on nothing* could also be rendered "follow nothing," and in this sense some commentators suggest that in the beginning of their respective religious histories the Jews and Christians did indeed "follow something" true, but then differed and altered their religion (Ṭ). But, as others point out, this would negate the obvious intent of censure in the verse, which indicates that the Jews and Christians are wrong to make this accusation against each other (IK). They make these claims even though they *recite the Book,* which means that in what they espouse they should affirm rather than deny the truths in the other religion; in the case of the Jews, the Ṭorah speaks to the truth of Jesus, and in the case of the Christians, the Gospel affirms Moses and the Torah (Ṭ). The people who spoke *words like theirs* are understood to be peoples before the Jews and Christians

come upon them; nor shall they grieve. (113) The Jews say, "The Christians stand on nothing," and the Christians say, "The Jews stand on nothing," though they recite the Book. Likewise did those who know not speak words like theirs. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed. (114) And who does greater wrong than one who bars [entrance to] the mosques of God, lest His Name be remembered therein, and strives for their ruin? They are those who should not enter them, save in fear. Theirs is disgrace in this world, and theirs is a great punishment in the Hereafter. (115) To God belong the East and the West. Wheresoever you turn,

(IK) or possibly the idolaters who opposed Islam (R). The commentator al-Kāshānī notes that the Christians are veiled from the outward by their attachment to the inward, while the Jews are veiled from the inward by their attachment to the outward, and that similar problems beset certain schools of thought in Islam (K).

The suspension of a final verdict regarding religious differences is a consistent theme in the Qurán. God's Judgment or disclosure of the truth in matters of religious disagreement on the Day of Judgment is also mentioned in 3:55; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:92; 16:124; 22:69; 32:25; 39:3, 46. The Quran states that at one time *mankind was but one community* (10:19), and that even if all were made one community again, *they did not cease to differ* (11:118). In other instances, the prophets are given the mission of making clear these differences (16:64, in the case of Muhammad; 43:63, in the case of Jesus).

114 *Mosques* translates *masājid* (sing. *masjid*), which is derived from the verb "to prostrate" (*sajada*). Many commentators attempt to specify the mosques mentioned here. Some point to the Temple in Jerusalem (the *Farthest Mosque* mentioned in 17:1) and the Kaʿbah in Makkah, since they are named "mosque" (*masjid*) in the Quran. They also give differing accounts of the destruction of the Temple, which according to some took place with the connivance of Christians. Some say this verse refers to when at Hudaybiyah the Makkans stopped the Prophet from entering Makkah to pray at the Kaʿbah in 6/628 and the Muslim pilgrims agreed to go back to Madinah and return the following year (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48). For al-Ṭabarī, since even the idolaters never tried to destroy the Kaʿbah, it must refer to the Temple. Others see it more generally, saying that it applies to anyone who prevents people from entering any house of worship (Q). A broader interpretation of *ruin* (*kharāb*) holds that in filling the Kaʿbah with idols and the practice of idolatry, the idolaters were seeking its ruin, because it was no longer a mosque of the One God but a temple of idols (IK, Q, R). Some also mention that Abū Bakr had a small mosque in Makkah before the Muslims migrated to Madinah, a mosque the Makkans later destroyed (R).

Some try to identify specific ways in which disgrace or fear is evidenced by Christians, such as the payment of the *jizyah*, or "indemnity" (see 9:29c; Ṭ). But others point out that the notion of disgrace can be quite broad, and that the Prophet would often pray that disgrace not be visited upon him and his community in this world (IK). Some Sufis discern another level of meaning, saying that the heart is the "house" of love and knowledge of God (the Kaʿbah is the House of God), and one does wrong in destroying it through false desires (Aj, Qu). See also 9:17: *It is not for the idolaters to maintain the mosques of God, bearing witness of disbelief against themselves.*

115 God is elsewhere called the *Lord of the East and the West* (73:9); *Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests* (55:17); and *Lord of the easts and the wests* (70:40). The famous Light Verse (24:35) speaks of *a blessed olive tree, neither of the*

there is the Face of God. God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. (116) And they say, "God has taken a child." Glory be to Him! Rather, unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him, (117) the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a thing, He only

*East nor of the West.* See also 2:142c. Regarding the remainder of the verse, the commentators converge on two main points: the practical question of the *qiblah* (the direction of the canonical prayer) and the doctrinal matter of understanding what it means that there is the Face of God wherever one turns.

Most commentators connect this verse to the change in the *qiblah,* which was at first oriented toward Jerusalem, but which, after the revelation of 2:144, became oriented toward the Kaʿbah in Makkah. Indeed, as a practical matter some thought that this verse gave permission to pray in any direction, but that this was abrogated by 2:144. For some, the present verse was revealed to the Prophet as a reassurance for some Muslims who told him that the previous night they could not discern the proper direction of prayer and later realized they had prayed facing in the wrong direction (IK, Q). Others connect it to the permission to pray in the direction one is facing while mounted (Āl); this permission pertains to nonrequired prayers.

Still others prefer to link it to the death of the Negus, the king of Abyssinia who had sheltered many Muslims as refugees during the worst days of the persecution in Makkah. The Prophet said, "Your brother the Negus has died; so pray for him." When those present objected that he was not a Muslim, it is said that 3:199 was revealed: *And truly among the People of the Book are those who believe in God and that which has been sent down unto you, and that which has been sent down unto them.* Then when they objected that the Negus did not face the *qiblah,* this verse was revealed (IK, R). In another account—regarding 40:60, *Call upon Me, and I shall respond to you*—some asked the Prophet, "In which direction?" at which this verse as revealed. In verses such as these where several occasions of revelation are given, commentators often adopt a neutral attitude and acknowledge that the occasion is not decisive in light of the doctrinal content, which in this verse is profound and universal.

*There is the Face of God* is understood by some to simply mean, "There is God," "There is the *qiblah* of God" (Ṭ), or "There is God's Contentment" (R). In connection with this verse many mention 28:88: *All things perish, save His Face;* 55:26–7: *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty;* 57:4: *He is with you wheresoever you are;* and 58:7: *He is with them wheresoever they are.* Some argue that the very fact that it says *wheresoever* is the strongest proof against anthropomorphizing God, since any body could be in only one place and not more than one place simultaneously (R).

*All-Encompassing* (*wāsiʿ*) can also mean "unstinting" or "generous" (Q). Related passages include 53:32: *Truly your Lord is of vast forgiveness;* and 7:156: *My Mercy encompasses all things.* Al-Rāzī mentions that, in connection with the ruin of mosques mentioned in the previous verse, one can understand this phrase to mean that, despite destruction of mosques, God's remembrance cannot be hindered since He is wherever one turns.

This verse can also be taken as an allusion to the Omnipresence of God, who is *the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward* (57:3), manifest in all things, though *naught is like unto Him* (42:11). This verse is understood to mean that God is present everywhere and is one of the scriptural foundations for the Sufi doctrine of the "oneness of being," or *waḥdat al-wujūd.*

116 Commentators do not restrict this verse to Christian theology; it can also refer to the Arab pagan belief that the angels were the daughters of God (16:57; 37:149; 43:16; 52:39); similar disavowals of Divine sonship in connection with Jesus are found in 5:17, 72; 9:30; 19:35. The Islamic arguments against God's having a child stem directly from the fundamental Islamic conception of Divine Oneness, Transcendence, Absoluteness,

and Uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) and are based on the principle that God is unlike anything in creation, God is beyond need of all things, and His Perfection can never be implicated in the limitations inherent in "having a son." Since Islam emphasizes God as the Absolute, it denies all possibility of relativizing Him through a relationship such as fatherhood.

Although a theologian such as al-Rāzī accepts a purely metaphorical understanding of God as "father"—in the sense that a father is prior, is responsible for or is the human cause of a person's being—he would utterly reject that this in any way reflects the actual filial relationship between God and any being. His arguments are representative of much mainstream thought on the question: (1) those beings who are called God's offspring are contingent beings, hence are created, and offsprings are begotten; (2) the offspring is either eternal or not; in the first case there is nothing to make one father and the other son, and in the second case the offspring would be a created being who is begotten; (3) the offspring is of the same species as the progenitor, being similar in some ways, but different in others; this would require that each be made up of parts, which cannot be said of God; (4) one has offspring as a result of certain needs such as happiness, care in one's old age, pride, and so on, none of which are attributable to God.

The term most often translated *glory be to* (*subḥāna*) also carries the sense of "disassociation," so that *Glory be to Him!* can also mean "God is far beyond such a thing!" which is a sense brought out often in connection with this verse (Q, Ṭ). For the general meaning of glorifying God, see 57:1c.

*Devoutly obedient* renders *qānit,* whose range of meaning includes compliance, humility, standing, and silence, all of which are emphasized by the commentators on this verse (Q, R, Ṭ). Since the opposite qualities are all attributes of human beings in this world, some say that this refers to their state on the Day of Resurrection, when everyone will be forced to obey, stand, and be silent before God (Q). Others understand the message of *All are devoutly obedient to Him* to be similar to that of 13:15: *And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly* (IK). The context also suggests that the phrase be understood as "All [of them] are devoutly obedient to Him," referring to Jesus, Ezra, and the angels who, far from being connected with this incorrect belief, are themselves sincere in their worship of God: *The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God; nor would the angels brought nigh* (4:172). On "devout obedience," also see 3:17c; 4:34c.

117 *Decrees* translates *qaḍā,* which can also mean "to accomplish," "to complete," or "to judge." The creative command *Be!* is also found in 6:73; 16:40; 36:82; 40:68. In each case, all that is necessary to bring a thing into being is for God to say *Be!* In connection with the previous verse, similar language can also be found with regard to Jesus' creation in 3:59: *Truly the likeness of Jesus in the Sight of God is that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be!" and he was;* and 19:35: *It is not for God to beget a child. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is.* For some commentators such as al-Rāzī, the command *Be!* is meant to convey the ease and power by which God creates, requiring no preparation, practice, or effort. This view rejects the idea of a sequence of (1) a thing's nonexistence, (2) God's saying *Be!* and (3) its existence, since one cannot address nothing, and if something exists, it does not need the *Be!* in order to exist. Others say *Be!* neither precedes nor follows the creation of a thing, but is coterminous with it (Q). This verse is also understood as confirming that God knows things prior to their creation, and hence before their existence (Q).

This latter idea is expanded upon by Ibn ᶜArabī and many members of his school, who explain that God says *Be!* to the forms (or "immutable essences," *al-aᶜyān al-thābitah*) in His Knowledge, meaning His Knowledge of His own Qualities and Attributes. That is to say, God knows what He will create and brings His Will and Power to bear upon that object of knowledge in order to create it by saying *Be!* Being within God's Knowledge, it is not nothing, but neither is it yet created, nor does it possess existence. Ultimately, these views converge on the unity of God's Knowledge, Will, and Power as His inseparable Attributes and on God's complete self-sufficiency in relation to what He creates. *Be!* (*kun*) also corresponds to the Biblical *fiat lux* ("Let there be light," Genesis 1:3) and serves to emphasize the fact that the existence of everything comes from God and His Will and that human beings do not have the power to bring anything into being out of nothing.

says to it, "Be!" and it is. (118) Those who do not know say, "Why does God not speak to us, nor a sign come to us?" Likewise did those who came before them speak words like theirs. Their hearts are alike. We have made the signs clear for a people who are certain. (119) Indeed, We have sent thee with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner, and thou wilt not be questioned about the inhabitants of Hellfire. (120) Never will the Jews be content with thee, nor the Christians, until thou followest their creed. Say, "Truly the Guidance of God is guidance. And if thou shouldst follow their caprices after the knowledge that has come to thee, thou shalt have against God neither protector nor helper." (121) Those unto whom We have given the Book and who recite it as it should be recited are they who believe in it. And whosoever does not believe in it, they are the losers. (122) O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and that I favored you above the worlds. (123) And be mindful of a day when no soul shall recompense another in any way, nor shall ransom be accepted

118 *Those who do not know* are identified by some as the Christians and by others as the pagan Arabs; *those who came before* are alternately the Jews, the Christians, or the Arabs, all three together, or anyone for whom that description is true (Ṭ). Rather than a sincere question, some interpret *Why does God not speak to us, nor a sign come to us?* as a taunt (Ṭ). A similar stream of requests or taunts is described in 17:90–95. The issue of such incredulous requests is discussed at length in 4:153c.

119 *Bearer of glad tidings* (*bashīr*) and *warner* (*nadhīr*) are complementary epithets used to describe the function of the Prophet (e.g., 6:48; 17:105; 34:28) and other prophets throughout the Quran. For a fuller discussion, see 4:165c. *Thou wilt not be questioned about* can also carry the sense of "Thou art not answerable/responsible for." An alternate reading would make the verb an imperative, "And ask not about," or nominative, "And thou askest not about," although the first reading is preferred by most and is in keeping with many other instances where the Prophet is absolved of responsibility for the error of others, such as 2:272: *Thou art not tasked with their guidance;* 35:8: *Let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them;* and 88:22: *Thou are not a warder over them.*

120 For some commentators this verse is a confirmation that the question in v. 118 is not sincere, but a taunt (Q). *Creed* renders *millah,* a word that also can mean "community," but that can furthermore be used to refer to the religious law (*sharīʿah*) or "way" that defines a particular religious community (Q) and is used this way elsewhere (2:130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 7:88; 12:37; 14:13; 16:123; 18:20; 22:78; 38:7). See v. 145 for a similar message about the following of others' *caprices,* meaning their egocentric whims rather than the truth. Some commentators report that when the *qiblah* was changed to the Kaʿbah away from Jerusalem, this created resentment among the Jews and Christians, who wanted to use a truce as a delaying tactic while trying to turn the Prophet away from the new religion (Th).

121 The recipients of *the Book* refers to either the Muslim believers or the learned among the Jews (Ṭ). The verb *recite* (*talā*) can also mean "to follow," so that *who recite it as it should be recited* can also mean, "who follow it as it should be followed," an interpretation preferred by many exegetes. To recite properly means, for example, do so

from it, nor shall intercession benefit it; and they will not be helped. (124) And [remember] when his Lord tried Abraham with [certain] words, and he fulfilled them. He said, "I am making you an imam for mankind." He said, "And of my progeny?" He said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers." (125) And [remember] when We made the House a place of visitation for mankind, and a

with humility (R). According to some, to "follow it" properly means to abstain from what the Torah forbids and to partake of what it allows (Ṭ). The theme of God commanding the People of the Book, through the Quran, to uphold the Torah and the Gospel is also addressed in 5:47, 66–68. For some, to follow the Torah is to follow ultimately the Prophet Muhammad, since the Torah is said to demand that (see 7:157), and similarly to reject the Prophet is to reject the Torah (Ṭ).

122–23 See commentary on 2:47–48.

124 Abraham was tried or "tested," but no specifics about this test are given in this particular passage. The commentators have differed widely over the question. Some believe these *words* were commands given to Abraham to institute various kinds of bodily cleanliness, grooming, and ritual purification (IK, R, Ṭ). Others believe they were the rituals and prayers he was to perform, specifically the central rites of the *ḥajj,* which Muslims consider to have originated with Abraham, including the circumambulation of the Kaʿbah, the running between Ṣafā and Marwah, and the pelting of the pillar representing Satan. Others see them as trials of suffering, such as circumcision, the sacrifice of his son (37:102), and the fire into which he was cast by his people, but which God made to be cool (21:68–69; Ṭ). Although Abraham is praised throughout the Quran, in this verse the commentators highlight his obedience and fulfillment of what was asked of him, mentioning it along with 53:37: *And Abraham, who fulfilled.* Some mention that this refers to his embodiment of the virtuous human qualities listed in the Quran in verses such as 9:112 and 33:35. Some also say that the word Abraham fulfilled was his selection as an *imām. Imām* means most generally "leader," including a religious or political leader or the person who leads the canonical prayer. In Shiism it also has the particular meaning of one in whom the Muhammadan Light is present and who is designated the spiritual leader of the community by Divine Decree (*naṣṣ*).

The response to Abraham's prayer means that a wrongdoer or tyrant would not deserve a covenant with God and could not rightly be an *imām;* or it means that such a person could be an *imām,* but an *imām* who does wrong would not receive the promise of the Hereafter; or it can simply be read as meaning that not all of Abraham's descendants would be virtuous, as in 37:113: *And We blessed him and Isaac. And among their progeny are the virtuous and those who clearly wrong themselves* (Ṭ). In Shiism, the fifth and sixth Imams have cited this verse to indicate that God does not set up or allow an unjust "imam" (Ṭū). Elements similar to those in this verse are found in 25:74: *Our Lord! Grant us comfort in our spouses and our progeny, and make us* imāms *for the reverent.*

125 This verse refers to the Kaʿbah, also called the House of God or the Sacred Mosque, which was built by Abraham and Ishmael (see v. 127). In pre-Islamic times, the Kaʿbah and the precinct surrounding it was a sanctuary, in that a murderer, for example, would be safe within it (Ṭ), which would have been seen as a continuation in some sense of its original status as established by Abraham. Some read the verb *take* to mean "they took," referring to past people who took the station as a place of prayer (R, Ṭ). The *station of Abraham* is a place in the close vicinity of the Kaʿbah marked by a stone that is said to have borne the footprint of Abraham. However, some consider the *station of Abraham* to refer to the *ḥajj* rites as a whole. Others consider it to be another location important in the *ḥajj,* ʿArafah, Minā, or Muzdalifah (Ṭ). Circumambulation is the practice of walking around the Kaʿbah and is one of the major ritual actions of the *ḥajj,* while bowing and prostration are movements in the canonical prayer. According to a *ḥadīth* the Prophet took ʿUmar by the hand and said, "This is the station of Abraham," upon which ʿUmar said, "Shall we take it as a place of prayer?"

sanctuary, "Take the station of Abraham as a place of prayer." And We made a covenant with Abraham and Ishmael, "Purify My House for those who circumambulate, those who make retreat, and those who bow and prostrate." (126) And [remember] when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a land secure, and provide its people with fruits: those among them who believe in God and the Last Day." He said, "Whosoever disbelieves, I will grant him enjoyment for a while, then I will compel him toward the punishment of the Fire. What an evil journey's end!" (127) And [remember] when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, "Our Lord, accept [it] from us. Truly Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing. (128) And, our Lord, make us submit unto Thee,

The Prophet said he was not commanded to do so, and some commentators say that before sunset of that day this verse was revealed.

Abraham was to *purify* it, that is, cleanse it from idolatry and doubt (Ṭ), which in Abraham's case would mean to maintain it in that state, a state to which the Prophet Muhammad would return it later. *Those who make retreat* means those who stay there without moving away; it derives from the root *ʿ-k-f,* which depending on context can mean "devoted to" or "resident in." The supererogatory Islamic practice of *iʿtikāf* (from the same root), which consists of spending a period of time, usually a number of days, within the mosque in prayer and remembrance, is based upon the Prophet's practice of doing so during the last ten days of Ramadan. The practice of seclusion (*khalwah*), or "spiritual retreat," in Sufism is also based ultimately upon *iʿtikāf.*

126 On the day Makkah was conquered, the Prophet said, "This land was made inviolable by God on the day the heavens and the earth were created. It is inviolable by God's Inviolability until the Day of Resurrection. Killing was not permitted to anyone therein before me, and to none after me." The word *secure* (*āmin*) is related by root to the word *sanctuary* (*amn*) in v. 125. Abraham's prayer for the land of Makkah is also mentioned in 14:37, where he asks God to *provide them with fruits* in *a valley without cultivation.* It is reported that the Arabs would visit the Kaʿbah "for no worldly need" (Ṭ), meaning presumably for only spiritual reasons.

127 Some commentators relate this verse to 22:26, where God assigns or designates the place of the House. In 3:96 the Quran states, *Truly the first house established for mankind was that at Bakkah,* an alternate pronunciation of Makkah also referenced in the Bible (Psalm 84:6). Some traditional lore attached to this verse includes accounts of a much more ancient origin for the Kaʿbah going back to Adam. In various accounts, Adam, having ceased to hear the voices of the angels due to his sins, prays to God, who informs him that He will send down a House around which people will circumambulate, just as the angels go round the Divine Throne. The House is raised up from the earth and then disappears with the flood until Abraham comes and, with his son Ishmael, brings out the foundations once again, rather than building them from nothing. Al-Ṭabarī, for his part, recounts these stories, but states that they are not reliable as actual history, although many other commentators consider them to be true.

128 *Submit* and *submitting* render *muslim,* the participle of a transitive verb (lit. "submitter to God" in this context), which is tied to the *submission* (*islām*) mentioned in v. 132, both of which are among those verses that testify to the universal meaning of *islām,* which existed before the revelation of the Quran. The *rites* (*manāsik*) are often taken to be the rituals of the *ḥajj* (rites also mentioned in connection with the *ḥajj* in v. 200), or sacrifice, or simply worship in general (Ṭ); this general meaning is found in passages such as *For every community We have appointed*

and from our progeny a community submitting unto Thee, and show us our rites, and relent unto us. Truly Thou art the Relenting, the Merciful. (129) Our Lord, raise up in their midst a messenger from among them, who will recite Thy signs to them, and will teach them the Book and Wisdom, and purify them. Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise." (130) And who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul? We chose him in the world and in the Hereafter he shall be among the righteous. (131) And when his Lord said unto him, "Submit!" he said, "I submit to the Lord of the worlds." (132) And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, as did Jacob, "O my children, God has chosen for you the religion, so die not except in submission." (133) Or were you witnesses when death came to Jacob, when he said to his children, "What will you worship after I am gone?"

*a rite* (22:34, 67), referring to their respective rituals and practices. To *relent,* here as elsewhere, suggests the reciprocity in the act of *tawbah* (see the essay "The Quran in Translation"), in which God "turns" toward human beings in compassion, while they "turn" to Him in repentance (see also 2:37c). Some commentators explain that the prayer for their *progeny,* rather than for all beings, reflects a general principle that one's kin have first right to one's kindness and concern, as in 66:6: *O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is mankind and stones* (R). It is connected with the prayer for a messenger to be sent in v. 129 (Ṭ).

129 The response to this prayer for a messenger is realized in v. 151, where the Prophet is described in terms identical to those in this verse. The *Book* is most often taken to be the Quran, while the *Wisdom* is understood to be the *Sunnah* (the exemplary sayings and doings of the Prophet) or more generally knowledge and understanding of the religion (Ṭ), although the pairing of the *Book* and *Wisdom* has more universal import in the Quran and is also used in connection with Jesus (3:48; 5:110), the Children of Israel (45:16), and the House of Abraham (4:54).

130 Regarding *creed,* see 2:120c. As seen in v. 135, Abraham's *creed* is often associated with the notion of *ḥanīf* (see 2:135c). *We chose him* means that in the world he was given special favor, in addition to his rank in the Hereafter. Other figures, such as Mary (3:42), Moses (7:144), Adam (20:122), the Prophet Muhammad (35:32), and other prophets (6:87), are also said to be "chosen." Many commentators understand Jews and Christians to be the ones who *shun* the creed of Abraham (Ṭ). For some commentators this verse demonstrates the continuity between the Law of Abraham and the Law of Muhammad; the latter would in principle retain the former except in instances where the latter abrogates the former (Q). This can be seen concretely in the explicit connection of the Islamic rites of the *ḥajj* with Abraham and the opinion that many of the *Sunnah* practices relating to bodily cleanliness are thought to go back to Abraham (see 2:124c).

131–32 The message of submission (*islām*) from v. 128 continues through to Jacob and his children. This submission to God, while being the proper name of the religion of Muhammad (*al-islām*), is generalized in the Quran to imply the primordial religion and true religion as such and also to refer to a fundamental attitude and orientation of the soul toward God that is universal and part of the bequest that prophets make to their progeny. Regarding *submission,* also see 3:19c; 3:85c; 5:3c; 6:125c as well as the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

133 This verse is part of the general Quranic argument that the patriarchs named here cannot be claimed by the People of the Book in an exclusive and narrow way; rather, the Quran

They said, "We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac: one God, and unto Him we submit." (134) That is a community that has passed away. Theirs is what they earned and yours is what you earned, and you will not be questioned about that which they used to do. (135) And they say, "Be Jews or Christians and you shall be rightly guided." Say,

asserts that they were followers of the pure religion of Abraham (Ṭ), identified with primordial monotheism and therefore also belonging to Islam. The story of Jacob (Abraham's grandson through Isaac) and his children is more fully discussed in *Sūrah* 12, which tells the story of his son Joseph. Jacob is often mentioned in other lists of prophets (e.g., 2:136; 4:163; 12:38). In this verse *the God* translates *ilāh,* which is the general noun for "god," not the proper name *Allāh.*

134 This statement is repeated in v. 141. The verb "to earn" (*kasaba*) also has the meaning "to commit" or "to perpetrate" depending on context. That they *will not be questioned* is understood as meaning that they are "not responsible" in that they bear no responsibility for the actions of these earlier people (Q).

135 This claim to guidance does not mean that the People of the Book were proposing a choice; rather, each group was making this claim on behalf of its own religion (R). Here the *creed of Abraham* is identified with Islam itself as well as with the term *ḥanīf.* In the Quran *ḥanīf* often describes Abraham (4:125; 6:161; 16:120, 123), and even though it is not specifically linked with any other prophet, its usage is not restricted to him (e.g., 22:31; 98:5). It is associated with being virtuous and submissive before God (4:125), straight (6:161), upright (30:30), and devoutly obedient (16:120); it is a quality that corresponds to the unspoiled primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) of human beings given to them by God (see 30:30c). In almost all verses, *ḥanīf* also describes one who is not an idolater, an unbeliever, or a follower of Judaism or Christianity (as in the present verse); the latter two are seen as particularizations of the universal primordial religion (*al-dīn al-ḥanīf*), which Islam reestablishes. *Ḥanīf* and its plural, *ḥunafāʾ,* are used in the Quran only in the indefinite accusative, meaning that they appear when someone is or does something "in the state of being *ḥanīf.*" It is understood to denote a state of pure *tawḥīd,* or monotheistic belief unencumbered by constraints, distortions, and idolatry, and combined with a life of virtue. Even among the non-Muslim Arabs of the Prophet's time, some of whom were *ḥanīf*s, the quality of *ḥanīf* was associated with Abraham and the renunciation of idolatry and demanded the leading of a moral life. It was not a label for Jews or Christians and did not denote an organized or distinct group.

Etymologically *ḥanīf* is somewhat enigmatic and has led some to debate its real meaning and origins. It can mean "lame" or "crooked" and also "inclining toward." Its likely cognates in other Semitic languages give the sense of "hypocrite," "vile," and "unclean," among other infelicitous meanings such as "pagan" or "heathen" in the sense of non-Jew or non-Christian. It has been used by Christians writing in Arabic to denote Muslims, but sometimes in the sense of pagan idolatry, suggesting that perhaps the negative connotations of its Semitic cognates were not forgotten. It is not implausible that a term denoting a person who "inclined away" from a group in a negative sense could come to acquire the positive sense of one who was not bound to a specific group's limitations, distortions, and errors. One who inclines away from a group may suffer rebuke (e.g., as a non-Jew or non-Christian), but be praised when such groups are judged to be in error. The meaning of *ḥanīf* among the Arabs was in any case clear without any attempts to reconstruct its etymology. But with such considerations in mind and in light of its usage in the Quran, one can also see in *ḥanīf* the sense of not being hidebound, parochial, tribal, or sectarian to the detriment of universal truth.

In keeping with its Quranic usage and its identification in the time of the Prophet, commentators have also understood *ḥanīf* as "pilgrim" (*ḥājj*); as "follower," in the sense of those who followed Abraham in various practices such as circumcision; or as "devoted entirely [to God]" (*mukhliṣ,* also "sincere"). For al-Ṭabarī, it means

"Rather, [ours is] the creed of Abraham, a *ḥanīf,* and he was not of the idolaters." (136) Say, "We believe in God, and in that which was sent down unto us, and in that which was sent down unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit." (137) And if they believe in the like of what you believe in, then they shall be rightly guided. And if they turn away, then they are merely in schism and God will suffice you against them, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing. (138) "The baptism of God, and who is better than God in baptism?

the "straight" following of the way of Abraham and could not be restricted to pilgrims, which would have included pagans, or the circumcised, which would have included the Jews. He points out further that this verse does not mean that the prophets before Abraham were not *ḥanīf* in the sense of being straight and upright in their obedience to God, but Abraham is mentioned in this context because God made him an *imām* of monotheism and he would have a special role for monotheists who came after him.

136 The *Tribes* (*asbāṭ*) refer to the twelve tribes descended from the children of Jacob, mentioned in 7:160: *And We divided them into twelve tribes.* The singular of *asbāṭ, sibṭ,* means "grandchild," which would signify that they are the grandchildren of Jacob (R). The ranking of the prophets is discussed in v. 285, where the Prophet and the believers are also enjoined to *make no distinction* between the messengers of God. The present verse is considered by commentators to invalidate the selective tendency to pick and choose condemned in v. 85: *Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part?* See the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." The continuity and wholeness of religion is described in such passages as *He has prescribed for you as religion that with which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed unto thee, and that with which We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, that you uphold religion and become not divided therein* (42:13).

137 The belief in *the like of what you believe in* is thought not to mean that the object of belief is literally similar, since in Islamic theology nothing can be "like" God, but that the People of the Book should affirm what the Prophet's followers affirm and believe (Ṭ). The verse could also refer to a belief in an undistorted Torah and Gospel (see 2:75c), which would be *the like of* what Muslims believe in (R).

*Schism* renders *shiqāq* (also in 2:176; 22:53; 38:2; 41:52), which carries the sense of fracture or separation and connotes an attitude of opposition and hostility (R). As in English, *suffice* (*kafā*) can mean "to be enough" as well as "to meet the needs of" or "to serve the purpose of" something. The Quran speaks of God's sufficing in many different ways: as Reckoner (4:6), Protector (4:45), Knower (4:70), Witness (4:79), Guardian (4:81), and in battle (33:25). One's own soul can also suffice as a reckoner (17:14), and in a negative sense Hell can suffice as a *blazing flame* (4:55). *Ḥasb* is also rendered "suffice," as in *ḥasbunā Allāh,* or *God suffices us* (3:173); also see 8:62; 8:64; 9:59; 9:129.

138 The *baptism of God* renders *ṣibghat Allāh,* which could also be translated "the coloring of God." The verb *ṣabagha* means "to dye," which involves plunging cloth in liquid and more generally means to cause someone to enter into something (R). The *baptism of God* can refer back to the *creed of Abraham* in v. 135, it can mean "[follow] the baptism of God," or it can be read as an adverbial clause connected to *We believe in God* in v. 136 (R). Thus one explanation is that the *baptism* (*ṣibghah*) is the primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) in human beings, which they bear the way a cloth bears its original color (Th) and which is the *upright religion* of 30:30. This would also connect *baptism of God* back to the *creed of*

And we are worshippers of Him." (139) Say, "Will you dispute with us concerning God, while He is our Lord and your Lord? Unto us our deeds and unto you your deeds, and we are sincere toward Him." (140) Or say you that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Say, "Do you know better, or does God?" And who does greater wrong than one who conceals a testimony he has from God? God is not heedless of what you do. (141) That is a community that has passed away. Theirs is what they earned, and yours is what you earned, and you will not be questioned about that which they used to do. (142) The fools among the people will say, "What has turned them away from the *qiblah* they

*Abraham* in v. 135 through the concept of *ḥanīf* (primordial monotheist), which is mentioned in both v. 135 and 30:30.

Some commentators mention Christian baptism and understand this verse to assert the superiority of Islam, as the true baptism of God, over the Christian rite (Th). Other interpretations include *ṣibghah* as "purification" and also as the wont of God, God's "wont" being His unchanging actions in relation to the world (see 17:77; 33:38; 33:62; 35:33; 40:85; 48:23). For others the *ṣibghah* may denote God's religion (*dīn;* R). These interpretations can be seen as complementary, as God's wont, religion, creed, and purification have overlapping significance, and all are brought out by the range of meaning in the term *ṣibghah* in the sense of an original dye or coloration by God in the fabric of existence.

139 This verse is a command to the Prophet; the question is directed to the Jews and Christians and, according to some, possibly the idolatrous Arabs (R, Ṭ). The Jews are said to have objected to a prophet coming from outside of the Children of Israel, while the idolatrous Arabs thought that if there were a prophet, it should be a man of higher social status than Muhammad (see 3:26; 43:31). The *dispute* can also refer to the various questions and challenges posed to the Prophet, such as the one mentioned in v. 135. A similar approach toward disputation with the Prophet is found in 10:41: *And if they deny thee, say, "Unto me, my deeds, and unto you, your deeds";* 2:258: *Hast thou not seen him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord;* 3:20: *So if they dispute with thee, say, "I submit my face to God, and so too those who follow me";* and 6:80: *His people disputed with him. He said, "Do you dispute with me concerning God, when He has guided me?"*

140 This denial of retroactive religious identity is also found in 3:65, where the People of the Book are asked, *Why do you dispute concerning Abraham, as neither the Torah nor the Gospel was sent down until after him?* In 3:67 it is emphatically stated, *Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but rather was a* ḥanīf, *a submitter. Testimony* renders *shahādah,* which is taken to imply the religion brought by Muhammad, which testifies to the same truths that the People of the Book uphold and which is moreover spoken of in their own books according to Islamic belief (IK). It can also mean that God has testified or borne witness that these prophets were not Jewish or Christian, since even their own books show that they lived before these religions existed (Ṭ). They would thus be concealing the true *ḥanīf* (v. 135) nature of these prophets by co-opting them into their exclusivist identity.

141 See v. 134, with the same wording.

142 See 2:115c, which discusses the *qiblah* and how *the East and the West* belong to God. The use of the future *will say* in this verse does not exclude its referring to the past, as a kind of trait, and not only a prediction (R). The verse is meant partly to remind one that it is not the place itself (Jerusalem or Makkah) that merits being the direction of prayer or *qiblah,* but the fact that God has commanded it to be so (R).

had been following?" Say, "To God belong the East and the West. He guides whomsoever He will unto a straight path." (143) Thus did We make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you. And We only appointed the *qiblah* that you had been

The Prophet prayed toward Jerusalem for a certain number of months after arriving in Madinah after the *hijrah* (the emigration from Makkah); in the reports the number of months varies between thirteen and twenty, but most mention sixteen or seventeen (IK, Q, Ṭ). Some accounts state that, initially, the Prophet and his followers, while still in Makkah, prayed in the direction of the Kaʿbah, then faced Jerusalem for a brief period after migrating to Madinah, and then faced the Kaʿbah once more. Others aver, however, that even while in Makkah they prayed toward Jerusalem (Q, R). Some commentators believe that it was the hypocrites who asked this question regarding the change in direction and that, as such, they were not sincere but cynical in their intentions (Ṭ).

This question of the change of *qiblah* is also significant for the issue of the "abrogation" (*naskh*) of legal rulings in the Quran. It is the first instance of abrogation in the chronological order of revelation and is often cited as a paradigmatic case, though it is an instance of the Quran abrogating the *Sunnah* (Q); on *naskh*, see 2:106c. This verse is also associated with *masjid al-qiblatayn*, or the Mosque of the Two Qiblahs, which still stands, although recently rebuilt, and is a few kilometers from the Prophet's mosque in Madinah, because it was reported that in the midst of a prayer, a caller came to announce the change in direction, at which the congregation turned, mid-prayer, and faced the new *qiblah* (IK, Q, Ṭ).

Determining the *qiblah* in locales outside of Makkah has been and continues to be a subject of lively debate. Several different methods have been employed throughout the centuries wherever Muslims have lived or traveled. One early method was to stand as though one were facing a wall of the Kaʿbah that was extended far enough horizontally; in this system the Islamic world was divided into geographic sectors, each praying toward a different wall of the Kaʿbah. Since the corners of Kaʿbah are oriented toward the cardinal directions and its sides face the summer sunrise and Canopus (the southern pole star frequently used for navigation), the direction of prayer was often determined by these celestial markers.

Later, increasingly sophisticated mathematical methods were developed and continue to be used to calculate the *qiblah*, among them the great circle, which is the shortest surface line between Makkah and any spot on the earth. In North America, for example, the great circle to Makkah begins in a northeasterly direction, constantly changing compass bearing toward the southeast until it reaches Makkah. The older method for calculating the *qiblah* direction for North America would give a southeasterly bearing, since North America would be part of the sector of the world corresponding to the Kaʿbah wall that is perpendicular to that direction. Both are used today. Another method is to face the direction that, if one kept a constant compass bearing or "rhumb line," would bring one to Makkah.

In some old Islamic cities the *qiblah* of various mosques was not always uniformly oriented, because it was calculated using the nonmathematical means available to their inhabitants. Islamic mathematics developed sophisticated methods for determining the direction of the *qiblah* before modern times, including the use of astronomical instruments such as astrolabes and armillary spheres. Sometimes later calculations would result in a physical adjustment of the *qiblah* within a mosque, often with the modification of an inner wall. A *ḥadīth* states, "Whatever is between the east and the west is a *qiblah*" (IK, Q), which has been interpreted as providing a certain latitude when it comes to matters of exact direction, not only in the absence of mathematical calculation, but also in consideration of local conditions that might make the determination of the *qiblah* difficult or even impossible.

143 The *thus* at the start of this verse is thought to connect this verse to what precedes it,

so that it is saying, "Just as the Kaʿbah is the center of the earth, so too are you the middle people," or, "Just as We guided you, so too have We made you a middle community" (Q). According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said that *middle* means "just," and a proverb (considered a *ḥadīth* by some) states, "The best of things is their middlemost." When one says that a man is the middlemost of his people, it means he is among their best and most esteemed people, a usage that perhaps comes from the fact that people huddle around their leader, thus placing him in the middle (Q, Ṭ). In idiomatic Arabic, often the *wasaṭ* ("middle") of a thing is the choicest part (R). With regard to faith and practice, to be in the middle means to avoid extremes (R): the virtue of courage lies between recklessness and cowardice, and the virtue of generosity lies between prodigality and miserliness (Aj). It can also mean that Muslims are in the middle in relation to other communities (Āl). Indeed, Muslims have argued that while Judaism emphasizes the law and Christianity emphasizes love and mercy, Islam creates a balance between the two or between emphasis on the exoteric and the esoteric; Islam also creates a balance between the concerns of this world and the demands of the Hereafter. At another level, many have pointed to the geographical location of Islam in the middle belt of the world.

To be a *witness* means one has a consequential role in the judging of a thing through one's knowledge of that thing. Thus in 36:65 God warns, *Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn,* which means that the experience of the body will testify against the soul on the Day of Judgment. The commentators often mention a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said, "God will cause to enter the Garden any Muslim for whom four people bear witness." When he was asked, "Even three?" he responded, "Even three." When asked, "Even two?" he responded, "Even two." But the questioner, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, said he did not ask about one. Similarly, the Prophet said, "You are God's witnesses over mankind." The commentators specifically mention various *aḥādīth* in which, on the Day of Judgment, the community of Muhammad will testify to other prophets' faithfulness to their missions, even when those prophets' own people do not (IK); on this issue, see 4:41c.

A *shāhid* or *shahīd* can also be a testimony or testament to something, evidence of something (R) in the sense that any "witness" is in a real sense a living "evidence" of something or someone. Thus a *shahīd* is both something or someone who witnesses and something or someone who is witnessed. Read in this way, this verse is saying that the Prophet is evidence or testimony for his community to look to, and in relation to the other communities of the world the Islamic community is a testimony or evidence of something for the sake of other communities, meaning that the Prophet is there to be an indicator of the truth for his community, and the Islamic community is there to serve the same function for the rest of humanity—a way for them to have knowledge of God and the truths that flow from that knowledge. See also 22:78: *He named you* muslim*s aforetime, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind.*

According to al-Ṭabarī, the hypocrites objected to the change in the *qiblah* by saying, "What is wrong with you, that you have a *qiblah,* then you change it?" The Jews said, "Muhammad longs for his homeland, but had he remained with our *qiblah,* we would have considered him the one we were waiting for." The Makkan idolaters said, "Muhammad has wavered in his religion." The phrase beginning *And We only appointed* is seen as a response to all these reactions. Some Muslims said, "What about our brothers who have passed on? What of their prayers?" (Ṭ). In this respect, some commentators see *God would not let your belief be in vain* as a reassurance for those who faced the Jerusalem *qiblah,* but died before it was changed (IK, Q).

*We only appointed . . . to know:* theologically, the idea that God might do something "in order to know" (18:12; 34:21; 47:31) raises the question of whether and how God knows a thing before it exists. Some interpret this to mean, "So that We observe," which would preserve the principle that God's Knowledge is eternal; that is, one could only observe a thing that exists, while God could know it before it exists (Ṭ). Some interpret it to mean, "So that My friends and partisans will know," reasoning that the actions of one's followers can be attributed to their leader, as when one says, "ʿUmar conquered Jerusalem," though he did not do so personally (Ṭ). It can also mean, "So that you will

following to know those who follow the Messenger from those who turn back on their heels, and it was indeed difficult, save for those whom God guided. But God would not let your belief be in vain. Truly God is Kind and Merciful unto mankind. (144) We have seen the turning of thy face unto Heaven, and indeed We will turn thee toward a *qiblah* well pleasing to thee. So turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque, and wheresoever you are, turn your faces toward it. Truly those who have been given the Book know that it is the truth from their Lord. And God is not heedless of what they do. (145) And wert thou to bring every sign to those who were given the Book, they would not follow thy *qiblah.* Thou art not a follower of their *qiblah,* nor are they followers of one another's *qiblah.* Wert thou to follow their caprices after the knowledge that has come to thee,

all know," referring to both Muslims and their opponents, where the use of the grammatical first person conveys a sense of kindness; that is, "We shall know" is less harsh than "you will know" when it comes to the damning verdict of disbelief (R).

Although God's saying "in order that We may know" seems to raise difficult theological questions concerning God's Knowledge, the issues are in a sense similar to those engendered by Quranic assertions that God tests people or sends them a trial, for example, *Does mankind suppose that they will be left to say, "We believe," and that they will not be tried?* (29:2). In such cases, one could argue that, since God knows what a person would have done, there is no reason for Him to actually test that person. According to Islamic theology, although God tests in order to know, He does not wait for the answer. The answer is known already in His eternal Knowledge, but the trial and its outcome still actually take place. The whole question of God's eternal Knowledge and its relationship with the world of change is a basic theological and philosophical question to whose complexities many Islamic thinkers have devoted long studies.

144 Though the change in the *qiblah* was ordained by God, commentators give varying accounts of how Jerusalem came to be the *qiblah* in the first place and the circumstances under which it was changed. A few have said that the Prophet chose to pray toward Jerusalem of his own accord in order to establish a bond with the local population, many of whom were Jewish or recent converts to Islam; most accounts say that the Prophet was instructed by God to face Jerusalem and then later commanded to change the direction toward Makkah (IK), The commentators say that the Prophet began to hope for a change in *qiblah* and hence turned his face toward Heaven, because the Jews were saying, "He follows after us in our religion, and uses our *qiblah,*" and the Prophet was displeased with their arrogance (Ṭ). Others understand that the hope to change the *qiblah* stemmed from the Prophet's love of the House of Abraham and Abraham's *qiblah* or from his hope that the Arabs might be more inclined toward Islam if the Kaʿbah were the *qiblah* (R).

Al-Ṭabarī says that *those who have been given the Book know that it is the truth* means that they know that Makkah is the true *qiblah* for Muslims, by which al-Ṭabarī must mean that they know more generally that the Prophet is right and thus that their opposition to the change in the *qiblah* is but one more example of their intransigence.

145 *Every sign* also has the sense of "every kind of sign," as in 10:96–97: *Truly those for whom the Word of thy Lord has come due will not believe,*

thou wouldst be one of the wrongdoers. (146) Those unto whom We have given the Book recognize it as they recognize their children, but a group of them knowingly conceal the truth. (147) The truth is from thy Lord; so be thou not among the doubters. (148) Everyone has a direction toward which he turns. So vie with one another in good deeds. Wheresoever you are, God will bring you all together. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (149) And whencesoever thou goest out, turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque. Indeed, it is the truth from thy Lord. And God is not heedless of what you do. (150) And whencesoever thou goest out, turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque, and wheresoever you may be, turn your faces toward it, so that the people may have no argument against you—not even those among them who do wrong. Fear them not, but fear Me—

*though every sign should come unto them, till they see the painful punishment.* The warning against following the *caprices* of other religious communities is mentioned in v. 120 (see also 5:48; 13:37; 42:15) and in this verse is addressed through the example of the following of different *qiblahs*. Jews traditionally face Jerusalem, while Christian churches were historically oriented toward the east and the rising sun, though the use of the *qiblah* signifies more than a physical orientation; it also relates to identity and community. To say someone follows a different *qiblah* is tantamount to excluding that person from the religious community in question. A *ḥadīth* states, "Whoever prays our prayer and faces our *qiblah* and eats what we slaughter is a Muslim and is under the protection of God and the protection of His Messenger."

146 Some commentators understand that what they *recognize . . . as they recognize their children* is the fact that the Kaʿbah is the true *qiblah* (Ṭ), evidently following the similar message in v. 144, where they are said to know that *it is the truth.* Others think that *recognize it* means "recognize him," referring to the Prophet, who is known not only through the prophecies in the Bible, but also (according to the Islamic view) through his presence, his character, the signs he brought, and the truth of his message (Q, R). Thus recognizing the truth of the Kaʿbah as the *qiblah* would be dependent upon the recognition of the truthfulness of the Prophet, rather than upon the status of the Kaʿbah itself, since Jerusalem was the legitimate *qiblah* for a time.

147 The command in this verse does not fall specifically upon the Prophet, even though it is addressed to him, but is meant to be an address to his Companions and all those in general who believe in him. This point applies to this and other seemingly superfluous commands to the Prophet, such as *And follow that which has been revealed unto thee* (10:109), because it is taken as a given that the Prophet would be complying with the command.

148 This verse is understood to mean that all religious communities have a *qiblah,* or a direction of prayer (Th, Ṭ). The grammar also allows the reading, "Everyone has a direction toward which He directs him," meaning that, in the case of the Kaʿbah and Jerusalem, it is God Who chooses that human beings pray in those directions (R). Several commentators tie the command to *vie with one another in good deeds* to refer specifically to the timely performance of the canonical prayers (R, Q), presumably because the *qiblah* is closely associated with the prayers; similar language regarding competing in good deeds, but not connected specifically with the *qiblah,* is found in 3:114; 5:48; 21:90; 23:56; 35:32.

149–50 *Whencesoever thou goest out* refers to leaving any place for another (Ṭ). *So that the people may have no argument against you* is thought by most to refer to the People of the Book (Ṭ). The argument in question is thought to be based on the

and so that I may complete My Blessing upon you, and that haply you may be guided, (151) even as We sent among you a messenger from among you, who recites Our signs to you and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and Wisdom, and teaches you what you knew not. (152) So remember Me, and I shall remember you. Give thanks unto Me, and disbelieve not in Me. (153) O you who believe! Seek help in patience and prayer. Truly God is with the patient. (154) And say not

conceit on the part of the Jewish community that the Prophet was merely following their religion and their *qiblah*. The change in the *qiblah* would thus nullify that claim. But this would not apply to *those among them who do wrong,* referring to the idolatrous Makkans (Ṭ), who would not be silenced by the change in *qiblah,* since one of their taunts was precisely that the *qiblah* was other than the Kaʿbah. They might even have seen it as a kind of victory, since they still were custodians of the Kaʿbah, and grew more hopeful that Muhammad would drift back to their religion (Q, R, Ṭ). The message of *fear them not, but fear Me* also appears in 3:175; 5:3; 5:44. In this verse the fixing of the direction of the *qiblah* is part of God's completion of His Blessings for humanity. Similar passages connect these completed blessings with pilgrimage (5:3) and ablution (5:6), so that all of these connect God's Blessings with ritual practices.

151 This verse describes the fulfillment of the prayer of Abraham for a messenger to be sent to his progeny in v. 129, which also mentions the same elements of the *Book, Wisdom,* and purification. *Even as We sent* is thought by some to be understood as a continuation of the guidance mentioned in the previous verse (Q) or as meaning that the sending of the Messenger is part of the completion of the blessings mentioned in the previous verse (Z).

152 It is understood by some that the beginning of the previous verse sets up the beginning of this one, meaning, "God sent you a messenger; so remember Him" (Ṭ). A saying attributed to many early commentators states, "God remembers whosoever remembers Him, and increases whosoever is grateful to Him, and punishes whosoever disbelieves in Him" (IK). According to some interpretations, one remembers God through praising Him or through acts of obedience, and God then remembers one through forgiveness (IK). A famous *ḥadīth qudsī* (a "sacred *ḥadīth*," in which God is quoted but which is not part of the Quran) states, "God most high says, 'I am as my servant deems Me to be. I am with him when He remembers Me. Whosoever remembers Me within himself, I shall remember him in Myself. Whosoever remembers Me in company, I shall remember him in company better than them. Should he approach Me by a hand, I shall approach him by a cubit, and should he approach Me by a cubit, I shall approach him by a fathom. Should he come to Me walking, I shall go to him running.'" This verse is one of the Quranic foundations for the spiritual practice of the methodical remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*), which is the central practice of Sufism, alluding to the reciprocity of remembering God and being remembered by Him. For a discussion of the virtues of *dhikr,* or "remembrance," see 13:28c, and especially 29:45c.

153 Recourse to patience and prayer is also mentioned in v. 45, and 3:200 enjoins believers to *vie in patience,* while 90:17 and 103:3 enjoin them to *exhort one another to patience.* Commentators usually categorize patience into three kinds: being resolute in avoiding sins, constant in meritorious actions, and content in the face of affliction (IK, R, Ṭ). God is also referred to as being with the patient in 8:46, 66; see also 2:177; 3:142; 22:35; 39:10.

154 See also 3:169 for a similar message that adds, *they are alive with their Lord, provided for.* Speaking of the posthumous state of those who die *in the way of God,* a *ḥadīth* states, "The spirits of the witnesses are in the bodies of green birds flying in the Garden as they will. They alight upon lamps hanging from the Throne, and then thy Lord will turn to them, saying, 'What do you desire?' They will say, 'O Lord, what should we desire, as you have given us what you have

of those who are slain in the way of God, "They are dead." Nay, they are alive, but you are unaware. (155) And We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits; and give glad tidings to the patient— (156) those who, when affliction befalls them, say, "Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return." (157) They are those upon whom come the blessings from their Lord, and compassion, and they are those who are rightly guided. (158) Truly Ṣafā and Marwah are among the rituals of God; so whosoever

not given to anyone else in Thy creation?' When they see that they will continue to be asked this question, they will say, 'We desire to return to the abode of the world, to set out in Thy way in order to be killed for Thy sake again.' They will say this because of the reward of martyrdom. The Lord will say, 'I have written that they will not return to it.'" Other accounts describe the spirits of the witnesses in the form of white birds eating of the fruits of the Garden or as birds perched on a tree in the Garden, a state in which they will remain until God returns them to their bodies when they are resurrected (Ṭ).

The accounts in the commentaries describe a state after death but before the Day of Resurrection that is also described in other *aḥādīth* as a period when human beings will be afflicted or blessed while their bodies are in the grave before they are bodily resurrected. On this question, see 3:169–71c and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

155 *Souls* here refers to friends, relatives, and other loved ones (IK). *Fruits* can refer to food and crops, but also to children, who are "the fruit of the heart" (Q). See also 106:4, where the Quraysh are protected from *hunger and fear.* Elsewhere an ungrateful town is afflicted with *the garment of hunger and fear* (16:112). Some interpret the *fear* to be that of God, the *hunger* to be the fast of Ramadan, the *loss of wealth* to be the alms, loss of *souls* to be from sickness, and loss of *fruits* to be the death of children (IK). When hunger befalls one in the way of God, *a righteous deed is recorded* (9:120).

A *ḥadīth* states, "Patience comes at the first blow," meaning that the proof of a patient and steadfast heart is its state "in the heat of the affliction" (Q), not when it is over, in which case anyone can be patient. Although some have defined it as not complaining (see also v. 153), al-Qurṭubī notes that Job tells God, *Truly Satan has afflicted me with weariness and punishment,* but of Job God says, *Truly We found him to be steadfast* (38:41–44).

156 *Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return,* traditionally recited by most Muslims at the moment of learning of another's death, is connected with the loss of souls mentioned in the previous verse. The theme of returning is common throughout the Quran. For example, human beings often are reminded that *unto God are all matters returned* (2:210) and are warned to *be mindful of a day when* they *shall be returned to God* (2:281), *willingly or unwillingly* (3:83), *all together* (5:48). That human beings belong to God is an extension of such passages as *Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth* (v. 116; see also vv. 255, 284), which appear frequently throughout the Quran.

157 *Blessings* renders *ṣalawāt* (sing. *ṣalāh*), a word that usually means "prayer" or "worship," but when used with the preposition *ʿalā,* meaning "toward" or "upon," indicates something that comes from God toward human beings rather than going from human beings toward God, as in 33:56: *Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon (ʿalā) the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!* See also 9:99, 103.

158 Ṣafā and Marwah are two hills near the Kaʿbah, between which pilgrims pass or "hurry" back and forth seven times, a practice that is said according to the traditional Islamic account to go back to the story of Hagar and Ishmael. After Abraham, following God's Command, brought them to that place and left them there (cf. Genesis 21),

performs the *ḥajj* to the House, or makes the *ʿumrah,* there is no blame on him in going to and fro between them. And whosoever volunteers good, truly God is Thankful, Knowing. (159) Truly those who conceal what We have sent down of clear proofs and guidance—after We made it clear to mankind in the Book—are those who are cursed by God and cursed by the cursers, (160) save such as repent, and make amends, and make clear. They are those unto whom I relent. And I am

Hagar frantically ran from one hill to another seven times in order to look for water for Ishmael. Called *saʿy,* this motion is partway between walking and running. Even though this was the action of Hagar, Muslims consider it part of the rituals of the pilgrimage, because it originated with Abraham, who built the Kaʿbah with Ishmael after the latter had become an adult (IK), and the practice was continued by the Prophet Muhammad.

Commentators point out that some of the Companions were reluctant to perform the ritual of going back and forth between Ṣafā and Marwah, fearing that it was a holdover from the Days of Ignorance and hence an idolatrous practice. This concern may have originated in a local legend that two people fornicated inside the Kaʿbah and were turned to stone; they were then placed near the Kaʿbah as a warning, and over time these stones slowly grew into the two hills (IK). Others mention that the verse may have been in response to other Companions who thought that the Kaʿbah was the only object around which such motions such as running to and fro and circumambulation should be made. The commentators point out that this verse could be understood to have addressed both questions (Q).

There are differences of opinion regarding Ṣafā and Marwah; according to some schools of thought, to go back and forth between them (*saʿy*) is one of the pillars of the *ḥajj* (e.g., Shāfiʿī), while for others it is only recommended (e.g., Ḥanafī), although adherents of all schools nevertheless do perform the *saʿy*. Those who see it as a pillar of the *ḥajj* mention a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "Go to and fro [between the two hills], for God has prescribed for you the running to and fro."

*Rituals* (*shaʿāʾir*) can also refer to ritual places; the root *sh-ʿ-r* carries the sense of "that by which God is known" (Q), thus referring both to sacred symbols and sacred actions. See also 5:2; 22:32; 22:36.

The *ʿumrah* is a supererogatory visit to perform a shortened form of pilgrimage and can be performed during any time of the year other than the days designated for the obligatory *ḥajj*. The *ʿumrah* contains some of the elements of the *ḥajj,* such as becoming *muḥrim*—that is, wearing two pieces of cloth; the circumambulation of the Kaʿbah; and the passing to and fro between Ṣafā and Marwah. Most scholars, especially those who see the ritual of Ṣafā and Marwah as obligatory, see *whosoever volunteers good* as a reference to the *ʿumrah,* which is not an obligatory Islamic rite like the *ḥajj*. On the *ʿumrah,* see v. 196.

159 This verse can either have a general import or refer specifically to the People of the Book around the Prophet (R). According to the former interpretation, it is sinful for any person to obscure a truth of religion; according to the latter interpretation, some Muslims asked a group among the People of the Book to point out to them the Prophet described in their Book, but they refused or "concealed" it (R). It can also mean that the People of the Book conceal the truth of Islam itself, by undercutting it, calling it false, and failing to make known the foretelling of the coming of the Prophet (Ṭ). The idea of concealing the truth of revelation is also addressed in v. 174; 3:187; 5:15.

Some say that the *cursers* in this verse are the beasts of the earth, while others mention that they are the angels and the believers, as in v. 161 (Ṭ). Others also mention the possibility that the denizens of Hell, who blame them for their own state, will also curse them (R).

160 On repentance, see 2:37c; 2:128c, 4:17–18c; 4:147c. Here, as in other places, *repent* and *relent* translate the same verb (with the root meaning of "to turn") with different prepositions. *Make amends* carries the sense of putting things right. *Make clear* is understood to mean that they should address and clarify what they were concealing (Ṭ).

the Relenting, the Merciful. (161) Indeed, those who disbelieve, and die disbelievers, upon them shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind all together. (162) Therein they shall abide: the punishment shall not be lightened for them, nor shall they be granted respite. (163) Your God is one God, there is no god but He, the Compassionate, the Merciful. (164) Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth; and the variation of the night and the day; and the ships that run upon the sea with what benefits mankind; and the water God sends down from the sky whereby He revives the earth after its death, scattering all manner of beast therein; and the shifting of the winds; and the clouds subdued between the sky and the earth are surely signs for a people who understand. (165) Among mankind there are some who take up equals apart from God, loving

161 *Curse* is commonly understood to mean being distanced from God and driven away from His Mercy; the curse of the angels and believers is their invocation of the curse of God upon the disbelievers (Ṭ). *Mankind* (*nās*) would seem to cover all people, or it could refer only to some people, as is often the case in the Quran; or it could mean that one's own allies curse one in the Hereafter for misleading them, and since all other human beings curse what is intrinsically vile, those who die disbelievers come to have the curse of all fall upon them in one way or another (R). Al-Qurṭubī understands *curse* to refer exclusively to the matter of the Hereafter; since a curse is meant as a kind of prodding away from disbelief and a communication of disapproval, it is of no use in the case of someone who is dead or insane. Thus this verse and others are taken as a description of the Hereafter, not a command to action in this world, as in 29:25: *Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another, and you will curse one another* (Q, Ṭ). Al-Qurṭubī further argues that the Prophet made the limits of cursing clear when he forbade the cursing or abusing of a person who was being legally punished or one who had sincerely repented, which is to say that a curse is leveled only against someone who is in a state deserving of that curse, and one does not heap insult onto injury by cursing a dead man or one who is condemned to die.

162 That the punishment will *not be lightened* is also mentioned in 2:86; 3:88 (same wording as here); 16:85; 35:36; 43:75. On the abiding in Hell and its duration and related issues, see commentary on 2:80–82 and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

163 This is one of the most often recited verses of the Quran. In all three instances in this verse *God* renders *ilāh,* the general noun for "god" or "divinity," rather than *Allāh,* which is the supreme personal Name of God in Arabic. God is *one* (*wāḥid*), which includes the sense of being unique, not made up of parts, without equal or like (Ṭ).

164 Some attach this verse to a specific challenge posed by the idolaters, who said that they wanted a sign and asked that the hill of Ṣafā (see v. 158) be turned into gold, or who asked in astonishment at the monotheistic idea, "How can a single God encompass all mankind?" (Ṭ).

The listing of such natural phenomena and cosmic events as signs of God appears throughout the Quran, sometimes individually, but at other times in series, as in 30:20–27. The elements in the present verse appear elsewhere: *the variation of the night and the day* (3:190; 10:6; 23:80; 45:5); *the creation of the heavens and the earth* (3:190; 30:22; 42:29); the *ships* that sail upon the sea (14:32; 17:66; 23:22; 31:31; 35:12; 42:32; 45:12). Ships are significant in being the only human-made items in this verse, but are so intimately connected to the natural world and so fragile in comparison with the sea that the very possibility of seafaring and the precarious nature of it are a reminder of

God. In other contexts, it is during a storm at sea that human beings are said to turn to God sincerely, only to lapse when the storm has passed (e.g., 29:65; 31:32). The revival of the *earth after its death* also appears in 16:65; 29:63; 30:19; 35:9; 45:5; 57:17. *Winds* as signs of God and blessings are also mentioned in 7:57; 15:22; 25:48; 27:63; 30:46; 45:5; the word *rīḥ* ("wind") is related by root to *rūḥ* ("spirit"). The *clouds* are made to course between the earth and the sky and are *subdued* just as many other objects are described in the Quran as being subservient to God or being made subservient to human beings.

165 *Equals* has the sense of competitors (R), as in v. 22. An alternate reading of the last sentence is, "If thou sawest those who do wrong when they see the Punishment of God, [thou wouldst see] that power belongs wholly to God." *Loving them like loving God* means they love their idols as the believers love God or that they obey their leaders as they should obey God (Ṭ). It may also mean that they love these equals as they themselves love God (thus dividing their love between God and the idols), or that they love them as they ought to love God, or that they glorify and obey their idols or their own human leaders or other human agencies as they should God (R). These interpretations are all possible because of the wording of the verse, which can be literally rendered, "They love them like unto the love of God." The believers' love is *more ardent* because it is directed undividedly at the one true object of love, unlike that of the idolaters, who direct love toward idols during ordinary times but then toward God in times of need, as when they call out when on a ship buffeted by waves (R).

The idea of the *love* (*ḥubb*) for God by human beings appears in this verse and in 3:31: *Say, "If you love God, follow me"*; 5:54: *God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him;* and 9:24: *Say, "If your* (family and possessions) *are more beloved to you than God, . . . then wait till God comes with His Command."* According to a *ḥadīth,* a man asked the Prophet, "When will the Hour come to pass, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet said, "What have you prepared for it?" The man said, "I have not prepared for it much by way of prayers or fasting or alms, but I love God and His Messenger." The Prophet said, "You will be with those whom you love." More often, however, dozens of times in fact, the word *love* (*ḥubb*) is used in the Quran to describe what God loves or does not love in human beings. For example, throughout the Quran God is said to love the virtuous, those who repent, the reverent, the patient, those who trust, the just, those who fight in His way, and those who purify themselves, but He does not love disbelievers, transgressors, sinful ingrates, wrongdoers, the vainglorious, workers of corruption, prodigals, the treacherous, or the exultant.

Many commentators use this verse as an occasion to discuss the nature of *ḥubb* (and the related term *maḥabbah*), which is the word here rendered as *love.* The English word "love" has a broader range of meaning than the Arabic *ḥubb,* and several Arabic concepts correspond to "love" depending on its usage. These include *raḥmah* (most often translated "mercy" or "compassion") and *mawaddah,* as in a verse describing the sentiments between spouses: *He established affection* (*mawaddah*) *and mercy* (*raḥmah*) *between you* (30:21).

The Quran, the *Sunnah,* and the mainstream exoteric exegetical tradition do not treat love as a technical or esoteric concept (although the Islamic intellectual, spiritual, and poetical tradition is replete with discussions of the reality and experience of love). Rather, they accept it as a self-evident reality whose basic meaning is known, while acknowledging the difficulty of explaining how love, and indeed any concept ordinarily used for created objects, can correctly be applied to God. The asymmetry between God's Love for human beings and human beings' love for God is reflected in the Quran's almost exclusive discussion of that love as originating with God. Because God is unlike anything in the world, love for Him is hard to encapsulate in a technical definition, and the exegetes often prefer to describe it by speaking in terms of the fruits of loving God. For example, when we love someone, we long to meet them, miss them and yearn for them when they are not there, do everything we do for their sake, seek to do what makes them happy, and love what they love (Aj). These are all symptoms, as it were, of love.

In the Islamic spiritual tradition, love is usually spoken of in light of knowledge, which is to say that one loves God to the degree that one knows Him, and vice versa. Al-Rāzī says, for example, that when we see the face of the beloved, we want to see the hair, which in theological terms means that even a slight familiarity with God will arouse a virtuous desire to know Him even more, and this desire is

them like loving God. But those who believe are more ardent in their love of God. If those who do wrong could but see, when they see the punishment, that power belongs altogether to God and that God is severe in punishment, (166) when those who were followed disavow those who followed, and they see the punishment, while all recourse will be cut off from them. (167) And those

itself a sign of love. In human life, the lover seeks to banish from the heart all but the beloved and sees all else as a kind of distraction; and among the spiritual wayfarers of Islam this is manifested in a discipline whose method and goal are the constant remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*); also see the essay "The Quran and Sufism."

It is typical for commentators to discuss two kinds of love: One is called "desirous love" or *ḥubb al-hawā,* which is when we love a thing because of what it does for us. The other kind is love for the sake of the beloved, which arises for no other reason than that the beloved's beauty, goodness, and perfection kindle love within the lover. That is to say, human beings love, or should love, God, but this love should not be seen as a means to something else (R). The first kind of love is said to be incumbent upon all believers in that one can see glorification, acts of obedience, and righteous behavior as means to the peace and happiness that God will provide as a reward for them. Lovers in the higher sense love God for God alone and, because of this love, want to perform those acts that God loves, not because of what they will gain; for them diverting oneself from what the beloved loves is more difficult than working for one's selfish ends.

At the lower level, we love what is good to us, and God's Goodness to us is everywhere. At the higher level, we love the beauty and goodness of what we know, and God's Beauty and Goodness are the object of our love to the degree that we come to know them; and in the case of God the perfections and beauties are endless, and so love for Him is potentially limitless. Sufis have written much about the distinction between what they call "metaphorical," or *majāzī,* love and "true," or *ḥaqīqī,* love; the former refers to such things as romantic love and love for the things of the world, and the latter refers to love of God alone and by extension the love of other beings through the love of God.

An idea closely related to love of God is love "in" or "through" God (*al-ḥubb fi'Llāh*), typically rendered "love for the sake of God"; a similar concept is "loving in God's Glory" (*bi-jalāl Allāh*). A *ḥadīth* describes God saying, "Those who loved each other in My Glory shall have pulpits (*minbars*) of light, and the prophets and saints will envy them." In another *ḥadīth* He said, "Where are those who loved one another for My Glory? Today I shall shade them in My shade, on the Day when there is no shade but Mine." The Prophet also said, "God says, 'My Love is realized for those who love one another for My sake, who are honest with one another for My sake, who give charity to one another for My sake, and who visit one another for My sake.'"

166 *Those who were followed* refers to the leaders of idolatry, while *those who followed* refers to their minions and adherents; or the two phrases may refer, respectively, to the satans and the human beings who followed them. This may also refer generally to all those who led and followed in the ways of error in the life of the world (Ṭ). *Recourse* renders *asbāb* (sing. *sabab*), which can mean a rope, a means by which to obtain something, or a cause. Here it is understood to refer to the bonds, the love, or the friendships and blood ties they shared in the world, all of which will be severed from them as a means of help in the Hereafter. According to another interpretation, the *recourse* consists of their deeds in this life, which remain sound in the Hereafter if they are righteous deeds, but these means are cut off when they are evil (Ṭ). It can also point to the fact that they have no way of staving off the punishment or escaping the consequences of their evil actions (R).

167 The *turn* here is the chance to return to the world. The wrongdoers' *regret* is about having done sinful deeds or having failed to perform righteous ones; they are seeing what they would have had in the Hereafter if they had acted

who followed will say, "If we had another turn, we would disavow them as they disavowed us." Thus does God show them their deeds as a source of regret for them, and they shall not leave the Fire. (168) O mankind! Eat of what is lawful and good on the earth, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Truly he is a manifest enemy unto you. (169) He only commands you to evil and indecency, and to say of God what you know not. (170) When it is said unto them, "Follow what God has sent down," they say, "Nay, we follow that which we found our fathers doing." What! Even though their fathers understood nothing, and were not

righteously and are tormented on account of it. According to another interpretation, they will see the houses of the Garden and wish for them, while the inhabitants of the Garden will see them and wish for God to bless them (Ṭ). Elsewhere it is said, *Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another, and you will curse one another* (29:25). The conversations that take place between the denizens of Hell are also described in 7:38–39, and Satan tells them on the Day of Judgment, *Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you* (14:22). Al-Ṭabarī understands the last part of the verse to mean that their regret and desire for another chance at life will not remove them from the Fire, and for him this is evidence that the disbelievers will be in the Fire everlastingly.

168 It is reported that this verse was revealed in connection with the tribes of Thaqīf, Khuzāʿah, and Banū Mudlij, who had decided that the eating of certain kinds of animals was forbidden, although the plain sense of the verse shows that it is of universal import (Q). *Good* (*ṭayyib*) also has the sense of being pleasant, agreeable, and delicious. *Lawful* (*ḥalāl*) is what in Islamic Law is deemed permissible and derives from a root with a range of meanings including "untie," "set free," and "unbind." In the categorization of actions in Islamic Law, it is the opposite of *ḥarām*, or "forbidden."

The image of following in the footsteps of Satan is mentioned elsewhere (2:208; 6:142; 24:21) and is often described by commentators as an idiomatic way of saying that a person submits to temptation and commits evil. Satan is often called a *manifest enemy* in the Quran (7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 36:60; 43:62).

Some relate this verse to the practice of taking oaths that one will refrain from something or other, but oaths cannot be taken in a state of anger. When they are taken in such a state, one can pay an expiation. On carelessness in oaths, see 2:225. Ibn Kathīr mentions several incidents where some people made oaths that they would do thus and so, but were reprimanded by other Companions for "following in the footsteps of Satan." A *ḥadīth* states, "God said, 'I created My servants as *ḥanīf*s. Then the satans came to them, and diverted them from their religion, and forbade for them what I had made lawful.'"

A Companion asked the Prophet how he could become someone whose supplications were accepted. The Prophet said, "Make wholesome what you eat, and your supplications will be accepted by Him in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad. Let a man put a forbidden morsel in his mouth and [his supplications] will not be accepted for forty days. Any man who raises his meat from ill-gotten gains is most deserving of the Fire."

169 That Satan commands people to *indecency* (*faḥshāʾ*) is also mentioned in v. 268 and 24:21. Elsewhere, both God and the prayer (*ṣalāh*) are described as forbidding and preventing *indecency* (7:28; 16:90; 29:45). Al-Ṭabarī connects this *indecency* to sacrificial practices spoken of in 5:103: *God has not established* baḥīrah, *or* sāʾibah, *or* waṣīlah, *or* ḥām. *But those who disbelieve fabricate lies against God, and most of them understand not.*

170 Some connect this verse to the previously observed norms of what is lawful and what is forbidden (see vv. 168–69; Ṭ), and it may be seen to be addressed to the idolaters and the People of

rightly guided? (171) The parable of those who disbelieve is that of one who cries to that which hears only a call and a shout. Deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not understand. (172) O you who believe! Eat of the good things We have provided you and give thanks to God if it is He Whom you worship. (173) He has forbidden you only carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by necessity—neither coveting nor transgressing—no sin shall be upon him. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (174) Truly those who conceal what God sent down of the Book and sell it for a

the Book or to people in general (R). Recourse to mere custom is no excuse, as the Quran emphasizes again and again, as in 5:104: *"Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing." What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided?* Similar injunctions are addressed to the Children of Adam (7:28), the Egyptians (10:78), Abraham's people (21:53–54), and people in general (31:21; 43:24).

171 This verse suggests that calling to disbelievers is like calling to sheep; they hear, but only the sound and not the meaning of the call (Ṭ). This verse can also refer to the prayers idolaters offer to idols, which the insensate idols cannot hear (R). Insensibility to the wisdom of revelation is described with metaphors of animals elsewhere in the Quran, as in 62:5: *The parable of those [who were] made to bear the Torah, then did not bear it, is that of an ass bearing books;* and 7:176: *Thus his parable is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, and if you leave him alone, he lolls out his tongue.* Being *deaf, dumb, and blind* is also attributed to disbelievers in 2:18; 8:22; 17:97.

172–73 The *good things* (*ṭayyibāt*) are those things that God has not forbidden or singled out as being sinful (Ṭ). See also 2:57c. In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "God is good (*ṭayyib*), and only accepts that which is good."

*Offered to other than God* means food that is sacrificed to an idol, thus excluding the meat eaten by the idolaters (but not that of the People of the Book according to many jurists). In Islamic practice, an animal is slaughtered with the words, "In the Name of God." It can occur that one *is compelled by necessity,* meaning by hunger, to eat under certain circumstances things that are forbidden in order to survive and protect one's life, but this should be done *neither coveting nor transgressing,* meaning not with the intention of bypassing God's Commandments in order to enjoy something that is forbidden (Q, Ṭ). In such cases of necessity one is therefore permitted to eat what in normal circumstances would be forbidden.

*Coveting* renders *bāghin*, which has the sense of rebellion. For some the idea of *transgressing* (*ʿādin*) also refers to the practice of highway robbery, going against the authorities, or setting out to disobey God, presumably meaning that it is not permissible to pursue food in these ways even in cases of need (Ṭ). Regarding the legal and ritual issues of *carrion, blood,* and *the flesh of swine,* see 5:3c.

174 Regarding *sell it for a paltry price,* see 2:79c. On *fire in their bellies,* also see 4:10c. Both phrases make the point that instead of consuming the wealth they sought in earthly life, in the Hereafter such people will consume only fire.

On God's speaking to human beings in the Hereafter, also see 3:77, which, like this verse, states, *God will not speak to them, nor will He look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. And theirs shall be a painful punishment.* However, elsewhere in the Quran God speaks to human beings on the Day of Resurrection: *So by thy Lord, We shall question them all concerning that which they used to do* (15:92–93); *Then We shall surely question those unto whom Our message was sent, and We shall surely question the messengers* (7:6); and *He will say, "Be gone therein, and speak not to Me"* (23:108, spoken by God in

paltry price are those who eat naught but fire in their bellies. God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Theirs shall be a painful punishment. (175) They are those who have purchased error at the price of guidance, and punishment at the price of forgiveness. How will they endure the Fire! (176) That is because God sent down the Book in truth. Truly those who differ concerning the Book are in extreme schism. (177) It is not piety to turn your faces toward the east and west. Rather, piety is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and who gives wealth, despite loving it, to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, the traveler, beggars, and for [the ransom of] slaves; and performs the prayer and gives the alms; and those who

response to those asking to be removed from the Fire). According to al-Rāzī, the plain sense of v. 174 and 3:77 is that He will not speak to them at all, but in light of these other Quranic verses it is to be understood, rather, as a description of a punishment, meaning that He will not speak words of peace and welcome. Al-Rāzī notes that this resembles intimacy with a king, who shows his displeasure through imposing exile and cutting off contact, and suggests that it will be the angels who speak to people on the Day of Resurrection. Al-Ṭabarī offers a similar interpretation, taking it to mean that God will not say things agreeable to them. Al-Qurṭubī points out that one says, "He did not speak to him," to describe someone who is angry.

*Nor will He purify them* means He will not praise them for their goodness or call them purified (Ṭ), that He will not set right their evil deeds (Q), or that He will not accept their deeds as He accepts those of the purified. The verb *zakkā* can mean both "to purify" and "to deem purified," as in 53:32: *So do not deem yourselves purified.* Al-Rāzī points out that the punishment of indignity and humiliation is worse than that of physical punishment, which is a way of implying that the spiritual punishment of distance and separation from God constitutes the worst suffering in Hell.

175 For some, this verse means, "What drove them to the deeds that brought them closer to the Fire?" meaning that it is not patience that helps them *endure the fire,* or, "What gives them patience in relation to the Fire so that they abandon truth for falsehood?" In a general sense it can be understood as a way of saying, "What made them do this?" (R, Ṭ).

176 *That is because* indicates that the punishment applies because of their treatment of God's Book, going back to v. 174 (Ṭ). For *schism* (*shiqāq;* see also 22:53; 38:2; 41:52), see 2:137c. It is also possible that *Book* could refer to the Torah and the Gospel, which attest to the truth of the Prophet according to Islamic belief, and that *differ* pertains to questions of interpretation and distortion (see 2:75c), or it could refer to the Bible as well as the Quran together as being collectively "God's Book" (IK, Ṭ).

177 *Piety* (*birr*) is understood as the obedience to God that is well established in the heart (Ṭ) or as the sum of acts of obedience and devotion that lead us closer to God; it is also used this way in relation to parents, as when one speaks of filial piety (R). It is reported that this verse was revealed when, after coming to Madinah, the Muslims observed the Jews praying westward and the Christians eastward (see 2:145c).

Faith in *God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book* (in other passages, *Books*), *and the prophets* are the five principal articles of faith upon which all Islamic creedal statements are based. They are also listed as such in the famous *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, where the Prophet is asked by the archangel to describe what Islam is. See 4:136, where this list of five also appears, and commentary.

To give wealth *despite loving it* (*ʿalā ḥubbihi*) means that one parts with it even when one fears

fulfill their oaths when they pledge them, and those who are patient in misfortune, hardship, and moments of peril. It is they who are the sincere, and it is they who are the reverent. (178) O you who believe! Retribution is prescribed for you in the matter of the slain: freeman for freeman, slave for slave, female for female. But for one who receives any pardon from his brother, let it be observed honorably, and let the restitution be made to him with goodness. That is an

poverty or yearns for the benefits of wealth (Ṭ); this phrase also appears in 76:8. It is interpreted by some to mean, "because of love for Him," where the pronoun refers to God rather than to wealth and the preposition *ʿalā* is read as "because of" instead of "despite." Many argue that this wealth must be other than what is given in alms (*zakāh*), since *alms* is listed later in the verse as one of the things to which one contributes that wealth (R, Ṭ).

The recipients of charity listed here (e.g., orphans, the indigent, and travelers) are also mentioned in v. 215; virtuous behavior is enjoined in relation to them in 4:36; part of the spoils of war go to them (8:41; 59:7); and each of these classes of needy people is mentioned singly in many passages throughout the Quran. See also the essay "Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society."

According to some, *misfortune* (*baʾsāʾ*) refers to challenges such as poverty, while *hardship* (*ḍarrāʾ*) refers to matters such as sickness (Ṭ). *Moments of peril* (*ḥīn al-baʾs*) is understood to mean during battle or war or when meeting the enemy (Ṭ).

178 Here *retribution* renders *qiṣāṣ*, which means retaliation for physical injury, most importantly for murder; in the context of Islamic Law it also means punishment. It falls under the general legal category of *ḥudūd*, or corporal punishments for crimes considered especially grievous (see the essay "The Quran as Source of Islamic Law"). The broad legal, social, and cultural context of this verse is the system of tribal feuds and vendettas in the Arabia of the time, which, as the commentators describe, would often escalate to proportions way beyond the original crime. Thus one tribe might retaliate for the killing of a man by killing not only his murderer, but many other members of his tribe, which served the purpose of not only exacting revenge for past crimes, but also sustaining the status and esteem of one's own tribe. Often a tribe bent on maintaining or exalting its position would target a person of higher social standing than the one who was originally killed: killing a free person for the death of a slave, a man for the death of a woman, a notable for the death of a person of low station (Q). Like vendettas in other cultures throughout history, often the original crime was irrelevant to the ongoing status of the conflict, which was fueled simply by the most recent act of retaliation.

The commentators explain this verse as a limitation on such disproportionate use of revenge and as an injunction to carry out remedies strictly in proportion to the crime. This verse was not interpreted as saying that a woman should necessarily be killed if a woman is murdered, for example, or that anyone but the perpetrator was responsible for the act. Rather, it restricts retaliation to just compensation, leading to the prevention of escalating vendettas and a predictable set of consequences for ensuing crimes. Against the prevailing practice, the verse is understood to maintain that responsibility for a crime is dictated precisely by the nature of the crime. Hence the wording of the verse implies that the retribution for a crime against a woman could neither fall short of nor exceed the retribution appropriate to that crime, which could vary, as will be discussed below.

Although a complex part of Islamic Law, the question of retribution for murder does have some basic features. Any punishment must be carried out only by the authorities; this verse is interpreted as disallowing vigilantism. The crime of homicide places the destiny of the perpetrator largely in the hands of the victim's next of kin, who can (1) request that the authorities carry out retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*); (2) accept a wergild, or monetary sum (*diyah*); or (3) forgive the crime. Some legal scholars did not

accept retaliation and wergild as equal alternatives in the case of clear and intentional homicide, in which case capital punishment would necessarily be carried out. Most left the choice to the victim's next of kin. Each option (punishment or wergild), once carried out, cancels the other two. Thus, once a wergild is accepted, the next of kin can no longer seek execution, and vice versa. Some jurists maintain that a killer can refuse the wergild option and submit himself for the punishment against the will of the next of kin (IK).

The understanding of *qiṣāṣ* in Islamic Law resembles *lex talionis* in Roman Law as well as other systems of compensation/retaliation in the ancient and premodern worlds, including the Anglo-Saxon and other European legal traditions. It also clearly resembles certain laws in the Torah, such as Deuteronomy 19:21 ("life for life, eye for eye . . .") and Exodus 21:23, which were also interpreted by Jews in terms of compensation, often with a version of *diyah,* or wergild. The hallmark of such systems, like the Islamic one, is not revenge, but making the punishment proportional to the crime. The Torah's rules are mentioned in 5:45.

Generally the amount of *diyah,* or wergild, for a woman was half that of a man, reflecting the economic and social position of men and women and the difference in expected financial loss to the family of the victim. As in contemporary wrongful-death civil suits, which calculate compensation based upon expected income that is now lost, the *diyah,* or wergild, reflects the economic realities of the time. Similar positions regarding the different financial worth and responsibility of men and women underlie the inheritance laws in 4:11–12, where, as a general rule, the inheritance of a woman is half that of a man, in light of the financial responsibilities placed on the shoulders of men in the Muslim family.

The majority of jurists make two points of equality a condition of *qiṣāṣ,* or retribution: both the murder victim and the perpetrator must be free and be Muslims. They say that a Muslim would not be executed for killing a *kāfir* (a disbeliever), nor a free man for killing a slave, though there would be some punishment in these cases if there was intentional murder. The Ḥanafī school, however, makes no distinction, since for it the operative part of the law is that a life is a life (*a life for a life,* 5:45) and that it is the fact that a person has been *slain,* and nothing else, that is operative legally, as in the present verse. Followers of this school also note that the Prophet said, "The blood of all Muslims is equal." For other possible scenarios all jurists are agreed on the matter of *qiṣāṣ,* which is to say that there is no distinction made in capital punishment between victims who are male or female, adult or child, sane or insane, or notables or commoners, with the possible exception that some jurists disallow the possibility of forgiveness for someone who murders a woman (IK). *Qiṣāṣ* is not applied in the case of the killing of someone who has the legal status of a belligerent enemy, which is to say that, although *qiṣāṣ* would apply for the killing of a *dhimmī,* or non-Muslim treaty holder (see 9:29), it would not apply during a state of war for the killing of a person from a non-Muslim state with which there was no established treaty.

Beyond these general guidelines regarding *qiṣāṣ,* legal authorities have differed over other considerations, such as whether the death was direct (e.g., by knife) or indirect (e.g., by falling into a pit); how the execution should be carried out; standards of evidence; what constitutes fair wergild (*diyah*); how it should be paid out, by whom, and to whom; and the role of the state in such matters. These questions gave rise to a variety of opinions regarding *qiṣāṣ* and the *diyah* among the various schools of Islamic Law.

The second part of the verse enjoins that wergild, if chosen, be collected with propriety and that the payment likewise be paid out honorably (Q). The *alleviation* refers to the very fact that a wergild can be accepted for homicide. Some interpret this Quranic injunction as being lighter in comparison with the laws of the Children of Israel, although the laws were in many ways similar. The Torah says, "Show no pity" (Deuteronomy 19:21), whereas the Quranic text discourages harshness by saying, *But whosoever forgoes it out of charity, it shall be an expiation for him* (5:45). The rabbinical tradition, however, did incorporate the possibility of wergild into the law of punishment.

The last sentence in this verse is understood to address those who might seek retaliation after the settling of the wergild, which, as mentioned above, cancels any further claim on the part of the next of kin. Should a person accept a wergild, then go on to kill the perpetrator, execution of that person becomes mandatory and no wergild can be accepted from him.

alleviation from your Lord, and a mercy. Whosoever transgresses after that shall have a painful punishment. (179) In retribution there is life for you, O possessors of intellect, that haply you may be reverent. (180) It is prescribed for you,

179 There is *life* in the exemplary punishment of *qiṣāṣ,* because it both serves as a deterrent for future crimes and places a concrete value on human life. Moreover, because the maximum revenge is limited to the execution of the perpetrator and vendettas are forbidden, it is a way of preserving life (Ṭ).

*Possessors of intellect* translates *ulu'l-albāb,* which literally means "possessors of the kernels," using the symbolism of the nut to show that wisdom is deeper than the shell, that one needs to grasp and be nourished by the kernel, or inner truth, of things; see also 2:197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29, 43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54; 65:10; 39:9c.

180 *Bequest* (*waṣiyyah*) is also used in 4:12 and 5:106. Here *some good* (*khayr*) means one's property, as in, *Whatever good you spend* (2:272), and also, *Truly he is fierce in his love for good things* (100:8). According to one interpretation, the prescription here is a conditional one, being an *obligation upon the reverent* only if one *leaves some good,* which does not make such a bequest a universal obligation. This command would not change the status of those who have debts or other financial obligations, which must be paid from one's property even after death. Thus the first phrase is taken to mean, "Should one desire to make a bequest." There are differences of opinion as to what amount must be involved for a bequest to be made; some jurists assign a specific amount, while others consider any sum, large or small, to be a possible bequest (Q).

In general there are two main restrictions on bequests in Islamic Law: (1) that they account for no more than a third of one's property, and (2) that the bequest not be designated for a person who automatically inherits according to the Quranic injunctions concerning shares of inheritance. Some consider this verse to be abrogated completely; others say it is partially abrogated in the case of those legally entitled to an inheritance share as stipulated in 4:11–13, but continues to apply in the case of others (Ṭs). Some, including the Shiites (who have a substantially different interpretation of inheritance law from Sunnis when it comes to the relationship between quota and nonquota heirs), believe that this verse was not abrogated and that nothing in it contradicts any other verse of the Quran.

The question of abrogation arises because of the *ḥadīth,* "Let there be no bequests for heirs." This *ḥadīth,* if taken as universally applicable, renders the verses concerning bequests partially incompatible with those describing inheritance shares. It means that one cannot make a bequest for those who, according to the shares specified by the Quran, would receive part of the deceased's property automatically without any bequest. For some commentators and jurists, such as al-Qurṭubī, the acceptance of this *ḥadīth* as binding shows that the *Sunnah* can abrogate the Quran (see 2:106c for a discussion of abrogation), while for others this shows that the present verse is not abrogated for the very same reason, namely, that a *ḥadīth,* about which one has less certainty (*yaqīn*) than about the Quran, cannot replace a ruling of the Quran (Ṭs). Al-Qurṭubī acknowledges that the only text preventing a harmonization of the Quranic injunctions regarding bequests and inheritance is this *ḥadīth* barring bequests for heirs. Some have tried to harmonize them by saying that the parents and relatives here are those who would not inherit in any case (e.g., parents who were disbelievers and thus nonquota heirs).

As a moral issue, bequests are to be made first to relatives and only secondarily to nonrelatives; early commentators severely condemned those who would leave relatives in need while giving property to nonrelatives (Q). One proof text for the one-third restriction on bequests is a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said to a man who offered to make a bequest of two-thirds or one-half of his wealth, "One-third, and a third is considerable. It is better to leave your heirs free from want than to leave them destitute and begging from people."

Prior to the institution of the Quranic rules of bequest and inheritance, the custom of Arabia was that male relations would inherit through the male line, called agnatic inheritance. The Quranic shares, which included the nearest male relatives,

when death approaches one of you and he leaves some good, to make a bequest for parents and kinsfolk in an honorable way—an obligation upon the reverent. (181) Then if anyone alters it after hearing it, its sin shall indeed be upon those who alter it. Truly God is Hearing, Knowing. (182) But whosoever fears injustice or sin from the testator, and sets matters aright between them, there is no sin upon him. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (183) O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that haply you may be reverent, (184) for days numbered. But if any one of you be ill or on a journey,

demoted the customary agnatic heirs to a secondary status in relation to the inheritance shares; they could still inherit under Sunni law, but only from the property left after the quota shares had been distributed. In Shiism, agnatic inheritance is rejected, and a system of proximity in blood kinship is used for the residual property after the distribution of the shares, applying equally for the male and female lines.

181 This verse means that one cannot alter a bequest, although an inherently invalid bequest can be canceled or modified. A bequest of greater than one-third, for example, would be reduced to one-third, and a bequest to give a person a forbidden substance such as wine could be nullified (Q).

182 This verse addresses the possibility that a testator might act prejudicially with regard to his heirs through manipulating his bequests. For example, he might make a bequest to his daughter-in-law with the intent of enriching his son, which would violate the rule that legal heirs cannot receive bequests (Q). A *ḥadīth* states, "Injustice [*janaf*, the same word as in this verse] in the matter of bequests is a major sin [*kabīrah*]." It is the duty of the community to adjust or cancel such bequests when it becomes clear that their intent was to circumvent the Quranic laws of inheritance (Q). *Them* refers to the heirs, and *him* to the executor of the estate, the witness of the bequest (as required by 5:106), or whoever has this responsibility (R), although some seem to place the responsibility on the heirs to address this question (Q). *There is no sin upon him* in such a case because, although altering a bequest would ordinarily be a sin, in this case justice overrules the instructions of the testator (R).

The commentators point out that none of this is meant to diminish the virtue of giving charity while one is still "healthy and avid" (*ṣaḥīḥ*$^{un}$ *shaḥīḥ*$^{un}$), an expression referring to the period of one's life when one can enjoy one's wealth. Several *aḥādīth* speak to this, as for example, "He who spends or gives charity at the time of his death is like one who donates something after he has had his own fill of it." All jurists agree that during life individuals may do whatever they choose with their property and may give away as much of it as they desire (Q).

183 *Fasting* (*ṣiyām*, also *ṣawm*) is the subject of vv. 183–87. These verses address some issues relating to the pre-Ramadan fasting practices of the Muslim community. As constituted in its final form, the obligatory fast of Ramadan is considered by all schools of law to be one of the five pillars of Islam. It consists of abstaining completely from food, drink, and sexual relations from dawn until sunset for all the days of the lunar month of Ramadan. In cases of hardship, including illness and travel, one can eat and drink and then make up for the lost day by fasting on another day after Ramadan or by giving alms if one is unable to make up the fast, such as in the case of diabetics. Women who are pregnant, nursing, or menstruating are exempted from the fast, with varying rules for replacing or expiating for those lost days. The fast of Ramadan was imposed shortly before the Battle of Badr (2/624; Th). *Those before you* may refer to either the Christians, all the People of the Book, or all people in general (R).

184 The phrase *days numbered* is a subject of disagreement; some identify it as referring to the days of Ramadan, others the days of fasting

it is a number of other days, and for those who can bear it, the ransom of feeding an indigent person. Whosoever volunteers good, that is better for him, and to fast is better for you, if you but knew. (185) The month of Ramadan is that wherein the Quran was sent down as guidance to mankind, as clear proofs of guidance, and as the Criterion. Let him among you who is present fast during that [month]. And whosoever is ill or on a journey, it is a number of other days.

before the fast of Ramadan was instituted. When the Prophet first came to Madinah, it is said that the community was fasting three days per month in addition to ʿĀshūrāʾ (the tenth day of Muḥarram). According to a *ḥadīth,* when they arrived in Madinah they found the Jews fasting on Yom Kippur (the same day as ʿĀshūrāʾ), and the Prophet ordered the Muslims to fast that day, saying that they had more right than Jews to celebrate Moses, though the commentaries are inconsistent about the nature of the Yom Kippur celebration.

There is disagreement about whether these three days per month were obligatory in the same way that Ramadan would come to be. Those who did not consider the pre-Ramadan fast as obligatory interpret vv. 183–84 as referring to Ramadan itself. Others say the fast of three days per month was the first to be prescribed, which was then abrogated by the fast of Ramadan, but al-Ṭabarī, among others, argues that those who say this have no firm report showing that any fast before Ramadan was made obligatory. It should be noted that fasting three days per month was and continues to be a meritorious deed that many pious Muslims perform in imitation of the Prophet. These three days are typically the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days, or the days of the full moon, or according to some the beginning, middle, and end of each lunar month. It is plausible that before the institution of Ramadan the Muslim community observed this practice, but not in the manner of an obligation, and that after the Ramadan fast became an obligation, it has continued on as a meritorious practice.

One opinion holds that the fast of Ramadan was obligatory, but that in the beginning one had the option of feeding one poor person instead, per day of fasting, based upon *For those who can bear it, the ransom of feeding an indigent person,* but that this injunction was abrogated by *Let him among you who is present fast during that [month]* in v. 185. Others consider that there had been no abrogation in these verses and hold that *those who can bear it* refers to old people who could conceivably fast, but for whom it would be a severe hardship (Q). In this latter interpretation, the verb rendered *can bear it* would mean something like "are burdened." It would thus mean "they are able to bear" in the sense that "they bear it with difficulty." This latter meaning is part of the lexical root *ṭ-w-q,* from which the verb originates (Q).

*Whosoever volunteers good* may refer to feeding people beyond what the verse requires or to providing the person one is required to feed with more than the bare minimum of food (Q). Al-Qurṭubī, among others, offers the idea that fasting is better than expiation and that choosing to fast while traveling or ill, so long as it is not too great a hardship, is better, but adds, "God knows best."

185 Some mention accounts that the Quran first came down to the "earthly heaven" (i.e., the lowest of the "seven heavens") from the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) and remained there and then Gabriel brought it down passage by passage to the Prophet (Q); see 97:1–2c. Muslims consider Ramadan a particularly blessed month, both because it is the month of fasting and also because it is the month when the Quran began to be revealed. In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said, "When Ramadan comes, the gates of the Garden are opened, and the gates of the Fire are locked, and the satans are fettered."

When people fall ill or are traveling, they have the option of breaking the fast and fasting on another day after Ramadan in order to make up for it. Opinions range on how sick one must be and what type of journey qualifies. These exemptions apply in another manner to the canonical prayers,

God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you. [It is] so that you may complete the number and magnify God for having guided you, that haply you may give thanks. (186) When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am

which one can shorten and combine when one is on a journey. To *complete the number* can mean to make up all missed days of fasting by fasting on days other than those of Ramadan or simply to complete the full number of days in the lunar month itself, which is twenty-nine or thirty days.

*Magnify God* is thought to refer to the practice of chanting extra formulas of *takbīr* (the chanting of *Allāhu akbar,* meaning "God is great!" or "God is greater" or "God is the greatest"), which takes place after the fast of Ramadan is over. This magnification takes different forms, such as chanting formulas of *takbīr* while on the way to the mosque for the ᶜĪd prayer (the prayers in the morning after the last day of Ramadan) or repeating magnifications after each prayer during the three days of ᶜĪd. Examples are "God is great, God is great, there is no god but God, God is great, God be praised!" and "God is great and grand, and praised be He often, and glorified be He day and night!" See also v. 203.

The exemptions from the rules of fasting (for the old, sick, traveling, etc.) are part of the *ease* that God bestows; the Quran states that God *does not desire hardship for you,* which is also mentioned in 22:78: *He . . . has placed no hardship for you in the religion* (Sh). In this regard, some mention the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "Make things easy, not difficult. Cause people to rejoice, not to flee."

*So that you may complete* either is connected with the previous sentence and refers to more of what *God desires* or is a continuation of the command to fast from v. 183, so that it would mean, "Fasting is prescribed for you . . . so that you may complete" (Z).

186 It is reported that this verse came as a response to some Companions who asked the Prophet, "Where is our Lord?" or "At what hour should we call upon God?" after the revelation of 40:60: *Call upon Me, and I shall respond to you.* Others mention that it was a response to questions such as, "How shall we make our call, O Prophet of God?" (Ṭ). Others say it was revealed after a Bedouin came and asked the Prophet, "Is our Lord near, such that I shall whisper to Him, or far, such that I shall shout to Him?" (R). In a related vein, the Prophet, while on a journey, reportedly reprimanded some Companions who were shouting their prayers, saying, "You are calling One who is neither deaf nor absent, but are calling One who is Hearing, Near" (R); *al-Qarīb* ("the Near") is a Divine Name. Some interpret the verb rendered *let them respond to Me* (*yastajībū*) to mean "let them ask of Me," which would echo the first phrase of this verse (R). This verse is one of the most central and often quoted verses of the Quran concerning God's nearness to us and the reality of reciprocity between the human call to God and His response.

The Prophet said, "Calling [upon God] is a form of worship." *Call* renders *duᶜā'*, which can also mean "individual prayer," "supplication," or "summons" depending on context. It can also be translated simply as "prayer" in the sense that one prays by calling upon God to receive something or to ask for a specific blessing. The sense of "prayer" in this verse is highlighted in M. Lings' evocative translation of this verse: "I answer the prayer of the pray-er when he prayeth Me," but *duᶜā'* does not extend to all possible uses of the English word "prayer." A similar passage can be found in 27:62, where God is spoken of as *He Who answers the one in distress when he calls upon Him.* In 7:55 believers are told, *Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret;* and in 42:26 it is said, *He responds to those who believe and perform righteous deeds.*

Several other verses mention God's nearness, such as 50:16: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein;* and 17:57, which asks concerning God and other idols, *Which of them is nearer?* In 34:50 it is said of God, *Truly He is Hearing, Nigh.* Nearness to God is a part of what it means to be in Paradise, as in 38:25: *Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return;* and at the moment of death it is said to those gathered around the dying person, *We are nearer to him than you, though you see not* (56:85). Other places where God's Nearness in mentioned include 4:135; 9:99; 34:37.

near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they may be led aright. (187) You are permitted, on the nights of the fast, to go unto your wives. They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them. God knew that you were betraying yourselves, so He relented unto you and pardoned you. So now lie with them and seek what God has prescribed for you, and eat and drink until the white thread and the black thread of the dawn become clear to you. Then complete the fast until nightfall and do not lie with them while you are in retreat in the mosques. Those are the limits set by God, so approach them not. Thus does God make clear His signs to mankind, that haply they may be reverent. (188) And devour not your property among yourselves falsely, nor proffer it to judges that you may knowingly devour

Al-Rāzī and some other commentators connect the message of this verse to the prayers of magnification commanded in the previous verse and also to the alleviation of the requirements of fasting, which came after some Companions had difficulty in fulfilling them (see v. 187).

187 Many commentators report that before the revelation of this verse, Muslims would fast after sleeping; after sunset, when one broke the fast, one could eat until the *ʿishāʾ* prayer (i.e., the end of twilight and the beginning of night), but that sleep would begin the next day's fast. Upon waking, one would be in a state of fasting. Some maintain that the Muslim community would abstain from sexual activity for the whole of Ramadan, even during the night, though the basis of this account is unclear. This verse is considered an alleviation of those requirements. It is reported that ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the prominent Companion and second Caliph, confessed to having had sexual relations with his wife after she said she had fallen asleep; he was remorseful about it and sought recourse. Commentators also mention Qays ibn Ṣirmah, who came home after a harsh day of work while he was fasting. His wife did not have food for him and went out to get some, but he could not stay awake and was asleep before she returned, so he continued to fast through the next day (Q).

*Seek what God has prescribed* can mean seek to have children; seek to fulfill what Quran commands you; seek *the Night of Power,* meaning a night during Ramadan when the Quran was first revealed (see 97:1); seek exemption and latitude when it is offered in matters of ritual; or seek to have sexual relations in a legitimate way (IK).

*The white thread and the black thread* refer to dawn and the night, respectively; "the white thread" is an idiom for the day (Q). Various *aḥādīth* describe the level of light that indicates the start of daybreak and ends the night, whether the indication is seeing light in the sky itself or the illumination of the tops of mountains (IK).

*Retreat in the mosques* refers to the practice of *iʿtikāf,* during which a person remains in the mosque for a number of days in a state of prayer and remembrance (*dhikr*). According to many reports the Prophet would spend the last ten days of Ramadan in the mosque in *iʿtikāf;* during his final Ramadan he spent twenty.

188 In addition to noting the plain sense of this verse, which forbids the enticing or bribing of judges, some commentators point out that in the ultimate sense even a sincere judge's ruling can never render the forbidden lawful or the lawful forbidden. Although judges' decisions are to be respected, they are not infallible and do not remove the moral weight of one's actions, for which one will answer on the Day of Judgment (IK). On the matter of adjudicating disputes, the Prophet is reported to have said, "I am only a man, and it may be that when two disputants come to me one

a part of people's property sinfully. (189) They ask thee about the new moons. Say, "They are markers of time for mankind and for the *ḥajj.*" It is not piety that you should come to houses from their rear, but piety is he who is reverent and comes into houses by their doors. So reverence God, that haply you may prosper. (190) And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Truly God loves not the transgressors. (191) And slay them wheresoever

will be more eloquent in his argument and I will judge in his favor. But whomever I judge in favor of against the right of a Muslim has only received a parcel of the Fire" (IK). On the question of dispensing justice, see also 4:135c.

189 Here *new moons* (*ahillah,* sing. *hilāl*) does not refer to the new moon considered purely astronomically, which refers to when the moon is still invisible (dark moon), but to the first visible crescent of the lunar cycle. During the dark moon, the moon is between the earth and the sun, so that the dark side of the moon faces the earth; this is referred to as lunar conjunction. A lunar conjunction does not usually cause a solar eclipse, because the lunar orbit is tilted several degrees in relation to the earth's orbit around the sun, and hence the three bodies are only in an approximately straight line. (That is also why the full moon is visible from the earth when the earth is approximately in between the moon and the sun.) The new moon or crescent (*hilāl*) appears when the moon moves far enough out of conjunction for a thin strip of the illuminated side of the moon to become visible. During the dark moon phase, the sun and moon set together over the western horizon, but at the start of a new lunar month, the sun sets first, leaving the moon just above the horizon for a short time. If the moon is far enough out of line between the earth and the sun, the crescent will become visible before the moon follows the sun below the horizon and disappears. The sighting of this new crescent begins the new lunar month in the Islamic calendar. (In the last part of the lunar month leading up to the dark moon, the moon "sets" before the sun and is below the horizon until it rises later in the night.)

On the question of entering houses *from their rear* or *by their doors,* it was reported that the Helpers, or Anṣār (the natives of Madinah who had become Muslims), would not enter their houses by their doors when returning from a journey, but would go over a wall instead in order to enter the house (IK). Others relate that the Anṣār and the rest of the Arabs (other than the religious confederation called the Ḥums, which included the Quraysh; see v. 199) would not enter through their doors in a state of *iḥrām* (a state of ritual purity in preparation for pilgrimage). Others say that when the people of Yathrib would return from a festival, they would enter their houses from the back, considering this to be a pious act. This verse brought the emphasis back to *reverence* (*taqwā*) over a superstitious practice (IK).

This verse is interpreted spiritually in many Islamic sources to mean that everything should be approached properly and in conformity with its essential nature. Ibn ʿAjībah, for example, notes in his commentary on this verse that spiritual wayfarers on their journey to God have three houses whose gates they must pass through: the Law (*sharīʿah*), the Spiritual Path (*ṭarīqah*), and the Truth (*ḥaqīqah*), each of which has three gates. The three gates of the Law are repentance, obedience, and reverence; those of the Path are sincerity, the purification from faults, and the realization of virtue; and the three gates of the Truth (also translated as the Reality) are concentration, contemplation, and gnosis (spiritual knowledge). That is to say, human beings should approach God through the means He accepts, the means He has given them.

190–94 Many of the issues raised in this passage are addressed in the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran." V. 190 is considered by some to be the first verse in the chronological order of revelation to permit fighting, though others dispute this opinion and consider the first such passage to be 22:39: *Permission*

*is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged.* Among those passages that had previously forbidden fighting (i.e., while in Makkah and initially in Madinah), some list 41:34: *Repel* [evil] *with that which is better; then behold, the one between whom and thee there is enmity shall be as if he were a loyal protecting friend;* 5:13: *Thou wilt not cease to discover their treachery, from all save a few of them. So pardon them, and forbear;* 73:10: *Bear patiently that which they say and take leave of them in a beautiful manner;* and 88:22: *Thou are not a warder over them* (IK, Q).

Some report that these verses were revealed in connection with the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah. In 6/628 the Muslims set out from Madinah for Makkah in order to perform the *ʿumrah* (lesser pilgrimage), but were met on the road by the Makkans at Ḥudaybiyah. There they came to an agreement that the Muslims would turn back, but would be allowed to return to perform the *ʿumrah* the following year. Then, as the time for that approached, some grew apprehensive about going to Makkah, fearing attack and being called upon to fight in the sacred precinct during the sacred months. This verse was then revealed in order to set the guidelines for engagement (Q, R).

Many commentators use this passage to discuss the usual rules of war, such as the prohibition against killing women, children, monks, hermits, the chronically ill, old men, and peasants (IK, Q). For example, Ibn ʿAbbās said, "Do not kill women, children, old men, or those who offer peace and restrain their hand. If you do that, you will have transgressed against them" (Ṭ). The Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99–101/717–20) commented on this passage in a letter, saying it meant, "Fight not those who do not fight you" (Ṭ).

This passage is among the most direct in describing the limits of warfare. Muslims are commanded to fight those who fight them first, to expel those who first expel them, but in doing so they are subject to limits. In *transgress against him in like manner as he transgressed against you,* the "transgression" that Muslims are ordered to commit is not seen as illegitimate, as the verb *transgress* (*iʿtadā*) would ordinarily imply. It is, rather, a legitimate response to aggression and in this sense could also be correctly translated "attack him in like manner as he attacked you" (Ṭ). This is similar to the message of 16:126: *And if you would punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were punished;* and also 42:40: *The recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it.*

In *strife is worse than slaying, strife* renders *fitnah,* a word that can also mean "trial," "temptation," or "sedition" (see also 3:7; 3:19; 4:91). Among the acts considered worse than slaughter are disbelief, idolatry, and becoming an apostate from Islam in favor of idolatry, as these things lead to perdition in the Hereafter (Ṭ). The phrase could also mean that some fighting now is better than a state of strife that would lead to even greater fighting and death later, an important idea in later Islamic political philosophy. The commentators typically gloss *strife* as "idolatry" (*shirk*) and hence also interpret the end of *fitnah* to mean the end of that idolatry. Some also reason that *if they desist* means "if they stop being idolaters and become Muslims," though others simply state that it is the fighting and hostility from which they must desist (R). The interpretation that the conversion of the idolaters is the final goal is problematic, not only in light of the plain sense of this verse, but also in view of other passages, such as 9:6: *And if any of the idolaters seek asylum with thee, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of God. Then convey him to his place of safety.* This passage makes a clear distinction between those who fight against Muslims and those who do not, those who expel them and those who do not, and little explanation is provided by the commentators who seem to take the position that hostilities begin with fighting and expulsion (political causes), but can end only with repentance and conversion to Islam (spiritual causes). Al-Rāzī mentions that *and religion is for God* shows that the purpose of fighting is to end disbelief and idolatry, though it is unclear why this would not be simply an extension of the goal of ending the very real danger posed by the idolaters. For more on this issue, see commentary on 8:38–40.

Regarding the command *do not fight with them near the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you there,* it should be recalled that the precinct around the Kaʿbah, the *ḥaram,* was considered inviolable by the Arabs as a tradition going back to the time of Abraham; see 2:126c.

*The sacred month for the sacred month* refers to the fact that, although according to the terms brokered at Ḥudaybiyah (6/628) the Muslims had

you come upon them, and expel them whence they expelled you, for strife is worse than slaying. But do not fight with them near the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you there. But if they fight you, then slay them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. (192) But if they desist, then truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (193) And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers. (194) The sacred month for the sacred month, and retribution for forbidden things. So whosoever transgresses against you, transgress against him in like manner as he transgressed against you, and reverence God, and know that God is with the reverent. (195) And spend in the way of God and do not, with your own hands, cast yourselves into ruin. And be virtuous. Truly God loves the virtuous. (196) Complete the *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah* for God, and if you are hindered, then [make] such offering as is easy. And do not shave your heads until the offering reaches

to turn back, they were able to return the following year (AH 7) to perform the lesser pilgrimage (*ʿumrah*) in the month of Dhu'l-Qaʿdah. *Retribution for forbidden things* refers to the rites of pilgrimage, which were restored by the return in that second year, meaning they were a compensation from God for the rites that they were unable to perform the previous year (Ṭ). The multiple "sacred things" are thought to refer to the sacred or inviolable month, the sacred land of Makkah, and *iḥrām* (the ritual state of pilgrims before performing the pilgrimage rites; R, Ṭ). Others state that when the Makkans heard that Muslims had been forbidden to fight during the sacred months, they thought they could take advantage of their quiescence. This verse was revealed indicating that if any shed the blood of a Muslim during the sacred month, their blood is liable to be shed in the sacred month as well, meaning that Muslims should observe the inviolability of *forbidden things* (e.g., spilling blood in the sacred precincts of Makkah), but not to the point of self-destruction (R).

195 One casts oneself *into ruin* by being miserly and ungenerous with regard to giving charity and spending in the way of God or, according to some, by being satisfied with family and wealth and abandoning struggle in the way of God (IK, Ṭ). This verse is also sometimes invoked to condemn recklessness. For example, during a battle with the Byzantines, the Companion Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī heard some people reference *do not . . . cast yourselves into ruin* when a man charged the Byzantine lines and was killed. He corrected them and said that the verse was revealed in connection with some Companions who had secretly begun talking about their desire to live with their wealth and replenish what they had lost rather than continuing to strive in the way of God (Ṭ). Another interpretation sees this verse as addressed to people who, having committed a sin for which they think they cannot be forgiven, continue sinning because they feel doomed in any case (IK). Instead of turning in repentance, they surrender to moral despair (Ṭ). Others interpret it according to its plain sense, understanding it as a warning to avoid anything that would lead to self-destruction, including courting Divine Punishment by doing what God has forbidden (Ṭ).

196 The command to *complete . . . the ʿumrah* raises the question of whether and/or how the *ʿumrah* is considered obligatory. The *ḥajj*, or "pilgrimage," is one of the five pillars of Islam and is universally considered an obligation upon all able-bodied Muslims who can afford it. The

*ʿumrah,* or "visit," however, is generally considered to be a voluntary pilgrimage according to Islamic Law, although some scholars consider it to be a requirement like the *ḥajj.* As will be seen below, the *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah* were often performed during the same trip. The *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah* are sometimes rendered as the greater pilgrimage and the lesser pilgrimage, respectively, and sometimes *ʿumrah* is referred to as *ḥajj al-ʿumrah.*

Others take the word *complete* to mean that once one sets out to perform the *ḥajj* or *ʿumrah,* one should complete it without interruption; this is not unlike the obligation to complete a fast outside of Ramadan once it is begun, which is to say one is obligated to finish a supererogatory fast once it has been started, and if one does break it, one must make up that day. Thus one could be commanded to complete the *ʿumrah* without the *ʿumrah* being obligatory a priori. This interpretation of the command to *complete* would also apply to anyone performing the *ḥajj* for a second time, since the *ḥajj* is only obligatory once. To complete these rites *for God* means that one should not perform them for the purposes of trade, meeting people, or other worldly benefits, but only to worship God (Q, Ṭ). This intention is concretely manifested by entering into the state of *iḥrām,* when many ordinarily permissible things are forbidden (Ṭ).

Thus a few commentators say that *complete* does not mean that either rite is obligatory, but rather means "institute them according to their rules" (Ṭ). The obligation of the *ḥajj* is, however, established through other verses, such as 3:97, *Pilgrimage to the House is a duty upon mankind before God for those who can find a way,* as well as in many *aḥādīth.* But al-Ṭabarī also mentions opinions that consider the *ʿumrah* to be a requirement associated with the *ḥajj* in the same way that alms and prayer are two requirements often associated with each other and mentioned together. The schools of law differ on this question, although, as will be seen below, the question tends to become moot since the *ʿumrah* is often performed in conjunction with the *ḥajj.* Some read the declension after *ʿumrah* in a way that would allow the verse to mean, "Complete the *ḥajj,* and the *ʿumrah* is for God," though this is a minority opinion (Ṭ).

Being *hindered* can describe anything that obstructs believers in their performance of the *ḥajj,* such as being ill or injured or in danger of encountering a hostile party on the way. A person in those circumstances may send *such offering as is easy* instead (Ṭ). The *offering* is almost unanimously specified to be a sacrifice of, at a minimum, a sheep, but other sacrificed animals, such as cows or camels, are also mentioned (Ṭ). At Ḥudaybiyah (on the road from Madinah to Makkah), when the Prophet and his Companions were hindered from making the *ʿumrah,* they shaved their heads and sacrificed their animals there, not in Makkah as they ordinarily would have done. Because of this fact, some maintain that for the *offering* to reach *its place* means for it to reach the place where it will be eaten (Ṭ), since most of the animals sacrificed ritually during the *ḥajj* or *ʿumrah* are consumed after slaughter. Others argue that depending on circumstances the sacrifice should actually reach Makkah before one shaves one's head or cuts one's hair, which is the final act of the *ʿumrah* (although not obligatory).

Since one who is sick is exempted from the *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah* in any case, it would seem that being *hindered,* which can include illness, refers to hindrances that arise after one has already set out in a state of *iḥrām* (Ṭ). The Ḥanafī school of law, for example, says that if any are on the road and get lost, stung, bitten, or sick, they should send the offering or its monetary equivalent ahead, and then their *ʿumrah* will be considered complete (Q). In general there is a range of positions regarding what constitutes a hindrance to the pilgrimage, where the offering should go, and whether one needs to make up a missed attempt at the *ʿumrah* or *ḥajj.* At the end of both *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah,* one usually shaves one's head or cuts one's hair, and in the case of one who has a head or scalp ailment preventing this act, *a ransom by fasting, charity, or rite* is required. *Rite* (*nusuk*) here refers specifically to sacrifice, though the word literally means "ritual" or "act of worship." The ransom of fasting is to fast for ten days; the ransom of feeding the poor is to feed ten poor people; and the ransom of sacrifice is at least a sheep (Q).

*Let those who enjoy the* ʿumrah *ahead of the ḥajj* refers to one of three combinations of *ʿumrah* and *ḥajj* carried out by those coming from outside of Makkah to perform them. In the first case, one enters into the state of *iḥrām,* performs the *ḥajj,* and then leaves *iḥrām;* one then reenters *iḥrām* and performs the *ʿumrah.* This is called *ifrād,* or "isolating." In the second case, which this verse addresses, one enters into the state of *iḥrām,* performs the

its place of sacrifice. But whosoever among you is ill or has an ailment of his head, then [let there be] a ransom by fasting, charity, or rite. When you are safe, let those who enjoy the *ʿumrah* ahead of the *ḥajj* [make] such offering as is easy. Whosoever finds not [the means], let him fast three days during the *ḥajj,* and seven when you return. That is ten altogether. This is for those whose family dwells not near the Sacred Mosque. And reverence God, and know that God is severe in retribution. (197) The *ḥajj* is during months well known. Whosoever undertakes the *ḥajj* therein, let there be neither lewdness, nor iniquity, nor quarreling in the *ḥajj.* Whatsoever good you do, God knows it. And make provision, for indeed the best provision is reverence. And reverence Me, O possessors

*ʿumrah,* leaves that *iḥrām,* then enters into a new state of *iḥrām* to perform the *ḥajj.* This practice, sometimes also called *tamattuʿ,* or "enjoyment," is when one performs the *ʿumrah* before the *ḥajj,* but does not remain in one's *iḥrām* between the *ʿumrah* and *ḥajj.* In this case one can then "enjoy" being out of *iḥrām* and free of the restrictions it entails before reentering *iḥrām* for the *ḥajj.* In the third case, one performs the *ʿumrah,* but remains in one's state of *iḥrām* and performs the *ḥajj,* which is called *qirān,* or "joining." The schools of law differ over which of these methods is most meritorious.

It is reported that the Arabs had severely frowned upon performing the *ʿumrah* during the time of the *ḥajj* and were reluctant to do so until the Prophet himself performed the *ʿumrah* during Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, the month of the *ḥajj* (Q). Thus, according to one view, since the month of the *ḥajj* is for the *ḥajj* and not for the *ʿumrah* (which can be done anytime during the year), the offering or fasting was instituted if one carried out the "enjoyment" of leaving *iḥrām* between performing the *ʿumrah* and *ḥajj,* since even the performance of the *ʿumrah* itself during the month of *ḥajj* is a mercy from God (Q). As for the *three days* of fasting enjoined for those who are unable to make an offering, opinions differ. Some allow it to be the three days preceding the stay in ʿArafah, others the three days after, when the pilgrims stay in Mina (Q). The *seven days* are considered by some to be best performed when one returns to one's homeland, while for others *when you return* simply refers to the state of leaving one's *iḥrām* (Q). Those who were local to Makkah were not subject to these same guidelines regarding the practice of the *ʿumrah* and *ḥajj.* One opinion is that those who dwell near the Sacred Mosque are those who would not shorten their prayers if they traveled there, while others place the limits at the border points (*mawāqīt*) in the environs of Makkah where one enters into a state of *iḥrām* when intending to perform a pilgrimage.

197 The *months well known* are considered to be Shawwāl, Dhu'l-Qaʿdah, and Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, although some say only the first ten days of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, since the rules regarding sacrifice change after the Day of Sacrifice. According to many authorities it is discouraged (*makrūh*) to enter *iḥrām* for the *ḥajj* in months other than these; that is, one should not enter *iḥrām* and stay in it until the *ḥajj* is performed in Dhu'l-Ḥijjah. *Lewdness* refers to sexual intercourse, which, if it occurs before the Day of ʿArafah, invalidates the *ḥajj* and requires a person to make a sacrificial offering and perform the *ḥajj* again. Others point out that *lewdness* refers to talking with or about women to whom one is not closely related (in the case of men). A *ḥadīth* states, "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, there is no deed between Heaven and earth better than struggle in the way of God, and a *ḥajj* performed faithfully in which there is no lewdness, iniquity, or argument." The *quarreling* does not refer to intellectual disagreements, but to interchanges resulting in anger and insults.

of intellect. (198) There is no blame upon you in seeking a bounty from your Lord. Then, when you pour out from Arafat, remember God at the sacred ground. And remember Him as He guided you, though formerly you were of those astray. (199) Then surge onward whence the people surge onward, and ask God for forgiveness. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (200) And when you have carried out your rites, remember God as you remember your fathers, or with more ardent remembrance. For among mankind are those who say, "Our Lord, give to us in this world," but have no share in the Hereafter. (201) But among them are those who say, "Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter,

Al-Qurṭubī notes that there used to be arguments about the Station of Abraham (see 2:125c), as the Quraysh would observe a spot different from that of the other Arabs. He prefers to think that the prohibition here is about the place and time of the *ḥajj,* but it could also refer to the practice of boasting that sometimes accompanied the pilgrimage, where some would claim that their *ḥajj* was better than that of others, that their forefathers were better, and so forth (Q).

To *make provision* means to come materially prepared for the *ḥajj* and not to rely upon the locals and other pilgrims for food and shelter. The *ḥajj* is not in any case incumbent upon those without the necessary financial means. At a spiritual level, one can speak of *reverence* (*taqwā*) as a provision for the Hereafter, likened to the provision one makes for the pilgrimage in this world (Q).

198 This verse is understood to say that commerce is permissible during the *ḥajj* and that engaging in it does not nullify the *ḥajj,* though to refrain and devote oneself totally to the spiritual aspect of things is better (Q). Some say *the sacred ground* is the hill named Quzaḥ, where the leader of the prayer stands to lead the joint *maghrib* and *ʿishāʾ* prayers after the pilgrims come from ʿArafah. Others say the verse seems to indicate that it is simply Muzdalifah itself, since it is a place of prayer and remembrance and is where one goes after the stay at ʿArafah (R). One remembers God there through various formulas such as *al-ḥamdu li'Llāh* ("Praise be to God"), *Allāhu akbar* ("God is Great"), and *subḥān Allāh* ("Glory be to God"; R).

199 This verse refers to the movement of pilgrims from ʿArafah to Muzdalifah. It is said to be addressed to the Ḥums, a confederation of the Quraysh and other tribes linked by a professed devotion to the Kaʿbah and the *ḥaram,* the immediate environs around the Kaʿbah. They would not stay with the other people when they went to ʿArafah and hence would not *surge onward* with the others from there, but rather remained at Muzdalifah, considering it, unlike ʿArafah, to be a part of the *ḥaram;* they deemed that the entire *ḥajj* should take place in the *ḥaram* (Q, R). (This is also the same group identified as not observing the taboo against entering doors while in *iḥrām* in v. 189). *Then surge* does not denote temporal succession; rather, the *then* functions as a kind of logical connector to what precedes it, like "so" or "and so" (Q).

200 *Rites* refers either to the sacrifice of animals, which take place during *ʿĪd al-aḍḥā,* or the Feast of Sacrifice, marking the end of the *ḥajj,* or to all the rituals of the *ḥajj* whose essential purpose is the remembrance of God (Q). *As you remember your fathers* points to the custom of the Arabs, at the conclusion of the *ḥajj,* of engaging in the magnification and celebration of their ancestors' past glories, often in a spirit of rivalry (Q). Others interpret *remember God as you remember your fathers* to mean that one should call upon and remember God the way a small child calls upon mother and father, in a state of helplessness, utter dependence, and trust (Q).

201 It is reported that one of the most often repeated supplications of the Prophet was "Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and protect us from the Fire!" (IK) This supplication is also frequently repeated by Muslims in their individual prayers and appears

and shield us from the punishment of the Fire!" ﴿202﴾ It is they who have a portion from what they have earned, and God is swift in reckoning. ﴿203﴾ Remember God in days numbered, but whosoever hastens on after two days, no sin shall be upon him, and whosoever delays, no sin shall be upon him—for the reverent. So reverence God, and know that unto Him shall you be gathered. ﴿204﴾ And among mankind is he whose talk of the life of this world impresses thee, and he calls God as witness to what is in his heart, though he is the fiercest of adversaries. ﴿205﴾ And when he turns away he endeavors on the earth to work corruption

often in books of prayer. *Good* in this verse renders *ḥasanah*, which like many other words derived from the root *ḥ-s-n* has the sense of "that which is beautiful." See also 7:156: *And prescribe good for us in the life of this world, and in the Hereafter;* 16:30: *For those who are virtuous in this world, there shall be good, and the Abode of the Hereafter is better;* 16:122: *And We granted him good in this world, and surely in the Hereafter he shall be among the righteous.* A similar message is given in 42:20: *And whosoever desires the harvest of this world, We shall give him some thereof, but he will have no share in the Hereafter.*

202 This verse refers to either the first group, who sought the good of this world (v. 200), or the second group, who sought the good of both this world and the Hereafter (v. 201), or both groups; that is, the person who sought the world would receive some good in the world, while the person who sought both would receive good in both (R).

203 *Days numbered* refers to the eleventh through the thirteenth of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, which pilgrims spend at Mina, often called the days of *tashrīq*, a word of uncertain derivation and hence difficult to translate. These are the three days after the Day of Sacrifice, not including that day, and during those days one rite that the pilgrims perform is to cast stones at the columns representing Satan (R, Q). *Hastens on after two days* means that one stays in Mina for only two days (until the twelfth of the month) rather than remaining three days (until the thirteenth). One then makes a farewell circumambulation around the Kaʿbah, and the *ḥajj* is complete.

The command to *remember God* is thought to refer to the magnification of God, or *takbīr* (*Allāhu akbar*, "God is great!"), recited while throwing pebbles at the columns and also at the times of the prayers during those days. The *takbīr* during the prayers is recited not only by the pilgrims, but by all Muslims during this period, from the day of the Feast of Sacrifice (the tenth of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah) until the last days of *tashrīq* (see above; Q). The litanies of *takbīr* are very similar to those recited at the end of Ramadan, the foundation of which is a variation of *Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar, lā ilāha illa'Llāh, wa'Llāhu akbar wa li'Llāhi'l-ḥamd* ("God is Great! God is Great! There is no god but God! God is Great, and praise be to God!"); other litanies are also sometimes added.

204 Although many mention specific incidents that may have been the occasion for vv. 204–7, most prefer to see these verses as universal teachings on the nature of hypocrisy (IK, R, Ṭ). Some commentators mention in this context a certain Akhnas ibn Shurayq al-Thaqafī, who feigned interest in embracing Islam and even went so far as to say, "God knows what is in my heart" (Ṭ). The verb rendered *impresses* can also mean "to please," "to evoke wonder," "to cause to marvel," or "to delight." *Fiercest of adversaries* can also mean "most crooked in disputation" (Ṭ). Other commentators mention as the occasion for the revelation of this verse an incident in which some Makkans pretended to want to learn about Islam and asked the Prophet to send a delegation of learned men to teach them. When the delegation was sent, it was ambushed and murdered on the road to Makkah by the Quraysh (Th).

205 *Turns away* can refer to becoming angry or more generally to leaving the presence of those one is deceiving (Ṭ). According to some this verse describes a particular hypocrite who

therein, and to destroy tillage and offspring, but God loves not corruption. (206) And when it is said to him, "Reverence God," vainglory seizes him sinfully. Hell suffices him, what an evil resting place! (207) And among mankind is one who sells his soul seeking God's Good Pleasure, and God is Kind unto His servants. (208) O you who believe! Enter into peace all together, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Truly he is a manifest enemy unto you. (209) And should you stumble after the clear proofs have come to you, then know that God is

burned some people's fields and hamstrung their donkey. The *tillage* refers to crops and agriculture, while the *offspring* refers to livestock, though some commentators say it can mean any offspring, including human ones (IK, R, Ṭ). *Corruption* (*fasād*), literally "rot," is used here, as in most instances in the Quran, to mean corruption in the broadest sense, including decadence and immorality. Such verses about the corruption of the earth are interpreted by some Muslims to also be referring to injustice in society and also to the destruction of the natural environment, as in vv. 11, 30.

206 The concept of sufficiency (*suffices*) is used both in a positive and in a negative sense in the Quran, often in the sense of "serving the purpose" of something, in this case punishing the misdeeds of the worker of corruption; see 2:137c.

207 As with the verses above, commentators mention specific individuals to whom the verse may refer, but prefer to see it also as a universal message. This verse is connected with the general precept of "enjoining right and forbidding wrong" (*al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf wa'l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*), a major ethical theme of the Quran mentioned in 3:104, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112; 22:41; 31:17. It is reported that ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second Caliph, commented on this verse, describing the *one who sells his soul* as "a man who sets out to enjoin right and forbid wrong and is slain." In this sense *sells his soul* can also mean "sells his life," since *nafs* can also mean "life" in addition to "soul" or "self." Others suggest that this verse may refer to those Companions of the Prophet who spent money on the emigration from Makkah to Madinah or who lost it by being forced to leave their wealth behind in Makkah when they migrated (IK, Ṭ). Some mention that this verse was connected with ʿAlī's act of sleeping in the Prophet's bed while he migrated from Makkah for Madinah during the *hijrah* in order to buy time for the Prophet, who was a target of the Makkans' hostility (Th). In its more universal sense one *sells his soul* means that one gives away one's selfish desires or one's life for the sake of God, a virtuous bargain in the ultimate sense.

208 Many interpret *peace* (*silm*) here to mean "submission" (*islām;* R, Ṭ), but acknowledge that this is not the word's literal meaning. Others interpret it to mean "enter into obedience" (IK). *All together* renders *kāffatan,* an adverb that can also be read as "altogether" (R), in which case the command would mean "enter into all of it," not "all of you enter it." Some report that this verse was revealed in connection with a group of Jewish converts who still desired to observe the Sabbath and other specifically Jewish rituals that did not explicitly contradict Islamic teachings (e.g., by continuing to abstain from certain foods that Muslims are permitted to eat). One possible interpretation is that, if it does mean *islām* and is addressed to Muslims, it means that Muslims should immerse themselves more deeply and completely in *islām* and not omit any of its rites and commands (R). Others think that it is addressed to Jews and Christians (i.e., believers in Moses and Jesus), urging them to convert en masse to Islam or to embrace the totality of Islam (Q). The verse can also suggest that when people enter into peace, they should do so together and not be factionalized. *Follow not the footsteps of Satan* also appears in v. 168; 6:142; 24:21.

209 The word *stumble* (*zalla*) can also mean "to slip" or "to err." The *clear proofs* can refer to the Prophet, the Quran, Islam, or all of them (Ṭ).

Mighty, Wise. (210) Do they wait for naught less than that God should come in the shadows of clouds, with the angels, and that the matter should have been decreed? And unto God are all matters returned. (211) Ask the Children of Israel how many clear proofs We gave them. And whosoever alters the Blessing of God after it has come to him, truly God is severe in retribution. (212) The life of this world is made to seem fair unto those who disbelieve, and they ridicule those who believe. But those who are reverent shall be above them on the Day of Resurrection. And God provides for whomsoever He will without reckon-

210 An alternate reading of *that God should come in the shadows of clouds, with the angels* would be "that God should come and that the angels [should come] in the shadows of clouds," according to which the coming "in the shadows of clouds" would apply only to the angels (Ṭ). Some say this means "that [the Judgment/Command of] God should come," indicating that what God has promised or threatened will come in the clouds. For some this verse refers to the angels who come at the moment of death (see 32:11 and commentary), while others interpret it as a description of events on the Day of Resurrection (R), as in 25:25: *And the day when the heavens are split open with clouds and the angels are sent down in a descent.* The commentators are careful to point out that this verse could not mean that God moves from place to place or could even be located in a place, as this would limit God and introduce change into His Nature. *That the matter should have been decreed* refers to the finality of the Hereafter, when one's deeds have already been done and there is no adding to or subtracting from them (R); see also 6:8, *Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed. Unto God are all matters returned,* which is usually understood to mean their return to Him in the Hereafter, is also found in 3:109; 8:44; 11:123; 22:76; 35:4; 57:5.

211 This verse is addressed to the Prophet, and the *clear proofs* are, according to the commentators, the miracles of Moses such as the casting of his staff, his white hand, the parting of the waters, and the drowning of the Israelites' enemies (see 7:105–36; Ṭ). The *blessing* is interpreted to mean the trust and covenant that God made with the Jews; to "alter" it means to deny it or disbelieve in it (Ṭ). *Alters* renders the verb *baddala,* which can also mean "to substitute," and some commentators mention the accusation that Jews engaged in distortion, or *taḥrīf,* of their scripture (see 2:75c) in this connection (Q).

212 This verse is said to have been revealed about the Makkan idolaters, or the Madinan hypocrites, or the Jewish leaders in Madinah who belittled the Muslim community for being made up of the poor and the weak (Th). There are various *aḥādīth* that describe how the believers who were belittled and mocked will receive great fame on the Day of Resurrection, while their abusers will be humiliated and punished (Q). The Companion Abū Dharr related the following exchange between him and the Prophet: "'Abū Dharr, look around and find the most exalted man you can see in the mosque.' I looked, and there was a man sitting wearing fine clothes, and I said, 'That one.' Then he said, 'Look around and find the lowliest man you can see in the mosque.' So I looked, and there was a weak man wearing tattered clothes, and I said, 'That one.' Then the Prophet said, 'By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, that latter is better in the Sight of God than a world full of that former's kind.'"

*God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning* (cf. 3:37; 24:38) can mean either that God does not give a reckoning to anyone concerning what He does or that because of His Infinitude, He does not need to reckon or keep an account of what He gives fearing that it will dwindle (Th). Furthermore, this giving can be both in this world and in the Hereafter (R). For some it could refer to the absence of a reckoning on the Day of Judgment for a select few who will enter Paradise directly, hence *without reckoning* (R). It can also allude to the incommensurability

ing. (213) Mankind was one community; then God sent the prophets as bearers of glad tidings and as warners. And with them He sent down the Book in truth, to judge among mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only they who were given it differed concerning it, after clear proofs came to them, out of envy among themselves. Then God guided those who believe to the truth of that wherein they differed, by His Leave. And God guides whomsoever He will

of God's Blessings and Punishments, as in 6:160, *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof* (see also 2:245, 261; 4:40; 64:17). It can moreover be seen to point to God's infinite Mercy and the imponderable nature of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness.

213 That *mankind was one community* refers, for some, to the period between Adam and Noah; al-Ṭabarī states that the exact dates are not significant to the meaning of the verse. Some believe that people were unified in disbelief and degradation, which was then corrected by Noah and later Abraham; others describe a state of unity in submission (*islām*) to God when all human beings followed one religion (Ṭ, Th). Another interpretation attributes this oneness to the person of Adam, meaning that humanity began as one individual, but then became many. Such a usage of *community* (*ummah*) referring to a single person is found in 16:120: *Truly Abraham was a community.* Others understand *one community* as an allusion to the pretemporal covenant all human beings made with God, described in 7:172 (Q, Th). See also 10:19, which mentions the one community of the past; other verses (5:48; 11:118; 16:93; 42:8) mention that had God willed, humanity would be one community.

Many understand an implied phrase in this first sentence, so that it would read *Mankind was one community* (and then they differed); *then God sent the prophets* (R). This reading would explain why God would then send the prophets *to judge* concerning *that wherein they differed.* Most commentators reason that the purpose of sending prophets is to correct error and sin, and they would be superfluous if human beings were united in one true religion (R).

Another interpretation is that the initial history of humanity was one without the need for the commands and prohibitions of religion, and the sending of prophets mentioned in this verse refers to a later time when prophecy became necessary (Th). Al-Rāzī disapprovingly relates an opinion he attributes to Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544 /1149), a prominent Mālikī jurist and theologian, that the first period was one in which human beings acted according to the intellect (both theoretical and practical); that is, they knew that there was a Creator, that one should be good to others, that lying and oppression are bad, that one should be just, and so forth. Pride, envy, and other vices eventually crept in and led to division, which then necessitated the sending of prophets.

But such a view would have to take into account that Adam was the first prophet according to Islamic belief, and the *clear proofs* would have begun with him and continued throughout history. It is useful to recall here that in discussing 3:19 (*Those who were given the Book differed not until after knowledge had come to them*), many commentators point out that after several generations the Jews and Christians came to differ each within their own group, and an analogy can be made with Adam and the initial *one community,* whose members began as one, but then came to differ among themselves over the truth. The Israelite prophets, for example, were sent to one people with one religion, who nevertheless differed among themselves. See 3:19c (and also 98:4c), where the apparent paradox of differences arising after the coming of revelation is discussed further. Here, as in 3:19 and 98:4, the passage suggests that it is upon receiving truth and guidance that people enter into differences over questions of belief and practice, and that there is something almost inevitable about this occurrence given the tendencies of human nature.

Here *the Book* is taken as the general name for all the revealed books (Sh), or it is simply a specific book, namely, the Torah, if this verse is read

unto a straight path. (214) Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without there having come to you the like of that which came to those who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and they were so shaken that the Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When will God's Help come?" Yea, surely God's Help is near. (215) They ask thee what they should spend. Say, "Let whatever of your wealth you spend be for parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler. Whatever good you do, truly God knows it." (216) Fighting has been prescribed for you, though it is hateful to you. But it may be that you hate a thing though it be good for you, and it may be that you love a thing though it be evil for you. God knows, and you know not.

in connection with only the Jews and Christians (Ṭ). *Clear proofs* (*bayyināt*) refers not only to revealed books, but also to any reality that demonstrates the Truth of God. Some commentators variously identify *that wherein they differed* to be the Truth as such, the revealed Book (including their own), or Islam and/or the Prophet (Sh).

214 Similar verses mentioning the testing of faith include 3:142 and 29:2–3. According to some this verse was revealed in connection with the Battle of the Trench (*al-Khandaq*, 5/627), also called the Battle of the Parties (*al-Aḥzāb*), which is discussed in 33:9–20; others connect it to the Battle of Uḥud (3/625; Th). It is related that the burden of being exiled and living without their property was a hardship for those who had left it behind in Makkah to migrate to Madinah, and they suffered the taunts and insults of the locals and hypocrites who asked them how long they would sacrifice themselves and their property for a seemingly losing cause (R, Th).

The *Messenger* is not identified, but some interpret it to mean Muhammad; others say that, because all prophets encounter severe trials, it could be a general description of all of them (Th). Perhaps to protect the idea of the perfect faith of the prophets, some interpret the question *When will God's Help come?* to mean that, although the Messenger knew the help was coming, he was seeking to hasten it (Q). Examples of prophets being troubled include 12:110: *The messengers despaired and thought that they were deemed liars;* 15:97: *We know that thy breast is straitened;* and 26:3: *Perhaps thou dost torment thyself that they are not believers.* Indeed, the station of prophethood in the Quran does not preclude the prophets' human vulnerability to fear, sadness, and discouragement. See 21:83, which mentions the story of Job.

215 It is said that this verse was revealed prior to the institution of the formal alms, or *zakāh*, and thus refers to ordinary charitable giving (Sh, Ṭ). The list of charitable recipients is familiar and appears in one form or another in many places throughout the Quran (e.g., v. 177; 4:36; 8:41; 59:7); see also the essay "Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society."

216 On the general topic of warfare, see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran." Some early commentators argued that *fighting has been prescribed for you* referred only to the Companions of the Prophet and that fighting alongside him was an individual responsibility for each of them, but later became a communal responsibility; that is, after Islam's precarious beginnings in Makkah, where warfare was forbidden, and its initial phase in Madinah, to which Muslims had migrated to survive and where they continued to fight to ensure their survival as a religious community, Islam itself was no longer in danger of being eradicated, and the universal prescription was lifted (Q, R). Some scholars of the early generations, such as Sa$^{c}$īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), deemed fighting in the way of God to be an everlasting obligation upon Muslims, while others, such as Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), said it was a voluntary action (Q). When challenged as to why he would not participate in fighting during the First Civil War, $^{c}$Abd Allāh ibn $^{c}$Umar

(217) They ask thee about the sacred month—about fighting therein. Say, "Fighting therein is grave, but turning [others] from the way of God—and disbelieving in Him—and from the Sacred Mosque, and expelling its people, is graver in the sight of God. Strife is graver than slaying." And they will not cease to fight you until they make you renounce your religion, if they are able. Whosoever among you renounces his religion and dies as a disbeliever, their deeds have come to naught in this world and the Hereafter, and they are the inhabit-

(d. 74/693), the son of the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, told his interlocutors, "We did that during the time of the Prophet, when Islam was small, when a man would be tried in his religion, and they would either kill him or torture him. But then Islam became great, and there was no trial (*fitnah*)." Al-Rāzī notes that the "unanimous consensus," or *ijmāʿ*, is that when fighting is called for, it is a communal responsibility, except if Muslim lands are invaded, in which case it becomes an individual responsibility.

217 It is said that this verse was revealed in connection with a Companion, ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Jaḥsh, who led a scouting mission against the Quraysh a year and a half after the migration from Makkah to Madinah, but before the Battle of Badr in 2/624. At an oasis between Ṭāʾif and Makkah, they killed a certain ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥaḍramī, took two prisoners, and returned with the spoils. These Companions claimed to have thought it was the last day of Jumādā'l-Ākhirah, not knowing that it was actually the first of Rajab, one of the sacred months in Arabia, since the calendar was dependent upon sighting the crescent moon (see 2:189c). When they returned to Madinah, the Prophet refused the portion of the spoils they had brought him and told them, "I did not command you to fight during the sacred months." The Quraysh condemned the breach and accused the Prophet of transgressing the accepted norm of observing the sacred months and spilling blood when it was forbidden. Eventually the matter was settled through a prisoner exchange and the payment of wergild for ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥaḍramī. The verse reminds all concerned that the current state of affairs was a result of Qurayshī transgressions, and that their enmity was unremitting and included not only expelling the Muslims, but preventing them from making pilgrimage and torturing them in order to make them renounce their religion.

Any who renounce their religion can reenter Islam, although in such a case some jurists believe that certain obligations, notably the *ḥajj*, must be performed again. The verb for *renounce* (*irtaddā*) is often translated "apostasy," but this can be a misleading translation in some cases. On the matter of choosing religion the Quran says elsewhere, *And say, "It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve"* (18:29); *There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error* (2:256). It also commands the Prophet to say to the disbelievers, *Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion* (109:6); and God tells the Prophet and his followers, *So leave Me with those who deny this discourse* (68:44).

Many classical and contemporary scholars, although not a majority, have declared that the mere changing of one's religion is no cause for punishment by the community, especially in light of the Quranic passages quoted above. Rather, such a move must amount to a seditious or destabilizing act in a political sense. This was, in their view, why the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, took up arms against the tribes who left the Muslim community in the so-called *riddah* wars, and why the Prophet left many people alone who left the religion. It would explain, for example, why some early religious authorities, such as Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as well as Abū Ḥanīfah and Sufyān al-Thawrī, did not allow the execution of women who renounced Islam (Q). This would seem to reflect a political and social cause rather than an intrinsically theological one, a cause that would be contingent upon external circumstances. During certain periods of the Prophet's life, changing religion amounted to

ants of the Fire, abiding therein. (218) Truly those who believe and those who emigrate and strive in the way of God—it is they who hope for the Mercy of God. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (219) They ask thee about wine and gambling. Say, "In them there is great sin and [some] benefits for mankind, but their sin is greater than their benefit." They ask thee what they should spend.

changing sides in the political sense and thus to high treason, and hypocrites were among the deadliest of enemies of the early community, often collaborating with the Qurayshī idolaters and those tribes who were allied with them.

218 When v. 217 was revealed, it is said that ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Jaḥsh and those with him despaired and doubted that they would receive merit for their actions, even though they were absolved of having committed a crime, and this verse was a comfort and promise to them (R).

The notion of *hope* reflects the idea that no reward is certain, that everything is in God's Hands, and that one might still die a disbeliever, but it may also be understood as a descriptive statement, indicating that believers should approach God with an attitude of hope and fear (R). This idea of hope is also connected by some with 2:46 (*Who reckon that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return unto Him*) in that the hoping and reckoning are descriptions of both what believers do and what they are called to do.

219 For a discussion of the proscription of drinking wine, see 4:43c. *Gambling* renders *maysir*, which literally denotes one type of gambling; gambling more generally is known as *qimār*. In *maysir* people draw arrows over meat, akin to drawing straws; the loser has to pay for the meat without getting any and is chided and ribbed, while the winners give their portions to the poor as a demonstration of generosity (Z). In this connection many of the commentators discuss various kinds of "play" (*laʿb*) and debate their legitimacy. In Islamic Law generally gambling in the form of wagering is forbidden, while playing games, such as chess and backgammon, as an idle pastime is frowned upon by many as a spiritual distraction, usually without being forbidden outright. Both games in fact came to the West from the Islamic world, and not being forbidden in the technical legal sense, both are popular among Muslims, even many devout ones.

Regarding the *benefits for mankind* in wine, al-Qurṭubī mentions that it helps with digestion, makes a miserly person magnanimous, gives boldness to the timid, gives color to the face, helps one to have sex, and makes one feel good for a short time. (Although this verse mentions specifically wine, Islamic Law understands this ruling to apply to all alcoholic drinks.) As for the benefits of gambling, he mentions that one can acquire wealth without effort and that the poor can benefit, since it was customary for the winners to distribute the meat of the *maysir*. As for their harm, intoxication leads to loss of one's rational faculties, quarreling, violence, promiscuity, impaired judgment, and forgetting the remembrance of God. In later judicial philosophy, the ruling on intoxication played a major part in identifying "protection of the intelligence" as one of the essential objectives of the Law (*maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*). Similarly, gambling creates enmity and despair (R), produces ill-gotten gains, and is thus a diversion from the healthy and wholesome pursuit of profit and gain. The risk associated with gambling factors into Islamic financial theory, in that certain kinds of transactions are invalid because they entail excessive risk, and this risk is related to the prohibition against *ribā* (usually but imperfectly translated "usury"), which is discussed by some Islamic financial theorists as carrying a severe form of risk. *Ribā* is discussed in vv. 275–80.

On the question of spending in charity, *what can be spared* renders *al-ʿafw*, which means "what is easy" or "what is done without difficulty" (R) and in other contexts means "pardon" or "forgiveness." There is disagreement over whether this refers to voluntary giving or to a required duty. Among those who uphold the former view are those who believe that this directive was abrogated by the institution of the alms (*zakāh*); others point out that there is no contradiction between the existence of the institution of the *zakāh* and a command to give charity (Q). The commentators note here that this means that one should be neither miserly nor

Say, "What can be spared." Thus does God make clear unto you the signs, that haply you may reflect (220) upon this world and the Hereafter. And they ask thee about orphans. Say, "Setting matters aright for them is best. And if you intermingle with them, they are your brothers. And God knows the one who works corruption from one who sets aright, and had God willed, He would have put you to hardship. Truly God is Mighty, Wise." (221) Marry not idolatresses until they believe. Truly a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, though she be pleasing to you. And marry none to the idolaters until they believe. Truly

improvident in matters of charity and that one should never impoverish oneself as a result of charitable giving. This verse is seen as expanding upon the question of giving in v. 215, which describes the recipients of charity, by further describing how much one should give (Q). The extent of proper charitable giving is also discussed in 17:29: *And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open.*

220 The Quranic theme of the Hereafter's superiority over this world is connected here with wine and gambling; one should *reflect upon* the transitory goods and lasting evils engendered by them and judge them in relation to the fleeting world and the abiding Hereafter (IK, R, Ṭ). It is possible to read the end of the previous verse and the start of this one as "Thus does God make clear, in this world and the Hereafter, the signs."

Other verses that mention taking care of orphans' property include 4:10 and 6:152. It is related that Muslims were scrupulous in keeping the property of orphans separate and would eat and drink from completely separate sources so as not to consume what belonged to the orphans; when this became difficult for the custodians, they would therefore sometimes stay aloof from the orphans in their care, so that at times the property of the orphans would spoil or become ruined (Ṭ). It is useful to remember that an orphan's inheritance would have often been in the form of fruit trees and livestock, and it is precisely through using them (e.g., by picking the fruit and riding and breeding the livestock) that their value and usefulness would have been maintained until the orphan could grow up and take possession of them. Another opinion sees this verse as addressing not a prior Muslim practice but a prevailing Arab custom of staying separate from orphans, not eating together with them or riding on the mounts used by them, as it was considered inauspicious or an ill omen to be guilty of stealing from an orphan even in pre-Islamic Arabia (Q).

In the Quran the opposite of corruption (*ifsād* or *fasād*) is often an act of *setting matters aright*, or *iṣlāḥ*, related by root to *ṣulḥ*, meaning "peacemaking" or "reconciliation," and *ṣāliḥ* or "righteous." "Intermingling" means drinking the same drink, eating the same food, riding the same mounts, being served by the same servants, and so on (Ṭ). The message in this verse is to deal equitably with the orphan's property, which is legally inviolable, but whose inviolability is not meant to harm the orphan. Hence reasonable latitude is given for the just use of an orphan's property, avoiding a pedantic and counterproductive separation between the custodian's property and that of the orphan (Q, R). *They are your brothers* is not conditional upon the preceding phrase, *if you intermingle with them;* rather, it is a clarification that intermingling with their property in a just fashion carries no blame (IK, R). That God could have *put you to hardship* highlights the inherent difficulties associated with maintaining the property of orphans, and that to balance the responsibility of disposing of that property with observing its intrinsic inviolability is often a matter of judgment. This judgment is itself overseen by God, who *knows the one who works corruption from one who sets aright.* For a longer treatment on other aspects of the law pertaining to orphans, see commentary on 4:2–10.

221 Islamic Law allows for marriage with women among the People of the Book, but not with idolaters, a permission given in 5:5, which states that *the chaste women of those who were given*

a believing slave is better than an idolater, though he should impress you. They are those who call unto the Fire, but God calls unto the Garden and forgiveness, by His leave, and makes clear His signs to mankind, that haply they may remember. (222) They ask thee concerning menstruation. Say, "It is a hurt, so keep away from women during menses, and do not approach them until they are

*the Book before you* are lawful to marry. Some commentators believe that 5:5 partially abrogated the ruling in this present verse so as to allow marriage between Muslim men and women from among the People of the Book (R, Ṭ), but the question arises only if the People of the Book were to be taken as a class of idolaters. Many maintain that the prohibition against marrying idolaters was never directed against the people of the Book (Q). In either case, the final legal ruling allows marriage with Jews and Christians, though some jurists have also included in this category marriage with Zoroastrians and, in India, with Hindus. A minority opinion held that in fact this verse abrogates 5:5 and hence no marriage with a non-Muslim is allowed. *And marry none to the idolaters* is most often, but not always, understood as a command to not give any Muslim woman in marriage to a non-Muslim man. For the related subject of marrying believing slave women, see also 4:25c.

222 This verse is understood to prohibit vaginal intercourse during menstruation without prohibiting other contact. The commentators mention that before Islam menstruating women would not sleep in the same bed or eat from the same plate as others, Arab customs that may have been influenced by Jewish (Leviticus 15:19–33) or Zoroastrian (Avesta, Vendidad 16) prescriptions and proscriptions, which mandated a relatively high level of separation for menstruating women and the ritual purification of objects that they had touched (R, Ṭ).

For some the *hurt* (*adha*) refers to the discomfort it causes women (Q); many others understand it to mean "uncleanness" specifically relating to the menstrual blood (R, Ṭ); still others simply gloss the *hurt* as a reference to the blood without attaching the notion of uncleanness to it.

Some interpret *until they are purified* to mean the cessation of the flow of menstrual blood. Most schools of law understand this verse to mean that a woman, at the end of her period, should perform the major ablution, or *ghusl,* which entails a washing of the entire body ritually with water, before having intercourse. Under certain circumstances the Ḥanafī school allows intercourse after the cessation of blood, but before the major ablution, or *ghusl.* There is no formal expiation or punishment for having intercourse during menstruation, although some monetary payment to the poor such as a *dīnār* or half a *dīnār* is sometimes mentioned in this connection (Q). It is not considered a major act of disobedience, although pious Muslims refrain from it.

Other actions generally prohibited for menstruating women include the canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*), fasting, circumambulation of the Kaʿbah during the *ḥajj* or *ʿumrah,* reciting the Quran aloud, and physically touching the Quran. Also restricted are remaining inside the mosque (rather than passing through) and retreat in the mosque (*iʿtikāf*), although these seem to have more to do with blood staining the mosque than any other concern. In this vein, the Prophet asked his wife to bring him a mat from the mosque. She said, "I am menstruating." And he said, "Your menses are not in your hands."

*Go in unto them in the way God has commanded you* refers to resuming vaginal intercourse, which is forbidden during menses. Jurists are unanimous in forbidding intercourse during menstruation as well as anal sex at any time, but in general have allowed other types of physical affection and fondling during menstruation. In many *aḥādīth* it is reported that the Prophet would not stay aloof from his wives during their periods, but would show them physical affection such as kissing and fondling, short of engaging in intercourse. Other than ensuring that an item be cleaned if menstrual blood comes in contact with it, Islamic teaching does not deem the touch of a menstruating woman to be unclean or to render

purified. And when they are purified, go in unto them in the way God has commanded you." Truly God loves those who repent, and He loves those who purify themselves. (223) Your women are a tilth to you, so go unto your tilth as you will, but send forth for your souls. And reverence God and know that you shall meet Him, and give glad tidings to the believers. (224) And make not God a hindrance, through your oaths, to being pious and reverent and to making peace between people. And God is Hearing, Knowing. (225) God will not take you to task for carelessness in your oaths. Rather, He will take you to task for what your hearts have earned, and God is Forgiving, Clement. (226) Those who

anything unclean, although she should not touch the Quran.

223 This verse is seen by some as giving permission for any kind of vaginal intercourse, the symbolism of *tilth* referring to procreation (IK, Ṭ). In a clash of prevailing customs, some Companions abhorred intercourse in positions where the man was behind the woman, while others practiced intercourse in all positions. In some cases, Emigrants from Makkah married Helpers, who were natives of Madinah, and the latter refused certain positions for intercourse. In some accounts, certain Companions came to the Prophet to inquire about these matters, which served as the occasion for the revelation of this verse. In some narrations, the Prophet said of this verse, "A single orifice" (Ṭ), referring to vaginal intercourse. Most commentators note that the grammar of the verse in Arabic denotes direction and place and devote their primary attention in commenting on this verse to "in what part of the body" one has intercourse and "coming from what direction"; they are generally emphatic that this verse does not refer to "when" or "how" or at whose behest intercourse takes place (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). *Send forth* means to perform good deeds that will benefit one in the Hereafter; see 5:80–81c; 82:5c; 75:13c.

224 Rules regarding oaths are also discussed in 5:89: *God will not take you to task for that which is frivolous in your oaths, but He will take you to task for the oaths you have pledged in earnest;* and 68:10: *So obey not any vile oath-monger.* These verses all convey the message against making excessive oaths and emphasize the seriousness of taking an oath; even in pre-Islamic Arabia it was considered a vice to be immoderate in oath taking. The present verse condemns oaths against righteous behavior, such as swearing never to speak to relatives, to give charity, to make peace between two people, to reverence God, or, in general, to perform some good deed (Q, Ṭ).

225 This verse is interpreted by some to refer to the habit of repeating "by God" (*wa'Llāhi*) for emphasis in everyday speech, which was a common habit among the Arabs and continues today even among non-Arab Muslims and non-Muslim Arabs. Others mention that it could refer to a situation in which a person believes something to be true, swears to it, and then finds out the belief is incorrect, in which case no expiation is required. This verse is also taken to exclude oaths taken in anger (Q).

226–27 These verses address the practice of a man staying away from his wife but not divorcing her, leaving her without the sexual benefits of marriage and without the freedom to marry another, which in pre-Islamic times could last years (Q, R). In this context to *forswear* means to make an oath that one would not have sexual relations with one's wife. To *forswear* in this sense is not the same as divorce, and the period of *four months* sets an upper limit on this abstention within marriage. Specifically, it is understood to draw a line beyond which the abstention is taken as an intent to cause harm to the wife (R). *If they return* means that they resume intercourse; the return is still valid if one intends to return to one's wife, but is hindered for some reason, as the intent to cause harm no longer exists, while for some it simply means that one bear witness that he has returned (Q, Ṭ). Many understand

forswear their wives shall wait four months. And if they return, God is Forgiving, Merciful. (227) But if they resolve on divorce, truly God is Hearing, Knowing. (228) Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three courses, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the Last Day. And their husbands have better right to restore them

*God is Forgiving, Merciful* in this context to indicate that no expiation is necessary *if they return* (Ṭ), though others believe some form of expiation, such as feeding the poor, is necessary, as returning to one's wife would then constitute going back on the oath of staying away from her (Ṭ).

Some say that these stipulations only apply when the oath is made in anger with the intent to cause harm, and that when someone swears not to have sexual relations for some other reason, for example, with the intention of protecting the well-being of a nursing child, the ruling of this verse does not apply (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). Others say that the forswearing mentioned here can refer to any oath that keeps one from having sexual relations with one's wife, while others say that the forswearing need not even pertain to sexual relations, but may pertain to any matter where the intent is to cause harm to the wife, such as not speaking to her or touching her (Ṭ). Perhaps the most serious point of disagreement is whether, upon the completion of the four months, divorce is effected automatically in the eyes of the Law or whether other steps must be taken. Some maintain that after the period of four months, divorce could be imposed by a judge at the request of the wife (Q, Ṭ).

228 In the type of divorce discussed here, called *ṭalāq,* the husband declares divorce from his wife, after which she observes a period of waiting (*ʿiddah*) amounting to *three courses,* during which the couple do not have sexual relations, before the divorce is final. These *three courses* are three menstrual periods, but some disagreement exists over whether the *courses* (*qurūʾ*) are marked by the actual menstrual flow, the flow's cessation, or by the ritual washing (*ghusl*) that allows the wife to then perform the canonical prayer. Until the waiting period is over, the husband can still withdraw his intention to divorce and the couple can resume normal marital relations. *It is not lawful for them to conceal* means that they should not conceal any possible pregnancy from the husbands who have just divorced them. That the husbands *have better right to restore them during that time* means that husbands, being the party who initiated the divorce, retain the right to resume the marriage before the waiting period is over. In Islamic Law the wife's options for divorce do not operate under the rubric of *ṭalāq* divorce, but under *khulʿ* divorce, discussed in v. 229 and 4:20.

*The women* appears in brackets in place of the feminine plural pronoun. According to some, *[The women] are owed obligations the like of those they owe* means that each side owes something to the other—that is, wives should obey their husbands and husbands should treat their wives well and with respect; for others, it means that women have a right to sexual relations similar to that of men (Ṭ). It is reported that Ibn ʿAbbās said, "I beautify myself for my wife, just as she beautifies herself for me" (Q). For others, it is a question of mutual protection from harm, where the man does not harm the wife through an endless cycle of divorce and reconciliation, and the wife does not harm the husband by hiding what she might be carrying in her womb (Ṭ). Others mention that the point of marriage is closeness, love, and peace, which should be shared between husband and wife, and al-Rāzī says, "One might even say that [in this] the share of the woman is more abundant."

In *And men have a degree over them,* many commentators understand a kind of *noblesse oblige.* Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have said, "This *degree* is a reference to men's encouraging good relations and their generosity toward women in wealth and virtuous behavior, which means that the one possessing the upper hand must be biased against himself" (Q). Others state that this *degree over them* consists of men's economic advantages and also obligations and their ability to fight in the way of God (although some female Companions of the Prophet did participate in fighting) or refers to qualities such as strength and intelligence (Q).

during that time, if they desire to make peace. [The women] are owed obligations the like of those they owe, in an honorable way. And men have a degree over them, and God is Mighty, Wise. (229) Divorce is twice; then keep [her] honorably, or release [her] virtuously. It is not lawful for you to take aught from what you have given [your wives], except that the two should fear that they would not uphold the limits set by God. So if you fear that they will not uphold the limits set by God, there is no blame upon the two in what she may give in ransom.

Interpreted spiritually, this verse can mean that the soul (*nafs*) has rights owed to it and rights that it owes, which in the context of Islamic spiritual psychology means that, although the spirit (*rūḥ*) dominates over the powers of the soul, it is precisely through the soul that spiritual progress takes place. Thus, one must be gentle with the soul, letting it rest when it needs it, to ensure healthy spiritual progress (Aj). The wedding of the soul to the spirit is a common motif in Islamic spiritual literature.

229 A couple can reconcile after a declarative divorce (*ṭalāq*) only twice. After the third divorce declaration, the divorce is final. The third divorce declaration is referred to either by the phrase *release [her] virtuously* or, in v. 230, *Should he then divorce her* (Q). In the other main type of divorce, called a *khul*$^{c}$ divorce (see also 4:20), the wife initiates the divorce and can give a *ransom* as part of obtaining the divorce. That is to say, a wife's property becomes material to the *khul*$^{c}$ divorce procedure, while the man may divorce without any transfer of wealth, which is the inverse of the procedure of marriage, where a wife collects a bridewealth from her husband as a part of the marriage contract, but has no financial responsibility within the marriage. Put another way, a man negotiates his way into a marriage through the bridewealth, and a woman can negotiate her way out of a marriage through the *khul*$^{c}$ divorce process.

*It is not lawful for you to take aught from what you have given [your wives]* refers to the bridewealth given to wives as stipulated in the marriage contract (see 4:24c); *your wives* appears in brackets in place of the feminine plural pronoun. The verse makes an exception in cases where a wife may, in the absence of mistreatment from her husband, negotiate a divorce from her husband by returning some or all of her bridewealth. A husband cannot initiate a *ṭalāq* divorce and then ask for any part of the bridewealth back, except in certain cases, such as a marriage that is not yet consummated, in which case he can expect half to be returned (see v. 237). Nor can he mistreat his wife in order to compel her to seek a *khul*$^{c}$ divorce and thereby regain some or all of the bridewealth.

In one example, described as the first instance of such a *khul*$^{c}$ divorce, a wife came to the Prophet and complained about her new husband's repulsive physical appearance, and the Prophet divorced them after negotiating the return of the two orchards her husband had given her (IK, Q, R, Ṭ).

The *limits set by God* are those rules established by God governing marriage and divorce (Q, R). A *fear* that the couple will *not uphold the limits set by God* as a condition for *khul*$^{c}$ divorce is generally interpreted to mean a fear that the couple would not be able to sustain a lawful marriage with its obligations of companionship and sexual relations and its prohibitions against adultery and abuse. Some have concluded that such a fear is not a necessary condition for a *khul*$^{c}$ divorce; others say that both spouses must have that fear. Still others assert that the wife's fear is enough, but that a man's fear alone is not sufficient (Q, Ṭ); that is, if a wife wishes to remain married, but the husband does not, for whatever reason, a *khul*$^{c}$ divorce is not permissible, and he can take no part of her property as part of a divorce. In the *ṭalāq* divorce, initiated by the husband, the wife retains all her wealth. Others have interpreted *so if you fear* to refer to the Muslim community's judgment of the couple. Indeed, some opinions grant arbiters, chosen by the spouses to help them reconcile their marital differences, the power to divorce them or to recommend divorce, if the arbiters think no reconciliation is possible (see 4:35c).

These are the limits set by God; so transgress not against them. And whosoever transgresses against the limits set by God, it is they who are the wrongdoers. (230) Should he then divorce her, she is no longer lawful for him until she marries a husband other than him. And should he divorce her there is no blame upon the two to return to each other, if they deem that they shall uphold the limits set by God. These are the limits set by God, which He makes clear to a people who know. (231) And when you have divorced women and they have fulfilled their term, keep them honorably or release them honorably, and do not keep them so as to cause harm and thus transgress. Whosoever does that surely wrongs himself. And do not take God's signs in mockery, and remember God's Blessing upon you, and

For some commentators *khul$^{c}$* divorce is connected with the presence of "discord and animosity" in the marriage (*nushūz;* see commentary on 4:34–35, 128) coming from both sides, as evidenced by the plain sense of the verse, which uses the dual form (*that the two should fear*). Others deem the "discord and animosity" operative in the *khul$^{c}$* divorce to be what originates from the wife in the form of clearly expressed statements of hatred, physical aversion, disrespect, or contempt toward her husband (Q). But these two opinions are not contradictory, as such negative feelings on the part of the wife, even in the absence of any intentional ill-treatment by her husband, can easily produce negative emotions on the part of the husband. In commentaries on this verse, there is a general message that a bad marriage could lead to other evils such as adultery and social instability and that two people who are denied companionship and intimacy may grow resentful, angry, and open to disobedience (R).

Opinions vary over the upper limit to be negotiated. Some say it should not exceed the amount of the bridewealth. Others say it can be any amount, since no figure is given in the verse. But even those who allow the amount to exceed the bridewealth think that it is shameful and reprehensible to accept it (Q, Ṭ).

230 The prohibition against the couple remarrying each other after the third divorce declaration unless and until the woman marries and divorces another man is an extension of the logic of limiting declarative divorce (v. 229) and the "forswearing" of marital relations (v. 226). That means that if a man were free to remarry his wife after three divorce declarations, he would then be free to conduct yet another three divorce declarations and repeat the process continuously, thus keeping the wife from the full enjoyment of marriage (through successive waiting periods) while denying her the freedom to marry another. Forbidding a man from remarrying a woman after making her wait three sets of three courses (one set after each divorce declaration) limits the harm he can inflict on her and discourages him from declaring divorce, since the prospect of remarrying a woman who is married to someone else is in most cases unlikely. According to most jurists the intervening marriage needs to have been consummated for the original couple to remarry (R, Q, Ṭ). This condition applies for those who have carried out three divorces; remarriage with only a single divorce declaration is discussed in v. 232.

231 *Keep them so as to cause harm* refers to the practice of declaring divorce, then taking one's wife back just before the waiting period is over, and repeating this action in order to harm her (Ṭ; see commentary on 2:229–30). *And thus transgress* could also be read "in order to transgress." In this context, to *take God's signs in mockery* means to declare divorce and then say, "I was only playing," or to take a similar attitude with any matter of marriage and divorce (Ṭ). On the idea of taking God's signs in mockery, also see 5:57–58; 31:6; 45:9, 35. The Book and Wisdom are mentioned together also in v. 129; 3:48; 4:113; 5:110; 45:16; 62:2.

what He sent down to you of the Book and Wisdom, exhorting you thereby. And reverence God, and know that God is Knower of all things. (232) And when you have divorced women and they have fulfilled their term, do not hinder them from marrying their husbands when they have consented to each other honorably. Therewith are counseled those among you who believe in God and the Last Day. That is more virtuous and purer for you. God knows, and you know not. (233) And let mothers nurse their children two full years, for such as desire to complete the suckling. It falls on the father to provide for them and clothe them honorably. No soul is tasked beyond its capacity. Let no mother be harmed on account of her child, nor father on account of his child. And the like shall fall upon the heir. If the couple desire to wean, by their mutual consent and consultation, there is no blame upon them. And if you wish to have your children wet-nursed, there is no blame upon you if you pay honorably that

232 It is said that this verse was revealed when a man balked at the idea of his sister, who was divorced and single, remarrying the man who had divorced her (Ṭ). This verse allows a couple to remarry even after they have gone through a complete legal divorce, but not in the case of the third consecutive divorce declaration; on the matter of remarrying after the third divorce declaration (*ṭalāq*), see 2:229c.

233 This verse addresses the status of women who bear children from husbands who have divorced them, since feeding and clothing one's wife is an obligation of marriage in all cases. *Two full years* is the maximum time period during which the father must provide material support to the nursing mother, although the parents can agree to a shorter period of nursing, as stated later in the verse, *by their mutual consent and consultation*. The mother can nurse for a shorter period, and the father cannot compel her to continue, but he must provide support if necessary for up to two years of nursing (Q). That the father must *provide for them and clothe them* means that he must, according to his means, provide what he can. The verse acknowledges that not all fathers can provide equally, since one must do so *honorably* (*bi'l-maʿrūf*), meaning to an honorable or morally acceptable level, which is reinforced by the recognition that *no soul is tasked beyond its capacity* (cf. 2:286; 6:152; 7:42; 23:62; 65:7). See also 46:15 and 31:14, which discuss the length of pregnancy and nursing.

That neither parent *be harmed on account of* the child relates to either nursing or custody, or both. The mother is not to harm the father by refusing to nurse his child or by trying to keep the father away, and similarly the father is not to harm the mother by keeping her child from her and refusing to let her nurse the child when she wishes to do so (Q, Ṭ).

Several opinions are offered regarding the identity of the *heir* who has obligations similar to those of the father, should the latter pass away. It is generally understood to refer to the heirs of the father, who inherit a portion of the wealth upon which the nursing mother and child have a claim. Upon the father's death, during the two-year period, these heirs are responsible for the material support prescribed in this verse (Q). Others say it refers to agnates (*ʿaṣabah*, male relatives through the male line), and others consider it to mean any relative too close in blood relation to marry (Q). Another opinion states that the heir is the child himself or herself, in which case the support would come from what the child inherits from the father, but if there are no such funds, it

which you give. And reverence God, and know that God sees whatsoever you do. (234) And those among you who are taken by death and leave behind wives, let them wait by themselves four months and ten days. And when they have fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you in what they do concerning themselves in an honorable way. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (235) And there is no blame upon you in intimating a proposal to [these] women, or in keeping it within yourselves. God knows that you mean to seek them in marriage, but do not pledge your troth with them secretly save that you speak in an honorable way, and resolve not upon the marriage tie until the term prescribed is fulfilled. And know that God knows what is within your souls; so

falls upon the state to support the child, and if the state does not, it falls upon the community (Q). Some interpret the heir's obligation to include only the intent not to harm the parent by means of the child, while others say the heir's obligation also includes the material support to the mother the father would have been obligated to provide (Q). If both parents agree, the child can have a wet nurse, who would be paid for by the father, not the mother (Q).

Most jurists agree that, so long as she does not remarry (presumably because they reason a father would not willingly allow his child to be raised by another man), the mother has greater right to custody and to raise the child than does the father. There are varying opinions on this matter, and some allow the child to choose after a certain age (Q).

234 Widows are to wait four months and ten days before they can remarry, unless they are pregnant, in which case they wait until they deliver, whichever period of time is longer (IK, Q); this is also discussed in v. 240 and 65:4. What they do *concerning themselves* refers to their entering into a new marriage after the period of waiting.

*Wait by themselves* is taken by some jurists to mean that they cloister themselves in their homes, on the basis of certain *aḥādīth* that point to widows keeping themselves home and not putting on perfume or ornaments (Q). Other prominent early jurists, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, say the text simply refers to refraining from marriage.

In contrast to the waiting period outlined here, it is related that in pre-Islamic times widows were often required to wait a year, observing such practices as wearing their worst clothes, neither grooming nor bathing, and marking the end of their mourning by leaving their house; the end of the mourning period was marked by flinging a piece of animal dung and rubbing the front of their bodies with an animal, acts of unclear significance (IK).

235 *Intimating* a proposal means that one can express a desire for marriage, yet stop short of proposing and making an agreement. For example, a man can say, "I hope I can marry a righteous woman," or, "I do not wish to marry any other woman," or, "I desire to marry," but he would not be allowed to say, "Promise me you will marry me and not another person" (IK). Actually contracting a marriage during this time period is forbidden. *Save that you speak in an honorable way* means that one's interaction with widows should not go beyond the limits of the intimation mentioned at the start of the verse (IK). *Do not pledge your troth with them secretly* can mean either that they should not agree to marry or that they should not consummate a marriage (IK, Q).

Some say that if two people actually consummate a marriage before the waiting period expires, the two are forbidden to marry each other forever, and the woman must remain unmarried for the remainder of the waiting period from her dead husband and the waiting period from her premature marriage. If they contract an agreement to marry, but do not consummate, then they must wait out the waiting period, after which the man must propose again (IK, Q).

beware of Him, and know that God is Forgiving, Clement. (236) There is no blame upon you if you divorce women not having touched them or not having designated a bridewealth. But provide for them—the wealthy according to his means, the straitened according to his means—an honorable provision: an obligation upon the virtuous. (237) And if you divorce them before touching them but designated a bridewealth for them, then [give] half of what you designated, unless they forgo it or he whose hand holds the marriage tie forgoes. And to forgo is nearer to reverence. Forget not bounteousness among yourselves. Truly God sees whatsoever you do. (238) Be mindful of your prayers, and the middlemost prayer, and stand before God in devout obedience. (239) But if you are fearful, then on foot or mounted. Then when you are secure, remember God, as He

236 See 33:49, which also discusses divorce before the consummation of a marriage. *Not having touched them* refers to consummation of the marriage. This verse refers to the case in which a couple have contracted a marriage, but have not consummated it or agreed upon the bridewealth yet. As with the bridewealth itself, a wealthy man would give a different amount than a poorer man in this set of circumstances. Some say that if the couple cannot agree on an amount, it should be half of the bridal payment of those with similar means (see next verse). On bridal payments in general, see 4:24c.

237 *He whose hand holds the marriage tie* is the husband himself, in which case he would forgo the half of the bridal payment that he could legitimately expect to get back (IK, Q). In this case "holding the marriage tie" refers to the husband's prerogative of divorce (see v. 228), since it is he who is exercising his power to divorce his wife; this verse refers to divorce declared by the husband (*ṭalāq*), not *khulᶜ* divorce (see v. 229; R). The party *nearer to reverence* would then be the one who forgoes one's "half" and allows the other party to have the entirety of the bridewealth after the divorce, thus realizing the virtue of *bounteousness among yourselves* (Q, R). Others interpret the holder of the marriage tie to be the legal guardian (*wakīl*) whose permission is usually necessary for a woman to marry, in which case the wife would, with the guardian's approval, forgo the half of the bridewealth she had been entitled to keep. The difficulty with this position is that, although the guardian is necessary for marriage, he has no legal control over the bridewealth, which is the personal property of the wife (Q).

There is an opinion that consummation is not necessary for a man to lose his right to half the bridewealth, and that if the husband is secluded with his wife in such a way that consummation was possible, he must pay the bridewealth in full (IK, R).

238 To *be mindful of your prayers* means one should observe them in a timely fashion, during the time when they are meant to be offered, and also to be fully present and concentrated while praying (IK, Ṭ). The *prayers* refer to the five canonical prayers, but there is no general consensus regarding the meaning of *the middlemost prayer;* it is identified variously as one or another of the five daily prayers, although some maintain that its identity is unknown (Ṭ). Others consider it to be the congregational Friday prayer (*jumuᶜah*), or the ᶜĪd prayer, or even the five prayers together (IK). Regarding the concept of *devout obedience,* which also connotes silence, obedience, and humility among other virtues, see 2:116c; 3:17c; and especially 4:34c.

239 One can be *fearful* when in battle or under persecution. Commentators mention that

taught you what you knew not. (240) And those among you who are taken by death and leave behind wives, [let them] bequeath to their wives provision for the year, without turning them out. But if they leave, there is no blame upon you in that which they do concerning themselves honorably. And God is Mighty, Wise. (241) And for divorced women an honorable provision—an obligation upon the reverent. (242) Thus does God make clear unto you His signs, that haply you may understand. (243) Hast thou not seen those who left their homes by the thousands fearing death? Whereupon God said to them, "Die," then revived them. Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind, but most of mankind do not give thanks. (244) So fight in the way of God, and know that God is

in cases of fear, such as during open warfare, one can pray while riding or walking, whether it is in the direction of the *qiblah* (facing the Kaʿbah) or not. One can, rather than bow and prostrate, nod and lightly move one's head in a manner corresponding to the motions of the prayer; according to some, one can shorten one's prayers down to one cycle of prayer, rather than two, three, or four (IK). Prayer in conditions of fighting and fear is discussed in detail in 4:101–2.

240 Some believe this verse's ruling was abrogated by the waiting period of four months and ten days described in v. 234, but others see no contradiction between the two, understanding the present verse to be affirming the option of a widow to receive up to one year of maintenance while living in her late husband's house; if she remarries before that, *there is no blame upon* the heirs of the husband for stopping their support (Q). *That which they do concerning themselves* is similar to the phrase in v. 234.

Others say that this was abrogated by the inheritance shares of 4:12 (Q). But if this is seen as a right to reside and receive sustenance for a year with the option of leaving earlier, there is no necessary contradiction and no need for abrogation.

241 The message of this verse is similar to that in v. 236, though that verse pertains to women divorcing where the marriage was yet to be consummated, while the present verse has a general import and places an obligation upon all men to make some manner of provision for women they divorce (IK).

242 The showing or making *clear* the *signs* (of God) is a common refrain throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:266; 3:103; 5:89; 24:61), and the use of *thus* (*kadhālika*) signifies a specific referent, namely, that on the preceding questions of divorce God makes His signs clear, but it also serves as a reminder that God does so in general.

243 It is related that this verse refers to a group among the Children of Israel who fled either a plague or war, apparently in disobedience, in order to reach a place of safety, but were nevertheless caused to die, after which a prophet was sent to revive them (Q, Ṭ). In this context some commentators mention that the Prophet Muhammad commanded people not to flee a place where there was a plague or to travel to a place where there was a plague (Ṭ, Th). Some say that the historical people or time is unimportant, as a theme of the verse is that God has the Power of life and death over human beings, that they cannot determine their own life and death, and that the Prophet and believers should take a lesson from this fact, especially since the subsequent verse mentions a command to fight in the way of God (Q).

Some commentators see this verse as a reference to the story described in Ezekiel 37:1–14, where Ezekiel is commanded to revive a valley filled with dry bones (Ṭ), but the Biblical account does not contain mention of why the valley was full of bones, and beyond the revival of the dead there are no similarities between the two accounts.

244 Some think that *fight in the way of God* is the command given to those who were revived

Hearing, Knowing. (245) Who shall lend unto God a goodly loan, which He will multiply for him many times over? And God withholds and outstretches, and unto Him shall you be returned. (246) Hast thou not seen the assembly of the Children of Israel, after Moses, when they said to a prophet of theirs, "Raise up a king for us, that we may fight in the way of God." He said, "Might it be that, were fighting prescribed for you, you would not fight?" They said, "And why should we not fight in the way of God, having been expelled from our homes and [away from] our children?" Then when fighting was prescribed for them they turned back, save a few among them. And God knows well the wrongdoers. (247) And their prophet said to them, "Truly God has raised up Saul for you as king." They said, "How shall he have sovereignty over us while we have more right to sovereignty than he, and he has not been given abundance of wealth?" He said,

in v. 243; others assert that because the grammar indicates a direct address, not a historical narration, the verse should be read as a general moral injunction to believers to struggle for the truth (Q, R, T), which can be a spiritual as well as physical struggle. If the latter interpretation is correct, the mention of fighting in this verse indicates that it was revealed after armed struggle was permitted for Muslims; see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

245 Some consider this verse to continue the line of thought in the previous one, in which case the *goodly loan* would be a metaphor for the effort expended and risk undertaken in fighting in the way of God. Others believe the verse begins anew and refers to the giving of one's wealth in charity or for religious causes, while still others point out there is no contradiction between these two interpretations (R). On lending God *a goodly loan,* see 5:12; 64:17; 73:20; 57:11c. In all such instances, commentators point out that to serve God and do good is always, as it were, a good bargain, and one can also engage in "unprofitable" transactions, such as when one sells God's signs *for a paltry price* (e.g., 2:41). God's multiplication of good is described in 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof,* and also discussed in 57:18.

"Withholding" and "outstretching" are two very important concepts in Islamic spirituality. The verb "withholds" is related to the state of spiritual contraction (*qabḍ*), and the verb "outstretches" is related to the state of expansion (*basṭ*). Interpreted spiritually, this verse describes a threefold process of spiritual realization: inner purification (*God withholds*), the acquisition of the virtues (*and outstretches*), and finally spiritual realization and illumination (*and unto Him shall you be returned*). Some Sufis describe contraction and expansion as "two states that follow each other in the heart like the night follows the day." Contraction and expansion are also related to the twin states of fear and hope, which must be kept in balance in order for a soul to progress spiritually. Seen in another way, when God *withholds* one is exposed to His Quality of Majesty, and when He *outstretches,* one experiences His Quality of Beauty (Aj).

246 *Raise up a king for us, that we may fight in the way of God* could refer to the same request of the Israelites to Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:19–20, "But we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."

247 Saul's low social status, which is here the source of the Israelites' disdain for his kingship, is mentioned by Saul himself when Samuel first speaks to him in 1 Samuel 9:21: "Saul answered,

"Truly God has chosen him over you, and has increased him amply in knowledge and body." And God gives His Sovereignty to whomsoever He will, and God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. (248) And their prophet said to them, "Truly the sign of his sovereignty shall be that the ark come to you bearing tranquility from your Lord and a remnant left by the House of Moses and the House of Aaron, borne by the angels. Truly in that is a sign for you, if you are believers."

'I am only a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the humblest of all the families. . . . Why then have you spoken to me in this way?'" And in 1 Samuel 10:27 the Israelites express their disdain: "But some worthless fellows said, 'How can this man save us?' They despised him and brought him no present." The basis for their aversion to Saul as king is similar to that for the aversion of the Quraysh and the Jews to Muhammad at his election as a prophet, namely, his lack of wealth and status among the Quraysh and his non-Jewish lineage among the Jews; see also 3:26c. In the case of Saul, the commentators understand this account to mean that Saul was from neither a kingly nor a priestly line, but hailed from the tribe of Benjamin (R). Saul's intelligence and physical prowess were intrinsic qualities useful for a good leader; the status and wealth expected by the people would be qualities extrinsic to any man, "accidental" to his nature (R). *Increased him amply in knowledge and body* could also be rendered "increased him in excellence of knowledge and body." The granting of sovereignty by God is also mentioned in 3:26; 4:54; 12:101.

248 The commentators relate that the ark was returned, after being either lost or taken in battle, as a sign of Saul's right to lead, though in the case of this passage much or all of the information in the commentaries seems to be based on Biblical or Talmudic material. In the Biblical account, the ark was returned from its capture by the Philistines after they were afflicted with plagues and other torments, but it resided in a private dwelling for many years in Kiriath-jearim, northwest of Jerusalem. Biblical commentators point out that during this time the Israelites were in a state of religious decline and had grown indifferent to the ark; during this period Samuel labored to revive the religion. Indeed, in 1 Chronicles 13:3 David says, "We did not turn to it [the ark] in the days of Saul." The fate of the ark during the time of Saul is not described in the Bible except with regard to its neglect.

In v. 248, the ark reenters the life of the Israelites in a way that functions as a sign for Samuel's truthful prophecy regarding Saul, but no details or chronology are given. From the Quranic perspective, it could mean that the chronology conventionally understood from 1 Samuel, in which the ark returns many years before Saul's anointing, is a misreading—which is possible if one considers the history given in Samuel as that of overlapping strands rather than a linear chronology—and that the ark returned around the time Samuel designated Saul as king. That an old but neglected sacred object should return could have had a special significance to the Israelites, leading them to rediscover a part of their own sacred history. Alternately, it could it be that the prophet (Samuel), in pointing to the ark as a sign, was in effect saying, "The ark has returned to you while I was your judge; so believe my prophecy about Saul" (Ṭ). In one Muslim account the Israelites, except for a single family who kept the ark, were prevented from coming near the ark from the time of its return from the Philistines until the time of Saul; some understood this to mean that, even though it was not in the possession of another people, the ark and its blessings were inaccessible to the Israelites (Ṭ).

The *tranquility* (*sakīnah*) within it may refer to either an object that would arouse tranquility in the hearts of the Israelites or something, properly referred to as *sakīnah*, that was contained within it. Some point out that the grammar of the phrase would allow the translation "that the ark come to you on account of which there will be tranquility" (R). This tranquility (*sakīnah*) is also mentioned in 9:26, 40; 48:4, 18, 26. If understood

(249) And when Saul set out with the hosts he said, "Truly God will try you with a stream. Whosoever drinks from it is not of me, and whosoever tastes not of it is of me—save one who scoops out a handful." But they drank from it, save a few among them. So when he crossed it, he and those who believed with him, they said, "We have no power today against Goliath and his hosts." Those who deemed they would meet their Lord said, "How many a small company have overcome a large company by God's Leave! And God is with the patient." (250) And when they went forth against Goliath and his hosts they said, "Our Lord, pour patience upon us, make firm our steps, and help us against the disbelieving people." (251) And they routed them, by God's Leave, and David slew Goliath, and God gave him sovereignty and wisdom, and taught him of what He wills. And were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, the earth would

as something whose presence would cause tranquility, it might refer to prophecies from books of Moses and Aaron telling of the victories to which Saul would lead them (Ṭ).

The *remnant* of Moses and Aaron is given several interpretations, among them the staff of Moses (v. 60), the fragments of stone tablets Moses brought from Sinai (7:150), the manna (see v. 57), and the clothing of Moses and Aaron, including Moses' sandals (see 20:12; Q, Ṭ).

249 Some have drawn a parallel between this verse and the account of Gideon's crossing the Jordan River in Judges 7:4–7, though the similarities are typological and not historical. In the Gideon account, the test was known to Gideon alone, the army was not aware they were being divided into two categories (those who drank with their mouths and those who did so with their hands), and the purpose was to reduce the army's numbers to three hundred men, so as to show that the Will of God could be carried out with a small number of fighters. In the Quranic account, Saul openly tests the faith of his soldiers, who are commanded to take only a handful of water and no more.

From a Quranic point of view, Saul's test of his army could be a reenactment of sacred history (Gideon lived before Samuel and Saul), much as parting the waters is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, taking place at the hands of Moses while the Israelites were escaping from the Egyptians through the Red Sea and by the ark when the people were crossing the Jordan during the time of Joshua (Joshua 3:14–17). That this incident echoes Gideon's crossing, whose purpose was to show that God could defeat many with few, is reinforced by the statement in this verse of those who believed that *they would meet their Lord, "How many a small company have overcome a large company by God's Leave!"* This group *deemed* they would meet their Lord, meaning they were either certain of the Hereafter or prepared to die (Q).

250–51 The Quranic account here assumes a general knowledge of the story of Saul, David, and Goliath: though a young boy, David is appointed by Saul to face Goliath as the Israelites' champion and fells the huge warrior with a stone from his sling (cf. 1 Samuel 17). He was given *wisdom,* meaning that, as a major prophet in the Islamic tradition, he inherited the prophethood of Samuel, and *sovereignty,* meaning he inherited the kingship of Saul (Ṭ). For further description of David and his prophethood and reign, see 38:17–29.

*Were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others* is similar to the message of 22:40, where the destruction of houses of worship is thwarted by this *repelling.* Here it is the corruption of the earth as such that is averted through this repelling of some by others. Commentators state that God uses good people to repel the effect

have been corrupted. But God is Possessed of Bounty for the worlds. (252) These are God's signs which We recite unto thee in truth, and truly thou art among the messengers. (253) Those are the messengers. We have favored some above others. Among them are those to whom God spoke, and some He raised up in ranks. And We gave Jesus son of Mary clear proofs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Had God so willed, those who came after them would not have fought one another after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed: among them were those who believed, and among them were those who disbelieved. And had God so willed, they would not have fought one another. But

of evil people, but offer different interpretations as to who precisely repels whom. Some say this refers to the "Substitutes" (*abdāl*), human beings who are inwardly members of a spiritual hierarchy through which God dispenses grace and protection to the world; they are forty in number, and when one dies, that one is replaced by another person (Q). Others interpret it to mean that the prayerful and the pious are used to repel those who do not pray and are impious, whose sins would otherwise destroy humanity, or that the obedient repel the evil of the disobedient (Ṭ). In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet says, "God repels the punishment of the one who does not pray by means of the one who prays, and of the one who does not give alms by means of the one who gives alms, and of the one who does not fast by means of the one who fasts, and of the one who does not make the *ḥajj* by means of the one who makes *ḥajj*, and of the one who does not struggle by means of the one who struggles."

252 This verse is addressed directly to the Prophet, and some commentators see vv. 243–51 as an encouragement for the Prophet in his struggles with his own enemies, reminding him that the messengers and prophets of the past underwent similar trials (Ṭ).

253 This verse, which states that some prophets are *favored above others,* and others like it (3:163, *ranked in degrees*) are usually understood in light of others that command believers to say, *We make no distinction between any of His messengers* (v. 285; see also 2:136; 3:84). In Islamic belief this ranking in degrees is understood to pertain to the prophets' missions, not their individual spiritual perfections. Thus, all prophets are considered equally to be protected from sin (*maʿṣūm*), but are given varying levels of earthly power (Solomon had a great earthly kingdom, Jesus did not), different kinds of miraculous signs (Moses' staff, Solomon's commanding the wind), and are sent to different segments of humanity (in Islamic belief the Prophet Muhammad was sent to all people, while other prophets were sent only to their own). *To whom God spoke* is usually considered to mean Moses specifically (see 7:143).

Jesus' strengthening with the *Holy Spirit* is also mentioned in v. 87 and 5:110; and in 16:102 the *Holy Spirit* is mentioned in connection with Muhammad. See 2:87c, where this Spirit is variously identified as the Spirit God breathed into human beings (15:29), the Archangel Gabriel, or the Gospel itself, all of which share the quality of being life-giving, whether it is bodily quickening or the nourishment of the heart and intelligence (R). The word *holy,* or "sacred" (*qudus*), can also mean "pure."

*And had God so willed, they would not have fought one another* echoes similar passages, such as *And had God willed, He would have made you one community* (5:48). The question of God's willing or not willing humanity to be united in one religion is also discussed in v. 213; 10:19; 11:118; 16:93; 42:8. Fighting *after the clear proofs had come* refers to the conflict between communities who have received Divine revelation; on this question see also 2:213c as well as 3:19; 42:14; 45:17; 98:1.

God does as He wills. (254) O you who believe! Spend from that which We have provided you before a day comes wherein there shall be neither bargaining, nor friendship, nor intercession. And the disbelievers, they are the wrongdoers. (255) God, there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting. Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep. Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Who is there who may intercede with Him save by His Leave? He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His Knowledge, save what He wills. His

254 This verse refers to the Day of Judgment, when the time for performing good deeds has passed (Ṭ). Spending from what God has given is one of the earliest descriptions of a believer in this *sūrah* (v. 3) and is repeated throughout the Quran. The ordinary bargaining and appeals to friends and protectors upon which one can rely in this world are useless on that Day. The present verse is very similar in content to 14:31 and 40:18, and the message that friends will not avail one another is also mentioned in 43:67: *Friends on that Day will be enemies to one another;* 44:41: *The Day when no friend will avail a friend in any way;* and 70:10: *And no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend.* Here it is noted by many commentators that the ability to intercede is unavailable only to the disbelievers (R, Ṭ); on the complex issue of intercession in the Quran, see 2:48c; 2:255c.

255 This verse is known as *Āyat al-Kursī,* the "Pedestal Verse," sometimes rendered "Throne Verse," and is perhaps the most well known single verse of the Quran, taking its name from the *Pedestal* (*kursī*) mentioned in it. It is often recited by Muslims setting out on a journey or seeking either spiritual or physical protection; and like the short *sūrahs* toward the end of the Quran, it is often one of the first passages Muslims memorize. The Prophet told his Companions to recite it before going to sleep, identified it as the greatest verse (*āyah*) of the Quran, and said that it was "a fourth of the Quran." This is one among many other *aḥādīth* that speak of its special place (IK). It is one of the most common passages of the Quran to adorn mosques and private homes and is often carried on one's person in the form of pendant, amulet, or similar object.

*There is no god but He* also appears in v. 163; 3:2 (where *the Living, the Self-Subsisting* also appears); 3:6; 4:87; 6:102; 7:158; and in many other places. Within the text of the Quran, the *shahādah,* or testimony of faith, takes the form "God, there is no god but He" much more often than "There is no god but God."

*The Living* (*al-Ḥayy*) is, doctrinally speaking, one of the most important Divine Names in Islam, considered to be among the "mothers of the Names" (*ummahāt al-asmā'*), and occupies a place in Islamic theology conceptually equivalent to Being. Theologically, a living being is that which is able to fully actualize all its perfections (R). Thus, in describing God's fundamental perfections, Muslims often say that God's Power is directed by His Will, which is determined by His Knowledge, all of which depend on His Life. *The Self-Subsisting* translates *al-Qayyūm,* an intensive form of a root meaning "to stand," "to sustain," or "to establish," which means that God subsists through Himself, but also that all things subsist through Him (IK, Ṭ). *Slumber* (*sinah*) and *sleep* (*nawm*) are usually understood to mean a kind of dozing and deep sleep, respectively, and God's eternal wakefulness is connected by commentators with *protecting [the heavens and the earth] tires Him not.* It also means that He is always aware of His creation, and there is no interruption in this awareness.

The question of intercession (*shafā'ah*) is also discussed in v. 48, where the plain sense of the verse would seem to deny the possibility of anyone interceding on behalf of anyone else before God. Here, the possibility of intercession is affirmed conditionally, by posing a question regarding who could intercede with God *save by His Leave.* In Islamic

Pedestal embraces the heavens and the earth. Protecting them tires Him not, and He is the Exalted, the Magnificent. (256) There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error. So whosoever disavows false

belief, the most significant kind of intercession is carried out by the Prophet on the Day of Judgment for the sake of his community, but also for all of the world, a status that Muslims understand to be conferred upon him by virtue of his *praiseworthy station* (*maqām maḥmūd*), mentioned in 17:79.

However, many Muslims, for example, the theologian al-Ghazzālī, have said that intercession is also granted to the saints and even ordinary believers in keeping with their spiritual rank. In Shiite doctrine, intercession is also available through the Imams, who play a central role in intercession for the faithful. In a sense, and as discussed in 2:48c, without the reality of intercession there would be no meaning to the prayers of forgiveness the angels make on behalf of human beings (e.g., 40:7) or to those prayers human beings make on behalf of other human beings (e.g., 12:97–98; 24:62, which commands the Prophet, *Seek forgiveness for them from God*). Indeed, anytime one prays for someone else, one is affirming a belief in intercession, because one believes that God responds to that prayer. In this sense, intercession is a special kind of supplicatory prayer. Many other verses convey a message similar to *There is no intercessor, save by His leave* (10:3; 19:87; 20:109; 21:28; 39:44; 43:86; 53:26), meaning that intercession itself can be performed only if the Divine Will permits it. Other verses that deny intercession do so for those who do wrong or disbelieve (40:18; 74:48), and still others say that God is the only intercessor (6:51, 70; 32:4; 39:44), which means ultimately it is only He who intercedes.

*That which is before them* refers to the Hereafter, and *that which is behind them* refers to the life of the world, or the two phrases can mean what is to come after people die and what happened before they were created. They may also refer to good and evil deeds, those they have committed and those they have yet to carry out (R). The pronoun *them* refers to all those who would intercede and all those for whom intercession is offered (R).

*Knowledge* here is used in the sense of "what is known" (R). A similar passage speaks of God as *Knower of the Unseen; He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, save to the one whom He approves as a messenger* (72:26–27). In 2:32 the angels say to God, *We have no knowledge save what Thou hast taught us.*

Some interpret the *Pedestal* (*kursī*) to be the "place of the feet," where one places one's feet while sitting on a throne, hence the common translation of *kursī* as "Footstool," but this translation is problematic, especially since commentators often see *kursī* as another name for the Throne (*ʿarsh*; Ṭ, R). Since a pedestal can mean a throne as well as that upon which a throne rests (and hence where one places one's feet), the rendering of "pedestal" for *kursī* is preferable. Indeed, in many Islamic cosmologies the Pedestal is above the cosmos, and the Throne is above the Pedestal, a symbolism that would collapse with the use of "footstool" to translate *kursī*, since a footstool sits in front of a throne, not underneath it.

There are various *aḥādīth* that state that the Pedestal encompasses the heavens and the earth, and the Throne encompasses the Pedestal (IK). According to Ibn ʿAbbās the heavens and the earth in comparison to the Pedestal are like a ring cast into the wilderness (IK). Others interpret *Pedestal* to mean knowledge, sovereignty, or authority, used metonymously here the way one uses "the crown" to refer to a monarch (R). Muslims attempt to avoid the two extremes of interpreting such passages as only metaphor or allegory, which allows human beings to read their own desires into the meaning of the Quran, and literalistic anthropomorphism, which assigns to God location in space and feet comparable to our own. In esoteric commentaries on the Quran, both *kursī* and *ʿarsh* possessed specific symbolic meanings, and the verse is seen to contain in its inner meaning a whole cosmology.

*Protecting them*, referring to the aforementioned heavens and earth, means that God sustains their very being encompassing the whole created order. *Tires Him not* can also mean "is not difficult for Him" (R) or it does not cause Him to stop.

256 Similar statements regarding faith are also found in 10:99–100: *And had thy Lord*

deities and believes in God has grasped the most unfailing handhold, which never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing. 257 God is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the idols, bringing them out of the light

*willed, all those who are on the earth would have believed all together. Wouldst thou compel men till they become believers? It is not for a soul to believe, save by God's Leave;* and 18:29: *And say, "It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve"* (see also 76:3; 2:217c). Some report that this verse was revealed in connection with some Muslims who had children among the Banū Naḍīr, a Jewish tribe that was exiled by the Muslim community from Madinah after they were found plotting against the Prophet. Before the coming of Islam, some women of Yathrib (later Madinah) whose children died in infancy made a vow that, if they had children who survived, they would have them raised Jewish, which is how these children came to be among the Banū Naḍīr. These Muslim parents questioned whether they should force their children to join the Muslim community (Q, Ṭ). Another account describes a Muslim man whose two sons became Christians and left for Syria with the merchants who had converted them (Ṭ). And a third account mentions that some Muslims were wet-nursed by Jews, and when the Jewish clans to which they belonged were exiled, they wanted to leave with them and become Jews, but their families forced them to remain Muslims (Ṭ).

According to some sources this verse refers specifically to the People of the Book or to anyone from whom one can take the *jizyah* (see 9:29c; IK, R). Indeed, many argue that the import of this verse is not absolute, since the Prophet, in his campaign and ultimate victory against the idolatrous Arabs, did not give them the option of remaining idolaters or paying the *jizyah* (IK, Ṭ). The Arabs were in fact forced to abandon idol worship, although some disagree over whether they could become Jews and Christians and fall under the protected status of *There is no coercion in religion* (R). This position would entail, in effect, that among a certain group of religions recognized by Islam (including Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism), *there is no coercion in religion.*

Others argue that this verse was abrogated by those verses that command Muslims to fight (e.g., 9:5), but this interpretation is not chronologically consistent with the three possible occasions of revelation for this verse, which all involve conditions resulting from conflict with the Jews, who were banished by force. This shows, as do many other verses in the Quran, that the fighting Muslims carried out was motivated by political circumstances and not the desire to convert. More important, coercion in religion negates the idea of responsibility before God (*taklīf*), in which one is taken to account for one's actions in both this life and the Hereafter (R). As an ethical or moral pronouncement, this verse is not subject to abrogation at all (see 2:106c). The Makkan idolaters were a special case, because they had been for years the primary threat to the very existence of Islam as a religion. Although forced conversions were not completely unknown in later Islamic history (including from Sunnism to Shiism and vice versa), they can be counted as rare exceptions to the historical rule. For a more detailed treatment of these questions, see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

*Sound judgment* translates *rushd,* which also means "maturity" and "being rightly guided"; *error* translates *ghayy,* which also carries the sense of transgression and temptation. *False deities* renders *ṭāghūt,* a word that seems to be related to the verb meaning "to rebel" and that is interpreted variously to refer to Satan, magicians, soothsayers, idols, or any being who rebels and trespasses against God (R); for a longer discussion, see 4:51–52c. The *unfailing handhold* (cf. 31:22) refers to either faith or the *shahādah,* "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha illa'Llāh*). The word for *breaks* refers to fractures that do not show or cause separation, meaning that the *handhold* does not give way even slightly or imperceptibly.

257 On the concept of *Protector* (*walī*), which can also mean "ally" and "friend," see 3:28c; 4:88–90c. The symbolism of light and

into the darkness. They are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. (258) Hast thou not considered him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord because God had given him sovereignty? When Abraham said, "My Lord gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "Truly God brings the sun from the east. Bring it, then, from the west." Thus was he who disbelieved confounded. And God guides not wrongdoing people. (259) Or [think of] the like of him who passed by a town as it lay fallen upon its roofs. He said, "How shall God give life to this after its death?" So God caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up. He said, "How long hast thou tarried?" He said, "I tarried a day or part of a day." He said, "Nay, thou hast tarried a hundred years. Look, then, at thy food and thy drink—they have not spoiled. And look at thy donkey. And [this was done] that We may make thee a sign for mankind. And look at the bones, how We set them up, then clothe them with flesh."

darkness, which appears throughout the Quran, is presented here with an explicit symmetry describing the ascent into light and the plunge into darkness; also see 5:16c; 24:35c. For the majority of commentators, light and darkness refer to belief or faith (*īmān*) and disbelief or denial (*kufr*), or guidance and error (Ṭ). Going from darkness into the light is also mentioned in 5:16; 14:1, 5; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11.

258 Commentators sometimes understand the antagonist here to be Nimrod, though this is based on folkloric material; he is not named in any *ḥadīth* and his place even in the Bible is ambiguous at best. It is said that this man *who disputed with Abraham* brought out two people, killing one and leaving the other alive, and said, *I give life and cause death.* A similar dynamic can be seen in the conversation between Moses and Pharaoh, when Pharaoh said, *I am your lord most high* (79:24). "Give life and cause death" appears in many places in the Quran; see 2:28c.

Grammatically, the recipient of *sovereignty* could be either Abraham or his antagonist, since Abraham's descendants are described as having been given a *mighty sovereignty* (4:54), but most commentators believe that it refers to the worldly power of the other person (R). Abraham's triumph in the encounter both exposes the pretense of the ruler who sought to mimic God's Power over life and death and reflects a general Quranic theme that the world of nature is full of signs of God. Abraham encounters the rising sun in a different context in 6:78.

259 Commentators typically identify the man in this verse as Ezra, but others mention Ezekiel and even Khiḍr (see *Sūrah* 18), which is why the *thou* is used in the translation. Others say that this verse refers not to a saint or prophet, but to a disbeliever who is shown the reality of Resurrection (R). *Fallen upon its roofs* means that the roofs had collapsed and the walls fell onto them; the word for *fallen* (*khāwiyah*) also evokes the sense of "empty."

The question *How long hast thou tarried?* is also asked of the sleepers in the cave in 18:19 and the resurrected soul on the Day of Judgment (23:112). Some say that the bones of the donkey were made to come back to life and be clothed with flesh, though others believe this phrase refers to the man himself (R).

It is thought by some that God's making this person a sign means that he was made a prophet (Ṭ), but elsewhere Pharaoh was also made a sign (10:92), and he is the opposite of a prophet. If this person is understood to be a prophet, his question is not taken as one of pernicious doubt, but in the same spirit as the question posed by Abraham in v. 260: *My Lord, show me how Thou givest life to the dead.*

When it became clear to him he said, "I know that God has power over all things." (260) And when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how Thou givest life to the dead," He said, "Dost thou not believe?" He said, "Yea, indeed, but so that my heart may be at peace." He said, "Take four birds and make them be drawn to thee. Then place a piece of them on every mountain. Then call them: they will come to thee in haste. And know that God is Mighty, Wise." (261) The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain

260 The verse implies no context for Abraham's question, but commentators nevertheless record several possibilities. Abraham saw a scene on a coast where creatures of the sea, land, and air were all eating other creatures and wondered how resurrection could bring all the pieces of these animals together; or it was part of his exchange with his antagonist in v. 258, where the sign would have given Abraham a stronger hand or lent support to his message to other people; or it may have been in connection with the sacrifice of his son or that Abraham wanted confirmation of his special status as prophet. Many interpret it spiritually to mean the revival of dead hearts through the Spirit (R).

*Dost thou not believe?* is understood to be a kind of implicit affirmation of Abraham's faith, as if to say, "You believe, so why are you asking?" *That my heart may be at peace* evokes other Quranic references, such as 89:27, where the *soul at peace* is invited to enter Paradise, and 13:28, where souls *are at peace* in the remembrance of God. Here commentators grapple with the idea that Abraham would be out of this state of peace. Some suggest that there are degrees of spiritual knowledge, and that Abraham is speaking of going from one depth of understanding to another, not that he is expressing doubt about God's existence or His Power (R). Since believers acknowledge no end to the Glories of God, Abraham's question can be seen as an expression of a desire to witness ever more of God's Self-Disclosure, to use the language often employed by Sufis. Regarding this verse a *ḥadīth* says, "We have more right to doubt than did Abraham." Abraham's "doubt" was an entreaty for more knowledge, not a hesitation about God's existence. Even the Prophet Muhammad is commanded to say, *My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!* (20:114), which is not meant to highlight the Prophet's ignorance, but to point to God's Limitlessness and His infinite Reality.

The verb in *make them be drawn to thee* is understood by many, perhaps even a majority, to mean "cut," though this interpretation leaves the difficulty of the place of the prepositional phrase *to thee* (R). According to this interpretation, Abraham takes four birds (peacock, eagle, raven, and rooster), cuts them up into pieces, and then places them on four mountains, representing the four cardinal directions. He then calls them, at which point the scattered parts of the birds reassemble into their original forms and come flying back to him. According to one reading, the eagle represents lust for food; the rooster, lust for sex; the crow, excessive curiosity; and the peacock, vanity, though many different lists of birds are to be found in the commentaries (R).

The other interpretation, reflected in the translation, is that there is no killing of the birds mentioned in the verse. Rather, Abraham first made each bird be drawn to him, then placed them, alive, each on a mountain, and then called them to himself. This interpretation would then represent the reunification of souls and their bodies with the ease of a man calling to a bird, which comes in haste to him (R).

It is related that Ibn ʿAbbās said of Abraham's question and God's gentle response to it, "There is no more hopeful verse in the Quran than this one." The colleague in conversation with Ibn ʿAbbās said that for him the most hopeful verse was 39:53: *O My servants who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls! Despair not of God's Mercy. Truly God forgives all sins* (IK).

261 *And God multiplies for whomsoever He will* is echoed in 24:38: *That God may reward*

that grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And God multiplies for whomsoever He will, and God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. ﴿262﴾ Those who spend their wealth in the way of God and then follow not what they spent with preening or injury shall have their reward with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. ﴿263﴾ An honorable word and forgiveness are better than an act of charity followed by injury. And God is Self-Sufficient, Clement. ﴿264﴾ O you who believe! Do not annul your acts of charity through preening and injury, like he who spends his wealth to be seen of men and believes not in God and the Last Day. His parable is that of a smooth rock with dust upon it: a downpour strikes it, and leaves it barren. They have no power over anything of what they earned. And God guides not the disbelieving people. ﴿265﴾ And the parable of those who spend their wealth seeking God's Good Pleasure, and out of a confirmation in their souls, is that of a garden upon a hill: a downpour strikes it, and brings forth its fruit twofold. And if a downpour

*them for the best of what they have done, and increase them from His Bounty. And God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning.* The Divine Name *All-Encompassing* (*al-Wāsiʿ*) also means "generous." The Prophet is reported to have said, "God makes the good deed of the son of Adam to be tenfold, or seven hundred fold, except for the fast, for God says, 'The fast is for me, and I reward it'" (IK). Sometimes such *aḥādīth* use more concrete imagery, as when a man came to the Prophet and said, "This camel I give in the way of God," and the Prophet replied, "On the Day of Judgment you shall have seven hundred camels" (IK).

262–63 Exulting in one's generosity or reminding the needy of their neediness destroys the virtue in charitable giving (R). It is better to offer *an honorable word* to the poor who ask for help and *forgiveness* for any harm they may cause, either because their manner is rough or because they may cause embarrassment. One should be kind and gentle with the poor, and if their asking causes one trouble or discomfort, one should forgive them for it (R).

264–65 The worst model of charity is one who gives only for appearance's sake, as in 107:6–7, which mentions *those who strive to be seen, yet refuse small kindnesses.* These verses compare the merit of two kinds of giving through the symbolism of rain striking the earth. When a downpour strikes the earth on a smooth stone, it can only wash it away, meaning it produces no real benefit. When it lands on a fertile garden, the surplus of water causes the garden to double its yield, symbolizing the fruit of charity with the right intention. *And if a downpour strikes it not, then a soft rain* is taken to mean that, even if the amount of rain is not great, the garden will at least thrive normally and bear its fruit.

Some commentators mention that certain kinds of oases flourish and have rich earth collect on them when they are slightly elevated, and that this is what is meant by *a garden upon a hill.* Moreover, on a hill of this sort, there are no streams that flow, and so it can be nourished only by rain (Q). Others say that *upon a hill* (*bi-rabwah*) must mean something more like "that which rises," meaning fertile soil from which crops grow upward, yielding the translation "the parable of a fertile garden." Al-Rāzī argues that a garden upon a hill would not be reached by streams and would be exposed to too much wind, while a garden in a hollow would be inundated with water and would

strikes it not, then a soft rain. And God sees whatsoever you do. (266) Would any one of you wish to have a garden of date palms and grapevines with rivers running below, partaking therein of every kind of fruit, old age then befalling him while he had weakly progeny, and a whirlwind with fire then befalling it, such that it is consumed? Thus does God make clear unto you the signs, that haply you may reflect. (267) O you who believe! Spend of the good things you have earned and of that which We have brought forth for you from the earth, and seek not the bad, spending of it though you would not take it without shutting

not receive the better effects of wind. He argues that the best garden is on level ground and prefers to relate *rabwah* to the verb "to grow," which comes from the same root. Such growth through charity is mentioned in the *ḥadīth,* "When a person gives a lawfully earned date in charity, God takes it in His Hand and causes it to grow as one of you would grow his foals or camels, until it becomes like a mountain or even greater."

*Out of a confirmation in their souls* means that the givers affirm and have certainty of faith in their act of giving (IK, Ṭ) or that they do so because they have confirmation of the Truth of God or certainty (Z). Or it can mean that when they give, they take care and confirm where they place their charity to make sure that it is used properly (Q, R).

266 For some this verse is a parable of those who follow up their charitable giving with *preening and injury,* as mentioned in v. 264, meaning that at the end of their life, they will have nothing of value to leave behind and nothing will bear fruit for them in the Hereafter. Their charity is like the fruits of the garden, and their insults and boasting are like the fiery whirlwind that devours it, and they have no progeny who could protect or support them (R). According to another interpretation attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, this verse refers to those who do good works, but afterward turn to evil works, thereby wiping away the value of earlier past actions (Q). *Every kind of fruit* can mean something like "many kinds of fruit." *With rivers running below* is a common image symbolizing the paradisal state; see 2:25c.

267 A similar message appears in 3:92: *You will never attain piety till you spend from that which you love.* In a famous *ḥadīth* the Prophet stated, "None of you believes until he desires for his neighbor what he desires for himself" (in another version, "for his neighbor" reads "for his brother"). Here *good things* can mean either what one considers wholesome and desirable, what one would not reject, or what is lawful, not forbidden. One should not seek unlawful or distasteful means to give in charity. It is reported that a group of Companions would bring bunches of dates from their date palms and hang them in the mosque for the poorest of the Muslims to eat. When another group sought to perform the same act, but brought inferior dates that no one would want, it is said that this verse was revealed (IK).

On the subject of charity, a *ḥadīth* states, "Truly God distributes your provisions among you, just as He distributes your virtues among you. God gives of the world to those whom He loves and does not love, but gives religion (*dīn*) only to those whom He loves. Whosoever God has given religion, God loves him. By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, no servant submits until his heart and tongue submit, and no believer believes until his bodily parts are safe from his misfortunes." When asked what the misfortunes were, the Prophet replied, "His lies and his wrongdoing. No servant receives blessing by earning wealth that is unlawful and giving it in charity; nor is it accepted from him if he donates it; nor does he leave it to anyone but that it goes to the Fire. God does not erase evil with evil, but he does erase evil with good. Evil does not erase evil." Another *ḥadīth* states, "Do not feed others with what you yourself would not eat."

your eyes to it. And know that God is Self-Sufficient, Praised. (268) Satan threatens you with poverty and commands you to indecency. And God promises you forgiveness from Him, and bounty. And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. (269) He grants wisdom to whomsoever He will. And whosoever is granted wisdom has been granted much good. Yet none remember save the possessors of intellect. (270) And whatever sum you spend, or vow you vow, truly God knows it. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. (271) If you disclose your acts of charity, that is well. But if you hide them and give to the poor, that is better for you,

268 Satan makes one dread poverty, causing one to refrain from giving charity, and moreover inspires one to commit other sins and acts of disobedience, whereas God causes the soul to remember forgiveness and generosity (IK). Al-Rāzī argues, for example, that ideally people should give from the best that they have, and that what begins as a desire to part only with the dregs can lead to a fear of giving any charity at all. This miserliness then infects the rest of the soul, which struggles to keep all that it desires while relinquishing nothing of what is of value to him. One's passivity to Satan's promptings then leads to the active commission of other sins, until one gradually ceases doing any good and commits every manner of evil. In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Satan has an inspiration (*lammah*) for the son of Adam, and the angel has one. As for Satan's inspiration, it is a promise to do evil and tell lies against the truth. As for the angel's inspiration, it is a promise to do good and affirm the truth. When one encounters that, let him know that it is from God, and let him praise God, and when one encounters the other, let him seek refuge from Satan." *All-Encompassing* (*al-Wāsiʿ*) also carries the meaning of "abundantly Generous in His Forgiveness" (R).

269 *Wisdom* here is interpreted as knowledge of the meaning of the Quran, including the abrogating and the abrogated, the symbolic and the determined (see 3:7), the order of revelation, and the licit and the forbidden, or as the fear of God, in accordance with the saying, "Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." *Wisdom* in this context is sometimes also glossed as intelligence (*ʿaql*) or comprehension (*fahm*). Certain theologians see in this verse an allusion to the power of rational demonstration. Some interpret this wisdom to mean prophethood (*nubuwwah*), but others dispute this interpretation (Q, R, Ṭ). The spirit or the intellect takes its nourishment from wisdom, unlike the desires of the ego, which are satisfied by the indecencies mentioned in the previous verse (R). *Wisdom* as knowledge or understanding differs from right action, but in a sense *wisdom* is the combination of understanding and right action based upon it (R). In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "Let there be envy in only two things: a man to whom God has given wealth and who exhausts it in the way of truth, and a man to whom God has given wisdom and who judges by it and teaches it." On *possessors of intellect*, see 2:179c.

270 *God knows it* means that He keeps an account of it (Ṭ) and knows what the intention was behind the act, great or small (R). The *wrongdoers* here are understood to be those who give for hypocritical reasons, as described in v. 264.

271 Many *aḥādīth* speak to the virtue of giving secretly, often including a variation of the saying, "Let the left hand know not what the right hand is doing." In an opinion attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, when it comes to obligatory actions such as the institutional alms (*zakāh*), performing them openly is twenty-five times better, while voluntary or supererogatory giving is seventy times better when done privately or secretly (IK, Ṭ). Open charity, it is reasoned, provides a good example for others, shows the poor that there is recourse in their neighbors, and creates an open bond between people in a community (R). Secret charity is a test of sincerity, since one gives but garners no prestige in the eyes of others for one's generosity.

*Acquit you* is related to "expiation" (*kaffārah*), meaning that the good deeds are a kind of atonement for the evil ones. The message of this verse

and will acquit you of some of your evil deeds. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (272) Thou art not tasked with their guidance, but God guides whomsoever He will. Whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves, when you spend only seeking the Face of God. And whatever good you spend shall be paid to you in full, and you shall not be wronged. (273) [It is] for the poor who are constrained in the way of God, who are not able to travel the earth. The ignorant one supposes them to be wealthy because of their restraint. Thou knowest them by their mark: they do not ask of people importunately. And whatever good you

is also present in 11:114: *Truly good deeds remove those that are evil.* Some commentators say, "Charity puts out sin like water puts out a fire" (T), as in the *ḥadīth,* "When you perform an evil deed, follow it with a good deed and it will wipe it away." When asked, "Is [remembrance of] 'There is no god but God' [*lā ilāha illa'Llāh*] a good deed?" the Prophet said, "It is the best of good deeds." Instead of *that is better for you, and will acquit you of some of your evil deeds,* some read here a first-person plural pronoun rather than the third-person singular, giving the translation, "that is better for you, and We will acquit you of some of your evil deeds" (T).

272 This verse uncouples charity from religious identity. Various occasions for its revelation are given. Some relate that the Prophet used to give charity to all, but when the impoverished among the Muslim community grew large, he restricted charity to Muslims only, at which time this verse was revealed (Q). In another version, a Companion had grandparents who were idolaters and who asked her for charity, but she did not wish to give it to them until she asked the Prophet, at which time this verse was revealed. In yet another version, some Companions had relatives among the Jewish tribe of Qurayẓah and would not give them charity unless they became Muslim (IK, R).

A similar message is found in 60:8: *God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, from treating them righteously and being just toward them.* That the Prophet himself is not responsible for whether people accept guidance is also related in 28:56: *Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will;* see also 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:82; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12; 88:21–22.

The Quran reiterates that God does not need humanity's good works, as in 41:46: *Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul* (also 45:15). In a long *ḥadīth,* it is related that a man gave charity to someone at night, only to learn the next day that he had given it to an adulterer; the same thing happened the next night with a rich man, and then the next night with a thief. Each time people began to talk about it, but he was told that his charity was accepted and that perhaps it would keep the adulterer from his vices, inspire the rich man to give, and keep the thief from stealing. *Shall be paid to you in full* refers to the reward one receives in the Hereafter for one's good works.

The idea of *seeking the Face of God* also appears in 30:38–39, which speaks of *those who desire the Face of God* (also see 76:9). On the use of the phrase "Face of God," also see 2:115c; 55:26–27c.

273 The verb *constrained* connotes something that hinders one on a journey or prevents one from setting out. It is reported that this verse pertains to the People of the Veranda (*ahl al-ṣuffah*), a group of poor and homeless Muslims who stayed in a roofed area connected to the mosque in Madinah and who were known for their piety, devotion, and asceticism (Q, R). They were *not able to travel the earth* either because they were too poor to do so or because they were vulnerable to enemies outside Madinah (Q).

Regarding requests for charity, it is said, based on certain *aḥādīth,* that any who possess a certain amount of wealth—40 *dirhams* was sometimes

spend, truly God knows it. (274) Those who spend their wealth by night and by day, secretly and openly, shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (275) Those who devour usury shall not rise except as one rises who is felled by the touch of Satan. That is because they say, "Buying and selling are simply like usury," though God has permitted buying and selling and forbidden usury. One who, after receiving counsel from his Lord, desists shall have what is past and his affair goes to God. And as for those who go back, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. (276) God blights usury and causes acts of charity to grow. And God loves not any sinful ingrate. (277) Truly those who believe, perform righteous deeds, maintain the prayer, and give the alms shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (278) O you who believe! Reverence God, and leave what remains of usury, if you are believers. (279) And if you do not, then take notice of a war from God and His Messenger. If you repent, you shall have the principal of your wealth, and you shall neither wrong nor be wronged. (280) And if one is in difficult circumstances, let there be a respite until there is ease, and it is better for you to give [it] as charity, if you but knew. (281) And be mindful of a day when you shall be returned to God. Then every soul will be

mentioned—would be categorized as "importunate," were they to beg. In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "The indigent person (*miskīn*) is not the one who wanders about you, whom you feed morsel by morsel. The indigent person is one who restrains himself, and does not ask people importunately."

Several other verses mention people being known *by their mark,* including 48:29: *Their mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration;* 7:46, 48; 47:30; 55:41. Some interpret this *mark* to refer to the pallor of the hungry or to other physical traits signaling their exertions or difficulties. Many interpret *mark* to refer to the manifestation of the soul in one's physical body, especially in the face. A *ḥadīth* states, "Fear the *firāsah* of the believer, for he sees by the light of God" (IK). *Firāsah,* which could be rendered "the skill of spiritual physiognomy," refers to the ability to perceive qualities of the soul through the form of the body, especially the face. Thus, the mark of the truly poor is the manifestation of their humility and self-effacement, perceptible in their bodies while not being of the body (R).

274 This is the last verse in the section vv. 260–74, whose main theme is the giving of charity. Beyond its general import, some commentators interpret this verse to be referring to specific people, for example, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, who are reported to have given a certain sum in the fashion described in this verse, giving one quarter of it by night, one by day, one secretly, and one openly (IK, R, Ṭ).

275–81 *Usury* is the usual translation for *ribā,* and this commentary follows this common rendering. However, it must be noted that these terms are not strictly synonymous. Insofar as

"usury" is understood as an unreasonably high rate of interest or simply any interest at all, it can be a misleading translation for *ribā*. Not all interest is *ribā*, and moreover not all *ribā* is interest. *Ribā* simply means "increase," "gain," or "growth," and in the Quran and *Ḥadīth* it refers to two main types of transactions: "growth through deferment" (*ribā al-nasī'ah*) and "growth through surplus" (*ribā al-faḍl*). It is one of the most complex and multifaceted aspects of Islamic Law.

In pre-Islamic Arabia the *ribā* of deferment was the charging of a fee on an interest-free loan once it came due. The founder of the Mālikī school of law, Imām Mālik (d. 179/795), writes in his *al-Muwaṭṭā'*: "*Ribā* in the pre-Islamic times was that a man would be owed a debt by another man for a set term. When the term was due, he would say, 'Will you pay it off or give me *ribā* (*a-taqḍī aw turbī*)?' If the man paid, he took it. If not, he increased his debt and lengthened the term for him." Many believe that the general prohibitions in the Quran allowing trade but forbidding *ribā* refer to this practice, which was a deferment on already existing loans at the time of their maturity. The deferment often led to doubling of the principal in a year and then redoubling when the deferment period expired and another deferment became necessary. This radical compounding is mentioned in 3:130: *O you who believe! Devour not usury, doubling and multiplying.* A debtor could eventually lose all his possessions to the creditor through the doubling and redoubling mentioned in the Quran.

When it comes to the lesser-known but equally important *ribā* of surplus, there is a *ḥadīth* that says, "Gold for gold, silver for silver, wheat for wheat, barley for barley, dates for dates, and salt for salt; like for like, hand to hand, in equal amounts; and any increase is *ribā*." The "surplus" (*faḍl*) in this type of *ribā* refers to the disparity in amounts between the two objects traded. For example, it is reported in a *ḥadīth* that the Companion Bilāl visited the Prophet with some high-quality dates, and the Prophet inquired about their source. Bilāl explained that he traded two volumes of lower-quality dates for one volume of higher quality. The Prophet said, "This is precisely the forbidden *ribā*! Do not do this. Instead, sell the first type of dates, and use the proceeds to buy the other." Moreover, the stipulation "like for like, hand to hand, in equal amounts" was understood to prevent trading, for example, an ounce of gold now for an ounce of gold at some point in the future. In such a transaction the time factor creates an inequality: an ounce of gold is worth more now than in the future because one loses the ability to use it in the meantime, and this disparity is a "surplus" (which applies in matters of trade, not charitable loans). Furthermore, jurists disagreed over whether the relevant legal attribute of these six commodities in the aforementioned *ḥadīth*—so that trading them in the way the Prophet described was obligatory—was that they were measurable, fungible, storable, usable as food, or some combination of these attributes (Q). Based upon this reasoning, they would then extend the *ribā* rules to other items based upon whether they possessed the relevant attributes.

At a more fundamental level, jurists have tried to understand the moral question underlying two seemingly quite different kinds of transactions, one involving the cost of credit, the other involving trade in commodities of the same kind but different amounts or at different times, both bearing the name *ribā*. Some have seen, in both types of *ribā* prohibitions, a protection against unfair pricing. In a lease or credit sale, for example, both parties can negotiate a fair price for the extension of credit linked to market conditions. In the case of trading goods of different qualities but of the same kind or of the same good at different times, fair pricing is difficult to ensure, hence the Prophet's command to "sell the first type of dates, and use the proceeds to buy the other [type of dates]," thus grounding the sale in fairly priced existing market conditions.

The rules about *ribā*, moreover, are always understood in terms of risk, which in Arabic is called *gharar*, a word semantically linked to "deception" (*ghurūr*). Unlawful risk is present in a sale if the uncertainty it entails makes the transaction equivalent to gambling. Thus in a *ḥadīth* it is said, "The Prophet has forbidden the purchase of the unborn animal in its mother's womb, the sale of the milk in the udder without measurement, the purchase of spoils of war prior to their distribution, . . . and the purchase of the catch of a diver [i.e., the future catch from the sea of an undetermined amount]." Thus one cannot sell an item one does not actually possess, whose attributes

are unknown, or that does not yet exist. Since risk is always present in some form in all honest business transactions, jurists allowed certain kinds of transactions, such as forward sales on agricultural products, which, though they amount to sales in the future of nonexistent items and involve risk, were allowed because of their social and economic benefits and also in many cases necessity. Forward sales of crops were practiced in Madinah (see v. 282), though the Prophet set strict conditions on them, as did later jurists following his example, so that they would not be made to bear excessive risk or become a cover for the forbidden *ribā*.

It is said by some that this passage dealing with *ribā* was one of the last or even the last to be revealed; 4:176 and 5:3 are also sometimes listed as the last verse in the chronological order of revelation. This fact is sometimes cited as a reason for the relative paucity of *aḥādīth* regarding the actual workings of *ribā*, especially when considering how intricate and subtle the laws on *ribā* and related questions would come to be (IK, Q). The cancellation and prohibition of *ribā* is also mentioned in the Prophet's "Farewell Sermon" at the end of his last pilgrimage in AH 10, a little over two months before his death.

275 *Shall not rise except as one rises who is felled by the touch of Satan* refers to how the usurers are resurrected out of their graves (Ṭ). Many *aḥādīth* speak of the terrible consequences on the Day of Judgment for those who are guilty of *ribā:* they are resurrected in a maddened state of choking or with bellies the size of houses with snakes coming out of them. Regarding *one who . . . desists shall have what is past,* a *ḥadīth* states, "Lo! All *ribā* from pre-Islamic times is forgiven. You shall have the principal of your wealth, and you shall neither wrong nor be wronged." That means that although the original amount can still be legitimately expected, the added increase to the principal was canceled; see also v. 279. This applied only to outstanding *ribā;* past *ribā* was not open to being reclaimed (Q).

276 In *causes acts of charity to grow, grow* is the verbal form of *ribā*. On the concept of causing charity to grow, see 2:261c.

277 *Alms,* mentioned here and in many other places, are obligatory and an integral dimension of Muslim devotional and social life. As a form of institutional charity, they are contrasted with the moral opposite, *ribā* (see 2:275–81c). It is reported that the Prophet said, "The ultimate result for anyone who engages in *ribā,* even if that *ribā* brings growth, is loss." This verse has content similar to that in 2:62 and 5:69.

278–79 The second half of v. 279 can also be translated, "If you repent, you shall have the principal of your wealth, neither wronging nor being wronged." The debtor was still liable for the original loan, or *principal of your wealth,* but this verse canceled any additional fees or interest that had accrued to that loan as a result of deferring it past its original term. In this way creditors would not forfeit their wealth, and debtors would not be responsible for the increases to the original loan amount through *ribā*. Of *then take notice of a war from God and His Messenger* Ibn ʿAbbās said, "On the Day of Resurrection it will be said to the one who partook of *ribā,* 'Take up your sword for war!'" (Ṭ). Some say that this means that they have made themselves the enemies of or hostile to God and the Messenger (Q). To practice *ribā* can be a cause for taking up arms against violators on the part of legitimate authority, forcing them to give up their gains from *ribā* or fighting them if they refuse to relinquish them or desist (IK, Q, R, Ṭ).

280–81 In the Islamic tradition, loans (as opposed to investments) were ideally charitable in nature, owing to the time factor in giving and taking money (see 2:275–81c) and since other transactions and financial instruments, such as credit sales and leases, were available for noncharitable investments and the raising of funds. Hence the invitation in this passage to turn previously *ribā*-laden loans into charity in the case of a debtor in dire financial circumstances: *and it is better for you to give [it] as charity.* A *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever grants a delay to one in difficult circumstances shall be credited an act of charity for each day of it." This does not negate the claim of a lender to the original principal, since the verse encourages *a respite until there is ease,* but does not require it (Q).

The passage on *ribā* ends with a reminder that all matters, including economic ones, will be accounted for in the Hereafter. It uses *and they shall not be wronged* in regard to a soul's ultimate destiny, which is similar to the phrase used in connection with a creditor's right to the loan principal in v. 279.

paid in full for what it earned, and they shall not be wronged. (282) O you who believe! When you contract a debt with one another for a term appointed, write it down. And let a scribe write between you justly, and let not any scribe refuse to write as God taught him. So let him write, and let the debtor dictate, and let him reverence God his Lord, and diminish nothing from it. And if the debtor is feeble-minded or is weak, or is unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate justly. And call to witness two witnesses from among your men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women from among those whom you approve as witnesses, so that if one of the two errs, the other can remind her. Let not the witnesses refuse when they are called, and be not averse to write it down, small or great, with its term. That is more equitable with God, more sure for the testimony, and more likely to keep you from doubt. Unless it is trade of present goods that you transact between yourselves: then there is no blame upon you not to write it. And take witnesses when you buy and sell between yourselves. And let neither scribe nor witness be harmed. Were you to do that, it would be iniquitous of you. And reverence God. God teaches you, and

282 This is the longest single verse in the Quran. It is said to have been revealed in connection with agricultural forward sales, but is generally applicable to all agreements, including loans (Ṭ), where payment and delivery do not take place simultaneously (IK, Q). In a forward sale (also see 2:275–81c) as practiced in Madinah at the time of the Prophet, one could receive payment for agricultural goods to be delivered one, two, or three years in the future. Of these transactions the Prophet said, "Whosoever contracts a forward sale, let it be for a set amount, a set weight, and a set time." This represents an exception to the general rule that one is prohibited from selling what one does not possess, because the agricultural seller legitimately requires funds to buy seeds and care for the crops before they are harvested, and the income-expenditure cycle is on a yearly, not daily or even monthly, basis (Q).

Though not without risk, a forward sale is not equivalent to gambling, and the social benefit is thought to outweigh the potential harm and uncertainty. The general condition for sellers is that they should own the means to produce the product (e.g., date palms if selling dates), that the product should be of known traits and attributes (e.g., the quality of the dates), and that it should be a known quantity to be delivered at an established time in a place where such delivery is possible. The condition on buyers is that they should pay in fungible or monetary material, since the reason for the exception is that the sellers of agricultural goods do not possess liquid wealth, but own agricultural land or animals not easily convertible into money (Q).

The one who has to deliver the product or repay a loan, the *debtor* (used in the general sense of one who owes, including the seller in a forward sale), is responsible for dictating the terms; according to some commentators, this is because the creditor is more liable to describe a higher amount, and presumably because the seller would normally be in the weaker position as an owner of nonliquid assets (Q).

*Write it down* is not understood to mean that writing can replace a living witness; the writing

was meant to serve as a means of remembering the terms of the agreement (Q); in Islamic Law the testimony was primarily oral and only secondarily written. *Let not any scribe refuse to write as God taught him* means that the writing of contracts is a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*), which means that someone in society must be available to carry out what is a solemn duty, but not every single person has a personal responsibility (*farḍ ʿayn*) for doing so (Q, R). One who *is feeble-minded or is weak, or is unable to dictate himself* is interpreted to mean someone who is mentally disabled, a minor, or someone who is sick to the point of incapacitation, respectively (IK, Ṭ).

Among the variety of interpretations concerning the stipulation that, if one cannot find two men to serve as witnesses, one may call two women and one man, it is acknowledged that this provision is peculiar to the commercial transactions mentioned in this verse (IK, Q, R, Ṭ) and differs from other kinds of testimony. Other verses explicitly equate male and female testimony, such as 24:6–9, where accusations of adultery are given equal consideration whether they are made by the husband or the wife. In the classical Islamic legal tradition, women were generally excluded from bearing witness in cases involving corporal punishments and *qiṣāṣ* (see 2:178c), but even in such cases it seems to be a question of preference, since in the absence of a male witness, women's testimony would be accepted (Q). Such preferences likely reflect a general social aversion to involving women in such matters. Moreover, since cases are adjudicated by a judge, it is impossible, strictly speaking, to quantify the value of testimony, and a judge simply needs all the relevant evidence to come to a decision.

*If one of the two errs, the other can remind her:* "to err" means to forget some aspect of the contract (Q, R, Ṭ). The commentators have generally hewed close to two interpretations of this phrase: that by being reminded the erring woman would become equal, legally, to the man; or that the two women together were equal, legally, to the man. The latter was more widely accepted. It is also true that some commentators, but not all, understood this verse to indicate an essential inferiority in women's ability to judge objectively and hence the intrinsic unreliability of their testimony. Nothing in the verse demands such a reading, however, and indeed the very structure of the transaction described indicates otherwise. This verse could easily describe a situation in which two female parties arrange a forward sale and bring in two men as witnesses. In Islamic Law women, like men, can transact any sale or loan on their own behalf, including any number of transactions where witnesses are not necessary; thus the provision for two women to act as witnesses in place of a single man in forward sales or debts must reflect a different purpose.

There are no rules about individual women entering into such contracts, but since the women of the time, as a general rule, would have been inexperienced with the particulars of potentially complex financial arrangements, accepting two women in the place of one man would have been more practical, since the purpose of such testimony was to ensure the proper observance of the particulars of the loan or sale. Considering the social conditions of the time, for women to participate in this way at all would have been itself a major change, and to require two of them in such transactions can be understood as providing a measure of protection for them against bullying or manipulation, rather than as an indictment of their testimony. Indeed, jurists such as Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, in *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, wondered why a man could not remind one woman if she erred, and he could not arrive at an answer.

If one reads this provision for women's testimony in light of the legally established principle upholding women's competence to own property and carry out economic transactions, it suggests that the stipulation regarding women's testimony in the present verse is particular to this circumstance and is meant to address certain social or communal difficulties a woman might face when witnessing in such a case. Unlike spot sales, which require no witnesses or written contracts, a forward contract involved items requiring a certain level of expertise to understand. Indeed, *from among those whom you approve as witnesses* suggests that it is a matter of competence in a specific area, and such transactions would not have been widely carried out by women of the time. Moreover, such arrangements could extend over years, and women would not necessarily be as available to act as male witnesses, from a strictly social point of view, over a long period of time. The *trade of present goods* refers to a transaction where delivery is made at the time of payment and is thus concluded instantaneously, obviating the need to write a formal contract.

God is Knower of all things. (283) And if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then let there be a pledge in hand. And if one of you trusts the other, let him who is trusted deliver his trust, and let him reverence God his Lord. And conceal not the testimony. Whosoever conceals it, truly his heart is sinful. And God knows whatsoever you do. (284) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. And whether you disclose what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it. He forgives whomsoever He will, and punishes whomsoever He will, and God is Powerful over all things. (285) The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord,

283 *And cannot find a scribe* can also mean that one does not find the means with which to write the contract down (Q, Ṭ). *Let there be a pledge in hand* refers to collateral property that is given by the debtor to the creditor, or the seller to the buyer in a forward sale, as a guarantee in the absence of a written contract with witnesses. But the verse then leaves open the possibility that one will trust the other party without taking a pledge in the form of property. Some believe that this latter provision abrogated the rules set out in v. 282 regarding contracts, but many believe that this provision applies only in the special circumstance of the person being on a journey, and that in ordinary circumstances one should make a written contract (Q, R, Ṭ).

284 Some report that the disclosure or hiding mentioned in this verse refers specifically to the testimony or witnessing legislated in vv. 282–83, namely, that the witness bears a moral responsibility for discharging this important duty truthfully (Ṭ). Following a more universal reading of this verse, it is reported that, upon hearing this verse, many Companions were distressed and grieved, fearing they could never escape from the reality it described, that *God will bring* them *to account* for what is disclosed or hidden. Some worried that it meant that they would be held responsible for fleeting thoughts, and some wept from fear. According to this version of the account, the subsequent two verses, which are the final verses of this *sūrah*, were revealed in part to quell the disquiet in their hearts (Ṭ).

Although some think that *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity* in v. 286 abrogates v. 284, there is no contradiction between the two, and moreover since these are descriptions of God's Acts and not legal rulings, they are not subject to abrogation. Also, the language *bring you to account* need not mean punishment (Ṭ), since according to Islamic belief people will first be called to account for all their deeds on the Day of Judgment before entering Paradise or Hell, except for the elect who go to Paradise directly (see also 2:212c). Regarding this accounting, see, for example, 18:49: *And they will say, "Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves nothing out, neither small nor large, save that it has taken account thereof."*

On the subject of being taken to account for one's inward and outward actions, a *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever intends a good deed but does not do it, God records a completed good deed for him. If he intends it and does it, God records ten good deeds and up to seven hundred times more or even greater than that. If he intends to commit an evil deed but does not do it, God records a good deed for him. If he intends to do it and does it, God records a single evil deed for him." This *ḥadīth* and similar ones distinguish between a psychological state and an executed choice, recognizing the difference between a concrete intention one is unable to carry out because of external circumstances beyond one's control—as when a would-be murderer's gun malfunctions as the trigger is pulled—and a vengeful thought that haunts one's mind, but that one sincerely seeks to overcome.

285–86 These final two verses constitute some of the most often recited and memorized passages in the Quran, encompassing both a

as do the believers. Each believes in God, His angels, His Books, and His messengers. "We make no distinction between any of His messengers." And they say, "We hear and obey. Thy forgiveness, our Lord! And unto Thee is the journey's end." (286) God tasks no soul beyond its capacity. It shall have what it has earned and be subject to what it has perpetrated. "Our Lord, take us not to task if we forget or err! Our Lord, lay not upon us a burden like Thou laid upon those before us. Our Lord, impose not upon us that which we have not the strength to bear! And pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy upon us! Thou art our Master, so help us against the disbelieving people."

statement of faith and true belief in v. 285 and a supplicatory prayer to God in v. 286. They are in fact often recited together. It is reported that the Prophet said of these two verses, "Whosoever recites these two verses during the night, they will suffice him," and also, "I was given the two verses that seal [the *sūrah*] 'The Cow' from a storehouse beneath the Throne *(min kanzⁱⁿ taḥta'l-ᶜarsh)*." In another *ḥadīth* it is said that during his Night Journey and Ascension (*al-isrā'* and *al-miᶜrāj;* see 17:1; 53:1–18) the Prophet was given three things: the five canonical prayers, the final two verses of "The Cow," and forgiveness of sins for any member of his community who does not ascribe partners to God.

The five fundamental articles of Islamic faith—namely, belief in God, angels, books, messengers, and the return to God (*and unto Thee is the journey's end*)—are summarized here; they are also listed in v. 177 and 4:136. *We make no distinction* is spoken by the believers and appears also in v. 136; 3:84; 4:152; the ranking of prophets is discussed in v. 253 and 3:163. Beyond the question of ranking and equality, the statement of the believers that they make no distinction between the prophets is also meant to distinguish them from the Jews, who rejected Jesus and Muhammad, and from the Christians, who rejected Muhammad. *Thy forgiveness* is understood as an entreaty, with an implied verbal imperative, meaning "Grant us Thy forgiveness."

The message that God *tasks no soul beyond its capacity* is also found in 2:233; 6:152; 7:42; 23:62. The verbs *earned* and *perpetrated* are closely related by root and can be synonymous depending on context. *It shall have what it has earned* means that what it earned is added to its merit, while *subject to what it has perpetrated* refers to sins for which it is held responsible (R, Ṭ).

*Take us not to task if we forget or err* can refer to sins of omission, such as forgetting to offer the canonical prayers, or of commission, such as adultery (IK). *Lay not upon us a burden* is understood to refer to the covenant or pact that was also made with different conditions with other religious communities, such as the Jews and Christians (Ṭ), and is usually interpreted to mean that in many ways Islam represented an alleviation and reduction of the ritual and legal obligations placed on peoples past (IK), though it may also refer to other burdens. *Impose not upon us that which we have not the strength to bear* refers to commands and prohibitions that would be too difficult to uphold (R). Some commentators mention in this context the *ḥadīth,* "Truly God has absolved my community of mistakes, forgetfulness, and that which they were compelled to do."

Various *aḥādīth* describe how, after each of the phrases of supplication uttered by the Prophet or the believers in this verse (*take us not to task, lay not upon us, impose not upon us, pardon us, forgive us, have mercy upon us*) God says, "I have done so" or "Yes," or the Prophet is told by Gabriel, "He has done so" (IK, Ṭ). It is said that, upon completing this *sūrah,* the prominent Companion Muᶜādh ibn Jabal would say *āmīn,* or "amen," which is also usually said at the end of the recitation of the *Fātiḥah,* the opening *sūrah* of the Quran (IK).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 3

# The House of ᶜImrān

## *Āl ᶜImrān*

From the Madinan period, Āl ᶜImrān, or "The House of ᶜImrān," refers to the family line, or "house," of ᶜImrān mentioned in v. 33. Early in the *sūrah* there is a discussion of the interpretation of the Quran (v. 7), raising questions of its levels of meaning and the spiritual qualities necessary to understand the depths of the text.

Among the events of sacred history described in this *sūrah* are the birth and early life of Mary, the mother of Jesus (vv. 35–43), the birth of Jesus (vv. 45–47), his miracles (v. 49), and his relationship with his apostles (vv. 52–57). Like *al-Baqarah,* this *sūrah* addresses the status of the People of the Book, both Jews and Christians, criticizing them strongly, but also distinguishing between the good and the bad among them and affirming their belief in God and the uprightness of some among them (vv. 61–115, 199).

A considerable portion of this *sūrah* is devoted to the events of the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), the second major battle that followed the first battle, the Battle of Badr. In this second battle the community of believers fought the Makkans at the foot of Mt. Uḥud, outside Madinah. This part of the *sūrah* also deals, among other matters, with the moral issues of cowardice, hypocrisy, and worldly attachment and theological questions such as the state of souls once they leave this worldly existence (vv. 121–79).

It is said that the first part of this chapter (between thirty to eighty verses according to various opinions) was revealed on the occasion of the visit to Madinah of a delegation of Christians from Najrān, one of whom was said to be honored by the Byzantines for his knowledge of religion (R). According to the traditional accounts, it was reported that in the course of the debate with the Prophet they said that Jesus was God, because he revived the dead, healed lepers, and spoke of unseen realities; that he was the son of God, because he had no human father; and that he was the third of three, because in scripture God says, "We did/made," and so on, whereas if He were not three, He would have

said, "I did/made." The account also reports that the Prophet asked the following set of questions, which were followed by the Christians' responses:

"Do you not know that there is no child who does not resemble his father?"

"Yes."

"Do you not know that our Lord is Living and does not die, and that Jesus is subject to passing away (*yaʾtī ʿalayhi'l-fanāʾ*)?"

"Yes."

"Do you not know that our Lord sustains all things, preserving them, guarding them, providing for them?"

"Yes."

"Was Jesus able to do any of those things?"

"No."

"Do you not know that nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden from God most high?"

"Yes."

"Did Jesus know aught of it save what he was taught?"

"No."

"Do you know not that God formed Jesus in the womb as He willed, and that our Lord does not eat food, nor consume drink, nor defecate?"

"Yes."

"Do you not know that [in the case of] Jesus his mother bore him as women do, then gave birth to him as women do, then fed him as children are fed, after which he ate food, drank, and defecated?"

"Yes."

"So how can it be as you allege?"

According to the account, it was after this that the first part of the chapter was revealed (Al, Ṭ).

*Āl ʿImrān* follows *al-Baqarah,* and in some of the *aḥādīth* describing the various "virtues" of the Quran it is paired with *al-Baqarah* and the two are called the "radiant ones" (*al-zahrāwiyān*): "Recite the Quran, and it will intercede on the Day of Resurrection for those who are devoted to it. And recite the two radiant ones, *al-Baqarah* and *Āl ʿImrān,* which will come on the Day of Resurrection as if they were two clouds, or like two rays of the sun, or like two flocks of birds that will argue on behalf of their devotees."

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① *Alif. Lām. Mīm.* ② God, there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting. ③ He sent down the Book upon thee in truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel ④ aforetime, as a guidance to mankind. And He sent down the Criterion. Truly those who disbelieve in the signs of God shall have a severe punishment. And God is Mighty,

1 *Alif, lām,* and *mīm* are the same letters that start the previous *sūrah*. See 2:1c. They could represent "God knows best" (*Allāhu aᶜlam*); or *Allāh, Jibrīl,* and *Muḥammad;* or the *alif* of oneness (i.e., as the first letter), the *lām* of kindness (*lutf*), and the *mīm* of sovereignty (*mulk;* Su).

2 For a fuller discussion of the two Names of God *the Living, the Self-Subsisting,* see 2:255c.

3–4 The first part of v. 4 should be read as continuous with v. 3. Although some understand a distinction between the two instances of *sent down* in v. 3, arguing that the former (*nazzala*) reflects that the Quran (*the Book*) was revealed in parts and the latter (*anzala*) indicates the Torah and Gospel were revealed all at once (R, Z), others hold that these two verbs are used interchangeably in the Quran (Ṭb).

For *the Criterion* (*al-Furqān*), see also 2:53, 185; 8:29; 21:48; 25:1. Here it is usually considered to refer to the Quran itself, though *furqān* has a wider meaning, as evidenced by its connection with Moses and Aaron (see 2:53; 21:48). Understanding *furqān* to mean "discernment," or that by which things are distinguished, some have also seen it as God's indication of what is true and false regarding Jesus, since otherwise the Quran would be denoted by both *the Book* and *the Criterion* instead of only one of them (Ṭ). Others say that it refers to the Psalms (see 17:55), or that this power of distinguishing truth from falsehood—*furqān*—is a second description of the three scriptures following their initial mention *as a guidance to mankind,* which is to say they all contain what separates truth from falsehood, forbidden from licit, and so forth (R).

For Muslims, *Tawrāt* (Torah) usually refers to the five books of Moses (much less commonly, it is thought to denote the entire Tanakh), and *Injīl* (Gospel) refers to the revelation given to Jesus. But questions remain as to whether the *Injīl* is the same as the *evangelion* (Greek, "Gospel"), and whether the *Tawrāt* is the same as the Pentateuch as we now have it. There was most likely no Arabic translation of the Bible at the time of the Quranic revelation; such a translation only appeared at least a century later. It is unlikely that in the early seventh century the texts in circulation would have been significantly different from the texts approved by Jewish and Christian authorities at the end of the fourth century, when both canons and the central doctrines of Christianity, including the Trinity, were formally established.

These verses state that these books were revealed in the past, but the Quran confirms *what was before it* (*ma bayna yadayh*), which is understood to mean "previous to" by the commentators, but which can also mean "in the presence of," as does the English word "before." Sensitive to this question, al-Rāzī asks himself, "How can this phrase refer to what is past?" and answers, "That lore, owing to how familiar it is, is referred to in that way," namely, as though it is present to the revelation of the Quran and commonly known if only in a general way. Jesus is spoken of in a similar fashion in 5:46, where Jesus and the message given to him confirm the Torah, and 5:47 follows with language very similar to that in 3:6.

The Quran confirms (e.g., 2:41; 2:101; 6:92) what was *before it,* but does not describe the content of that existing teaching. If both the texts and interpretation of the People of the Book are true and correct, it would be through their moral shortcomings that they fail in their religion. This seems unlikely, since the Quran criticizes some of

Possessor of Vengeance. (5) Truly naught is hidden from God on earth or in Heaven. (6) He it is Who forms you in the wombs however He will. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise. (7) He it is Who has sent down the Book upon thee; therein are signs determined; they are the Mother of the Book, and others symbolic. As for those whose hearts are given to swerving, they follow that of it which is symbolic, seeking temptation and seeking its interpretation. And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord." And none remember,

their doctrines (4:171), not only their behavior. If the texts are true, but the interpretation is incorrect, this would support the position of those who accuse the People of the Book of distorting (*taḥrīf*) the meaning, but not the text of scripture (see 2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41). For example, in later times some Muslims argued that the Trinity, as described in the Nicene Creed, is nowhere to be found in the Biblical text, but results from a faulty interpretation.

Another possibility is that the *Injīl* given to Jesus is conveyed by the existing Gospel, but is not coterminous with it, yet is still recognized and sanctioned by God. In this connection, it should be noted that, although monks are praised in the Quran (5:82), it is asserted that monasticism was not prescribed for them, but was a practice they initiated themselves (57:28). This would make the existing Gospel a different kind of Divine book than the Quran, constituting a work of Divinely inspired or approved authors rather than a message delivered directly through Gabriel. This would agree with the view of Christians themselves that the text is guided and sanctioned by God, but not directly revealed. In this way, the truths and commands of the *Injīl* given to Jesus are communicated to Christians through *that which they had with them* (2:89) and *what* is *before* the Quran. One could thus hold that the Quran, when referring to the *Injīl* that the Christians have with them, includes both the text and the normative tradition around that text insofar as they convey Christ's original message to his apostles, which was given to him by God.

A similar approach could be taken regarding the *Tawrāt* (the Torah), which would allow Muslims to acknowledge the scriptures of the People of the Book, since God acknowledges them in the Quran, without affirming some of the interpretations and practices that may diverge from the original revelation. Such distinctions between text and interpretation are necessary, since God holds Himself and the People of the Book to their covenant (2:40; 9:111); mentions a partial (hence not total) forgetting of the original message (5:14); describes Islam as a fulfillment of prophecies in the Bible (7:157); enjoins Jews and Christians to govern themselves according to their scriptures (5:43–47, 68); and advises the Prophet to *ask the people of the Reminder,* interpreted by most as the People of the Book (16:43; 21:7). For those reasons and because there is little to support a belief that the Bible has changed significantly since the seventh century, it becomes necessary to see the Quranic statements about the Jewish and Christian scriptures in light of the existing Jewish and Christian traditions and not as an alleged variation existent at the time. A *ḥadīth* states, "Do you not see these Jews and Christians? They read the Torah and the Gospel and do not act in accord with them." See the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions" and the commentary on 3:113–15; 48:28. The description of God as *Mighty, Possessor of Vengeance* is also found in 5:95; 14:47; 39:37.

5 Cf. 14:38; 27:75.

6 Many see this verse as an implicit argument against divinizing Christ, as Jesus himself was once within the womb (IK, R). The development in the womb is described more fully in 22:5.

7 This verse is perhaps the most direct discussion in the Quran of the science of Quranic inter-

pretation. Each part of the Quran conventionally called a "verse" in English means originally "a sign" (*āyah*), as Arabic has a separate word for "verse" as it applies to poetry. A sign (*āyah*) can be either within us or outside of ourselves (see 41:53). Here Quranic *signs* (or passages) are described as being either *determined, muḥkam,* or *symbolic, mutashābih.* The verb *ḥakama* means lexically to "curb," "repel," "command," or "judge" and hence is rendered by "determine." A solidly made structure or knot is also called *muḥkam.* To be *mutashābih* is for things to be alike or resemble one another, as in 2:25, 70, 118; 6:99; 6:144; 13:16. *Mutashābih* can also mean "unknown" or "undetermined" in the sense that one cannot tell whether a thing is there or not; that is to say, a thing's being can "resemble" that thing's *not* being so (R). One can understand the Quran as wholly *muḥkam,* based on 11:1, *a Book whose signs have been determined* (*muḥkam,* in the verb form *uḥkimat*), as well as wholly *mutashābih,* based on 39:23: *God has sent down the most beautiful discourse, a Book consimilar* (*mutashābih*); the present verse says that it is partly *muḥkam,* partly *mutashābih* (R, Ṭ). It can be wholly *muḥkam* in that it is all truly the Book of God, and wholly *mutashābih* in that its parts are alike in beauty, in affirming each other (IK, Th), and in having an inner and symbolic meaning.

Among the many opinions (R, Ṭ, Th), examples of what can be considered *muḥkam* are (1) the abrogating as opposed to the abrogated (see 2:106; and the essay "The Quran as Source of Islamic Law"); (2) perennial moral commandments such as 6:151–53 and 17:23–39—including prayer to the One God, justice, truthfulness, generosity, and humility, and the condemnation of murder, theft, and adultery—which all religious communities follow, as opposed to the variable specifics of those commandments, such as number of prayers and amount of alms; (3) that which deals with the licit and the forbidden (*ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*), as opposed to that which addresses other matters; (4) that which can have only one interpretation, as opposed to that which can allow several interpretations; (5) the stories of the prophets in the Quran, as opposed to the elements within those stories that change upon repetition, as in 7:107 and 20:20, where two synonyms for "serpent" are used to describe Moses' transformed staff; (6) that whose interpretation is known and understood by the scholars as opposed to that which cannot be known, such as the moment when the world will end; (7) that which is clear, whose truth or falsehood can be known by common people, so that one does not need to search for its meaning in the *mutashābih;* (8) the openings of the chapters of the Quran (which is the meaning of their being the *Mother of the Book;* see below), as opposed to the remainder of the text. Some say the *mutashābih* are the single letters at the start of some *sūrah*s (see 2:1c).

At least some of these possibilities can be further clarified by thinking of the *muḥkam* as unambiguous or univocal, and the *mutashābih* as multivalent or equivocal—not in the sense of being unclear or questionable, but of being open to levels of meaning. For example, *the Hand of God* would be symbolic or equivocal for most theologians in *The Hand of God is over their hands* (48:10), since the Hand of God could not be purely identical to a human hand or any other material hand. Thus "hand" is not strictly *determined* by the literal understanding of the word. Muslims have differed about what passages are symbolic or equivocal and who is qualified to identify and interpret them. Indeed, the commentators themselves often point out (R, Th) that a common pitfall among theologians and interpreters is to consider a passage to be determined or unequivocal when its plain sense agrees with one's theological position, but symbolic or equivocal when it disagrees.

*Mother of the Book* also appears in 13:39: *God effaces what He will and establishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book;* and 43:4: *And truly it is with Us in the Mother of the Book.* Many identify the *Mother of the Book* with the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22). Makkah is called Mother of Cities (6:92; 42:7). An *umm* ("mother") can also be the leader of a group of travelers, the flag of an army, or the archetype or origin of something, and idiomatically both the singular and plural (*ummahāt*) can mean the main, principal, or original instances of something (e.g., the principal virtues). That the *muḥkam* are the *Mother of the Book* can also mean they comprise or entail the Book or are its focus and point of convergence (Ṭ).

Both *hearts* (9:117; 61:5) and eyes (33:10) can swerve, usually understood to mean from the truth. Thus many gloss *zaygh* (*swerving*) as "doubt" or say that those who have swerving in their hearts

are the hypocrites (Ṭ). Beyond this general meaning, some give an occasion for the revelation of the phrase mentioning *swerving.* The Christians said to the Prophet, "Do you not say that he [Jesus] is the Word of God and a Spirit from Him?" (4:171). The Prophet answered, "Indeed." They said, "That suffices us!" presumably thinking that they had just won the argument. At that moment, this part of the verse was revealed, the connection being that "Spirit" and "Word" are *mutashābih* rather than *muḥkam.* Another opinion is that some Jews sought knowledge of how long the Muslim community would last on earth based upon decoding the abbreviated letters (Ṭ, Th).

*Fitnah,* here translated *temptation,* can also mean *strife* (2:217; 8:39). The interpreters believe it refers to *shirk,* or to doubts that would be created in human hearts (Ṭ). One can read the rebuke as being directed against the deviancy in hearts that seek to interpret the Quran for false reasons.

*Interpretation* renders *taʾwīl,* generally meaning "explanation," and is used also in connection with dreams (*Sūrah* 12 passim; 18:78). Etymologically it has the sense of "bringing back to the origin"; hence the same word is translated in 17:35 as *in the end* in the sense of the ultimate return. The Quranic usage (with regard to the understanding of dreams and the mysterious actions of Moses' companion) indicates that *taʾwīl* is the act of taking something whose meaning is either unclear, ambiguous, symbolic, allegorical, or metaphorical and returning it to its true meaning. In classical Islamic learning it became conventional to refer to the transmission of texts and quotations from sources considered to be normative and authoritative as *tafsīr,* while *taʾwīl* refers to what a commentator might then proceed to say about a passage, especially in attempting to draw out spiritual, esoteric, or moral dimensions of the passage. However, the two words are near synonyms for many commentators on the Quran (e.g., al-Ṭabarī's mainly historical and textual commentary is subtitled *taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*), and the sense of *taʾwīl* as representing a separate class of interpretation is not part of the Quran's usage but became common later.

*And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord":* An alternate pause in the Arabic would yield the translation, "And none know its interpretation save God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord.'" This reading reserves all interpretation of the *mutashābih* to God; the *firmly rooted* (*rāsikhūn*) are then characterized merely by their faith in it. However, as the commentator al-Thaʿlabī points out, in practice all schools of thought interpret the entire Quran; despite declarations that only God knows the interpretation of *mutashābih* verses, they pass over no aspect of the Quran in silence, though degrees of uncertainty about their meanings remain. Some say this means, "We believe in the *mutashābih,* but only act by the *muḥkam*" (Ṭ). See also the essay "Quranic Commentaries."

The question of unambiguous versus multivalent passages, coupled with the possibility or impossibility of knowing what is multivalent and symbolic and what is not, have given rise to several positions on interpreting the Quran, especially on questions of moral responsibility, eschatology, and God's Attributes. At one extreme are those who approach the Quran as literalists, seeing only one discrete true meaning identified with the literal and outward sense, even if that meaning is unknown. At the other end are those who dispense with the plain sense and embrace metaphor and allegory, often to avoid attributing created qualities to God such as spatial or temporal extension, which often leads to an impoverished, rationalized meaning. Most interpreters, however, affirm the plain sense, but in such a way as to also plumb the text's deeper levels of meaning. Taken as a whole, the genre of Quranic exegesis includes the dimensions of interpretation known to the medieval Western world as the literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical (which are also reflected in this commentary).

Sufis such as Ibn ʿArabī and Rūmī (d. 672/1273) as well as philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā affirm all these levels of meaning at once. For them literalists err in reading everything as though it were *muḥkam,* while rationalists, such as the Muʿtazilites, read everything as though it were *mutashābih,* that is, open to more than one meaning, but as determined by one's own sense of plausibility rather than a multivalent approach toward the plain sense of the text and its deeper possibilities. They consider other theologians, such as the Ashʿarites, to be inconsistent in their application of the distinction between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih.* Moreover, beyond the proper application of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih,* Sufis assert that only

save those who possess intellect. (8) "Our Lord, make not our hearts swerve after having guided us, and bestow upon us a mercy from Thy Presence. Truly Thou art the Bestower. (9) Our Lord, Thou art the Gatherer of mankind unto a Day about which there is no doubt." Truly God will not fail the tryst. (10) As for those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against God. And it is they who shall be fuel for the Fire. (11) [It is] like the affair of the House of Pharaoh and those who were before them; they denied

certain spiritual qualifications of the reader of the Quran open up the Book's deeper meaning, since a blind or hardened heart cannot understand the fullness of God's Word. For a lengthier discussion of many of these issues, see the essay "Traditions of Esoteric and Sapiental Quranic Commentary."

Regarding *those who possess intellect,* see 2:179c.

8 Many consider the words in this verse to be spoken by the *firmly rooted in knowledge* (v. 7). A *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet paraphrases this verse begins with a prayer, "O God, Changer of hearts, keep my heart upon Thy religion." When asked if hearts change, he said, "Yes. No man of the Children of Adam was created but that his heart lies between two of the Fingers of God, most High and Glorified. If He wills, He makes it go straight, and if He wills, He makes it swerve." This verse, like many others (e.g., 2:6–10), raises the question of whether and how God causes or denies faith to a human heart.

*A mercy* could also be simply "mercy." The preposition *ladun,* meaning "at" or "in the presence/possession of," is here rendered *Presence.* See 18:10 for similar wording, and especially 18:65, which mentions *knowledge from Our Presence.* This Quranic theme gives rise to the term *al-ᶜilm al-ladunī* in later Islamic spirituality, meaning "God-given knowledge."

9 The *tryst* (*mīᶜād*) is an appointed meeting or something promised and is used often in reference to God's promises and threats regarding the Hereafter (13:31; 34:30; 39:20). It is similar in meaning to *mawᶜid,* also rendered *tryst* (20:58; 11:17). These words are also related etymologically to the theologically important concepts of *waᶜd* and *waᶜīd,* "promise" and "threat," respectively, which also refer to the thing promised or threatened (e.g., 4:122; 9:111; 10:48; 36:52). See also the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy."

10 Cf. 3:116; 26:88; 60:3. The Quran frequently refers to the fact that in the logic of this world riches buy preferential treatment and children provide status, protection, and a means of surviving beyond death; these are mentioned alongside other desirable objects of this world in v. 14. Yet on the Day of Judgment they carry no influence with God, who bestowed them in the first place (16:72; 17:6), and can even be a source of trial for human beings (8:28; 64:14–15); on the same theme, they can be a means by which disbelievers come to punishment, and believers should not be impressed by them (9:55, 85; 68:10–14). What is desirable in this world is not always a sign of God's Favor or a guarantee against the punishment of the Hereafter (9:69; 18:39–40; 23:55; 34:35); righteousness and piety, not wealth and children, endure and bring reward (18:46; 34:37); and wealth and children can be a distraction and diversion from the remembrance of God (57:20; 63:9; 71:21).

Human beings as *fuel for the Fire* of Hell is also mentioned in 2:24; 21:98; 66:6. In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet described a future time when those who recite and teach the Quran, considering no one to be superior to them because of their position, would be an example of "fuel for the Fire."

11 *Daᵓb,* here translated *affair* in the sense of "matter" or "case," can also be taken to mean "wont" or "way." As an illustration of the warning presented in the previous verse, it is mentioned that the worldly wealth of the Egyptians and others did not help them when God destroyed them (7:133–36). They were *seized* (*akhadha,* lit. "taken"), which in Quranic usage often means "punished" (e.g., 4:153; 7:73).

Our signs. So God seized them for their sins, and God is severe in retribution. (12) Say to the disbelievers, "You shall be vanquished and gathered unto Hell, an evil resting place!" (13) There was a sign for you in the two hosts that met, one host fighting in the way of God and the other disbelieving, whom they [the former] saw as twice themselves as the eye sees. And God strengthens by His help whomsoever He will. Truly in that is a lesson for those who possess insight. (14) Made to seem fair unto mankind is the love of passions, among them women, children, hoarded heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle, and tillage. Those are the enjoyment of the life of this world. And God, with Him is

12 Some believe this verse is directed at the idolatrous Makkans (Th). Others report that the Prophet admonished some of the Jews of Madinah, upon his victorious return from the Battle of Badr (see 3:13c), that their fate could be like that of the Quraysh (IK, Ṭ). They haughtily dismissed the warning, after which this verse was revealed. For *Hell,* see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." *Resting place* translates *mihād,* which can mean a bed or even cradle, lexically a place smoothed out and prepared for rest. It is, however, usually used in connection with Hell, although in 78:6 and 43:10 the related term *mahd* is used in reference to the earth. This verse echoes similar verses that warn of both defeat in this world and punishment in the next (e.g., 5:33; 5:41; 22:11; 33:57). Some read this as third person ("that they shall be vanquished"), which does not change the meaning (IK, Ṭ, R). Examples of such shifts in grammatical person are found in the Quran; see the essay "Quranic Arabic: Its Characteristics and Impact on Arabic Language and Literature and the Languages and Literatures of Other Islamic Peoples."

13 This verse is taken by most as a reference to the Battle of Badr, in 2/624, which was the Muslim community's first major military encounter with and victory over the Makkans. *They* in *whom they saw* can refer to either the believing army or the enemy, but most scholars seem to prefer the former (IK, R, Ṭ). Cf. 8:44, where each side is said to have seen the other side as fewer in number during the battle (see also 8:44c). The commentators sometimes attempt to reconcile this verse and 8:44, because Islamic tradition consistently numbers the Quraysh army at one thousand (or nearly that number) and the Muslims at just over three hundred. Doubling the latter would give less than a thousand. But an army on the battlefield whose size is triple one's own might well appear as only double. Moreover the wording in this verse is different from that in 8:44, *And [remember] when He showed them to you, when you met them, as being few in your eyes, and made you appear to be few in their eyes,* as there is no similar suggestion in the present verse that God caused them to see an army of a different size from the one that was actually there. One explanation is that the *twice* could mean twice again, implying three times as much in total (Ṭ), which would then approximate the traditionally accepted ratio of three to one. Others connect it to 8:66: *And if there be one hundred steadfast among you, they shall overcome two hundred.* But the actual numbers are not crucial to the message of the verse, as evidenced by the different ratio mentioned in 8:65: *And if there be one hundred of you, they shall overcome one thousand of those who disbelieve.*

14 *Made to seem fair* (*zuyyina*) describes a common theme connecting fallen human beings to their ephemeral desires (cf. 2:212; 9:37) and can mean, in other contexts, "to adorn" (15:16). Although the objects of desire in this verse are spoken of positively elsewhere in the Quran as things for which one should be grateful in this world, here their seductive side is brought out, echoing 18:46: *Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world;* and many other verses (see 3:10c). *Heaps* translates *qanāṭir* (sing. *qinṭār*).

the beautiful return. (15) Say, "Shall I inform you of what is better than that? For those who are reverent, there shall be with their Lord Gardens with rivers running below—they shall abide therein—and spouses made pure, and Contentment from God." And God sees His servants, (16) who say, "Our Lord, truly we believe, so forgive us our sins, and shield us from the punishment of the Fire," (17) the patient, the truthful, the devoutly obedient, those who spend, those who seek forgiveness ere dawn. (18) God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice.

Some try to give an exact measure for *qinṭār,* but in this context it should simply be taken as denoting a vast amount, hence *hoarded heaps* to match the consonance of the Arabic *qanāṭīr muqanṭarah. Horses of mark* refers to either branded or beautiful horses. For *cattle,* see 6:138. For *beautiful return* (*maʾāb*), referring to the Garden, see also 13:29; *Sūrah* 38 passim.

15 *That* refers to the aforementioned passions, which are a pale shadow of the joys of the Hereafter. Regarding *reverence,* see 2:2c. Regarding the Garden's *rivers* and *spouses made pure,* see 2:25c; 4:57c. God's *Contentment* (*riḍwān*) is at the pinnacle of the paradisal state, since *Contentment from God is greater* even than the Gardens of Paradise (9:72). God's Contentment (*riḍwān*) is also sought in this world (5:16; 48:29; 57:27; 59:8), and God and human beings can be reciprocally content or pleased with each other, as in 89:28: *Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting;* and also in 5:119; 58:22; 98:8. Contentment and Good Pleasure are opposed to God's Wrath (3:162; 47:28). The Prophet described an exchange between God and the denizens of the Garden: "Are you content?" "Why should we not be content, as Thou hast given us what no one else among Thy creation has been given?" "Shall I give you what is better than that?" "O Lord, what could be better than that?" "I shall loose My Contentment (*riḍwān*) upon you, and be not angry with you ever again."

16 *Those who* refers to the reverent servants from the previous verse. The verb *shield us* (cf. 2:201; 3:191; 40:7) is etymologically related to *reverence* (*taqwā;* see 2:2); for example, one can be *shielded from the avarice of his soul* (59:9; 64:16), which relates to the sense of *taqwā* as being mindful and on guard when it comes to sin and obedience to God.

17 For *devoutly obedient* (*qānit*), which carries the sense of conformity, but also of constancy, standing, and silence, see 4:34c. *Those who spend* (see 2:3c) do so in the way of God; this carries the sense of giving for the good, and not only of monetary expenditure. *Ere dawn* translates *asḥār* (see also 51:18), which refers to the last part of the night before the morning twilight. The Prophet would rise for prayers before dawn and strongly encouraged others to do so. On the supererogatory night prayer, also see 17:79; 25:64; 73:20. In Islamic spirituality, the night vigil (*tahajjud, qiyām al-layl*) is profoundly significant. It is when one is alone for none to see, and the world is quiet, and there is an ease of concentration and inwardness. It is the inverse of one's usual state during the day, when the egotistical passions are awake, but the spiritual heart is often asleep.

18 *Upholding justice* is thought by most to refer to *God* or *He,* but grammatically it could refer to the *angels* and *possessors of knowledge* as well. This latter opinion is made more plausible by the very similar wording of 5:8: *O you who believe! Be steadfast for God, bearing witness to justice;* as well as that of 4:135. It can also be read in connection with the start of the next verse, meaning that "God, the angels, and the believers bear witness that truly the religion ..." God is the supreme witness in that He was when there was nothing else with Him (as is said in a well-known *ḥadīth,* "God was and there was nothing other than Him"), and He thus has most right to be called a witness (R). God is spoken of as Witness throughout the Quran; see, for example, 5:117: *And Thou art Witness over all things.* God bears witness along with

There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise. (19) Truly the religion in the sight of God is submission. Those who were given the Book differed not until after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. And whosoever disbelieves in God's signs, truly God is swift in reckoning. (20) So if they dispute with thee, say, "I submit my face to God, and so too those who follow me." And say to those who were given the Book and to the unlettered ones, "Do you submit?" Then if they submit, they will be rightly guided, but if they turn away,

the angels in 4:166: *God Himself bears witness to that which He has sent down unto thee . . . and the angels bear witness.* See also 7:172, where the primordial covenant between human beings and God is framed as humans bearing witness or attesting to the Lordship of God.

19 *Submission* (*islām*) is both the proper name of the religion revealed through the Prophet Muhammad and a state that describes the adherents of any true religion who conform themselves to God's Will. The Quran describes previous prophets as "those who submit"—Abraham and Jacob (2:132); Abraham and Ishmael (2:128); the apostles of Christ (3:52; 5:111)—and hence as followers of *islām*. Many Muslims say that this verse shows that the only religion acceptable to God is the one revealed to the Prophet of Islam, but the most universal meaning of it, which has been emphasized by many Islamic authorities over the ages, is that *islām* in this verse refers to submission to God even if it is not in the context of Islam as the specific religion revealed through the Quran. Cognizant of the broader Quranic sense of submission, the commentators do not restrict *islām* to simply denoting the proper name of the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad; yet a number of them assert that, after the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, no religion other than his will be accepted by God. They apply a similar conclusion to 3:85: *Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission* (*islām*), *it shall not be accepted of him.* For a fuller discussion of this view of Islam's unique validity, see 2:62c; 3:3–4c; 3:85c; 3:113–15c as well as the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

The second part of this verse is similar to 98:4: *Those who were given the Book did not become divided until after the clear proof had come unto them.* Some mention that the Jews, after having been entrusted with the Torah by Moses, began to dispute about it after several generations, and that the Christians came to differ regarding the Gospel later (Aj, Th). Some say that the worst of the Jews' differences emerged after they became the learned community among humanity (Ṭ). Still others say it refers to people's reception of the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran; some accepted it, some said it was meant only for the Arabs, and others rejected it outright (Aj).

*Envy* is usually understood to imply seeking wealth, power, and status. *Reckoning* (*ḥisāb*) may refer to God's "counting up" of human deeds (Ṭ), related to their final judgment by God (see also 24:39; 40:17), but can also refer to God's reckoning in this world, as in 13:41. It can have a positive (2:202) or negative connotation (3:199).

One might say that the application of *knowledge* is a double-edged sword and that with guidance comes the possibility of misguidance: *He misleads many by it, and He guides many by it, and He misleads none but the iniquitous* (2:26). One can be taught spiritual, psychological, eschatological realities and benefit from those truths, but human intelligence cannot always escape the distortion of the will. Just as each vice is, in a sense, a warped virtue, so too can truth be misrepresented or misinterpreted so as to be misused; when truth is used as a means to achieve false ends, rather than an end in itself, strife and schism ensue.

20 To *submit* one's *face* (see also 2:121; 31:22) signifies a reorientation of one's being. In a sense, the face represents what is most intimate, most direct in reflecting the states of the soul, highest in outward appearance, and the most beautiful part of the human body. In the Quran, one seeks the *Face of God* (e.g., 2:272; 13:22). Cf. Psalm 27:8,

then thine is only to convey. And God sees His servants. (21) Truly those who disbelieve in God's signs and kill the prophets without right, and kill those who enjoin justice among mankind: give them glad tidings of a painful punishment. (22) They are those whose deeds have come to naught in this world and in the Hereafter, and they shall have no helpers. (23) Hast thou not considered those who were given a portion of the Book, [being] called to the Book of

"Your face, Lord, do I seek." And *All things perish, save His Face* (28:88; cf. 55:26–27). See also 6:79: *Truly, as a* ḥanīf, *I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth;* and 10:105: *And Set thy face toward the religion as a* ḥanīf, *and be thou not among the idolaters.*

*Unlettered* is thought to refer to the idolatrous Arabs, who had no scripture (Ṭ), or to anyone without a Divine book (R). See also 62:2, *He it is Who sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves,* in which *Messenger* means Muhammad. *Unlettered (al-ummī)* is thus also an epithet of the Prophet (7:157–58). This term also appears in connection with the People of the Book in 2:78. The idea that it is the Prophet's duty *only to convey* the message is also found in 88:21–22: *Thou art but a reminder; thou art not a warder over them;* 2:272; 13:40; 29:18. *Sees* translates *baṣīr,* which connotes not only sight or ordinary vision, but also knowledge and penetrating insight.

21 This verse is understood in reference to disbelievers among the People of the Book, more particularly the Children of Israel (Ṭ). On the killing of prophets, a crime mentioned in connection with the Children of Israel more than once in the Quran, see 2:61. Some think this verse refers to the tyrannical rulers of Israel (Th). Al-Ṭabarī mentions a *ḥadīth* that states, "The worst punishment on the Day of Resurrection is for those who were killed by a prophet or killed a prophet." Here, it is not just the killing of the prophets that is addressed, but also the killing of *those who enjoin justice,* who are not prophets themselves, but who stand up for truth. An example would be the man who came running in support of the message bearers in 36:20–28. In this connection, al-Rāzī mentions the *ḥadīth,* "The best struggle is to speak a true word in the presence of a tyrannical ruler." Several commentators mention the *ḥadīth,* "O Abū ᶜUbaydah! The Children of Israel killed forty-three prophets in one hour at the start of the day. One hundred and seventy men of the Children of Israel then stood to command what is right against those who killed them and to forbid them from committing evil. They killed them all at the end of the same day. They are the ones God mentioned, Glorified and Majestic is He."

To *give tidings,* when stated without an explicit object, has the sense of glad tidings and is often used this way in the Quran. It is related to "glad tidings" (*bushrā*) and "bringer of glad tidings" (*bashīr*), a title also given to the Prophet Muhammad, sometimes in combination with his function as a "warner" (*nadhīr*).

22 *Come to naught* renders *ḥabaṭa,* which has the sense of failure and futility. On earth, disbelievers' works ultimately fail, are reviled by posterity, and bear no positive fruit in the life to come, because they were undertaken with the wrong intention (R, Ṭ). They have no helpers, since death robs them of the benefits they enjoyed in life, and in the Hereafter they must stand alone. Having *helpers* is sometimes interpreted as related to the possibility of intercession and ransom, as in 2:48, where such means of trying to stave off the consequences of one's conduct in this world are described as futile.

23 *Those who were given a portion* again refers to the People of the Book; the *Book* here is not the Quran, but the Torah. The commentators mention an account where two prominent Jews committed adultery and brought their case to the Prophet, hoping to avoid the penalty of stoning. The Prophet called for their most learned man in Torah to come and recite the passage on stoning; when the man attempted to cover the passage with his hand, a Companion pointed it out. The Prophet commanded that the punishment be carried out according to the Torah, which surprised and angered the Jews (Q), even though the

God that it may judge between them. Then a group among them turned away. (24) That is because they say, "The Fire will not touch us save for days numbered." That which they used to fabricate has deluded them in their religion. (25) How shall it be when We gather them unto a Day in which there is no doubt, and every soul will be paid in full for what it earned, and they shall not be wronged? (26) Say, "O God, Master of Sovereignty. Thou givest sovereignty to whomsoever Thou wilt, and wrestest sovereignty from whomsoever Thou wilt. Thou exaltest whomsoever Thou wilt, and abasest whomsoever Thou wilt.

Prophet had called their *Book* to *judge between them.* This incident is also sometimes referenced in connection with 5:43: *And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah, wherein is God's Judgment?*

In another account the Prophet invited a group of Jews to Islam, upon which they asked the Prophet, "What is your religion?" to which he answered, "The creed of Abraham." They said, "Abraham was a Jew," to which he responded, "Then let us go to the Torah." The Jews refused, and this verse was then revealed (R). Another version describes how, after the Jews refused Islam, the Prophet invited them to consult the Torah, where they would find him described. They refused. Although the exact context is somewhat uncertain, the common thread in these accounts is the Prophet's recourse to the Torah, which its custodians hesitated about or refused.

Al-Qurṭubī notes that Muslims can read and act according to the Torah, except for whatever is known to be abrogated by the Quran or *ḥadīth,* and that they are obligated to act in accord with the religious laws of previous prophets (an observation he repeats in his treatment of 5:43) unless these laws are abrogated by Islam. However, for al-Qurṭubī this would have been conditional upon the text being authentic, and although the Prophet would have known what was authentic, we cannot do likewise. Although tempered by questions of abrogation (*naskh;* see 2:106) and distortion (*taḥrīf;* see 2:75), this verse and 5:43 can be seen to suggest, together with the Prophet's actions, the continuing religious validity and spiritual efficacy of previous scriptures for the followers of those religions. See also the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

24 *Days numbered* (cf. 2:80), according to some, refers to the Jews' belief that they would be punished for only forty nights, corresponding to the time spent worshipping the calf, after which they would be replaced by another people (Ṭ). Others mention seven days, one day for each thousand years of the earth's existence as they calculated it (IK, R). Whatever duration they claimed, to believe that their days of punishment in the Hereafter would be "numbered" suggests their unwarranted confidence in avoiding eternal punishment.

25 Some commentators understand *unto a day* to signify all that they will undergo on that day (R, Ṭ), while for others it simply means the Day of Judgment itself (Th). *Paid in full* is a common way of expressing the soul's experience on the Day of Judgment and is related to the word for fulfilling one's oaths, as in 2:40: *Fulfill My covenant, and I shall fulfill your covenant.*

26 This verse is often used in Islamic piety as a prayer. *O God* translates *Allāhumma,* since this construction designates an address to God in the second person, but opinions differ over its etymology. Some consider it a shortening of *yā Allāhu ummanā bi-khayr* ("O God, bring us good"), but others suggest somewhat less plausibly that the *mīm* of the suffix takes the place of the traditional vocative particle *yā* (usually rendered "O"); some scholars speculate that it comes from Aramaic or Akkadian. It is not related to the plural form, as is the case with the Hebrew *Elohim.*

*Master of Sovereignty* renders *mālik al-mulk,* two words closely related etymologically to each other and also to "king" (*malik*) and "dominion" (*malakūt*). *Mulk* can also mean "rule" or "possession"; see 67:1c. Some recount that the Prophet asked for the sovereignty over Byzantium and

In Thy Hand is the good. Truly Thou art Powerful over everything. (27) Thou makest the night pass into the day, and Thou makest the day pass into the night. Thou bringest forth the living from the dead, and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living. And Thou providest for whomsoever Thou wilt without reckoning." (28) Let not the believers take the disbelievers as protectors

Persia for his religion, after which this verse was revealed (Aj, R). Some say *mulk* here refers to prophethood (Ṭ) and could thus be meant to counter objections from various quarters to the selection of Muhammad as a prophet, objections that stemmed from that fact that he was not of the Children of Israel, that he was not considered, before being chosen as a prophet, the most prominent or notable of the Arabs, or that he was a human being and not an angel. All commentators understand *the good* to mean all possible good.

27 The theme of the night and day passing into one another appears also in 22:61; 31:29; 35:13; 57:6. On the cycle of life and death, also see 2:28. In the Quran this cycle refers both to creation as such, which is brought out from the "death" that is nonexistence, and to the cycles of life on earth, both human and of other living things, such as the revival of dry earth by rain (2:164). In one *ḥadīth* the Prophet advised a Companion who was in debt, "Shall I inform you of a prayer that, if you used it, and if you had a debt equal to Mt. Uḥud in gold, God would free you of it? Recite *Say, 'O God, Master of Sovereignty . . .'* until '. . . *without reckoning*' [i.e., vv. 26–27] [and then say], 'O Compassionate One of this world and the Hereafter, and Merciful One of them both, Thou givest from these [two worlds] as Thou wilt, and withholdest from these [two worlds] as Thou wilt! Bestow Mercy upon me that will make me beyond need of the mercy of those other than Thee!"

For Ibn ᶜAjībah, those who are sovereign over their ego are exalted by God in both worlds, and those who take their ego as sovereign are abased in both worlds. Ibn ᶜAjībah speaks to the esoteric tradition that interprets the *night* as the night of the soul—that is, the soul in a state of spiritual contraction—and the *day* as the soul's relief and spiritual expansion, which in the spiritual life are said to inevitably follow upon one another.

Some interpret the notion that God provides *without reckoning*—that is, for whomsoever He wills—and the assertion that *God does as He wills* (2:253; 14:27) to imply that God is "free" to be what appears to human beings to be unjust, while others claim that God can reward and exalt only those who are deserving. But the supremacy of God's Will does not detract from or contradict His Goodness and Compassion; at the same time God could never be bound by a human conception of merit, as the span of any life includes both this world and the next and human beings do not possess God's measures. For the commentators, *without reckoning* can mean that none can hold God to account, that His giving is limitless, or that He can give without regard to the merit of human beings (R, Ṭs). It also can allude to God's infinite Mercy beyond any human measure.

28 In this context, *protectors* renders *awliyāʾ* (sing. *walī*), a multifaceted word that can mean "protector," "ruler," "ally," "client," or "friend" depending on the context. The subject matter here is not friendship in the ordinary sense, but allegiance and group alignment in which the political stakes go beyond mere confessional identity. According to one view, this verse was revealed in connection with hypocrites in Madinah who were collaborating with the Makkans against the Prophet; others believe it referred to a friendship between some Helpers and certain Jewish men who wanted to lead them away from their religion; still others mention the case of a prominent Companion at the Battle of the Trench who wanted to marshal several hundred Jews to fight on the side of the Prophet, though generally without explaining why this suggestion was rejected (R, Ṭ, W). In these possible accounts it is primarily the political dimension that is in view. See 4:88–90c, which gives the political context of a verse employing similar language, as well as 4:144; 5:51; 5:57. Also see 3:118: *O you who believe! Take not intimates apart from yourselves; they will not stint you in corruption.*

apart from the believers. Whosoever does that has no bond with God, unless you guard against them out of prudence. And God warns you of Himself, and unto God is the journey's end. (29) Say, "If you hide what is in your breasts or disclose it, God knows it, and He knows whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth." And God is Powerful over all things. (30) On the Day when every soul will find presented the good it did, and the evil it did, it will wish that there might be a distant term between it and itself. And God

*They wish you to suffer.* Similar prohibitions apply to those who reject God, but take another agent as their *walī* (7:30; 11:20; 13:16; 18:102; 29:41; 39:3; 42:6, 9, 46). *Has no bond with God* could be translated literally, "is not of God in aught," the phrase "of [someone]" meaning to be allied or associated with them, to be part of their community—to be "one of them."

*Prudence* translates *tuqāh,* which some read as *taqiyyah;* the latter is more widely known and often translated "dissimulation," though the word itself is etymologically related to "taking care" and "being wary" and is lexically related to *taqwā,* or reverence (see 2:2c). Those who *guard against them out of prudence* are exempted if they fear death or great harm through persecution at the hands of the community in which they live, in which case they can hide their faith through words but not through actions, which is to say they can deny to others that they are Muslim, but they cannot then violate the major rules of Islam by, for example, murdering, stealing, or committing adultery under the cover of this denial (Q, R, Ṭ). Elsewhere the Quran excuses *the one who is coerced, while his heart is at peace in faith* (16:106), revealed in connection with the earliest martyrs in Makkah (Q), whose identity as Muslims put them in mortal danger. Others mention an exception that is made for blood relatives, in which case a disassociation in religion is still necessary even if the familial connection is maintained (Ṭ). The commentators mention an incident in which two Companions were captured by Musaylimah, a man who claimed to be a prophet, and were asked to affirm his prophetic status alongside that of Muhammad. One of them did, but the other did not, but neither lost faith in his heart. The Prophet said, "As for the first victim, he stayed with his certainty and truth, and happy is he. As for the second, he received the leniency of God, and there is no blame on him."

The concept of *taqiyyah* is often associated more strongly with the Shiites, since during the period of the Imams (until about the mid-third/ninth century) *taqiyyah* was considered an important virtue in Shiite piety, though it was later deemphasized when the Shiites constituted a large number and as the political position of Shiism became less insecure; *taqiyyah,* however, continued throughout the history of Shiism and is still considered legitimate when circumstances necessitate it. The Sunni view toward *taqiyyah* is substantially the same at a legal and political level, though the terminology might differ. At a spiritual level, *taqiyyah* has also been used, in both Shiite Islam and the Sufi tradition in Sunni Islam, in the context of hiding or concealing spiritual teachings that are not appropriate for everyone.

God *warns you of Himself* is taken to mean that He warns about His Wrath and Punishment. Some suggest that there is an elision of a word, meaning something like "God warns you of [His own punishment]," while others read it as "God warns you of that very thing," referring back to the act of taking others as allies and protectors (R).

29 Cf. 28:69; also see 31:16: *If it be but the weight of a mustard seed, be it in a rock, in the heavens, or on the earth, God will bring it forth.* The Quran frequently describes how God knows what *lies within breasts* (e.g., 3:119; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 39:7; 40:19; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13; 100:10), and mention of His Omniscience is often combined with that of His Omnipotence.

30 Some understand *On the Day when* as a continuation of the warning in v. 28, so that together they would mean, "God warns you about Himself concerning a day when . . ." Others connect it to *the journey's end* in v. 28, "And unto

warns you of Himself, and God is Kind unto His servants. (31) Say, "If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins. And God is Forgiving, Merciful." (32) Say, "Obey God and obey the Messenger." If they turn away, then truly God loves not the disbelievers. (33) Truly God chose Adam, Noah, the House of Abraham, and the House of ᶜImrān above the worlds,

God is the journey's end . . . on the day when . . ." (R). Still others read it as having an elided verb, meaning something like, "And remember a day when . . ." (Ṭ). This evokes 99:6–8, when human beings will see every *mote's weight* of evil or good they committed, and 18:49, when the book will be handed to them in the Hereafter in which they will *find present . . . whatsoever they did. Term* (*amad*) in this context refers not to a span of time, but to an appointed moment, and so the wish here is for a postponement (JJ, R). Of related meaning is 43:38: *Till, when he comes unto Us, he will say, "Would that there were between me and Thee the distance of the two easts!"* See also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

31 For some, the command in this verse is a response to the position of the Christians of the Najrān delegation, who said they worshipped the Messiah out of love for God and that they loved their Lord (Th). In this connection some also mention the claims of the idolatrous Arabs that they worshipped the idols out of love for God, *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God* (39:3). Al-Thaᶜlabī mentions the *ḥadīth,* "Idolatry (*shirk*) is more hidden than the creeping of an ant upon a stone on a dark night. The least of it is to love something tyrannical or to hate something just. Is religion other than loving in God and hating in God? God said, *Say, 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you.'*" It is noteworthy that this verse says *follow me* and the next says *obey God and obey the Messenger,* since not every act of following is an act of obedience. One cannot, in an ordinary sense, be a follower of God, but one can obey Him as well as His Prophet.

This verse puts to the test the claims of those who say that they love God, since in the presence of one of His prophets this should translate into action. Love demands, or inevitably leads to, a sacrifice of the soul. Even true earthly love cannot be a mere feeling or sensation. *Love* renders the verb *ḥabba* (whose corresponding noun is *ḥubb* or *maḥabbah*), one of several Arabic words denoting love (others include *raḥmah, ḥilm, mawaddah, lutf,* and *ᶜishq,* the last of which does not appear in the Quran), and here denotes the responsive dimension of God's Love, unlike *raḥmah* (usually "compassion" or "mercy"; see 1:3c), which in Islamic theology and spirituality has both an unconditional and a responsive dimension. The Quran mentions God's Love for human beings much more often than their love for God. In Islamic spirituality it is more important to be considered beloved than a lover of God, as reflected in one of the names of the Prophet, *Ḥabīb Allāh,* whose primary meaning is "the Beloved of God," though it can also mean "the Lover of God." The Sufis say that we cannot be the beloved of God without loving Him and we cannot love Him unless He loves us. For more on *love,* see 2:165c.

32 See also 4:80: *Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God;* and 4:59: *Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.* Such passages describe obedience to the Prophet as second only to obedience to God and set in place the normative character of the Prophet's teachings and actions (as do other passages such as 3:132; 5:92; 8:2, 20, 46; 24:54; 33:33; 47:33; 49:14; 64:12). Conformity with the sayings and doings of the Prophet is an essential aspect of Islamic Law and gave rise to the genre of *aḥādīth* that records the *Sunnah,* or Wont of the Prophet (see the essay "The Quran as Source of Islamic Law"). For the Sufis the Prophet is a living presence through whom God acts to provide the spiritual traveler the strength to move along the path toward God. In the eyes of all Muslims, those who claim to love God and His Prophet but fail to follow them fall short in their faith. *Indeed, you have in the Messenger of God a beautiful example* (33:21).

33–34 The language of "being chosen by God" (*muṣṭafā*) is used in connection with several figures

(34) as progeny, one from another. And God is Hearing, Knowing. (35) [Remember] when the wife of ʿImrān said, "My Lord, truly I dedicate to Thee what is in my belly, in consecration. So accept it from me. Truly Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing." (36) And when she bore her, she said, "My Lord, I have borne a female," and God knows best what she bore, and the male is not like the female,

in the Quran (see 3:42; 6:84–87; 7:144; 38:47). In fact, one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad is *al-Muṣṭafā,* "the Chosen One." *House* is used here in the sense of familial line. As in other places, such as 21:71, *above the worlds* could also be read as "above all peoples" and is used in connection with other figures as well (e.g., 2:47; 6:86; 7:140).

ʿImrān is the name of Mary's father (also in v. 35; 66:12), who is not named in the Bible, but is known in extra-Biblical literature as Joachim, which means "He whom Yahweh set up." The commentators who equate the name ʿImrān with the Hebrew Amram (the name of Moses' father), and thus believe that both the father of Moses and the father of Mary were separately named ʿImrān, do not seem to be aware of the name Joachim. The Quran and *Ḥadīth* do not name Moses' father; so it is unclear how the equation between ʿImrān and Amram came to be, even though commentators as early as Muqātil (d. 150/767) seem to accept it, and they make an explicit distinction between the two (including the centuries between them). It is noteworthy that ʿImrān comes from the root *ʿ-m-r,* among whose meanings is to "erect," "build," or "set up." The name is close to the word *ʿumrān,* which means a building, edifice, or structure, and the *-ān* ending is common in Arabic, as in the name ʿUthmān and many other words, such as *ghaḍbān, subḥān, sakrān, ḥirmān, ḥasrān, furqān.* One could speculate that *ʿImrān Allāh* is equivalent to *Yehoyaqim.*

*As progeny, one from another* is understood in terms of bloodlines, in that the House of ʿImrān is descended from the House of Abraham, which is descended from Noah, who descended from Adam (M). It is also understood as a spiritual filiation, in that these houses and figures are connected through their worship of and obedience to the One God (Ṭ). The verse can also be read as a way of not elevating one family line over another, as the phrase rendered here as *one from another* appears as *the one of you is as the other* in 4:25 (M).

35 *[Remember] when* renders the Arabic particle *idh,* which indicates attachment to something that has preceded. In this instance it is said to be related, as is often the case, to the implied injunction *udhkur,* meaning "remember" or "mention." It is reported that Mary's father, ʿImrān, died before she was born, and her mother, Ḥannah (Anne), promised to dedicate her child to the service of the Temple, to study and learn from the Book and to be free of other responsibilities outside of service and worship (R, Ṭ).

36 Some commentators consider Anne to be the one who remarks upon the gender of the child, *and the male is not like the female,* meaning that it would not have been possible for a girl to have carried out the same responsibilities as a boy in the Temple; commentators mention here differences in physical strength and endurance, but issues of ritual purity related to menstruation may also have been a barrier to service in the Temple (IK, Ṭ). By *progeny* commentators understand an allusion to Jesus. Some mention that this could be interpreted as connoting the superiority of the female, in that, though she was expecting a male, God chose to give her a female child (Q) who would bear and manifest knowledge of God (R). One way of understanding *the male is not like the female* is that it establishes that there are real, meaningful differences between the sexes; at the same time, however, God *accepted her with a beautiful acceptance* (v. 37), suggesting that those differences are irrelevant from the spiritual point of view.

Seeking refuge in God from Satan is frequently mentioned in the Quran: *So when you recite the Quran, seek refuge in God from the outcast Satan* (16:98); *And should a temptation from Satan provoke thee, seek refuge in God* (7:200; 41:36). *The outcast* literally means "the stoned one," evoking the casting of stones; throwing stones against

"and I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in Thee, and for her progeny, from Satan the outcast." (37) So her Lord accepted her with a beautiful acceptance, and made her to grow in a beautiful way, and placed her under the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah entered upon her in the sanctuary he found provision with her. He said, "Mary, whence comes this unto thee?" She said, "It is from God. Truly God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning." (38) Then and there, Zachariah called upon his Lord. He said, "My Lord, grant me from Thy Presence a good progeny. Truly Thou hearest all calls!" (39) Then the angels called to him while he was praying in the sanctuary, "God

columns representing Satan is a part of the rites of the *ḥajj*.

37 Depending on how the verb in *placed her under the care of Zachariah* is read, this could also be translated, "Zachariah took her under his care" (IK, Ṭ). This verse is usually understood in light of v. 44: *And thou wast not with them when they cast their lots [to choose] who among them would care for Mary.* In the Islamic tradition, Zachariah's wife is Mary's maternal "aunt," not necessarily her mother's sister, but her mother's relative (IK; cf. Luke 1:36).

God accepted her prayer *with a beautiful acceptance* by protecting Mary, and then Jesus. A possible Christian counterpart to the Quran's narration about Mary's life at the Temple, but one that does not appear in the Bible, is found in noncanonical literature such as the *Protoevangelium of James*, which describes the presentation, or entrance, of Mary into the Temple, an event recognized by Catholic and Orthodox traditions. According to this account, Mary was presented at the Temple at age three by her parents, who had previously been childless, in fulfillment of their vow. They promised that, if a child were born to them, that child would be dedicated to the service of God. Almost nothing of Mary's youth is to be found in the Bible itself.

The latter part of this verse, *Whenever Zachariah entered . . . without reckoning*, is found inscribed, in many mosques throughout the Islamic world, over the semicircular hollow or niche (*miḥrāb*) in the front inner wall, sometimes topped by an arch, that marks the direction of prayer toward Makkah and before which the imam stands to lead the canonical prayer. In this verse, *miḥrāb* is translated *sanctuary*, as Mary's sanctuary would have been a separate room or area, not a niche hollowed out in a wall. It is mentioned in v. 39 as the place where Zachariah is given news of his son John's impending birth and again in 19:11 as the place from which he emerges to signal his people to glorify God.

The *provision* can be either material or spiritual, or both (IK). Some commentators say that Mary would have had the fruits of summer in winter and of winter in summer, but others have said, rather, that what she was given seemed to multiply beyond the original amount (Ṭ). That *God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning* (cf. 2:212; 3:27; 24:38) means that God's Provision is limitless, uncountable, and that God answers to no one for the way in which He provides for His creation; see 2:212c. That the fruits were out of season would have implied that no human being could have brought them to her. This Divine provision is also a symbol of the fact that both Mary and her mother conceived "out of season," Mary, because no man had touched her, and her mother, because of her advanced age.

38–39 *Then and there* means upon seeing the blessing bestowed upon Mary (Ṭ). The story of Zachariah and John is given in fuller detail in 19:2–15, which describes Zachariah's fear of what his existing heirs might do after his death and his mention of his own and his wife's advanced age. *Confirming a word from God* is understood to mean that John will confirm Jesus son of Mary, who is described as *a Word from Him* in v. 45 (R,

gives thee glad tidings of John, confirming a word from God, noble and chaste, a prophet, from among the righteous." (40) He said, "My Lord, how shall I have a boy when age has overtaken me and my wife is barren?" He said, "Thus does God do whatsoever He will." (41) He said, "My Lord, appoint for me a sign." He said, "Your sign is that you shall not speak to the people for three days, save through signs." And remember your Lord much, and glorify [Him] at eventide and at dawn. (42) And [remember] when the angels said, "O Mary, truly God has chosen thee and purified thee, and has chosen thee above the women of the worlds. (43) O Mary! Be devoutly obedient to thy Lord, prostrate, and bow with those who bow." (44) This is from the tidings of the Unseen, which We reveal unto thee. And thou wast not with them when they cast their lots [to choose]

M, Ṭ). To "confirm" means to affirm the truth of something or someone; it is used in many verses to describe the Quran itself as a confirmation of previous revelations (e.g., 2:41; 3:4; 5:48). *Noble* (*sayyid*) is understood to mean learned, devout, wise, generous, reverent of God, clement, and temperate (IK, Ṭ). *Chaste*, according to some, refers to someone who abstains from sexual relations with women or vice versa, though many commentators believe this means abstention only from illicit sexual relations, not total celibacy (IK).

40–41 For a fuller discussion of John's birth and Zachariah's sign from God, which consists in his not being able to speak but communicating through gestures or *signs*, see 19:2–15. *At eventide* is the time from the declining of the sun until its setting, and *at dawn* the time from daybreak until sunrise.

42 The *and [remember] when* at the start of this verse is continued with the *when* at the start of v. 45, both of which set up *She said* in v. 47, so that it would mean, "When the angels said what they said, she said . . ." A *ḥadīth* states, "Mary the daughter of ʿImrān, Khadījah bint Khuwaylid [the Prophet's first wife], Fāṭimah bint Muhammad [the Prophet's daughter], and Āsiyah the wife of Pharaoh suffice you among the women of the worlds." This and similar *aḥādīth* speak of these four women as being the best or most perfect of all women (IK), and most Muslims believe that these women lead the soul of blessed women to Paradise.

In this verse Mary is *chosen, purified,* and then *chosen* a second time. Some understand the first election to refer to the first part of her life, when she was given to devotion and service in the Temple and was granted miraculous sustenance (see v. 37), and the second, to her being given the miracle of Jesus' birth (R). *Purified* is understood to mean her purity of intention and worship (R), but, as in other contexts, to be purified can also mean to be kept pure from the defilement of the evil of others. The verse has language similar to that of Luke 1:42, where it is said to Mary, "Blessed art thou among women."

43 Regarding *devoutly obedient* (*qānit*), which carries the sense of conformity, but also of constancy, being in a standing position, and silence, see 4:34c. Prostration and bowing are mentioned together in 2:125 in a command to Abraham and Ishmael, and *bow with those who bow* also appears in 2:43.

44 *Unseen* (*ghayb*) can mean what is absent from us through being invisible or hidden, but also what is absent by being in the past, in the future, or in another state of being; the Quran also points out that the prophet was not witness to the events at Sinai in 28:44, 46. The most widely accepted account is that the priests of the Temple desired to be the custodians of Mary after she entered the Temple (see v. 37) and cast lots to decide who would have the privilege (IK, M). In many places the Bible mentions that lots were cast on a regular

who among them would care for Mary, and thou wast not with them when they were disputing. (45) When the angels said, "O Mary, truly God gives thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, high honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought nigh. (46) He will speak to people in the cradle and in maturity, and will be among the righteous." (47) She said, "My Lord, how shall I have a child while no human being has touched me?" He said, "Thus does God create whatsoever He will." When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is. (48) And He will

basis for matters of varying levels of importance (choosing persons—who would be king, who would offer incense in the Temple, who would sacrifice an animal—and also for divination), not only for occasional intractable decisions. Some commentators believe, however, that Zachariah was not disputed as the custodian or caretaker of Mary (Ṭ), since he was the husband of her maternal relative. In the latter interpretation, the disputation regarding Mary could have been a question of her ongoing care or of who would serve her in the Temple. But it is more widely accepted that indeed they cast lots and it was God's Will that she be given into the care of Zachariah.

45 *When* renders the particle *idh,* which is thought by some to be a continuation of the *when* at the beginning of v. 42 (Z), although it is read by others to be connected to v. 44, so that it could be read, "Thou wast not with them when . . . and when . . ." *When* may also serve as a kind of connecting particle that does not necessarily give the sense of "when" or any other concrete meaning. Some interpret Jesus' description as *a Word from Him* to mean that Jesus was a means by which God's Word became manifest in the world, in a manner analogous to the way one refers to the sultan as the "shadow of God on earth" to indicate that he is a means by which God's Justice is manifest on earth. Since Jesus was created "directly" by the word "Be!" (see v. 47), one might also say that his association with *the Word* is stronger and more unmediated, in the way one says that a generous person is generosity itself, or pure nobility, and the like (R). On the concept of Jesus as Word, see 4:171c.

*Messiah* renders *al-Masīḥ,* which corresponds closely in meaning to the Hebrew *mashiach* (Z), "anointed one." The commentators do not mention the later eschatological associations of this word in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Even in Judaism the word was first used to designate anointed kings or priests and is used in the Bible as a title for the Persian king Cyrus who freed the Jews from captivity in Babylon, the high priest, David, the patriarchs, and Israel as a whole. *Those brought nigh* refers, in the Hereafter, to the foremost believers, mentioned in 56:11, 88; 83:21, 28; it also refers to the angels (4:172). The idea of being *brought nigh* is also used by Pharaoh in the worldly sense of being part of the ruler's inner circle (see 7:114; 26:42).

46 On Jesus' speaking in the cradle, see commentary on 19:29–31.

47 For Gabriel's announcement of Jesus to Mary, see 19:16–21. *He only says to it, "Be!"* is discussed in 2:117c and is also found in 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68. In v. 59 of this *sūrah,* it is connected explicitly with Adam and Jesus.

48 Regarding the Quranic understanding of the *Torah* (*Tawrāt*) and the *Gospel* (*Injīl*), see 3:3–4c. The Book and Wisdom appear together in many verses of the Quran describing what was given to various prophets (e.g., 2:151; 3:164; 4:54). They are used in connection with Jesus also in 5:110, and with the Children of Israel in 45:16.

That Jesus was taught the Book *and* the Torah and the Gospel raises the question about what "the Book" refers to here. Some solve this by saying that *the Book* (*kitāb*) must mean the ability to write (*kitābah*; IK, R). However, in Arabic the conjunction *wa* ("and," but simply designated by a comma here after *Book*) can in certain cases denote two nouns in apposition, as in 2:98, *Whosoever is*

teach him the Book, Wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel. (49) And [he will be] a messenger to the Children of Israel, "Truly I have brought you a sign from your Lord. I will create for you out of clay the shape of a bird. Then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird by God's Leave. And I will heal the blind and the leper and give life to the dead by God's Leave. And I will inform you about what you eat and what you store up in your houses. Truly in that is a sign for you, if you are believers. (50) And [I come] confirming that which was before me, the Torah, and to make lawful unto you part of that which was forbidden unto you. And I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So reverence God and obey me. (51) Truly God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path." (52) And when Jesus sensed disbelief in them, he said, "Who are my helpers unto God?"

*an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael,* where Gabriel and Michael, who are archangels, are mentioned alongside the other angels; that is, in this verse the Book and the Torah would not necessarily refer to different things.

49 For a discussion of the miracles mentioned in this verse, see 5:110c, where similar points are discussed. Although some opinions record that the *blind* are those who can see during the day, but not at night, or they are the bleary-eyed (*aʿmash*), most commentators understand it to refer to those who are born blind. *The leper:* leprosy was widely known in the ancient world, causing severe disfigurement and nerve damage, and was highly contagious. Until recently it was incurable by medical means.

*And I will inform you . . . your houses:* some relate that as a child Jesus would tell his playmates or his classmates about what their parents were doing or what they kept in their houses (R), while others say that this was in relation to a time when the people were forbidden to store up food in their houses (R, Ṭ). Others say that this refers to the table onto which food descended in 5:112–15, adding to the story the detail that they were supposed to partake of the feast of the table, but were not to store up any of it; they did so and were chastised for it (Ṭ). Jesus' giving *life to the dead* is accepted in both the Quran and the Bible, but the Quran emphasizes the fact that both Jesus' giving life to the clay bird (not found in the New Testament) and his raising of the dead were miracles that happened *by God's Leave.*

50–51 Jesus is also said to confirm the Torah in 5:46 and 61:6. The language of confirmation echoes the manner in which the Quran is said to confirm earlier revelations (2:41, 91, 97; 3:3; 4:47; 5:46; 35:31; 46:30; 61:6). *To make lawful unto you part of that which was forbidden* is understood to pertain to certain dietary restrictions, but not to fundamental moral injunctions such as those against murder and adultery (Q, Ṭ). What was previously forbidden and is now made lawful was either some of the rules in the Torah (see 4:160; 6:146) or restrictions the Israelites imposed upon themselves in succeeding generations (see v. 93; IK, Q). This latter interpretation, that Jesus did not change any aspect of Moses' original revelation, is supported by Jesus' words in 43:63: *I have come unto you with wisdom and to make clear to you some of that wherein you differ.* Some commentators maintain that what Jesus brought was "gentler" than what Moses brought and constituted an "alleviation" (Ṭ). *Reverence God and obey me* is spoken also by the prophets Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb (see 26:108, 126, 144, 163, 179, respectively). The statement that God is *my Lord and your Lord* is also spoken by Jesus in 5:72, 117; 19:36; 43:64; by Hūd in 11:56; and by Moses in 40:27; 44:20.

52 The *disbelief* is understood to mean actual hostility beyond simple rejection, and commentators contextualize this verse in relation to Jesus'

The apostles said, "We are God's helpers. We believe in God; bear witness that we are submitters. (53) Our Lord, we believe in what Thou hast sent down, and we follow the messenger, so inscribe us among the witnesses." (54) And they plotted, and God plotted. And God is the best of plotters, (55) when He said, "O Jesus, I shall take thee and raise thee unto Me, and purify thee of those who disbelieved, and place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved, until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me is your return, and I shall judge between you concerning that wherein you used to differ. (56) And as for those who disbelieve, I shall punish them with a severe punishment in this world and the Hereafter; and they shall have no helpers. (57) And as for those who believe and

being in exile or fleeing from those wishing to kill him (R, Ṭ). *Helpers unto God* is understood to mean, "Helpers [along] with God" (Ṭ), so that the question means more specifically, "Who will add their help to that of God?" (R) or "Who will be my helpers [in my fleeing] unto God?" (R). *Apostles* translates *ḥawāriyyūn,* a word that may be derived from the Ethiopic *ḥawārya. Submitters* renders *muslimūn* (cf. 5:111) and is one of several places in the Quran in which *islām* and *muslim* convey a universal meaning beyond indicating followers of Muhammad specifically (2:128, 132; 5:111; see 3:19c).

53 The idea of *witnesses* reflects an important theme in the Quran regarding testifying and bearing witness, which is carried out by human beings, angels, and God, as in 3:18: *God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice.* In 3:64 the Muslim community is commanded to say, *Bear witness that we are submitters,* if others turn away from them. *Witness* (*shāhid*) can have the dual sense of someone who knows as well as someone who upholds and confirms. See also 2:143c.

54 *They plotted* refers to Jesus' enemies. Other verses mention God's "scheming" against the schemes of disbelieving people (8:30; 13:42; 27:50). Some understand God's "scheming" to refer to His taking and raising Jesus unto Himself (see v. 55, and commentary on 4:157–58).

55 Cf. 4:158. *Take* in *I shall take thee* translates *mutawaffī,* which is usually understood to mean that God takes one unto Himself, that is, in death. In the context of this verse, most assert, however, that it does not refer to being taken in death, but rather to being taken from the world (Ṭ), although others believe this does refer to God causing Jesus to die. Others say it refers to sleep, as in 6:60: *He it is Who takes your souls by night;* and 39:42: *God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not during their sleep* (IK). See 4:157c for a discussion of the crucifixion and end of Jesus' earthly life.

*Purify thee* can mean to free him from his enemies or to absolve him of their doings (R). Some understand *place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved* to refer to the historical relationship of Christians to Jews (IK), though for others it means that the Muslims who believe in him in the proper way, not the Christians, will be "placed above" the disbelievers (Ṭ). For others, it is a question of the superiority of proof and demonstration, meaning that the believers' arguments will always be "placed above" those of the disbelievers (R). Many commentators also mention the belief that Jesus will return before the end of time, fight the Dajjāl ("Antichrist"), and rule according to the Law of Muhammad until the world comes to an end. In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet is reported to have said, "No man has greater claim to Jesus than I do, because there was no prophet between us, and he will be my vicegerent over my community. He will descend, and when you see him you will know him." For God's Judgment or disclosure of the truth in matters of religious disagreement (*that wherein you used to differ*) on the Day of Judgment, see 2:113c.

56–57 Punishment and reward are meted out in both this life and the Hereafter, as in 2:114; 3:22; 16:30 (cf. 16:122; 39:10).

perform righteous deeds, He shall pay them their rewards in full. And God loves not the wrongdoers." (58) This is what We recite unto thee of the signs and the Wise Reminder. (59) Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be!" and he was. (60) The truth is from thy Lord; so be not among the doubters. (61) And to whomsoever disputes with thee over it, after the knowledge that has come unto thee, say, "Come! Let us call upon our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves. Then let us pray earnestly, so as to place the curse of God upon those who lie." (62) This is indeed the true account; there is no god but God, and truly God is the Mighty, the Wise. (63) And if they turn away, then God

58 The *Wise Reminder* (*al-dhikr al-ḥakīm*) is another name for the Quran, though some understand this to refer to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) from which all revelation comes down to earth. This verse ends the passage in which God is addressing Jesus and begins to directly address the Prophet Muhammad regarding belief in Jesus.

59 It is reported that these verses were revealed while the Christian delegation from Najrān was in Madinah (see the introduction to this *sūrah*). These Christians reportedly argued that since Jesus had no human father, he was truly God's son. This verse constitutes one of the central arguments in the Quran against the divinity of Christ. It acknowledges the miraculous nature of his birth, but rejects the implication that this makes him Divine. If God could create Adam, who had neither earthly father nor mother, *from dust,* he could also create Jesus from the "blood" of Mary (R). The word *likeness* means that certain attributes of Adam and Jesus are alike (R). Regarding the Divine fiat *Be!* which appears also in 6:73; 16:40; 36:82; 40:68, see 2:117c.

60 This verse says not to doubt the description of Jesus in the previous verse (Ṭ).

61 There are varying accounts of the details of the encounter, but the elements common to the story are that when the Christians refused to embrace Islam and continued to hold to their beliefs about Jesus, they were challenged *to place the curse of God upon those who lie,* and the two sides agreed to meet the next day. Upon retiring, the Christians consulted among themselves and concluded that, since they wished to remain Christian, no further good could come from entering into this challenge; either they feared the curse of God upon themselves if Muhammad was in fact a true prophet or they feared Muhammad politically and did not desire to become his political enemy. According to some reports, the Prophet came out the next day with his daughter Fāṭimah and her two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; other accounts also include ʿAlī, Fāṭimah's husband and the Prophet's cousin, as the verse says the disputants' sons and women were part of the challenge (IK, R, Ṭ). Rather than enter into this challenge, the Christians declined and, according to some versions, said, "We seek refuge in God!" (IK). Then the Prophet and the Najrān delegation came to an agreement that the Najrānīs would become a treaty-holding people (*dhimmī*), remaining Christian and running their own affairs, but paying a yearly indemnity (*jizyah;* see 9:29) to the Muslim community. They requested that the Prophet send back with them a trustworthy Companion, which the Prophet did, according to one account in order that he might act as a kind of arbiter among them regarding some preexisting financial issues. For Ibn Kathīr this incident took place in 9/631, since the Najrānīs were the first to pay *jizyah,* and the *jizyah* was imposed after the conquest of Makkah; but this chronology depends on the various and sometimes conflicting reports regarding the circumstances under which the Najrānīs came to Madinah, what transpired while they were there, and the agreement that was reached before they left.

62–63 The *true account* is understood to refer to the preceding verses, meaning that they are a

knows well the workers of corruption. (64) Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you, that we shall worship none but God, shall not associate aught with Him, and shall not take one another as lords apart from God." And if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are submitters." (65) O People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham, as neither the Torah nor the Gospel was sent down until after him? Do you not understand? (66) Behold! You are the very same who dispute concerning that of which you have knowledge; so why do you dispute concerning that of which you have no knowledge? God knows, and you know not. (67) Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but rather was a *ḥanīf,* a submitter, and he was

true account of Jesus' reality and of what led to the prayer challenge (R), or it refers to the Quran as a whole and the accounts it relates (Q). It is noteworthy that here *there is no god but God* translates *mā min ilāhin illā'Llāh,* not the usual formula *lā ilāha illa'Llāh.* The latter is the standard Islamic testimony of faith in Arabic; the former is understood by some as a kind of intensification of the negation of other gods (R, Z).

64 Interpreting this verse hinges on the understanding of *common* (*sawāʾ*), a word sometimes understood as meaning "just" or "fair." *Sawāʾ* comes from a root meaning "level [with]," "same," "equal," "straight," "sound," "well-proportioned," or "middle [of]," as in *sawāʾ al-sabīl,* which literally means "the middle of the road," but idiomatically means "the right way" (e.g., 28:22). Thus this phrase is interpreted by some to mean not that the Quran is calling the People of the Book to observe what Christianity or Judaism have in common with Islam, but that this word (or these words) to which the Prophet is calling the People of the Book are just and fair (R). Al-Rāzī glosses it thus: "Come to a word in which there is fair treatment from each of us to the other." Others, while accepting the gloss of "just," go on to explain that it refers to what these religions have in common, since they all claim to worship God (M), and others similarly say that *sawāʾ* refers to that regarding which the Quran, the Torah, and the Gospel do not differ (Z). Al-Thaᶜlabī quotes an opinion of Ibn Masᶜūd that to call some to the *sawāʾ* of something is to call them to the middle of it.

For some, the command in this verse was meant to address the Jews in and around Madinah, while for others it was directed at both Jews and Christians (Ṭ), but some restricted it to the Christians of Najrān in particular (Q). Some understand *take one another as lords* to mean that one prostrates before them (Ṭ); for others it means that one is obedient to them to the detriment of the truth (R). This part of the verse is similar to 9:31: *They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God.*

65–66 *That of which you have knowledge* refers to the People of the Book's knowledge of Muhammad and his religion, including the foretellings of the coming of the Prophet that Muslims maintain Jews and Christians find in their own scriptures (see 7:157; Q); others say their dispute was over what was forbidden or lawful in their own religion (R, Z); still others say they disputed whether the law of the Quran differs from the law of the Torah and the Gospel (R). *That of which you have no knowledge* refers to their claims regarding Abraham, about whom they have no direct knowledge, unlike those matters about which they had direct knowledge, but still could not agree upon (Q, R, Ṭ).

67 Related to this verse is 2:135: *And they say, "Be Jews or Christians and you shall be rightly*

not one of the idolaters. (68) Truly the people worthiest of Abraham are those who followed him, and this prophet and those who believe. And God is the Protector of the believers. (69) A group among the People of the Book wishes to make you go astray; yet they make none go astray but themselves, though they are unaware. (70) O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in God's signs, while you are witness? (71) O People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with falsehood, and knowingly conceal the truth? (72) And a group of the People of the Book say, "Believe in what was sent down unto those who believe at the start of the day, and disbelieve at its end, that haply they may

*guided." Say, "Rather, [ours is] the creed of Abraham, the* ḥanīf, *and he was not of the idolaters."* Alongside Abraham, 2:140 adds *Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes* among those who were neither Jews nor Christians. The related question of the claims of Jews and Christians to having a special status before God is mentioned in 2:111–13 and 5:18. For a discussion of the concept of *ḥanīf*, see 2:135c. Regarding *submitter*, 3:19c.

68 *Worthiest of Abraham* means having the most claim on him, the most right to be associated with him (IK, R). *Worthiest* translates *awlā*, a term that is related to *wali*, "protector" or "friend," which appears later in this verse in the description of God as the *Protector* of the believers. In this sense, to say that they are *awlā* means they have the strongest bond of *walāyah* (inheritance, protection, friendship, alliance) with Abraham. A *ḥadīth* of the Prophet states, "Every prophet has protection (*walāyah*) from among the prophets, and my protector among them is my father, the Friend of God (*Khalīl Allāh*), Abraham." The *walāyah* mentioned in this *ḥadīth* can also evoke the sense of succession and inheritance in the spiritual sense.

69 Some People of the Book *go astray* themselves insofar as they reject the truth that exists before them in the person of the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Quran; or they *go astray* because they *wish to turn you back into disbelievers after your having believed, out of envy in their souls* (2:109). This verse resembles other verses that describe how the effects of evil actions rebound upon those who commit them, as in 2:9: *They would deceive God and the believers; yet they deceive none but themselves, though they are unaware;* and 2:57: *They wronged Us not, but themselves did they wrong.* Some commentators as well as ordinary Muslims take this as a warning not to be taken in by false friends among the People of the Book (R). The desire of others for the suffering and disbelief of the Muslim community are also mentioned in 3:118: *They wish you to suffer;* 4:89: *They wish that you should disbelieve, even as they disbelieve, that you may be on a level with them;* 60:2: *And they wish you to disbelieve;* and 68:9: *They wish that thou might compromise.*

70–71 The warning of v. 70 resembles that of v. 99: *O People of the Book! Why do you turn those who believe from the way of God, seeking to make it crooked, while you are witnesses?* The wording of v. 71 is similar to that of 2:42: *And confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth.* These verses are usually understood to refer to the rejection of the mission of the Prophet by Jews and Christians, even though he is foretold, according to Islamic belief, in their sacred books (see 7:157; Ṭ). Some say that their being *witnesses* means that they bear witness to the truth of the prophets in their own tradition, who themselves manifest the same truths (Q).

72 It is thought that this verse refers to a stratagem on the part of some Jews to pray with the Muslims at the start of the day, affirming their belief in Islam, but then at the end of the day to revert back to their own religion with the intention of creating doubt and uncertainty in the minds of the Muslims about Islam (IK, Ṭ); that is, their about-face would be a more

return. (73) And believe none but him who follows your religion. . ." Say, "Truly guidance is God's Guidance." ". . . lest anyone be granted the like of what you were granted or dispute with you before your Lord." Say, "Truly bounty is in God's Hand. He grants it to whomsoever He will, and God is All-Encompassing, Knowing." (74) He selects for His Mercy whomsoever He will, and God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. (75) Among the People of the Book is one who, were you to entrust to him a *quintal,* would render it back to you. And among them is one who, were you to entrust to him a *dinar,* would not render it back to you unless you kept standing over him. That is because they say, "There is nothing to stop us when it comes to the non-Jews." But they knowingly speak a lie against God. (76) Yea! Whosoever fulfills his pact and is reverent—truly God

powerful cause of doubt in the minds of the Prophet's followers, *that haply they may return* to their pre-Muslim ways (Ṭ).

73 The subtle grammatical structure of this verse lends itself to several interpretations. As translated, the first clause is a continuation of what was said by *a group of the People of the Book* in the previous verse. Their words are then interrupted by a command that the Prophet say to them, *Truly guidance is God's Guidance,* after which the words of the People of the Book resume. Then the Prophet is commanded to say, *Truly bounty is in God's Hand.* Alternately, the Prophet may have been given two successive Commands to speak to the People of the Book, in which case it would be translated, "Say, 'Truly guidance is God's Guidance, [this guidance being] that someone be granted the like of what you were granted or dispute with you before your Lord.' Say, 'Truly bounty is in God's Hand. He grants it to whomsoever He will, and God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.'" Another reading would make the intervening clause a partial question, interpreted to mean, "Say, 'Truly guidance is God's Guidance. Is it that someone be granted the like of what you were granted or dispute with you before your Lord [that leads you to object]?'" (Q, R, Ṭ). Similar words spoken by the People of the Book appear in 2:14; also 2:76: *And when they meet those who believe they say, "We believe," and when they are alone with one another they say, "Do you speak to them of what God has unveiled to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord? Do you not understand?"* As in other instances, *All-Encompassing* (*al-Wāsiʿ*) means also "Generous" and "Munificent."

74 *Selects for His Mercy* could also mean "singles out for His Mercy." The language used to describe God's Mercy reflects that describing His Bounty in the previous verse, both of which He bestows upon *whomsoever He will,* underscoring the vastness and generosity of God and the limitless ways in which He provides and shows kindness (R). More specifically, the one *He selects for His Mercy* here refers to the Prophet (*al-Muṣṭafā,* "the Chosen One"), who has been selected for prophethood, even if others object (see 3:26c); it may also refer to the Quran or to Islam itself (Ṭ).

75–76 Distinguishing between the good and bad among the People of the Book is revisited in 3:113: *They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate.* A *quintal* (*qinṭār*) is an amount many times larger than a *dīnār,* though not necessarily a precise measure (R); see also 3:14, where the plural of *qinṭār* is translated *heaps,* and 4:20, where it means a *great sum.*

What is entrusted can refer to a loan, a purchase, or simply something given for safekeeping (Q). According to one explanation, some Jews considered previous agreements between them

loves the reverent. (77) Truly those who sell God's Pact and their oaths for a paltry price, they shall have no share in the Hereafter and God will not speak to them, nor will He look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. And theirs shall be a painful punishment. (78) And there is indeed a group among them who twist their tongues with the Book, that you may suppose it to be from the Book. But it is not from the Book. And they say, "It is from God," though it is not from God. And they knowingly speak a lie against

and former Jews who became Muslims (but who were still Jews when those agreements were made) to be null and void, claiming that this was the teaching from the Torah (Q) or that it was attributed to an excess of tribalism (R). *Non-Jews* renders *ummiyyūn* (sing. *ummī*), elsewhere rendered *illiterate* (2:78) or *unlettered* (3:20; 7:157–58; 62:2); see 3:20c. Here it is understood to mean that, from the point of view of the Jews speaking, the contractual obligations with non-Jews were different, and they did not have to be observed with the same care, if at all, with those Jews who had become Muslims (Q, R, Ṭ). It is said that some Muslims came to Ibn ʿAbbās and made a similar claim against some members of a non-Muslim treaty-holding community (*ahl al-dhimmah*), saying, "There is nothing to stop us when it comes to them." They were corrected by Ibn ʿAbbās, who told them that it was not permissible to take any wealth from the treaty peoples beyond what they paid in indemnity, or *jizyah* (Q; for the *jizyah*, see 9:29). Many commentators use this verse as an occasion to speak of the importance of protecting trusts and repaying what one owes. Al-Qurṭubī quotes a long *ḥadīth* stating that, regarding the weighty matter of returning trusts to their owners, resentment leads to perfidy, and perfidy leads to a lack of compassion, which in turn leads to being cursed and outcast, which ultimately leads to Islam leaving one's heart.

77 Cf. 2:174. Selling one's ultimate destiny *for a paltry price* is an act frequently decried in the Quran, whether it is selling God's signs (2:41; 3:199; 5:44; 9:9), God's Book (2:79, 174; 3:187), or an oath with God (16:95). *No share in the Hereafter* means no share of its goodness and blessings, not that one will have no experience of the events after death (R, Ṭ). The phrase translated by *no share* (*lā khalāq*) is also used to describe someone who lacks virtues. Although some commentators understand from this verse that God will not speak to or look at such people at all, others understand this to be an expression of displeasure and punishment, since other verses describe God speaking even to disbelievers on the Day of Judgment (e.g., 7:6; 15:92–93; 23:108). To not wish to speak with or look upon a person is an expression of anger or wrath and, when coming from God, is a severe form of punishment, just as God's looking upon or speaking with a person is a great form of blessing (R). For more discussion, see 2:174c. As in 2:174, *nor will He purify them* means He will not praise them for their goodness or deem them purified (Ṭ), or He will not set right their evil deeds (Q), or He will not accept their deeds as He accepts those of the purified. The verb *zakkā* can mean both to purify and to deem purified, as in 53:32: *So do not deem yourselves purified.*

78 Much like 2:79 (*So woe unto those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God"*), this verse has been interpreted to mean outright forgery, obfuscation—by means of misinterpretations—of the prophecies fortelling the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, or the deception for worldly purposes of ignorant people who were told that the Torah says so-and-so when they did not have the ability to read the Torah for themselves (R, Ṭ); see 2:79c, which suggests that these distortions were isolated incidents meant to deceive people who did not know the scriptures. *Twist their tongues with the Book* means their tongues are twisted for the purposes of distorting or misrepresenting the Book of God (Z); that is, they bend or contort their words while reciting the Book, so as to change or misrepresent it

God. (79) It is not for any human being, God having given him the Book, judgment, and prophethood, to then say to the people, "Be servants of me instead of God." Rather, "Be sages, from having taught the Book and from having studied." (80) And he would not command you to take the angels and the prophets as lords. Would he command you to disbelief after your having been submitters? (81) And [remember] when God made the covenant of the prophets: "By that which I have given you of a Book and Wisdom, should a messenger then come to you confirming that which is with you, you shall surely believe in him and you shall help him." He said, "Do you agree and take on My burden on these conditions?" They said, "We agree." He said, "Bear witness, for I am with you among those who bear witness." (82) Then whosoever turns away after that, they are the

(R). Regarding the "distortion" of scriptures, see 2:75c; 4:46c; 5:13c; 5:41c.

79 It is reported that the Prophet was asked by the Jews whether he wanted to be an object of worship, as Jesus was among the Christians (Ṭ), or that he was asked whether he thought people should prostrate themselves before him (an act associated with worship) rather than greet him normally (Z). *Judgment* (*ḥukm*) can also mean "rule." To be *servants* (*ᶜibād,* sing. *ᶜabd*) means to be worshippers of something. Although most commentators draw a connection between this verse and the Islamic rejection of the worship of Jesus, other types of worship directed at human beings are similarly deplored, as in 9:31: *They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God.* It is related thematically to 5:116: *And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, "Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?" He said, "Glory be to Thee! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right."*

*Sages* renders *rabbāniyyūn* (cf. 5:44, 63), a word interpreted variously as meaning those who are wise, knowledgeable, or pious (Ṭ) or the most eminent of religious scholars who understand the lawful and the forbidden (Q); on this term, see especially 5:43–44c. A variant of *rabbānī, ribbiyyūn,* appears in 3:146 as *devoted men.* An alternate reading of the verse's final phrase would give the translation, "from having known the Book and from having taught it" (Ṭ).

80 This verse can also be read as resuming from the middle of the previous verse, meaning, "It is not for any human being . . . to command you to take the angels and prophets as lords." *And he would not* means the Prophet would not do so, although others read this as "And He would not," meaning that God does not command the worship of angels and prophets (JJ, R). The taking of other figures as *lords* is also mentioned in 3:64 and 9:31.

81–82 The particle *lamā,* rendered here as *by that which* and as *should* (in *should a messenger*), gives rise to different possible translations that are nonetheless substantively similar. It can be interpreted to mean that the Book and Wisdom are invoked in a covenant that binds a prophet, and by extension his followers, to follow a later, true messenger, should he come confirming *that which is with you.* Here *by that which I have given* is understood to be an oath (Ṭ). Some commentators see this as a direct command to the various prophets to affirm Muhammad, should he appear during their own lifetime. The verse may actually be referring to the followers of the prophets, since prophets would never *turn away* or become *iniquitous,* though their followers might (Q, R); that is, since belief in the Prophet Muhammad or any true prophet is incumbent upon prophets

iniquitous. (83) Do they seek other than God's religion, while whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth submits to Him, willingly or unwillingly, and unto Him they will be returned? (84) Say, "We believe in God and what has been sent down upon us, and in what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses, Jesus, and the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit." (85) Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission, it shall not

themselves, it is also incumbent upon their followers (R).

*Do you agree and take on My burden* can be understood to be spoken by God to the prophets or to be spoken by the prophets to their followers (R), though the commentators seem to agree that *Bear witness, for I am with you* is spoken by God (Q, R, Ṭ). Commentators typically emphasize that it is the Prophet Muhammad to whom reference is made here, and they mention the foretelling of the coming of Muhammad, *whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them* (7:157), though al-Rāzī, for example, acknowledges that the covenant pertains to any prophet who fulfills the criteria in the verse.

83 For some, *whosoever is in the heavens* refers to the angels, while those on *the earth* refer to human beings (IK, R). *Submits* (*aslama*) is the verbal form of *islām*, or "submission." *Willingly* (*ṭawʿan*) can also be rendered "obediently," while *unwillingly* (*karhan*) can mean "grudgingly." In an apparent paradox, this verse asserts that all beings submit to God, and some do so unwillingly. Some explain this by saying that all beings must in some sense succumb to God's Will (IK), implying a passive rather than active submission. Others mention that believers submit in life willingly, while disbelievers submit in death unwillingly (R), but their submission at the moment of death does them no good (Q), as mentioned in 40:85: *But their believing benefited them not when they saw Our Might.*

The willingness and unwillingness of those in the heavens and on the earth are also mentioned in 41:11; 13:15: *And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening.* This verse is related to many other verses that speak of all creatures prostrating before God (e.g., 22:18) or glorifying God, as in 17:44: *The seven heavens, and the earth, and whatsoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise.*

84 See 2:136, which is nearly identical with this verse, and commentary.

85 It is reported that this verse was revealed in connection with one of the Companions who left Islam along with twelve other people and went to Makkah (Q, M, Th). Although some commentators record the opinion that considers 2:62 (*Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord*) to have been abrogated by this verse, this type of abrogation is not recognized by mainstream Islamic Law and Quran interpretation, since only a ruling or legal command can be abrogated, not a truth or a report, such as one has here (see 2:62c). However, the idea that 3:85 abrogates 2:62 is connected to the interpretation expressed by some commentators (R, Ṭ) that this verse denies the "acceptability" of any form of religion other than that brought by the Prophet Muhammad. This opinion is not without its inconsistencies, however, since it does not take into account the more general and universal use of *islām* and *muslim* in the Quran to refer to all true, monotheistic religion; see 2:128c; 2:131–32c; 3:19c; 3:52c; 5:111c; and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

In 2:62 the issue is whether the notion of belief or faith (*īmān*) can be applied to Jews, Christians, and Sabeans, while in this verse the question is whether *islām*, or submission to God, can

be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers. (86) How shall God guide a people who have disbelieved after having believed, having borne witness that the Messenger is true, and the clear proofs having come to them? And God guides not wrongdoing people. (87) They are those whose recompense is that upon them shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind all together, (88) abiding therein; the punishment shall not be lightened for them, nor shall they be granted respite, (89) except those who repent after that, and make amends, for truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (90) Truly those who disbelieve after having believed, then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and they are the ones who are astray. (91) Truly those who disbelieve and

include others beyond the followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Opinions seem to leave the interpretation open. Ibn Kathīr, for example, understands *a religion other than submission* here to mean, "A path other than what God has laid down," which can include the People of the Book, while al-Zamakhsharī says that in this verse *islām* (*submission*) means recognizing Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) and submitting one's face to God, attributes not limited to the followers of Muhammad. Moreover, reading this verse in the context of those that precede and follow it and taking into consideration the occasion of revelation mentioned above, one could reasonably conclude that the scope of this verse is limited to those people who, after having accepted Islam, then make a conscious decision to leave it. This would echo the themes brought up in vv. 79–80 as well as v. 86, which mention those who disbelieve in Islam after having believed in it.

86 *People* refers to either apostates or the People of the Book (Ṭ). Those who uphold the former interpretation point to the case of a Companion who left Islam and went to Makkah (see v. 85), but later repented, returned to Islam, and was accepted; his repentance is mentioned in v. 89: *except those who repent after that.* The clause beginning *having borne witness* could also be translated, "and who bore witness that the Messenger is true; and that clear proofs came to them" (R, Z).

87–88 On being cursed, widely interpreted to mean being distanced from God and driven away from mercy, see 2:161c, where the joint curse of God, the angels, and human beings is also discussed. See also 7:38: *Every time a community enters [the Fire], it curses its sister;* and 29:25: *Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another, and you will curse one another.*

89 The Companion who left Islam (see v. 85) reportedly wrote a letter to his family asking if repentance was possible, and this verse was revealed (Ṭ).

90 *Their repentance shall not be accepted* can refer to those who repent only at the moment of death (e.g., 4:18: *And repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly, now I repent";* Q, R). Or it can mean that any repentance from such a person would not be sincere (R). Or it can be saying that an initial repentance is nullified by the increase in disbelief; if a person disbelieves, repents, and disbelieves again, the first repentance is no longer valid (R). *Then increase in disbelief* can also refer to the sins that ensue after one leaves belief or faith (*īmān;* Q, Ṭ). Although the context would seem to indicate that Muslim apostates are spoken of in this verse, commentators also mention that it could refer to People of the Book who believed in the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, but then rejected him, and went on to show enmity toward him and the believers; it could also refer to the Jews who believed in Moses, but rejected Jesus (R).

91 Dying as disbelievers is also mentioned in 2:161, 217; 4:18; 9:125; 47:34. The idea of trying to give ransom in the Hereafter is also discussed in 2:48c. Offering expiation or ransom in this life,

die while they are disbelievers, an earth full of gold would not be accepted from any one of them, were he to offer it in ransom. For them there shall be a painful punishment, and they shall have no helpers. (92) You will never attain piety till you spend from that which you love. And whatever you spend, truly God knows it. (93) All food was lawful unto the Children of Israel, save what Israel had forbidden for himself, before the Torah was sent down. Say, "Bring the Torah and

where such deeds are accepted by God if sincerely offered, is contrasted with trying to strike a bargain after one's life has ended and the opportunity to choose between good and evil is gone. The idea that even an earth full of goods is inadequate ransom in the Hereafter is also mentioned in 5:36; 10:54; 13:18; 39:47. The opposite of dying in disbelief, dying as a believer, is mentioned in v. 102, where believers are commanded: *Die not except in submission.* This same command is enjoined by Abraham and Jacob upon their children in 2:132.

92 *Piety* (*birr*) can also mean the rewards of piety (Q). Depending on the context, *birr* carries with it a sense of goodness, kindness, loyalty, sincerity, or obedience. For *piety,* see also 2:44, 177, 189. The "pious" (*abrār*) are often mentioned in connection with heavenly rewards (3:193; 76:5; 82:13); see 2:44c; 76:5–6c. Many commentators connect this verse with the story of a Companion who had a tract of land in Madinah that was his most prized possession and that he desired to give in the way of God (Q, R, Ṭ). But the *Ḥadīth* is so replete with examples of the Prophet and Companions giving charity that this verse could not be limited in its import to a single incident. This verse echoes the injunction to give wealth, *despite loving it* (2:177; cf. 76:8), and is similar in theme to 2:267, which enjoins Muslims to *spend of the good things* they *have earned,* and warns against giving what is the least desirable of their property. It is also echoed by a famous *ḥadīth,* "None of you believes until he desires for his neighbor what he desires for himself" (or in another version, "for his brother"). Spiritually speaking, one cannot advance until one gives away one's ego, which one loves above all things (Aj).

93 According to this verse, before the revelation of the Torah, there were no prohibitions to abide by for the descendants of Jacob except those that Jacob, also known as Israel, had imposed on himself and that his children followed him in observing (Q, Ṭ). This verse is interpreted as a response to those Jews who claimed that the current prohibitions in the Torah were always in effect, as part of their argument against the possibility of one religion (Islam) abrogating another (Judaism; R). According to one account, Jacob was afflicted with some sickness and swore that if God cured him, he would give up certain kinds of food (IK, Q, Th); in another account his doctors told him to avoid certain foods, which he then forswore (Th); still others say he avoided certain foods out of simple asceticism (Th). Some commentators believe that the Torah then enshrined the prohibitions that were already being observed (Ṭ, Th). It is possible that message of this verse is found in some form in Genesis 32:32, where it is said that, due to Jacob's injury after wrestling with the angel, Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle on the socket of the hip, where Jacob was injured; that is, such a prohibition would have predated the Torah.

According to one interpretation, vv. 93–95 should be read as a single passage, as it is all understood as a response to those Jews who said that Abraham was subject to the same prohibitions that the Jews still practiced (Th). Jacob/Israel, a descendant of Abraham, then forbade some things for himself, though all things were previously lawful to consume. Even so, some commentators are reticent to attribute to the pre-Torah Jews the eating of carrion or pork and understand this verse to refer to the misattribution to Abraham of the detailed prohibitions (e.g., those dealing with dietary restrictions) found in Jewish Law (R). The verse then commands the Prophet to challenge them to bring a proof from the Torah that Abraham ever observed such prohibitions. See also 4:160c; 6:146c.

recite it, if you are truthful." (94) So whosoever fabricates a lie against God after that, it is they who are the wrongdoers. (95) Say, "God has spoken true. So follow the creed of Abraham, a *ḥanīf,* and he was not of the idolaters." (96) Truly the first house established for mankind was that at Bakkah, full of blessing and a guidance for the worlds. (97) Therein are clear signs: the station of Abraham, and whosoever enters it shall be secure. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty upon mankind before God for those who can find a way. For whosoever disbelieves,

94 *That* refers to the challenge to recite from the Torah in v. 93 (Ṭ), in which case *after that* would mean after it is shown that the body of prohibitions by which the Israelites lived did not exist before the revelation of the Torah (R); presumably the Torah would show that Abraham's life was lived before these prohibitions went into effect.

95 *God has spoken true,* here, specifically regarding Jacob and what was made lawful and forbidden in the Torah (Ṭ). *God has spoken true* (*ṣadaqa Allāh*) is often uttered by Muslims after completing a passage of recitation from the Quran outside of the canonical prayers. On Abraham and the concept of *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c.

96 *Bakkah* is another name for Makkah, a different pronunciation of the same name resulting from an exchange of the *m* and *b* sounds, a common pronunciation alteration in Arabic (Z). Some opine that Bakkah meant the actual ground of the Kaᶜbah itself and Makkah referred to the land around it (Ṭ, Z). Others derive the name from the verb *bakka,* meaning "to crowd," in reference to the crowding that takes place as a result of pilgrimage or to the fact that only in Makkah do men and women "crowd together" in the same place for prayer (Ṭ, Z). Later scholars have speculated as to whether the valley of Baca mentioned in Psalm 84:6 refers to Makkah, a question that is highly dependent upon various elements in that psalm, including the meaning of Baca, which could be "weeping" or "balsam trees."

One interpretation of this verse is that the Kaᶜbah was not the first house ever built, but it was the first one established for *all* human beings—not only some—to come for worship (R). Others say it is *first* in being *full of blessing and a guidance for the worlds* (Ṭ), in which case *first* (*awwal*) could connote the sense of "foremost," as in *I am the first of those who submit* (6:163), referring to priority or status rather than temporal sequence. Commentators also mention interpretations based on traditional myths that describe the Kaᶜbah's foundations as dating back to the time of Adam (see 2:127c), thus interpreting the Kaᶜbah as being literally the first house ever built, referring not to the stones from which it was built, but to the ground plan and the place where it stands (R, Ṭ).

If one understands *mankind* (*nās*) as "the people"—namely, the people of the region—it could mean that the Kaᶜbah was the first temple established for the Arabs, which would reflect the story of Abraham and Ishmael described in 2:125–27 as well as the idea that God *assigned for Abraham the place of the House* in 22:26, rather than helping him to discover it.

To be *full of blessing* (*mubārakᵃⁿ*) derives from blessing or grace (*barakah*), which has the root meanings of growth and permanence (R). Regarding the Kaᶜbah a *ḥadīth* states, "One prayer at this Mosque is like a thousand prayers in all other mosques." In commenting on *full of blessing,* al-Rāzī pauses to reflect upon the great numbers of people of "exalted spirits, sacred hearts, luminous inner mysteries, and divine minds" who pray following the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) established by God to be the Kaᶜbah, further remarking that at every moment part of humanity is offering prayers in the direction of Makkah and has been doing so for thousands of years (i.e., both before and after the advent of Islam).

97 The *clear signs* refer to the *station of Abraham;* some say they refer to the footprints of Abraham that are believed to be preserved on the ground there (Ṭ). It may also mean there are clear signs that this is indeed the structure built

truly God is beyond need of the worlds. (98) Say, "O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in God's signs, while God is Witness over what you do?" (99) Say, "O People of the Book! Why do you turn those who believe from the way of God, seeking to make it crooked, while you are witnesses? And God is not heedless of what you do." (100) O you who believe! If you obey a group among

by Abraham and that God has exalted and blessed it (IK). The station of Abraham, a place in the close vicinity of the Kaʿbah, is discussed in 2:125c. There is a minority opinion that reads this in the singular, "clear sign" (Ṭ), in which case it would refer to the station of Abraham.

*Whosoever enters it shall be secure* is read by some as referring to the past, in which case it would be rendered, "Whosoever entered it was secure," since in pre-Islamic Arabia the *ḥaram,* or precinct around the Kaʿbah, was a place where one could seek sanctuary and not be captured or arrested (Ṭ; see also 2:125–26; 14:35; 28:57). Many believe that under Islam the Kaʿbah and the *ḥaram* no longer serve this function, that one can no longer hide there from prosecution, and that any crimes committed there are equally liable to penalty (Ṭ), although the penalty is not carried out there. Another opinion holds that it is indeed a sanctuary, but that the person using it as sanctuary must not engage in trade, speak with anyone, take up lodging, or be fed by anyone. This would essentially starve out the sanctuary seeker, who would then be prosecuted after leaving it (Ṭ). In any case, if a crime takes place in the *ḥaram* itself, then it cannot serve as a sanctuary from prosecution for that crime (Ṭ).

Others point out that the majority allow punishment there, as the Prophet ordered the execution of Ibn Khaṭal even though he was clinging to the curtains of the Kaʿbah when the Muslims conquered Makkah. Some note that, since as a matter of historical fact some people were indeed not "secure" after the revelation of this verse, it must refer to the past (Q). Some say that "secure" could mean "it shall be made secure," so that it is a command that people are meant to follow, but might violate (R). Another interpretation is that whoever enters the House in order to perform its rites will be safe from the Fire of Hell (Q, R), although other instances of the word *secure* suggest a more conventional usage referring to physical safety in this world. Indeed, in treating 2:126, many commentators point to the *ḥadīth* regarding the limited but real violence during the conquest of Makkah (i.e., the killing of Ibn Khaṭal and a handful of others), when the Prophet said, "This land was made inviolable by God on the day the heavens and the earth were created. It is inviolable by God's Inviolability until the Day of Resurrection. Killing was not permitted to anyone therein before, and to none after me. It was only permitted to me for an hour of a day."

*Pilgrimage to the House is a duty* is thought to be the passage that institutes the *ḥajj* as a requirement; others believe it is 2:196 that does so (IK). *Who can find a way* refers to those who are physically and financially able to undertake the *ḥajj*. *Whosoever disbelieves* can refer to denial of the obligatory nature of the *ḥajj* (Q) or to a general rejection of God and the Day of Judgment (Ṭ).

98–99 The Prophet is commanded to challenge the People of the Book regarding their rejection of him (Ṭ). Some interpret their attempts to *make the way of God crooked* (cf. 7:45; 11:19; 14:3) as an act of misdirection, since, when they were asked about it, the People of the Book denied that Muhammad was foretold in their books (Ṭ); see 7:157. It is understood not as a physical hindering, but as a desire on their part to misguide Muslims and turn them away from their own religion by making it *crooked,* that is, making it appear false (Q, Ṭ), in order to create doubt in the minds of as many Muslims as possible (R). That they are *witnesses* refers to the fact that they should be conscious of the Messenger's presence among them (v. 101) and that the truths the Prophet teaches are not unfamiliar to them, but are in fact found in their own sacred books (Q).

100 An incident is often reported in connection with this part of the *sūrah* dealing with division among the believers (vv. 100–106). One of

those who were given the Book, they will render you disbelievers after your having believed. (101) How can you disbelieve, while God's signs are recited unto you and His Messenger is among you? And whosoever holds fast to God is indeed guided unto a straight path. (102) O you who believe! Reverence God as He should be reverenced, and die not except in submission. (103) And hold fast to the rope of God, all together, and be not divided. Remember the Blessing of God upon you, when you were enemies and He joined your hearts, such that you

the Jews of Madinah happened upon a gathering of Muslims belonging to the previously warring tribes of Aws and Khazraj. He began to instigate trouble between them by reminding them of their wars and the insults they used to hurl at one another and succeeded in heating up the gathering to the point that the Muslims almost came to blows. When the Prophet heard this, he came out and said, "Would you return to the practices of the times of ignorance [before Islam], though I am among you, and God has honored you with Islam and reconciled your hearts?" They then laid down their weapons, embraced one another, and left with the Prophet (Q, R).

101 The point of this verse is that, in the face of both the revelation of the Quran and the presence of the Prophet, people have all the proof they need to keep them from disbelief (R). The challenge presented by the Quran, in its eloquence and inimitability (see 2:23; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88), is here coupled with mention of the Prophet himself. The description of the Prophet's physical and spiritual presence is a major aspect of the Islamic tradition, regarding which there is an entire genre of literature. Muslims consider his physical presence and demeanor to have been signs of the truth of his message and vocation, and the Companions believed that his actual physical body carried blessings and a kind of palpable grace. This belief has continued among later generations of Muslims.

To "hold fast" (see also v. 103) evokes in Arabic the image of a person holding on to something to avoid falling into harm, in this case disbelief (*kufr;* R). Here it can mean to hold fast to God's religion and to obedience (Ṭ) or to the Quran itself (Q). *Is indeed guided unto a straight path* is understood either to be identical with "holding fast," meaning that the very act of holding fast is God's Guidance for His creatures, or that in holding fast one will then become guided (R).

102 For God to be given all due reverence is for Him to be "obeyed not defied, remembered not forgotten, thanked not denied" (Ṭ). *Reverence God as He should be reverenced* is similar in wording to *They did not measure God with His true measure* (6:91; 22:74; 39:67), in that both phrases use the word *ḥaqq,* which denotes a right or what something is due; in other contexts *ḥaqq* means "truth" or "reality" and can also be an adjective meaning "true," as in "true religion." It is reported that the command in the present verse was considered too heavy a burden, one that could never be fulfilled, and caused great anxiety among the Companions; some speculated that it was therefore abrogated by 64:16: *So reverence God as much as you are able* (M, R, Ṭ). This is similar to the speculation made regarding 2:284: *And whether you disclose what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it;* and 2:286: *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity.* It was said that 2:284 alarmed the Muslim community as being too rigorous a standard for sinful human beings, so it was then abrogated by 2:286. But as pointed out in 2:284c, such matters as God's Qualities or actions in the Hereafter are not subject to abrogation. Indeed, some argue that to reverence God *as He should be reverenced* is precisely to reverence Him *as much as you are able,* given that *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity* (R). It is also interpreted to mean that one should fear God's Punishment and Wrath as they should be feared (M). The command to *die not except in submission* is enjoined by Abraham and Jacob upon their children in 2:132.

103 *The rope of God* is usually understood to be the community of Muslims (*al-jamāᶜah;*

became brothers by His Blessing. You were on the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it. Thus does God make clear unto you His signs, that haply you may be rightly guided. (104) Let there be among you a community calling to the good, enjoining right, and forbidding wrong. It is they who shall prosper.

Ṭ), which would logically flow into *and be not divided;* or it refers to the Quran itself, and at the deepest level to faith in God. In a *ḥadīth* the Quran is described as "a rope extended from Heaven to earth." Others say the *rope* refers to a covenant or pact (IK), reflecting the usage of *rope* in v. 112: *They shall be struck with abasement wherever they are come upon, save by means of a rope from God and a rope from mankind.* According to some Shiites, the Imams are the *rope of God* (Ṭs). The *rope* is also understood to mean devotion (*ikhlāṣ*) toward God (Ṭ).

In 42:13 the same command to not become *divided* is given to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The People of the Book are described as having become divided in 42:14 and 98:4, after the revelation had come to them. Similarly, in this verse Muslims are warned against becoming *divided* after Islam has come to them. *When you were enemies* is understood to be the time before the coming of Islam, when the strong would prey upon the weak (Ṭ); more specifically, it refers to the tribal wars among the Arabs such as those among the Aws and Khazraj in Madinah before the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad (IK); see 2:84c; 3:100c. The joining of hearts is also mentioned in 8:62–63: *He it is Who supports thee with His help, and with the believers, and joined their hearts.* The believers are described as brothers elsewhere, including 15:47; 49:10. They were on *the brink of a pit of fire* because of their disbelief before they were guided by Islam (R, Ṭ) and were separated from that fire only by not having died yet (Ṭs). A parable about a similar kind of brink is also mentioned in 9:109.

104 The concepts of *enjoining right* and *forbidding wrong* appear again in vv. 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112; 22:41; 31:17. In Islamic history, these ideas have been invoked in discussions regarding the legitimacy of political rebellion, the right to privacy, the speaking of difficult truths to those in power, and the balance between personal and communal responsibility. There is a wide range of opinion among jurists and theologians regarding how obligatory enjoining right and forbidding wrong are and in what situations such obligation would apply. A *ḥadīth* often quoted in reference to this subject states, "Whosoever among you sees a wrong being done, let him change it with his hand, and if he is unable then with his tongue, and if he is unable then with his heart and that is the feeblest of belief." Although the heart usually refers to what is most essential, in this case "a wrong being done" calls for outward action, not only an inner attitude. *Right* renders *maʿrūf,* which can also be translated "honorable," "decent," "good," or "fair," and when rendered as a noun can refer to a courtesy or a kindness. It also means, literally, "what is known/recognized" and in this sense denotes what is conventional, generally acceptable, customary, or familiar. In encompassing the sense of both custom and goodness, it resembles the root meaning of the English word "moral," which derives from the Latin root that means "customs," as does the word "mores." *Wrong* renders *munkar,* which can also be translated "dishonorable," "indecent," "bad," or "foul," and when rendered as a noun can mean atrocity or abomination or, literally, "that which is denied or disavowed."

Some interpret the *community* here to refer to the elect of the Companions (IK, Ṭ), though others believe that *among you* does not refer to a distinct group, since the entire Muslim community is praised in v. 110 for *enjoining right and forbidding wrong* (R); as such it can be read as descriptive, giving the translation, "And may you be a community calling to the good . . ." But for others it is meant to describe a segment of the community, since many Muslims—such as many women and children and the elderly in general—would not be able to fulfill the requirements of enjoining right and forbidding wrong insofar as this requires influencing the actions of others. Many believe these commands are specific to the *ʿulamāʾ*, or scholars, since an ignorant person might inadvertently call one to evil or enjoin what

(105) And be not like those who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them. And it is they who shall have a great punishment (106) on the Day when faces whiten and faces blacken. As for those whose faces blacken, "Did you disbelieve after having believed? Then taste the punishment for having disbelieved." (107) And as for those whose faces whiten, they will be in the Mercy of God, abiding therein. (108) These are God's signs which We recite unto thee in truth, and God desires no wrong for the worlds. (109) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and unto God are

is wrong; many also see it as a communal responsibility that is fulfilled so long as some segment of the community is carrying it out (Q, R). The moral concept of communal responsibility is also demonstrated in 9:122, where only a segment of the community is considered to have the need to seek out expertise in religious matters.

Some interpret enjoining right and forbidding wrong to be the two kinds of *good,* mentioned in the first part of the verse, to which one calls others (R). Others say that one can interpret the *right* as what is considered good and beautiful in one's consciousness, and the *wrong* as what is considered bad and ugly (M), meaning that *right* and *wrong* are determined not only through religious teaching, but also by one's innate moral consciousness. The Prophet said, in answering a question about piety (*birr*), "Consult your heart. Piety is that by which the soul and heart find peace."

105 This verse refers to the People of the Book; see 2:213c; 3:19c.

106–7 *On the Day* either is directly connected with the previous verse or stands alone with an implied word so that it would mean, "Remember the Day when . . ." (R). The implied phrase "[it will be said to them]" is understood to come after *As for those whose faces blacken* (R, Ṭ). Faces blackening is an Arabic idiom describing a state of distress, shame, or grief, as in 43:17, when a man's *face blackens* upon hearing news of an infant girl. A similar meaning is invoked in 10:26, where it is said that *neither darkness nor abasement* will come over the faces of the virtuous. *Blackened faces* are also mentioned in 39:60. Conversely, when *faces whiten* denotes joy and relief and spiritually refers to the light of faith. V. 106 is interpreted by some to refer to Muslims who renounce their faith before they die (Ṭ). Others interpret it as the renunciation or disavowal of the primordial pretemporal covenant when human beings bore witness that God was their Lord (see 7:172) or as a reference to hypocrites generally, insofar as they attest to faith and then knowingly commit actions that contradict it (Ṭ).

Those who *disbelieve after having believed* are variously identified as all disbelievers in general or as the various sects that appeared in later Islamic history after the death of the Prophet, including the Khawārij, a puritanical movement that emerged within a generation of the Prophet's death (Q, R). Some commentators adduce various *aḥādīth* of the Prophet that describe visions he had of the Hereafter, where, to his dismay, some Companions were driven away from his presence. In the vision the Prophet was told that he did not know what they would do after him (IK, Q). The context of the verse would suggest that the phrase refers to the disbelievers mentioned in vv. 90, 100–101. Other verses use the faces of human beings to describe their state in the Hereafter, such as 10:26–27; 14:50; 17:97; 18:29; 23:104; 75:22–24; 80:38–41.

108–9 One reading of v. 108 says that God does not desire that human beings do wrong (R). Another reading connects this verse with v. 109 and says that God has no need to wrong or to be unjust to anything or anyone, since He has power over all things and all things belong to Him (IK, Q), or it simply means that God does not in fact wrong anyone (M). These verses raise the question of God's relationship to good or evil; namely, what does it mean to say that *God desires no wrong for*

all matters returned. (110) You are the best community brought forth unto mankind, enjoining right, forbidding wrong, and believing in God. And were the People of the Book to believe, that would be better for them. Among them are

*the worlds*? One perspective, typified in Ashʿarite theology, states that God does no wrong because wrong (*ẓulm*) is definable as trespassing upon what belongs to another, and since everything belongs to God, nothing He does could amount to a wrong. Another prominent perspective, typified by the Muʿtazilite school of theology, states that God is always just, and what is just or unjust are objective features of the world recognizable by human beings. Some philosophers and Sufis make a distinction between God's "prescriptive command" (*al-amr al-taklīfī*) and the "engendering command" (*al-amr al-takwīnī*); the former refers to what God asks of human free will and the latter to God's Power to create. Being free, human beings can choose what God does not want, but cannot oppose what God wills to be. See the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy."

110 Some understand this verse to mean that Muslims are destined to be the best religious community as already "written" in the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) and that it is implied that Muslims should live up to this destiny (R), a reading that is possible because the verb can be read as either present or past tense (i.e., "You were the best community [in the Preserved Tablet]."). Another understanding, also based on a past-tense reading, understands these words as being spoken to the Muslims in Paradise to describe their life in the world (R). The verb can also signify that they "become" the best community by virtue of enjoining right and forbidding wrong (R). This *community* is interpreted variously to mean the Emigrants who left Makkah for Madinah with the Prophet (Ṭ), the elect of the Companions of the Prophet, or the Prophet's Companions as a whole. It can also refer to the Islamic community as a whole when compared with other religious communities. *Best community* may also refer to those who are the best people toward other people, which is the domain of enjoining right and forbidding wrong and explains why action is placed before faith in this verse (IK). The verse can be seen as describing the Muslim community's role in relation to other peoples in a way similar to the Quran's being described as a *protector* (*muhaymin*) in relation to other scriptures (5:48).

The passage *And were the People of the Book to believe, that would be better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are iniquitous* is the subject of varying interpretations. In its plain sense, it could be interpreted to be saying that if they all believed it would be better for them, and indeed some of them are believers, a view seemingly adopted by al-Zamakhsharī, for example, who makes a distinction between belief in God in general and belief in Muhammad as His Prophet. Moreover, since belief (*īmān*) is contrasted with being iniquitous (*fāsiq*) rather than with being a disbeliever (*kāfir*), the sense of being false to their own religions seems to be highlighted here. Indeed, al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabarī both interpret *iniquitous* as referring to Jews' and Christians' failure to observe their own faiths; al-Rāzī interprets this iniquity as an act of being false to what is already false, and al-Ṭabarī interprets it as an act of being false to the true teachings of the Torah and the Gospel, which, most Muslims maintain, demand the acceptance of the Prophet Muhammad. Many understand *among them are believers* as a reference to prominent Jews and Christians who embraced Islam, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, the Abyssinian Negus, who provided sanctuary for many Muslims during the early persecutions by the Makkans (M, R, Ṭ). According to this later interpretation, the Negus became a Muslim himself, but this is problematic and contradicts other accounts; see 5:82–83c.

Such interpretations depend on allowing the categories of "Muslims" (i.e., followers of the religion brought by Muhammad) and "People of the Book" to overlap. If ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām was Muslim, then he was not in any sense one of the People of the Book unless these are political designations like "Arab" or "Byzantine." By the same token, if one is *among* the People of the Book (i.e., one of them), then one is by definition not a Muslim. Although the terms "Muslims" and "People of the Book" can designate political entities, the

believers, but most of them are iniquitous. (111) They will not harm you save a [trifling] hurt. And if they fight you, they will turn their backs upon you; then they will not be helped. (112) They shall be struck with abasement wherever they are come upon, save by means of a rope from God and a rope from mankind. And they shall earn a burden of wrath from God, and they shall be struck with indigence. That is because they used to disbelieve in God's signs and kill the prophets without right. That is for their having disobeyed and transgressed. (113) They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate.

Quran and *Ḥadīth* do not refer directly to a Muslim (i.e., a follower of Muhammad) as one of the People of the Book or vice versa. This fact does not prevent the scope of *muslim*—namely, one who submits to God—from embracing others beyond the followers of Muhammad (see 3:85c). A similar overlap between "Muslims" and "People of the Book" is proposed by some commentators for v. 113, where Muslims are grouped by some commentators as "People of the Book" in order to make sense of *Among the People of the Book is an upright community. Among them are believers* is often skipped in some commentaries, such as those of al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Māturīdī.

111 The *hurt* (*adhā*) refers to an insult or a taunt or to blasphemous claims about God (R, Ṭ, Th). That the People of the Book would, when challenged with physical danger, turn their backs is also mentioned in 59:12, where it also says that they will not be helped. Not being helped or not having helpers is a fate often associated with perdition in the Hereafter and in this world (e.g., 2:270, 3:22, 56; 4:52; 9:74; 16:37).

112 Similar themes, including *abasement, wrath,* and *indigence,* are addressed in 2:61. They are understood by some to refer to the status of the People of the Book during times of war when they are belligerents, whose property could be legitimately seized as spoils and children taken as prisoners, among other things (R). Others say the *abasement* refers to the *jizyah,* the indemnity levied on non-Muslims, and *dhimmah,* the state of living as a non-Muslim treaty people under Muslim rule (Q; see 9:29). Some, however, dispute that this *abasement* refers to the *jizyah,* because the *jizyah* does not disappear with the *rope from God* and *rope from mankind,* interpreted to mean a covenant with God and a covenant with the believers (Ṭ). Others point to the historical situation of Jews as exiles who are historically poor and powerless, since the verb could be understood as referring to the past or the future (R).

113 Although this verse is usually interpreted as setting up a distinction among different kinds of People of the Book, some understand *they are not all alike* to refer to Muslims and the People of the Book together, meaning that Muslims are not like the Jews and Christians (Q, Ṭ). The word *upright* renders *qāʾimah,* which connotes justice (Ṭ) as well as evokes the literal "standing up" of worshippers in prayer. Some think the *upright community* refers to a group of Jews who became good Muslims (Ṭ); see 3:110c. Several somewhat enigmatic occasions of revelation are provided for this verse. Some mention an incident in which the Muslims were waiting for the Prophet to lead the night prayer in the mosque and the Prophet said to them, "No people from among any of the religions are remembering God at this hour other than you." Vv. 113–15 were then revealed. Another version states that this *upright community* refers specifically to forty people of Najrān, thirty-two people from Abyssinia, and three from Byzantium who followed the religion of Jesus and affirmed the truth of Muhammad. Another account says that it refers to a people who prayed between sunset and the end of twilight (R).

One interpretation of this verse identifies Muslims as People of the Book, since they do indeed follow a Book from God, and thus sees this

(114) They believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and hasten unto good deeds. And they are among the righteous. (115) Whatsoever good they do, they will not be denied it. And God knows the reverent. (116) Truly those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against God. They are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. (117) The parable of what they spend in this life of the world is that of a frigid wind that strikes the tillage of a people who have wronged themselves, destroying it. God wrongs them not, but themselves do they wrong. (118) O you who believe! Take not intimates apart from yourselves; they will not stint you in corruption. They

as a comparison between Muslims (*the upright community*), on the one hand, and Jews and Christians, on the other (R), while others say "People of the Book" can mean a people following a "good way." Some state, without exposition, that there are believers among the People of the Book (M). To be *upright* is interpreted as meaning being just (Ṭ) and maintaining the limits set by God, obeying Him and not distorting the Books (M, Th).

114–15 Whether these verses refer to the Muslims or to the People of the Book depends on how the *upright community* is identified in v. 113 and how *among them are believers* is interpreted in v. 110. These verses are similar in content to 2:62 and 5:69 (see commentary on those verses) and address similar issues of identifying what it means to believe in God and the Last Day and to be righteous. Some understand *they will not be denied it* as a way of reassuring the former Jews who were grieved by the assertions of their former coreligionists, who said that their actions were futile now that they had abandoned Judaism and embraced Islam (IK, R). Some read the verb here in the second person, giving the translation, "you will not be denied it" (Q, Ṭ).

As with vv. 110 and 113 as well as 2:62 and 5:69, among others, the identification of current Muslims as being among the People of the Book often raises new questions as it seeks to answer others. As noted in 3:113c, "People of the Book" and "Muslims" appear to be treated as overlapping categories only in commentaries attempting to make sense of verses such as vv. 110–15; 2:62; and 5:69. Moreover, it is unclear why Muslims such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām needed special reassurance in the face of their former coreligionists' taunting. The plain sense of the verse suggests more strongly that it is addressed to Muslims unsure of how to judge the belief and actions of the People of the Book, informing Muslims that God does not reject the good deeds of the People of the Book when they are truly good and that *they* (the People of the Book) *are not all alike* (3:113).

116 Some note that wealth and children are thought to be the most dependable and beneficial goods in life, but they will nevertheless be of no use to anyone in the Hereafter (R). Elsewhere the Quran states that wealth and children will not avail *save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:89). Possessing wealth and children deludes the disbeliever into a sense of security and superiority *simply because he possesses wealth and children* (68:14), a theme also developed in 34:35–37, where the positive dimension of wealth and children is mentioned. See also 9:85; 17:64; 18:46; 19:77; 23:55; 71:21.

117 Other verses invoke the wind's destructive power in order to describe how unrooted and sterile the actions of disbelievers are in this life. In this verse the wind is cold, while in 2:266 it burns, and in 14:18 the deeds of disbelievers are already ashes waiting to be blown away. Verses involving the nourishing dimension of wind include 7:57; 25:48; 30:46; 35:9. The wronging of oneself is mentioned numerous times in the Quran (3:135; 4:97; 9:70; 16:33; 29:40; 30:9; 34:19; 35:32; 37:113).

118 *Intimates* renders *biṭānah*, meaning confidants or trusted friends (denoting both the singular and plural); it also literally means the inner lining of a garment, evoking a sense of direct closeness and

wish you to suffer. Hatred has appeared from their mouths; yet what their breasts conceal is greater. We have indeed made clear the signs for you, were you to understand. (119) Lo! You are the ones who love them, while they love you not, though you believe in the Book entire. And when they meet you they say, "We believe," but when they are alone they bite their fingers at you from rage. Say, "Die in your rage!" Truly God knows what lies within breasts. (120) If good befalls you, it vexes them, and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it. But if you are patient and reverent, their plot will not harm you in the least. Truly God encompasses what they do. (121) And remember when thou didst leave thy household at daybreak to assign the believers their positions for the battle. And God

intimacy. They are those to whom one tells one's secrets (Ṭ). *They will not stint you in corruption* means that when it comes to the act of corruption, they will not be miserly in providing that corruption. This is interpreted by some commentators to mean that in certain important matters pertaining to the affairs of Muslims, such as writing contracts or sending significant messages, one should not rely on non-Muslims (IK, Q); in this vein al-Qurṭubī bemoans the fact that in his day Muslims were relying on Jews and Christians as scribes and secretaries, although this is a reflection of the society of his day. Others seem to interpret this as a statement on human nature in general, mentioning a *ḥadīth* that states, "God has sent no prophet, nor appointed any vicegerent, save that he had two groups of intimates. One group enjoins and encourages what is right while the other enjoins and encourages what is evil. He is protected who is protected by God," which is interpreted to mean that God will protect whom He will from the evil promptings of those who are close to them.

119 Depending on whether these enemies are hypocrites or People of the Book, this *love* can refer to various matters. *You are the ones who love them, while they love you not* can mean that, although you love them in Islam (as religious brothers and sisters), they in truth do not love you; or it can mean that you wish for them to become Muslim (an act of love), while they wish for you to remain or become disbelievers; or it can mean that you do not wish for them to fall into distress, while they wish that you be afflicted by trouble (R).

*Though you believe in the Book entire* refers to Muslims' affirmation not only of the Quran, but also what was revealed before it (IK, Ṭ). Making the claim that *we believe,* but saying something different when one is alone with one's true allies, is also described in 2:14, 76; 5:41. *Die in your rage!* is interpreted to be a call to increase the cause of their rage, namely, the success and flourishing of Islam, rather than a direct call for death (R, Z).

120 This verse reflects the statement in v. 118 that *they wish for you to suffer.* The same sentiment appears in a supplication of Moses in 7:150: *Let not the enemies rejoice in my misfortune.* To be *patient* carries the sense of being steadfast and constant. That *their plot will not harm you at all* echoes the message of v. 111, where it is said that they cannot harm except through insults and taunts. Moreover, beyond simple self-interest, their joy at another's suffering shows just how severe their enmity is (IK).

121 Although most see this as a reference to the Battle of Uḥud, some say it refers to the Battle of Aḥzāb (often called the Battle of the Trench; IK, R, Ṭ). Uḥud took place in 3/625, approximately one year after the defeat of the Makkans at the Battle of Badr (see 8:5). The Quraysh set out for Madinah, seeking revenge against the Prophet and his followers for the unexpected and humiliating defeat at Badr, in which the Muslims were greatly outnumbered. The Makkans camped at the foot of Mt. Uḥud, between the mountain and the city of Madinah. The Prophet consulted with the community, many of whom suggested waiting within the city and using its fortifications to their

is Hearing, Knowing. (122) Remember when two companies among you were on the verge of losing heart, though God was their Protector. And in God let the believers trust. (123) God certainly helped you at Badr, when you were lowly. So reverence God, that haply you may give thanks. (124) Remember when thou saidst unto the believers, "Is it not enough for you that your Lord should support you with three thousand angels sent down?" (125) Yea, if you are patient and reverent, and they come at you immediately, your Lord will support you with five thousand angels bearing marks. (126) God made it not save as a glad tiding for you, and that your hearts may repose thereby—and there is no victory save from God,

advantage; another group preferred going out to face the enemy. The Prophet ultimately decided to go out from the city to confront the Makkans directly. Some sources have said that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, generally known as the leader of the hypocrites, withdrew from the battle with approximately one-third of the Madinan forces (about three hundred of nearly one thousand), ostensibly out of anger that his suggestion to remain in the city was ultimately not heeded (IK). Before the battle was joined, the Prophet ordered a group of archers to remain in position atop a hill no matter what transpired during the battle; this is what the commentators understand by *assign the believers their positions for the battle.* When many of them disobeyed at a crucial point in the battle in order to capture a share of the spoils, the remaining archers were overtaken and the rear and flank of the Madinan forces were exposed. The Madinans lost their advantage and suffered losses, and some believers fled (see v. 144), but the Makkans did not achieve a full victory. They returned to Makkah without pushing farther into the city of Madinah itself.

122 The two *companies* refer to Banū Salimah (of Khazraj) and Banū Ḥārithah (of Aws; IK, Ṭ). Though they contemplated abandoning the battle, as had ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy (see v. 121), ultimately they did not. *Though God was their Protector* can also be rendered "and/but God is their Protector." According to this latter interpretation, the phrase is a sign that God was Merciful to them despite their inner equivocation (R).

123 The Battle of Uḥud was launched by the Makkans as revenge for the Battle of Badr a year earlier. For a longer discussion of Badr, see 8:5c.

124–26 There is a debate over whether these words were spoken by the Prophet to the believers regarding the Battle of Badr or the Battle of Uḥud (R). If it refers to Badr, v. 124 continues from the phrase in the previous verse, ". . . when you [the believers] were lowly . . . [and] when thou [the Prophet] saidst unto the believers," in which case, the particle *idh* is rendered "when" rather then *remember when.* If read as being spoken at Uḥud, it continues from v. 121, "and remember when thou didst leave thy household . . . when thou saidst."

There is disagreement among the traditional sources over whether angels fought at Uḥud or not. Most commentators hold that the angels fought only at Badr (IK, R); see also 8:9–12. They are thought to have participated in the battle in various ways. Some say the angels assumed visible or invisible form and actually killed disbelievers, and accounts exist in the *Ḥadīth* and *sīrah* (biographical literature about the Prophet) that describe certain mysterious deaths (e.g., heads flying off enemies' bodies as if severed) and mysterious fighters (presumed to be angels) witnessed during the battle of Badr (IK, Q). Another interpretation sees the help of the angels as being spiritual, strengthening the believers' hearts, heightening their senses, increasing their power, and giving them courage by their presence (R). The most common opinion is that no angels fought at Uḥud (only at Badr) and that the ones at Uḥud were sent as a kind of moral support (IK, Q, R), although some have pointed out that God does not need angels to support the believers (Ṭ). Thus, *a glad tiding for you* in v. 126 is interpreted to be a reference to the support mentioned in v. 125 (R), where

the Mighty, the Wise— (127) that He may cut off a faction of those who disbelieve or abase them, so that they be turned back disappointed. (128) Naught is thine in the matter, whether He relent unto them or punish them, for truly they are wrongdoers. (129) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. He forgives whomsoever He will and punishes whomsoever He will, and God is Forgiving, Merciful. (130) O you who believe! Devour not usury, doubling and multiplying. And reverence God, that haply you may prosper. (131) And be mindful of the Fire that has been prepared for the disbelievers. (132) And obey God and the Messenger, that haply you may receive mercy. (133) And hasten unto forgiveness from your Lord, and for a garden whose

believers would find happiness in the fact that the angels would come (IK) or at least in the promise that they would come (Q).

In v. 125 *immediately* carries the sense of "without hesitation" or "at once." There is disagreement over whether the promise of v. 125 to *support* them *with five thousand angels* was fulfilled or whether the believers failed to be patient and reverent so that the five thousand angels were never sent (Q, Ṭ). Some say that *bearing marks* (*musawwimīn*) can refer to the angels being sent or to their sending something, since the word can also refer to one who sends an animal out to pasture or uses such an animal as a mount in battle (Q, R).

127 *Cut off a faction* is understood to mean that God eliminated a part of them during Badr, although others say this refers to Uḥud (Ṭ). *Turned back disappointed* means they could not achieve victory against the believers (Ṭ).

128–29 Verses with a similar message include 2:272: *Thou art not tasked with their guidance, but God guides whomsoever He will;* 3:20: *but if they turn away, then thine is only to convey;* and 28:56: *Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will.* According to one account, v. 128 was revealed in connection with the Prophet's reaction to his enemies' attacks. He fought at Uḥud and was physically wounded during the battle, reportedly chipping or breaking one of his lateral incisors and suffering a wound that caused him to bleed from his face (Ṭ). The Prophet stated, "How can a people prosper who bloody their prophet while he is calling them to their Lord?" Then this verse was revealed. In another account, during the canonical prayer the Prophet (after rising from bowing) said, "O God, curse so-and-so," at which time this verse was revealed, and in some versions the Prophet specifically named some people who would later become Muslims (IK). But according to other accounts, it was said that he would imprecate against the believers' enemies, until this verse was revealed, after which he ceased to do so. These two versions of the account differ insofar as one directly links the Prophet's actions to the revelation, while the other shows only how the verse relates to the Prophet's actions more generally.

130 For an extended discussion of *usury* (*ribā*), see 2:275–81c.

131 *Be mindful* renders a word usually translated "reverence," but which also connotes fear, taking care, and being on guard; see 2:2c.

132 Obedience to the Prophet is discussed in many verses in the Quran (e.g., 4:80; 8:1; 24:54; 48:17) and obedience is also mentioned with regard to other prophets throughout *Sūrah* 26. Cf. v. 31, which links following the Prophet with receiving God's Love (see also 3:31c), just as this verse links obeying the Prophet with receiving God's Compassion and Mercy.

133 Cf. 57:21. It is said that the Byzantine emperor Heraclius sent an emissary to the Prophet saying, "You call to a garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth. So where is the fire?" The

breadth is the heavens and the earth—prepared for the reverent, (134) who spend in ease and hardship, and curb their rage, and pardon others—and God loves the virtuous— (135) and who, when they commit an indecency or wrong themselves, remember God and then seek forgiveness for their sins—and who forgives sins but God?—and who do not knowingly persist in what they have done. (136) For these, their reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein. Blessed indeed is the reward of the workers [of righteousness]! (137) Wonts have passed before you; so journey upon

Prophet replied, "Glory be to God! Where is the night when the day comes?"

134 A *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever curbs his anger even though he is able to release [act on] it will be filled with security and faith by God." Another *ḥadīth* states, "He is not forceful who throws down his opponent, but he who controls his soul when he is angry." See also 42:37: *who . . . when they are angry, forgive. Ease* refers to a time when one's wealth is plentiful (Ṭ), though some interpret it to mean that, whether the reverent are happy or sad or whether giving makes them feel happy or irritates them, they still spend for good causes (R). The word rendered *rage* is *ghayẓ*, which some differentiate from *ghaḍab* (also often rendered "anger"), in that *ghayẓ* is the internal aspect of *ghaḍab*, while *ghaḍab* is anger manifested in words or physical actions (Q). *And pardon others* refers to those over whom one has power (Q). Spiritually speaking, this verse is understood to mean that believers do not hoard away things from God, giving both their bodies and their souls (Qu); some Sufis say that if one wants to know the station of a spiritual traveler (*faqīr*), one should do something to anger the person and see what comes out (Aj).

135–36 One can *remember God* by recalling His Anger and Punishment, being aware that God is always watching over, or by pronouncing God's Name (Aj). There is no great sin once forgiveness is sought, and no small sin that is done perpetually (Aj). An *indecency* (*fāḥishah*) is something that is ugly or trespasses the limits of a norm. *Knowingly persist* means they do so intentionally or with an awareness that their action is a sin or is forbidden (Ṭ). Some report that v. 135 was revealed in connection with a man who bought dates from a beautiful woman, impetuously embraced her and kissed her, and then regretted it (Q). *Workers [of righteousness]* (*ʿāmilīn*) refers to those who perform right actions, and for some this constitutes evidence that entering Paradise is not only a matter of God's Grace, but that it also involves at least some element of human action (R).

137 *Wonts* renders *sunan*, the plural of *sunnah*. The Quran refers to the wont of previous peoples (4:26; 8:38; 15:13; 17:77; 18:55; 35:43) and to the *wont of God* (33:38, 62; 35:43; 40:85; 48:23). The most common usage in the Islamic tradition for *sunnah* is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, which comprises his sayings and doings, which are recorded and transmitted through the *Ḥadīth*. Because the Prophet's life is both morally and legally normative for Muslims, *Sunnah* came to signify also that class of actions and behaviors that, though not strictly enjoined as an obligation, are nevertheless recommended in order to follow the Prophet's example. When referring to "the *Sunnah*" Muslims are referring to the Prophet's *sunnah*, though the word has the general meaning of established practices, a way of living that has been in some way instituted as a norm, whether good or bad from the Islamic point of view. Thus a *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever establishes a good wont (*sunnah*) shall have its reward and the reward of those who act according to it until the Day of Resurrection, and whosoever established an evil wont shall bear its burden and the burden of those who act according to it until the Day of Resurrection." In the present verse *sunan* (*wonts*) could also be rendered "cultures," if culture is understood in the general sense of received norms of practice and

the earth and behold how the deniers fared in the end! (138) This is an exposition for mankind, and a guidance and exhortation for the reverent. (139) Do not falter and do not grieve, for you will be ascendant if you are believers. (140) If a wound afflicts you, a like wound has already afflicted that people. And such days We hand out in turns to mankind. And [this is] so that God may know those who believe, and take witnesses from among you—and God loves not the wrongdoers— (141) and so that God may assay those who believe and blight the

knowledge. For some, there is an implied sense here of "the [peoples who practiced] wonts" (Q). Some connect this verse with the battle of Uḥud, the implication being that the enemies of the believers will meet with a fate similar to that of the enemies of prophets before them (Q).

*The end* (*ᶜāqibah*) refers not only what comes last, but also denotes the result, upshot, or consequence of an act and its effect upon the being of the actor. This verse, like dozens of others, invites people to contemplate the end, or result, of such wonts, or "cultures," by actually witnessing what they left behind after their end, sometimes referring to them as wrongdoers (10:39), those who were warned (10:73), the deniers (16:36), and the workers of corruption (27:14). Some commentators specifically mention those peoples with whom the Arabs had some familiarity, such as the ᶜĀd (see 46:21–26) and the Thamūd (see 27:45–52), but the primary lesson drawn from considering the ends of earlier peoples is that their worldly power and wealth did not save them from a terrible fate (Ṭ). Some say that one can acquire this knowledge without actually traveling, but simply by hearing stories of such peoples, though hearing is less powerful than seeing (R).

**138** *Exposition* translates *al-bayān,* which is also known as one of the names of the Quran (see 55:4). In this context, some commentators say that *an exposition* refers to the whole Quran (Q), while others say that it refers only to what was just said in the previous verses (Ṭ). In 5:46, the Torah is also described as *a guidance and an exhortation to the reverent.*

**139** *Do not falter* connotes also "do not deem yourselves weak" (Q); see also 47:35. The believers should *not grieve* over the losses that they have suffered in battle (Ṭ). To be *ascendant* (*aᶜlawn*, sing. *aᶜlā*) means they will triumph over their enemies (Q) or that their end will be better than that of their enemies (IK, R). Some read the particle *idh* as "since" rather than "if" and understand *if you are believers* to mean "since you are believers" (Q).

**140–41** *That people* refers to the believers' enemies who, at the battle of Badr the year before, had suffered injuries and losses at the hands of the believers (IK, R), even as the believers now suffered wounds at their enemies' hands at the Battle of Uḥud. *We hand out in turns* is interpreted by some using the Arabic proverb, "One day for you, one day against you" (Ṭ), an expression of the ephemerality of the world (R). According to some, it is assumed that God will grant victory to the believers, but when the believers disobey or lose faith, their enemies get the better of them (Q); that is, God does not support the disbelievers as such, but does so to test the believers with loss (R). To *take witnesses from among you* can mean that some of them are given the noble station of being witnesses to human sin and disobedience (R), but it is widely understood to mean that they will die in the way of God and be martyrs (IK, R, Ṭ), even though the sense of martyrdom is not necessarily evoked in other uses of *shahīd* ("witness") in the Quran.

Grammatically, *And [this is] so that God may know* functions with an implicit phrase so that it says something like either "[God did thus] so that He may know" or "So that God may know [He will do thus]" (Z). For a discussion of the theological issues concerning God's Knowledge raised by *so that God may know,* see 2:143c.

*Assay* refers to refining or removal of impurities. It is understood to be a process of trials to test

disbelievers. (142) Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without God knowing those among you who strived, and without knowing those who were patient? (143) You did indeed long for death before you met it. Now you have seen it, looking on. (144) Muhammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him. So if he dies or is slain, will you turn back on your heels? Whosoever turns back on his heels will not harm God in the least, and God will reward the thankful. (145) It is not for any soul to die save by God's Leave—an enjoined term. Yet whosoever desires the reward of this world, We shall give him of it; and whosoever desires the reward of the Hereafter, We shall give him of it.

patience (Ṭ). *Blight* also appears in 2:276. Here it is understood to mean reduction and shortage, the decrease of a thing until one can no longer see any of it (R).

142 Cf. 29:2. This verse is understood to mean not that God's Knowledge is incomplete (see v. 139), but that one must strive and be patient in order to enter the Garden (R). Put another way, it is like saying, "I know no good in him," meaning, "He is no good" (Z). The verb in the clause *and without knowing those who were patient* is read by some to mean, "without God knowing those among you who strived such that He would know those who were patient" (Q, R). In commenting on this verse, al-Rāzī says, "Know that love of this world cannot coexist with happiness in the Hereafter, and to the degree that one of them increases the other diminishes. That is because happiness in the world only is achieved by the heart's occupation with worldliness, and happiness in the Hereafter can only be achieved by emptying the heart of all that is other than God and filling it with the love of God. Not all those who affirm the religion of God are truthful. Rather, in the difference there is a question of the sway of things that we hate and things that we love. Love is that which does not diminish with difficulty and does not increase through fulfillment. If love survives the onset of suffering, it is shown to be true love."

143 This verse is thought to address certain believers who did not participate in the Battle of Badr and yet who hoped to have the chance to fight against the idolaters in the way of God (Ṭ); they *longed for death* in the sense of longing for the fighting that could lead to death (Ṭ). Some interpret *you have seen it, looking on* to be a kind of emphatic statement akin to, "You heard it with your own ears" (Ṭ); others think that it means they saw it with untrammeled vision (Q), or that it implies a question, "You have seen it, looking on, so why then did you flee?" (Q), referring to the events at Uḥud when, during the heat of battle, some believers retreated or fled (see v. 144).

144 Similar verses include 39:30: *Surely thou wilt die, and surely they will die;* and 3:185: *Every soul shall taste death.* As mentioned in 3:128–29c, the Prophet was seriously injured during the Battle of Uḥud, and in the fog of the battle rumors began to circulate that he was not only injured, but killed, causing alarm and hesitation among some of the believers and temporarily raising the morale of the idolaters. One Companion was reported to have said, "O people, if Muhammad has died, then the Lord of Muhammad will not die. How shall you live your lives after the Messenger of God? Fight as he fought, and die as he died!" Moreover, some hypocrites taunted the believers, saying that if Muhammad were truly a prophet, he would not have been killed, and prodded the believers to return to their old religion. Years later, immediately after the Prophet had died, some Companions, such as ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, refused to believe he was dead. In his famous words to the Muslim community after the Prophet's death, Abū Bakr reminded the people of this verse, and ʿUmar is reported to have responded, "It is as though I had never recited those words before that day."

145 *An enjoined term* is thought to include an implicit verb and to mean "He enjoined an enjoined term" (Ṭ). It is said that *whosoever*

And We shall reward the thankful. (146) How many a prophet had many devoted men fight alongside him! They did not then falter in the face of what befell them in the way of God, nor did they weaken, nor did they demean themselves. And God loves the patient. (147) Their words were but to say, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and our prodigality in our affairs, and make firm our steps, and help us against the disbelieving people." (148) And God gave them the reward of this world and the most beautiful reward of the Hereafter, and God loves the virtuous. (149) O you who believe! If you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back on your heels; then you will be overturned as losers. (150) Rather, God is your Master, and He is the best of helpers. (151) We shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve for having ascribed partners unto God, for which He has not sent down any authority. And their refuge shall be the Fire,

*desires the reward of this world* refers to those seeking after the spoils of war, glory, and renown (R), though it has a more universal import (Q). This verse reinforces the message of the previous verse that all human beings, including prophets, will die, and this death does not diminish the mission of prophethood (R). Moreover, it is interpreted as a means of imparting wisdom regarding fear and courage, a reminder that fear and cowardice do no one any good, and that one should courageously fight for the good (R). It also denies the hypocrites the right to say such things as, "Had he been with us, he would not have died" (R). A long *ḥadīth* describes a warrior, a philanthropist, and a scholar who expect Paradise for their actions while having only worldly intentions: the warrior for his fighting and dying, the philanthropist for giving charity, and the scholar for teaching others. Their true intentions of gaining only worldly renown and glory are exposed by God on the Day of Judgment, and they are rewarded with the Fire instead of Paradise. Regarding desiring the rewards of both this world and the Hereafter, see also 2:201.

146 Some read *fight* (*qātala*) as "were killed" (*qutila*), in which case it would mean, "And how many a prophet was killed, while there were alongside him many devoted men!" (R, Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī prefers this interpretation, as it accords with the plain sense of the previous verses.

*Devoted men* translates *ribbiyyūn,* which is interpreted by some as a form of *rabbāniyyūn,* rendered in this translation as *sages* (Z; see v. 79). Others suggest that it refers generally to large groups (Ṭ); some give ten thousand as the specific number for *ribbī* and interpret *ribbiyyūn* to mean large numbers of learned people (*ᶜulamāᵓ;* Ṭ) or patient people (Q).

147 Some interpret *our sins* to mean small sins and *our prodigality* to mean great sins (Q). *Prodigality* renders *isrāf,* which means both waste and excess, the going beyond bounds.

148 Some interpret the *reward of this world* to refer to victory and spoils, and stability in the world (Ṭ); see 4:134c. Although in other verses it is stated that God is said to love the reverent (see 3:76; 9:4, 7), the patient (3:146), the just (5:42; 60:8), and the equitable (49:9), among others, the virtuous in general are cited most often as those whom God loves (see 2:195; 3:134; 5:13, 93).

149 *Those who disbelieve* is interpreted to mean variously the Muslims' enemies among the Jews, Christians, hypocrites, and idolaters (Ṭ). *Back on your heels* means back to disbelief after faith (Ṭ). *As losers* can mean, as in other instances, both those who are lost and those who have lost everything.

150 This verse counsels seeking refuge with God, seeking help from no other (Ṭ).

151 Although this verse can be understood more generally, it is reported that, on the way back

and evil is the abode of the wrongdoers. (152) And God certainly was true to His Promise to you when you were eradicating them by His Leave, until the moment you lost heart, and quarreled with one another about the matter, and disobeyed, after He had showed you that which you loved. Among you are those who desire this world, and among you are those who desire the Hereafter. Then He turned you from them, to test you, and He certainly pardoned you—God is Possessed of Bounty for the believers— (153) when you were climbing, casting a glance to no one, while the Messenger was calling you from your rear. So He recompensed you with sorrow upon sorrow, that you may not grieve over what escaped you or

to Makkah after the Battle of Uḥud, the idolaters lamented that they did not eradicate the Muslim community, though they had inflicted severe casualties upon them. When the Makkans had mustered the intention to return to Madinah, God cast terror into them until they lost heart and continued on toward Makkah (Q, Ṭ).

152 The first part of this verse refers to the failure of the archers to stand their ground, abandoning their positions on the high ground to ensure their share of the spoils once they saw the battle's tide turn in the believers' favor (Q; see v. 121). *Showed you that which you loved* thus refers to coming victory portended by early events in the battle, such as the killing of the idolaters' standard bearers (Q). The *you* in *and He certainly pardoned you* refers to either the archers specifically or the believers as a whole (Q). The Companion Ibn Masʿūd reportedly said that, prior to the revelation of this verse, he had not known or believed that any among the Prophet's Companions could be characterized as *those who desire this world* (Ṭ). *Quarreled with one another* means that some of the archers did not want to leave their posts to seek after the spoils and insisted on staying and following the Prophet's orders (Q, Ṭ). *Turned you from them* means that you (the believers) were turned away from them (the disbelievers), because of your disobedience, failing to achieve the rout that would have been yours if you had been obedient; *to test you,* that is, to try you (Ṭ). *He certainly pardoned you* means that God did not utterly eradicate them, according to some interpretations, even though what they did was an enormity, disobeying the Prophet in the midst of battle (Ṭ).

153 *When you were climbing* continues the discussion of the events of the previous verse, but if the *when* is translated "Remember when . . .," it can also indicate the beginning of a new sentence (R). Although the verb rendered *climbing* (*aṣʿada*) has the root meaning of "to go up," some say that in the form the root takes here it means to traverse level ground (Ṭ), not to climb. According to this reading, one performs the action *aṣʿada* through a valley, while another verb, *ṣaʿida*, is used to indicate going up a mountain. Reading the verb to mean traversing level ground would, moreover, be in accord with the narration of events, which indicates that, far from climbing, some of the believers are being blamed for descending from their posts on high ground to chase after the spoils. However, others interpret this to mean that, when the battle turned against the believers, some fled up Mt. Uḥud (Ṭ). *Casting a glance to no one* means not caring about anyone else. As they were running away, the Prophet was reportedly calling from behind them, "To me! Servants of God! To me! Servants of God!" (Q, R, Ṭ).

*Sorrow upon sorrow* is understood by some to mean "sorrow because of sorrow"; that is, they were made to feel sorrow for having made the Prophet sorrowful (R). Or it can mean "sorrow after sorrow," in which case the first sorrow was the news that the Prophet had died, and the second was the casualties they suffered later, or the reverse (Ṭ); or it was losing both the battle and the spoils, then hearing the gloating of the enemy (Ṭ);

what befell you. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (154) Then He sent down upon you—after sorrow—security, a sleepiness enveloping a company among you, while a company were anxious over themselves, thinking about God what is not true—the thinking of the Age of Ignorance—saying, "Do we have any decision [in this]?" Say, "The decision belongs entirely to God." They hide in their souls what they do not disclose to thee, saying, "Had we any decision [in this], we would not have been slain here." Say, "Had you stayed in your houses, those who were destined to be slain would have gone out to their places of rest." And [this is] so that God may test what is in your breasts and so that He may assay what is in your hearts. And God knows what lies within breasts. (155) Those of you who turned away on the day the two hosts met—Satan alone

or the first was the loss of the battle, which was then followed by fear that the idolaters would return to finish them off and complete their victory over them (R). Still others interpret it to mean a kind of compounded, relentless grief (R).

*That you may not grieve* is connected to either *So He recompensed you* or *He certainly pardoned you* from v. 152. According to the former, God caused sorrow in them for their causing sorrow in the Prophet, but saved them from the grief over losing the spoils of battle (R). It is also interpreted to mean that God caused them sorrow, so that they would not become attached to the world and be neither saddened at losing it nor pleased at gaining it (R). Al-Rāzī mentions that the very act of retreating or running away is a kind of sorrow, because one feels weak and cowardly.

154 *Sleepiness* (*nuᶜās*) here is either a description of *security* or an independent object of the verb *sent down*. In the latter case it means, "sent down sleepiness as safety," where the two words are reversed, or "we made you sleep safely" (R). According to Ibn Masᶜūd, to sleep during a battle shows one's trust and faith in God and one's detachment from the world, but sleep during prayer shows one's distance from God (R). This sleepiness was thus a kind of miracle and moreover caused them to rest physically, so that they might carry on the battle; it was a sign that God was on their side (R). Some of the believers were able, while on the field, to achieve a restful sleep. One *ḥadīth* tells of a Companion who said he would fall asleep and his sword would fall out of his hand, and this happened repeatedly.

*Anxious over themselves* means they were afraid (R). *Thinking about God what is not true* refers to the belief of some of them that, if Muhammad really were a prophet, they would not have encountered the setbacks at Uḥud (R). Al-Rāzī also offers a discussion about providence in commenting upon this verse, asserting that we should not claim to derive what God wills or does from our egocentric evaluation of pleasure and suffering, because we do not possess all the measures by which we might judge whether such and such a thing is bad or good, including success or failure on the battlefield.

*Do we have any decision?* referring to the decision to go out and meet the idolaters in battle (see v. 121), is a question spoken by the hypocrites (Q), although al-Rāzī thinks that this question could have been spoken by the believers in a sincere way in their anticipation of victory. The hypocrites were arguing that it was foolish for them to go out and meet the Makkans in battle, and that had they stayed in Madinah, they would not have suffered such casualties. *Places of rest* refers to their final resting places, where they will lie when they are dead (Q, R). *So that God may test* means He does so in order to separate out the hypocrites from the sincere (R).

155 *The day the two hosts met* refers to the battle between the idolaters and the believers at Uḥud (Ṭ). What this verse describes would have

made them slip because of part of what they committed. And God certainly pardoned them; truly God is Forgiving, Clement. (156) O you who believe! Be not like those who disbelieve and say of their brethren when they travel upon the earth or campaign, "Had they stayed with us, they would not have died and been slain," that God may make that a source of regret in their hearts. And God gives life and causes death, and God sees whatsoever you do. (157) And indeed if you are slain or die in the way of God, truly forgiveness and mercy from God are better than what they amass. (158) And indeed if you are slain or die, truly unto God shall you be gathered. (159) Then [it was] by a mercy from God

happened after the archers left the high ground and the Makkans began to make gains against the believers (see v. 121). Many details exist in the *Ḥadīth* and *Sīrah* (biographical literature about the Prophet) regarding the Battle of Uḥud, but there is no unanimity as to which group of people this verse describes. According to some commentators, *those of you who turned away* could refer to a group of the believers who ran away from the fighting or to a group who remained back in Madinah, or it means that some ran away to the city while others clambered up Uḥud (Ṭ). Others believe that it refers to a specific group of known individuals: ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, Saʿd ibn ʿUthmān, and ʿUqbah ibn ʿUthmān (Ṭ), who ran either out of simple fear or because they believed the rumor that the Prophet had been killed (see v. 144). That some eminent Companions are included among those who turned away and then were pardoned by God is explained as a lesson in God's Forgiveness by commentators, who also cite, for example, God's accepting Adam's repentance and pardoning him (see 2:37; Q).

*Because of part of what they committed* can also be read as "in part of what they committed," meaning Satan caused them to *slip* only in certain matters, not more generally (R). But according to the former reading, it could mean that they were made to slip precisely because they turned away, since one error or sin can lead to another (R). Some interpret this verse to mean that they ran away because they did not wish to die except in a state of perfection and were afraid to meet God before they had achieved true repentance (R).

156 *Say of their brethren* has the sense of "on account of their brethren," meaning they say this because of what happened to them (Z). The words *Had they stayed with us* are spoken by either disbelievers in general, the hypocrites in general, or specifically ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy (see v. 121; Q, R). Some understand it to mean that those who could have prevented their friends and relatives from going out to campaign or travel for some other reason would be made to feel regret and anguish upon hearing these words, because they failed to stop their relatives and friends from going out to their doom; or the words were spoken simply to create doubt (and hence regret) in the hearts of weaker believers (R). The verse could be telling the believers, "Be not like them, so that God may make that a source of regret in their hearts," a regret that might also be experienced by them on the Day of Judgment for their having spoken those words (R). That *God gives life and causes death* restates a point made in v. 154, namely, that human beings should never forget that God, not human agency, determines life and death. It is also interpreted spiritually to mean that God quickens the hearts of His friends and brings death to the hearts of His enemies (R).

157–58 *What they amass* refers to their wealth or more broadly to their collecting the vanities of the world (IK). The state of those who are slain or die is discussed in 3:169–71c.

159 Other verses describing the Prophet's treatment of the believers include 7:199; 9:128; 26:215. This gentleness was directed toward the Prophet's Companions and followers who had

that thou wert gentle with them. Hadst thou been severe [and] hard-hearted they would have scattered from about thee. So pardon them, ask forgiveness for them, and consult them in affairs. And when thou art resolved, trust in God; truly God loves those who trust. (160) If God helps you, none shall overcome you. And if He forsakes you, who then can help you thereafter? And in God let the believers

fallen short in their conduct during the battle (Ṭ). *Scattered from about thee* means they would have left the Prophet (Ṭ).

*Consult them in affairs* refers to matters of war, since the Prophet by definition would not consult them in matters of revelation (Q, R). Before the battle the Prophet did precisely that, consulting with the Muslims of Madinah about whether they should remain in the city or ride out to meet the idolaters in battle (see v. 121). Many view any consultation carried out by the Prophet to be superfluous and good only as a kind of flattery, since he had revelation and needed no one's advice (Q), but this is rejected by many, and the Prophet did consult his contemporaries, men and women, in many matters. Some see the Prophet's act of consulting others as a means of establishing consultation as a wont of his community (R). Others note that there are all sorts of things to be known in the world and quote the Prophet's qualification of his own knowledge of the world in the famous *ḥadīth*, "You all know more about the affairs of this world of yours," thus giving a more substantive interpretation to the Prophet's consultation. According to one view, this verse reassures the Companions not only that they were forgiven, but that God still looks upon them with favor by telling the Prophet to consider their judgment (R). *Consult them in affairs* also contains guidance for politics in general and the affairs between human beings and throughout the centuries has been important for Islamic political thought and the ideal of political action and especially in the modern period when Muslims have sometimes used the Quranic concept of consultation to interpret the Western notion of democracy. *When thou art resolved* means when the Prophet has come to a decision on his own, not based on consultation (Q), or that after the Prophet has gone through consultation, he should then make his attitude one of trust in God, not in human deliberations (R).

On the subject of gentleness, al-Rāzī quotes a saying attributed to ᶜAlī: "God has been so good to us! We were idolaters, and if the Messenger of God had come with this entire religion all at once, and with the Quran all at once, the responsibilities would have weighed heavily upon us, and we would not have entered Islam. Rather, he called us to a single word, and when we accepted it and tasted the sweetness of faith, we accepted what came after it, word upon word, in a gentle way, until the religion was completed and the law was perfected."

The Prophet is to *pardon them* when it is a matter of their having violated his rights and *ask forgiveness for them* insofar as they have violated God's rights (R,Z). Al-Rāzī argues that this is an obligation only for the Prophet and that the believers are merely encouraged to do so, since "the sins of those brought nigh (*muqarrabūn*) are the virtues of the pious (*abrār*)." He also notes that this verse indicates that even great sins can be forgiven, since 8:16 states that turning one's back on the enemy during battle *shall certainly earn wrath from God,* and fleeing from the battlefield is often listed as one of the great sins, though this is not universally held. The concept of *trust* (*tawakkul*) is a cornerstone of Islamic spirituality, and believers are told to trust in God in dozens of verses (e.g., 4:81; 5:23; 8:61; 25:28).

160 This verse is often interpreted to mean that God helped the believers at Badr, but forsook them at Uḥud (R). *Thereafter* means after being forsaken, but it can also be read as referring back to God, in which case it would be rendered "who can help you other than He?" (R). This verse is one of the most famous Quranic verses, cited often by Muslims throughout life. In reaffirming the supremacy of God's Power, this verse is similar in rhetorical form to 10:107; 28:71; 39:38: *If God desires some harm for me, could they remove His Harm, or if He desires some mercy, could they withhold His Mercy?*

trust. (161) It is not for any prophet to defraud. And whosoever defrauds will bring what he obtained by fraud on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul shall be paid what it has earned in full, and they shall not be wronged. (162) Is he who pursues God's Contentment like one who earns a burden of anger from God, and whose refuge is Hell? An evil journey's end! (163) They are ranked in degrees in the sight of God, and God sees whatsoever they do. (164) God certainly favored the believers when He sent them a Messenger from among

161 *Defraud* renders a verb often associated with the unfair distribution of the spoils of war or purloining of some part of it. For some this refers to the battle of Badr when a valuable textile went missing, and it was said the Prophet might have taken it, on which occasion this verse was revealed (R, Ṭ). For others it is simply a command to distribute the spoils equitably and not favor one person or group over another (Ṭ). Another view sees the purpose of this revelation was simply to inform people that the Prophet does not do such a thing, which is al-Ṭabarī's preferred interpretation (Ṭ).

Some say that this verse refers to the matter of the archers, who were initially given none of the spoils they precipitously sought to secure during the battle, or that it refers to certain expeditionary groups the Prophet sent out, distributing the spoils before their return (Q, Ṭ). Others say it was revealed after the archers tried to explain themselves and the motivation for their hasty decision, meaning that they did not need to act as they did to guarantee their shares (R). Still others say that this verse has nothing to do with spoils, but commands the Prophet never to withhold from people any of the revelation he has been given (Ṭ). In another view it has the general sense of "no prophet should betray anyone" or "no prophet should be betrayed" (Q, Ṭ).

In connection with *whosoever defrauds will bring what he obtained by fraud* some mention various *aḥādīth* describing how people will come to the Prophet on the Day of Judgment literally with the objects they wrongfully took hanging around their necks, even with stolen animals upon their backs. They will ask for the Prophet's help, but he will not be able to give it (Q, Ṭ). This is a message similar to that of v. 180: *On the Day of Resurrection they will be collared by that with which they were miserly.*

Though many commentators treat this verse in the context of purloining the spoils of war, they also generalize it to refer to any kind of embezzlement or misuse of a trust (Q, R). To consume or keep the spoils of war before they are fairly divided is considered by many to be a major sin, subject to varying levels of punishment, including physical punishment (Q). More broadly, any kind of mishandling or corruption in the matter of public goods is severely condemned in Islam. In connection with this verse some commentators mention a *ḥadīth* describing a man who was sent by the Prophet to collect the alms (*zakāh*); when he returned he said, "This is for you, and this was given as a gift to me." The Prophet severely reprimanded him for this, asking if he waited for his gift at his mother's and father's house, meaning that the accepting of the "gift" was an unjust practice that could not have been applied to all people equally.

162 Similar verses comparing believers and unbelievers, the righteous and the unrighteous, include 32:18; 38:28; 45:21. The notion of a *burden of anger* or wrath from God also appears in 2:61, 90; 3:112.

163 *Ranked in degrees* can mean at the most basic level that the two aforementioned groups in v. 162 are at different levels in this world (Ṭ), but it is also interpreted to mean that those who are punished are ranked at different levels of suffering in the Hereafter, just as those who achieve Paradise experience varying levels of bliss (R). That God will reward or punish in *degrees* in accord with people's actions is explicitly stated in 6:132 and 46:19. On this topic see also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Qurʾān." This verse can also be seen as a general affirmation of the general principle that reality consists of a hierarchy of levels.

164 The wording of this verse closely matches that of 2:129 and links the coming of the Prophet

themselves, who recites His signs unto them, and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and Wisdom, while aforetime they were in manifest error. (165) And when an affliction befell you, though you wrought an affliction twice its like, did you say, "Whence is this?" Say, "It is from yourselves." Truly God is Powerful over all things. (166) And that which befell you on the day the two hosts met was by God's Leave, and that He may know the believers, (167) and that He may know the hypocrites. And it was said unto them, "Come, fight in the way of God or defend [yourselves]." They said, "Had we known there would be fighting, we would have followed you." That day they were closer to disbelief than to belief, saying with their mouths what was not in their hearts. And God

Muhammad with the prayer of Abraham in that verse; see also 2:151; 62:2. That a human being like them, *from among themselves,* should be God's Messenger was a cause of the idolaters' incredulity and denial of Muhammad's prophethood, as in 54:24: *Shall we follow a single human being from among us?* and 11:12: *Why has no treasure been sent down upon him, or an angel not come with him?* Part of the answer to this latter question is given in 15:8: *We do not send down the angels, save in truth, and were We to do so, they would be granted no respite.* In 7:69 they are questioned as to why they marvel at this appointment of a human being like them, an incredulousness also described in 10:2; 38:4; 50:2. *Manifest error* refers to their state in the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance.

165 According to this verse, the believers caused twice the affliction to the idolaters at Badr that the idolaters caused at Uḥud. The number of believers killed at Uḥud is considered to have been 70; at Badr the believers killed approximately 70 idolaters, but also took 70 prisoners (Ṭ), which is in a sense equivalent to twice as many, because prisoners can be executed; if they had executed the prisoners, that would mean 140 people killed (Q). For some this verse means that the believers were afflicted at Uḥud because they ransomed the prisoners of Badr, while others say this happened because they disobeyed the Prophet through their aforementioned faltering or pursuing the spoils or by running away (R, Ṭ). Some suggest that *twice its like* refers to this retreat; that is, the believers put the idolaters to flight at the battle of Badr and had done so also at the start of the battle of Uḥud, though the battle later turned against them and they were put to flight, resulting in the believers routing the idolaters twice overall, but suffering that fate themselves only once (R). *Whence is this?* refers to the flight during the battle, meaning, "If this is a true prophet, why did this rout take place?" (R)

166 Regarding *that He may know the believers,* see 3:140–41c. *The day the two hosts met* refers to the Battle of Uḥud.

167 Regarding *that He may know the hypocrites,* see 3:140–41c. This verse refers to the withdrawal of ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy with approximately three hundred others before the battle began (see v. 121). When called upon to stay and fight with the Prophet, he said, "We do not believe there will be fighting. If we knew that there would be fighting, we would be with you" (Q). This can mean either that they did not believe there would be fighting, only a kind of tense standoff, or that if fighting ensued, it would not be a battle, but an all-out massacre (R); in either case, their attitude would have been hypocritical, not sincere.

*Or defend [yourselves]* means that, if they would not fight in the way of God, they should at least fight in their own self-defense (Q); that is, they should not be cowards. Or it can mean that they should "repel" the enemy, even if there is no fighting, by at least remaining on the battlefield, forming ranks, and giving the appearance of greater numbers (Ṭ).

Some say *they were closer to disbelief than to belief* shows that one should not call anyone who

knows best what they conceal. (168) Those who said of their brethren, while they were sitting [at home], "Had they obeyed us, they would not have been slain." Say, "Then ward off death from yourselves, if you are truthful." (169) And deem not those slain in the way of God to be dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, provided for, (170) exulting in what God has given them from His Bounty, and rejoicing in those who have not yet joined them from among those who remain behind—that no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve— (171) rejoicing in Blessing and Bounty from God, and that God neglects not the

declares the testimony of faith (*shahādah*) a disbeliever, since even God said only that they were closer to disbelief (*kufr*) than to belief (*īmān*), rather than calling them disbelievers outright (R). For others this means that outwardly they were closer to disbelief, but inwardly actually fully disbelievers (Q).

168 It is said that this verse was revealed in connection with ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy and other hypocrites. What they said to the survivors regarding those who had been killed (Ṭ) is similar to the statement in v. 156: *Had they stayed with us, they would not have died and been slain.* The theological issues related to death are similar to those of v. 156: all matters of life and death are determined and ordained by God (R). In a sense this verse, like v. 156, exposes the illogicality of applying a counterfactual argument when it concerns God's Will. Since it was the Will of God for them to die that day, the hypocrites are in essence claiming to know what God would have done under other circumstances, though they do not realize that this is the logical conclusion of their assertion. It is as if they were saying, "You could have warded off death by staying home," to which the reply is that no one can ward off death at a place and time ordained by God. These words would have been spoken not only regarding *brethren* in the spiritual sense, but also concerning blood relatives (Q).

169–71 See 2:154c, which also negates the notion that those who are slain in the way of God are dead. Unlike 2:154, these verses expand upon the description of those who were killed in the way of God, but are truly alive. Commentators mention accounts similar to that of the green birds around the Divine Throne described in 2:154c. Other accounts describe how, in the midst of receiving all that they ask for, the believers ask to return to the world so that they can die again in the way of God (R, Ṭ). *They are alive with their Lord* can also be understood as "God knows them to be alive," or it means that they are in proximity to God, as reflected in the translation. Al-Rāzī considers and rejects the idea that this means that they will be alive in the future in the Hereafter, preferring the understanding that they are alive at that instant. Since all human beings will be alive in the Hereafter, he argues, there would be no purpose to saying, *And deem not those slain in the way of God to be dead.* Moreover, that they are *rejoicing in those who have not yet joined them* shows that they are alive at that moment. These and similar verses were used extensively in Islamic theology to support the idea that souls are alive between physical death and the Resurrection, against the views of some theologians such as some Ashʿarites.

Vv. 169–71, even more so than 2:154, raise questions regarding the state of those who have died while others remain alive in this world, since they describe the dead as *exulting* and *rejoicing.* In traditional Islamic eschatology, there is a stage after death called the "trial of the grave," which is sometimes referred to as the *barzakh,* or "barrier," and lasts until the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāmah*), when all human beings rise from their graves, as described in many verses (e.g., 22:7; 54:7). Many *aḥādīth* allude to the experience of souls in this intervening period; in them the Prophet speaks to or prays at the graves of people, virtuous souls experience the grave as spacious and light-filled, and vicious souls are beset

reward of the believers, (172) who responded to God and the Messenger after being afflicted by wounds; for those among them who have been virtuous and reverent there shall be a great reward, (173) to whom the people said, "Truly

with torments and a state of narrow confinement. It is said that souls will be questioned in the grave by the angels Nakīr and Munkar regarding their conduct in life. Then, after this questioning in the *barzakh,* at the end of the world, all human beings will be resurrected and face final judgment.

In a particularly vivid account, it is reported that after the Battle of Badr the Prophet called out to the slain of the enemy, "Have you found what your Lord promised to be true?" When asked why he was addressing the dead, he told the questioners, "You cannot hear better than they can." Other *aḥādīth* say that the recently deceased can hear the footsteps of the funeral procession, are tormented by the wailing of their relatives, or are comforted by the prayers of the Prophet at their graves. Among the funeral rites commonly practiced by Muslims is the "instruction of the dead" (*talqīn al-mayyit*), in which people "instruct" the dead and remind them of their faith in the Oneness of God and in the Prophet Muhammad, although some claim this practice is valid only as one approaches death, not after death. Moreover the recital of verses of the Quran at the burial, especially *Sūrah* 36, *Yā Sīn,* and 55, *al-Raḥmān,* is a practice that most Muslims consider to be a *sunnah* of the Prophet, done for the benefit of the dead, not the living. Moreover, almost all Muslims believe that, wherever they are, if they send prayers and salutations to the Prophet, these will be conveyed to him, and indeed an address to the Prophet, "Peace be upon thee, O Prophet" (*al-salāmu ᶜalayka ayyuhā 'l-nabī*), is a part of the canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*); see 33:56c.

It is not easy to classify neatly the stages of the soul's journey beyond this world, since the Quran and *Ḥadīth* describe torments and pleasures experienced after death, then during the Day of Judgment itself after the resurrection of the dead, and finally at the various levels of the Garden and the Fire. Verses such as 2:154 and 3:169 do not give details regarding "where" the dead are, and the picture is further enriched (and perhaps made more imponderable) by *aḥādīth* such as "The grave is a Garden from among the Gardens of Paradise, or a pit from among the pits of the Fire"; "The grave is the first station of the Hereafter. If a person is delivered from it, what comes after is easier, but if he is not delivered, what comes after is harsher"; and, "Whosoever among you has died, his resurrection has taken place."

One can imagine that, after death, time is not the linear time experienced in this life. A person's temporal journey after death transcends time as experienced by the living, partially or totally, so that the departed can be in Paradise "now" from a certain point of view, even though the Day of Resurrection is still in the future according to the view from this world.

These verses and *aḥādīth* speak to those who are still in this world and its spatial and temporal confines and suggest that the soul retains a kind of attachment to the physical body and to the world, even as it exists in another dimension or level of reality. Other traditions, such as those describing souls who are spared the questioning of the Day of Judgment, and indeed 2:154 and 3:169 suggest that exalted souls detach themselves from the world easily and quickly and ascend to God's proximity, while worldly souls, to varying degrees, cling to the world in accordance with their attachment to it. V. 170 suggests that those who have died have a certain benevolent solicitude and relationship to those still living in this world, *rejoicing in those who have not yet joined them.*

It should be noted that a central doctrine of Islamic eschatology is the affirmation of bodily resurrection, that in the Hereafter human beings will be embodied, not disembodied spirits, although these will be bodies of another kind, sometimes called "subtle" (*laṭīf*) or "luminous" (*nūrānī*) bodies in various schools of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Even the trials in the grave are described in bodily as well as spiritual terms, as are the tribulations of the Day of Judgment, the rewards of Paradise, and the punishments of the Fire (all of which must be understood symbolically).

172/ The day after the Battle of Uḥud, the Prophet called those who had participated in

the people have gathered against you, so fear them." But it increased them in faith, and they said, "God suffices us, an excellent Guardian is He!" (174) So they returned with Blessing and Bounty from God, untouched by evil. And they pursued the Contentment of God, and God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. (175) That is only Satan, sowing fear of his friends. So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are believers. (176) And let not those who hasten unto disbelief grieve thee. Truly they will not harm God in the least. God desires to give them

the battle the previous day to set out with him to pursue the Makkans, who were still on the road between Makkah and Madinah and might have returned for another attack. Most of the Muslims, including the Prophet, were already wounded. They stopped several miles outside Madinah, at a place called Ḥamrāʾ al-Asad. Although the Muslims were badly wounded and even fewer in number than they had been the previous day, the Prophet was able to arrange for a man from the tribe of Khuzāʿah (a non-Muslim tribe with whom the Prophet had a treaty) to tell the idolaters that the Madinans were in hot pursuit of them and in far greater numbers than what the Makkans had encountered the previous day, because they now included all those who had remained in the city away from the fighting. Additionally, the Prophet ordered hundreds of individual campfires to be lit at night, in sight of the Makkan camp, to give the illusion of greater numbers.

A minority of commentators hold that these verses deal with the incident of the "Lesser Badr," referring to an agreement reportedly made between the two sides immediately after Uḥud to meet on the anniversary of the Battle of Badr at the site of the original battle. According to this account, the Prophet and his followers set out to meet the opponents at the appointed time and place, but the idolaters did not follow through on the promise to have another battle. Ultimately, the believers found only a market there, where they bought goods and returned to Madinah (Q); see 3:174c.

173 These words of warning were reported to have been spoken either by travelers on the way to Madinah who passed by the Makkan contingent on the road or by the hypocrites, who had been warning against fighting all along (Q), reminding the Madinans of the possibility of the Makkans' regrouping and attacking Madinah again. Indeed, many of the Makkans were eager to return to Madinah to win a more decisive victory. The word of the Madinans' greater numbers and eagerness for battle along with the appearance of campfires indicating substantially greater numbers led the Makkans to decide against returning to Madinah. The declaration *God suffices us* or *God suffices me* also appears in 9:59, 129; 39:38; *God suffices us, an excellent Guardian is He!* (*ḥasbuna'Llāhu wa niʿma'l-wakīl*) is a famous prayer invoked often by Muslims especially at times of danger. This verse is interpreted allegorically to mean that those of a spiritual nature should not be discouraged when worldly people unite to repudiate them, and that in fact the repudiation of worldly people will be only further proof of the truth of their spiritual attainment (Aj).

174 They were *untouched by evil* in the sense of having avoided harm or injury from the enemy, since they returned to Madinah having staved off a second battle (T). Alternately, it may refer to their returning from the "Lesser Badr" without having to engage in fighting (see v. 172). Some say the *blessing* refers to worldly goods, while bounty is a good of the Hereafter (R).

175 According to this verse, Satan inspires the disbelievers to frighten the believers (Q, T). Here *Satan* may also refer to the disbelievers and hypocrites themselves, since human beings can also be referred to as "satans" in the Quran (R; see 2:14c; 6:112c). The believers' assertion that God suffices them (v. 173) in the face of the attempts of others to frighten them (this verse) also appears in 39:35. The command to *fear them not, but fear Me* is also found in 2:150 and 5:3.

176 The Prophet is spoken of as being grieved or saddened by others' disbelief and denial in 5:41:

no share in the Hereafter, and theirs shall be a great punishment. (177) Truly those who have purchased disbelief at the price of belief will not hurt God in the least, and theirs shall be a painful punishment. (178) And let not those who disbelieve suppose that the respite We grant them is good for them. We only grant them respite that they may increase in sin, and theirs shall be a humiliating punishment. (179) God will not leave the believers as you are till He separates the bad from the good. And God will not apprise you of the Unseen, but God chooses from

*Let them not grieve thee;* 10:65 and 36:76: *Let not their speech grieve thee;* 31:23: *Let not his disbelief grieve thee;* 35:8: *So let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them.* The notion of having a *share in the Hereafter* refers to having a share in its goodness and blessing (see 3:77 and commentary), not that such people will have no experience in the Hereafter whatsoever. *Those who hasten unto disbelief* may include the idolatrous Makkans, who were the Prophet's own kinsmen trying to harm him (R); the People of the Book, who according to the Quran should have recognized and followed him; or the hypocrites, who claimed belief, but strove to undercut the believers at many turns (Q).

177 Using the mercantile image of buying and selling as a metaphorical description of fruits of human moral choices and actions is a common rhetorical construction in the Quran. For other examples, see 2:16 and 2:175, which speak of those *who have purchased error at the price of guidance;* and 2:86: *It is they who have purchased the world at the price of the Hereafter.*

178 *The respite We grant them* refers to the disbelievers being given more life to live, instead of dying or being killed. That they should not *suppose that the respite We grant them is good for them* can be interpreted to mean that, since they are disbelievers, giving them long life can only be worse for them, or it can mean that God punishes their disbelief by increasing them in it, in which case the dark state of disbelief (*kufr*) is a punishment in itself and not only a cause of later punishment. That God should respond to disbelief by giving people the opportunity to increase in their disbelief raises theological questions about whether human beings are always free to believe, but God's response can be better understood if one interprets the state of *kufr* (which is a state of being without guidance, meaning, or hope) as suffering itself, which also entails further suffering by leading one to commit further evil actions (see also 2:7c). Some read the verb *suppose* in the imperative (Q), giving the translation, "And do not suppose that the respite We grant to those who disbelieve is good for them."

Al-Rāzī describes a debate between Ashᶜarites and Muᶜtazilites over the question of whether God "wants" some people to increase in sin (*We only grant them respite that they may increase in sin;* see also v. 176: *God desires to give them no share in the Hereafter*). The Ashᶜarites argue that this means God is the agent of both good and evil from the point of view of human beings (R). The Muᶜtazilites, however, argue that since God *did not create jinn and mankind save to worship* Him (51:56), He does not desire for them to disbelieve and rebel. The Ashᶜarites respond that 51:56 is a general verse, but 3:178 is specific and still holds true in the face of it. The Muᶜtazilites go on to argue that what would be *good for them* relates specifically to the outcome of battle, meaning that they should not think that their survival during the battle is better than the death of those who fought in the way of God, since all it achieved was allowing them to go on living in a wicked state; God granted them life, but not because He favored them. Another interpretation reads the particle in this sentence as representing causation, not intent, so that it would be translated, "We grant them a respite which only results in their increasing in sin." Al-Rāzī rejects this interpretation as a contradiction of the verse's plain sense.

179 That God will separate *the bad* (*khabīṯ*) *from the good* (*ṭayyib*) means He will separate the hypocrites from the sincere believers (Ṭ). Some

His messengers whomsoever He will. So believe in God and His messengers. And if you believe and are reverent, you shall have a great reward. (180) And let not those who are miserly with what God has given them from His Bounty suppose that it is good for them; rather, it is evil for them. On the Day of Resurrection they will be collared by that with which they were miserly. And unto God belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth, and God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (181) God has certainly heard the words of those who said, "God is poor, and we are rich." We shall record what they said, and their slaying of the prophets without right, and We shall say, "Taste the punishment of the burning." (182) That is because of what your hands sent forth, and because God

interpret these words as being addressed to the disbelievers and hypocrites, meaning that God would not leave the believers in the same state as those who disbelieve. However, for most commentators it is an address to the believers themselves, promising them that they will not be left mixed together with the hypocrites and disbelievers (Q). *God will not apprise you of the Unseen* means that He will not reveal what is in the hearts and minds of human beings (i.e., whether they are truly believers or not), but rather will use trials and tribulations as a means of exposing the sincerity or hypocrisy of people, as happened at the Battle of Uḥud, when the sincerity of the believers was tested (R, Ṭ). Some say that this verse was revealed after the believers asked for a way to distinguish between the true believers and the hypocrites (Q). Others say that it was, rather, a challenge issued by an opponent of the Prophet, bidding him to tell the difference between the two groups (Ṭ). *But God chooses from His messengers whomsoever He will* means that He singles them out from among other human beings, to be given knowledge regarding the state of people's hearts (R, Ṭ). Spiritually, this verse can be understood as a description of the purification of the soul, a removal of *the bad from the good,* encouraging spiritual travelers to continue on the path but without expecting, as their final goal, to gain any kind of secret knowledge by it; rather, they should be seeking after God alone (Aj).

180 This verse is interpreted to refer to the hoarding of both material wealth and spiritual knowledge; those who did not share spiritual knowledge are the People of the Book, because they refused to teach the Book they had (Ṭ). The imagery of being *collared* by what one withheld is similar to the imagery in v. 161. Among the interpretations attributed to the Prophet for this verse is that a person's hoard of wealth will appear on the Day of Judgment as a serpent following him, slowly consuming him or wrapping itself around him, and the serpent will say to him, "I am your wealth; I am your treasure." The deleterious effects of miserliness are also discussed in 4:37; 47:37–38; 57:24. The end of this verse is similar to 19:40: *We shall inherit the earth and whatsoever is upon it.* Commentators distinguish between human inheritance and the kind spoken of here, in that God is always in possession of the heavens and the earth and inherits them only in the sense that all other owners cease to be and He alone remains (Q, R, Ṭ).

181–82 It is said that some Jews, upon hearing the verse *Who shall lend God a goodly loan?* (2:245; 57:11), taunted the Muslims by saying that this means that they are rich and God is poor, not because they actually believed it, but in order to stir up disquiet in the hearts of the weak among the believers (Q); see also 47:38: *God is the Rich, and you are the poor.* Their words and deeds will be recorded in the book they will read from on the Day of Judgment (Q), referred to in 17:13–14; 18:49; 69:19–25; 78:29; 84:7–10. *Slaying of the prophets without right* (see also 2:61c) refers to events in the Israelite past, but is also interpreted here (and in other places) as a reference to their

wrongs not His servants. (183) [As for] those who say, "Truly God has committed us to not believe in any messenger until he brings us a sacrifice consumed by fire," say, "Messengers certainly came before me with clear proofs and with that whereof you speak; so why did you slay them, if you are truthful?" (184) So if they deny thee, they certainly did deny messengers before thee, who came with clear proofs, scriptures, and the luminous Book. (185) Every soul shall taste death, and you will indeed be paid your reward in full on the Day of Resurrection. And whosoever is distanced from the Fire and made to enter the Garden has certainly triumphed. And the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of

approval or acceptance of it (Q). In this vein, some quote a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "When a sin is committed on earth, whosoever is present but deplores it is like one who was absent from it. Whosoever is absent from it but approves it is like one who was present."

183 The commentators describe a challenge posed to the Prophet by some prominent Jews, who asked him to prepare a sacrificial offering that would be consumed by a fire from Heaven (Q, Ṭ). Fire coming down from Heaven or from an angel is mentioned in the Bible in connection with Elijah (1 Kings 18:22–38), David (1 Chronicles 21:26), Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:1), Gideon (Judges 6:21), and Manoah (Judges 13:20). Many commentators note that since a miraculously burned offering was not exhibited even by all the prophets of Israel, and since the practice of Jewish animal sacrifice had stopped after the destruction of the Second Temple, the challenge thus amounted to an empty and cynical ploy (R). On the slaying of the prophets more generally, see 2:61c. As a spiritual allegory, this verse is seen as describing the soul's stubbornness in refusing to follow the spiritual way and coming up with excuses to fool itself (Aj).

184 The *clear proofs* are various demonstrations of truth (IK, Q). *Scriptures* renders *zubur*, which etymologically means something that is written; according to some it can refer to any book containing wisdom (R). It is different from *zabūr*, which refers specifically to the Psalms of David (*al-Zabūr*). *Luminous Book* refers to the Torah and the Gospel, but is not necessarily something different from the scriptures (*zubur*); the *and* in *and the luminous Book* signifies that *scriptures* and *luminous Book* are the same object (R), although *scriptures* can refer to Divine revelations sent to messengers in a more general sense (e.g., to Abraham, as mentioned in 87:18–19; IK).

185 The Arabic allows this first phrase (also in 21:35; 29:57) to be also translated, "Every soul tastes death" and "Every soul is a taster of death," signifying that death is not only a future event, but can also be a state of being or a recurring experience of the soul. Some mention that, in connection with *whosoever is distanced from the Fire and made to enter the Garden*, the Prophet said, "The area covered by a whip [i.e., how far you can reach with a whip] in the Garden is better than this world and everything in it." Verses similar in theme include *All things perish, save His Face* (28:88); and *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* (55:26–27). Al-Qushayrī says of this verse that the cup of death has been placed in the hand of every living being, and one can either drink it well and find bliss or drink it with a grimace and a wail. It is a very often quoted verse among Muslims and even appears on many tombstones. See also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

*Delusion* (*ghurūr*) connotes vanities, deception, pride, and even peril; *enjoyment of delusion* also appears in 57:20. The notion of this world as being a place of ephemeral *enjoyment* (*matāᶜ*) is mentioned throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:36; 3:14, 197; 4:77; 7:24; 9:38; 10:23, 70; 16:80, 117; 21:111; 28:60–61; 36:44; 40:39; 42:36; 43:35).

delusion. (186) You will surely be tried in your wealth and your souls, and you shall hear much hurt from those who were given the Book before you, and from those who are idolaters. But if you are patient and reverent, then that is indeed a course worthy of resolve. (187) [Remember] when God made the covenant with those who were given the Book, "You shall make it clear to the people, and not conceal it." Then they cast it behind their backs and sold it for a paltry price. Evil indeed is their selling! (188) Do not suppose that those who exult in what they have brought about and love to be praised for what they have not done—do not suppose that they are delivered from the punishment; theirs is a painful

186 *Your souls* can be rendered "yourselves," but also as "your own," meaning your near kinsmen and members of your clan or tribe (Ṭ). The trial of wealth and souls is also mentioned in 2:155: *And We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits. Much hurt* refers to taunts and insults; it renders an Arabic word that can mean both physical harm and verbal deprecation as well as falsehoods and blasphemies about God and His prophets (Ṭ). *A course worthy of resolve* also appears in 31:17; 42:43.

This verse reflects other verses that counsel patience and forbearance in the face of those who reject the prophetic messages, such as 20:44, where Moses and Aaron are commanded with regard to Pharaoh, *Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear;* 41:34: *Repel* [evil] *with that which is better; then behold, the one between whom and thee there is enmity shall be as if he were a loyal protecting friend;* and 45:14: *Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God.* Al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī reject the argument that this verse is abrogated by the verses allowing fighting, since patience and leniency in the face of ridicule and insults was a wont of the Prophet and his Companions throughout their lives, even during the days of war (Q, R).

187 *God made the covenant* is interpreted to mean that the prophets made a covenant with their peoples by God's Leave (Ṭ). This verse can be understood as a general condemnation of anyone who is given knowledge, but then does not teach it, even though it is speaking specifically of the Jews (Q). The *it* in *make it clear . . . and not conceal it* refers back to *the Book,* though some offer the interpretation that this refers more specifically to the foretellings of the coming of the Prophet Muhammad believed by Muslims to be found in earlier scriptures (Q, R; see 7:157). The Prophet said, "Whosoever conceals knowledge from his people will wear one of the bridles of the Fire," and ʿAlī said, "God tasks no ignorant person with learning until he tasks a learned person with teaching." On this theme of the People of the Book concealing what God has revealed to them, see also 2:42, 76, 140, 146, 159, 174; 3:71; 5:15; 6:91. The casting aside of the covenant and the Book is also mentioned in 2:100–101 and refers to the lack of commitment to it and failure to live according to its teachings (R).

188 Those who *exult in what they have brought about* while wanting to be *praised for what they have not done* find happiness in worldly things and passions, yet want to be known as sincere, pious people (R). The commentators mention different kinds of hypocrisy and deceit to which this verse seems to be referring. It is reported by some that this verse was revealed in connection with certain hypocrites who would find an excuse not to go out with the Prophet when he left for a battle, but would seek pardon from him upon his return and, moreover, seek to be praised for their actions (IK). Or it refers simply to the hypocrites in general, those who wanted to be praised for a faith they did not possess. Others say it refers to the practices of People of the Book, such as distorting their scriptures and then wanting to be praised as devoted people of religion. Or it refers

punishment. (189) Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and God is Powerful over all things. (190) Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation of the night and the day are signs for the possessors of intellect, (191) who remember God standing, sitting, and lying upon their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth, "Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain. Glory be to Thee! Shield us from the punishment of the

to the concealing of truth mentioned in v. 187, exulting in this concealment while still desiring to be praised as learned (R).

189 On God's having *sovereignty over the heavens and the earth,* see also 5:17, 40; 24:42; 42:49; 45:27; 48:14; 67:1c.

190 It is said that the Prophet would recite vv. 190–200 of this *sūrah* every night. When it was first revealed, the Prophet stood to pray, and while he was praying Bilāl came to call him to the congregational prayer, found him weeping, and said, "O Messenger of God, why dost thou weep, though God has forgiven thee whatever sins you have or may commit?" He said, "O Bilāl, shall I not be a grateful servant, since God has revealed the verse *Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation of the night and the day are signs for the possessors of intellect*?" He then said, "Woe unto him who recites it and does not reflect upon it" (Q). Muslims are therefore advised not only to read, but also to meditate deeply upon the meanings—in fact, levels of meaning—of this verse.

*Creation* renders *khalq,* which can refer not only to God's creative Act, but also to the nature or qualities of *the heavens and the earth* as being created, or *makhlūq.* On the *variation of the night and the day,* see also 2:164 (where *the creation of the heavens and the earth* is also mentioned); 10:6; 23:80; 45:5. For a discussion of *possessors of intellect* (*ūlu'l-albāb*), see 2:179c; 39:9c; see also 13:19; 14:52; 38:29; 39:18.

191 *Standing, sitting, and lying* as three modes of remembering God are also mentioned in 4:103. On one level, one should always be remembering God, since a human being is always in one of these three states (R). It can refer also to remembrance in the heart, by the tongue (R), or in the various positions of the prayer (e.g., for people who must perform the canonical prayer sitting or lying down due to physical disability or illness; IK). It can, moreover, refer to all modes of remembrance, including the recitation of the Quran, and it is one of the scriptural bases of the Sufi practice of remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*) at all times. That creation is not *in vain* is echoed in 21:16: *We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in play;* and 38:27: *And We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in vain; that is the conjecture of those who disbelieve.* Nevertheless, the positive symbolic nature of the world as an object of contemplation, emphasized in the Quran, and its reflecting the Wisdom of its Creator should not be confused with the seductive, dispersive dimension of life in this world, spoken of in 6:32 as but *play and diversion* (also in 29:64; 47:36; 57:20). The "life" of this world suggests the frailties and passions of the subjective ego, which can turn God's creation into a diversion and end in itself, but God's creative Act and the objective nature of the heavens and the earth as reflections of His Qualities and Wisdom are signs pointing to truths beyond themselves. Other verses that mention the nature of God's creation as an object of reflection or meditation include 10:24; 13:3; 16:11, 69; 30:8; 45:13.

This verse also indicates that one can meditate upon God through His creation and His Attributes and Qualities reflected in it, but not upon God's Essence directly, since the Divine Essence can never be the direct object of meditation by limited human consciousness (R). In this sense this verse echoes the message of 41:53: *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.*

A *ḥadīth* states, "One hour of reflection [or meditation, *tafakkur*] is better than a night's vigil." Meditation and reflection are mentioned many

Fire. (192) Our Lord! Whomsoever Thou makest to enter into the Fire, Thou hast surely disgraced him. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. (193) Our Lord! Truly we have heard a caller calling to faith, saying 'Believe in your Lord,' so we believed. Our Lord, forgive us our sins and absolve us of our evil deeds, and take us unto Thee with the pious. (194) Our Lord! Give us what Thou hast promised us through Thy messengers, and disgrace us not on the Day of Resurrection. Truly Thou wilt not fail the tryst." (195) So their Lord answered them, "I shall not

times in the Quran (13:3; 16:11, 44, 69; 30:21; 39:42; 45:13; 59:21), and the notion of reflection (*tafakkur* or *fikr*) forms an important foundation of Islamic spirituality. Some say, "Reflection (*fikr*) is the lamp of the heart. If it vanishes the heart has no illumination" (Aj). It is reported that the wife of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī said he would spend his days in reflection in a corner of his house, and the wife of Abū Bakr said that is how he would spend his nights (Aj). In this vein, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is reported to have said, "If one's words are not wisdom, they are vain. If one's silence is not reflection, it is absent-mindedness. If one's thought is not contemplation, it is play" (Aj).

*Shield us from . . . the Fire* is a theme that appears also in 2:201; 3:16; 40:7.

192 This "disgrace" is said to be specific to those who enter the Fire but never leave it, not those who are only there for a time (Q, Ṭ). On this topic al-Ṭabarī quotes a saying of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that those who committed some sin will enter the Fire, but will at some point leave it because of the faith that exists in their hearts. For more on this issue, see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

This verse also shows the spiritual or psychic torment of the Hereafter, since disgrace is not a material punishment (R), just as *They shall hear no idle talk therein, but only "Peace!"* (19:62) does not describe material rewards in the Garden. This verse has been sometimes employed by theologians in the debate over whether the perpetrator of a great sin can still be considered a believer or if such a person will enter the Fire. Since in 66:8 it is said that the Day of Judgment is *the Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believe with him,* some assert that no believers can enter the Fire, since, in doing so, they would be disgraced (R).

193 The *caller* is most often interpreted to be the Prophet Muḥammad, though some see it as a reference to the Quran itself, since the Quran reaches everyone and only a limited number of people actually heard the Prophet (R). Found in many manuals of prayer, this verse is one of the most famous Islamic prayers and is repeated often by pious Muslims.

194 *What Thou hast promised us through Thy messengers* can mean either that God made the promise to the messengers, or that the messengers conveyed this promise to others (R), or both. Here al-Rāzī comments on the apparent pointlessness of praying to God to do something He would do in any case, such as fulfilling His Promise, noting that such prayers are not calls to action, but rather expressions of humility, deference, and meekness by the believer, such as 21:112: *My Lord, judge with truth!* and 40:7: *Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge, so forgive those who repent and follow Thy way.* That is, these are supplications, but God does not do these things as a response to them; rather, these supplications are a kind of response to those actions by God. V. 191 mentions the bodily punishment of the Fire, but here the believers seek deliverance from the spiritual punishment of *disgrace* (R).

195 *Each of you is like the other* means that reward for obedience and righteous deeds is not differentiated between men and women or different tribes and groups (R). The phrase can also mean "Each of you is 'of' the other," in the manner of "Whosoever does that is one 'of' us" (R). Moral equality between men and women is also mentioned in other verses, such as 9:71:

let the work of any worker among you, male or female, be in vain; each of you is like the other. So those who emigrated, and were expelled from their homes, and were hurt in My way, and fought and were slain—I shall absolve them of their evil deeds and shall make them enter Gardens with rivers running below, a reward from God. And God, with Him is the most beautiful reward. (196) Let it not delude thee that those who disbelieve are free to come and go in the land. (197) It is a little enjoyment. Then their refuge is Hell, an evil resting place! (198) But [as for] those who reverence their Lord, theirs shall be Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein, as a welcome from God. And that which is with God is better for the pious. (199) And truly among the People of the Book are

*But the believing men and believing women are protectors of one another, enjoining right and forbidding wrong.* The emigration and expulsion refer to the fate suffered by the believers in Makkah when they migrated to Madinah. *Those hurt in My way* can refer to those being insulted and ridiculed as well as those who have received physical injury.

196–97 It is reported that this verse came in response to a remark made by some believers that, while they were suffering from hunger, the idolaters traveled freely throughout the land and made profit from their commerce (cf. 40:4; Q); others say that this was spoken by the hypocrites (R). Though this verse is addressed to the Prophet, it is considered to have a broader audience, as if to say, "O listener" (R). These two verses also echo the idea found in v. 178.

198 *A welcome* renders *nuzul,* a word referring to what a host prepares for a guest (R); see also 18:102, 107; 32:19; 37:62; 41:32c; 56:56, 93.

199 According to some, this verse was revealed in connection with the death of the Negus, the Christian king of Abyssinia who provided asylum for believers from Makkah before the migration from Makkah to Madinah (Q, R); this event is also given by some as the occasion for revelation for 2:115. Other opinions about who this verse refers to include forty people from Najrān (from the tribe of Banū al-Ḥārith ibn Kaᶜb), or thirty-two people from Abyssinia, or eight people from Byzantium who followed the religion of Jesus and then became Muslims (R, Th), though further details are not provided. Mujāhid states that it refers to all the believers among the People of the Book (R, Th), but without specifying what this "belief" means.

Part of the objection to the Prophet's praying for the Negus was that the latter was a Christian, an objection voiced by sincere followers, but also by the hypocrites, who feigned outrage that the Prophet would perform funerary rites for a Christian he had never even met (R, Ṭ). Though this verse presents the People of the Book as a separate group (*unto you* versus *unto them*), it affirms that some members of this group believe in what was *sent down unto* the community of the Prophet. In keeping with interpretations applied to similar verses dealing with Christians and Jews, some commentators understand this as a reference to former Christians or Jews, such as ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Salām, who had converted to Islam (Ṭ; see also commentary on 3:113–15). Commentators often leave the status of the Negus open-ended, referring to the hesitation regarding prayer for a Christian on the part of the community, but recording neither a positive statement on the part of the Prophet beyond his calling the Negus "your brother," nor that the Prophet corrected them by informing them that he was in fact a Muslim and not a Christian (see 5:82–83c). In mainstream Islamic thought, for a person to believe in what was sent down to the Prophet is precisely to become a Muslim, and this may be why the commentaries are generally mute about the nature of "belief" in this verse. This issue is related to, but separate

those who believe in God and that which has been sent down unto you, and that which has been sent down unto them, humble before God, not selling God's signs for a paltry price. It is they who shall have their reward with their Lord. Truly God is swift in reckoning. (200) O you who believe! Be patient, vie in patience, persevere, and reverence God, that haply you may prosper.

from, the status of belief of Jews and Christians as such, which is discussed at length in 2:62c; 5:69c; 5:82–83c; and elsewhere. The question raised by this verse consists in what it means to remain one of the People of the Book while believing in *that which has been sent down* to the Prophet Muhammad.

It is possible to interpret this verse to refer to the affirmation of the truths that, according to Islam, are expressed by all true religions: belief in the One God, the judgment of the Hereafter, and the moral obligations of justice and mercy in this life and similar issues. Insofar as the Negus believed in these things, he would have believed in *that which has been sent down unto you*. But since this kind of phrasing, as found in verses that mention belief in what was revealed to the Prophet and what was revealed to other prophets, often denotes a more specific affirmation of the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Quran, the question remains as to the status of a Jew or Christian ("them") who believes in what was sent down to the Prophet Muhammad. There may be a third possibility often left unexplored by Muslims until recently: that one can remain a Christian while affirming the veracity of the Prophet Muhammad and of what was revealed to him. This possibility may be understood to have been mentioned in 5:82, which speaks in positive and praiseworthy terms of *those who say, "We are Christians."* In 5:83 they are described in this way: *When they hear that which was sent down unto the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize.* Some commentators note that this may refer to Christians in general, not only those who would later become Muslims, and would include those who accepted the prophethood of Muhammad, but continued to live according to the "*sharīʿah* of Jesus," as discussed in 5:82–83c.

200 *Be patient* and *vie in patience* are two forms of the same root (*ṣ-b-r*), the first referring to patience itself, the second to a contest of patience in which one should outdo the enemy in patience and endurance (R, Z). *Persevere* renders *rābiṭū* (noun form *ribāṭ*), which comes from a root with a range of meanings including to "tie," "fortify," and "join." Though *ribāṭ* has the general meaning of being steadfast and firm, more specifically the word refers to taking up a border or frontier post (or to the post itself) in defense of the community or in anticipation of an attack; it is called *ribāṭ* because one "ties" or bridles one's horse, as referred to in 8:60, *horses tethered [for battle]* (*ribāṭ al-khayl;* R). In this vein, there are *aḥādīth* such as "One day of *ribāṭ* in the way of God is better in God's Eyes than this world and all that is in it." Other *aḥādīth* speak of *ribāṭ* as a deed whose merit accrues even after death, since the defense of the community allows others to accomplish their acts of piety and righteousness (IK, Q). Referring to the spiritual understanding of *ribāṭ*, in a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "Performing ablutions under unpleasant conditions, multiplying one's steps to the mosque, and waiting for the prayer after the prayer, that is *ribāṭ*." Here "waiting for the prayer after the prayer" refers to waiting in remembrance, devotion, and reflection between two of the canonical prayers (such as the late afternoon and sunset prayers). This is a spiritual *ribāṭ*, which is compared with the martial *ribāṭ* by the famous jurist al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278) in his commentary on the aforementioned *ḥadīth*. In the same way, two types of *jihād* (striving) are described in a well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said to those returning from a battle, "You have returned from the lesser *jihād* to the greater *jihād*." When asked what the greater *jihād* was, he said, "A servant's *jihād* against his passions."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 4

# Women

## *al-Nisāʾ*

*Al-Nisāʾ* was revealed in Madinah around the fourth year of the *hijrah* and after the crucial Battle of Uḥud, which took place outside of Madinah between the Muslims and the still idolatrous Quraysh of Makkah. It takes its name from the fact that much of the *sūrah* deals with women and their rights along with various conditions of marriage, marital relations, and laws of inheritance. Most of the first part (vv. 1–36, 127–30, 176) is legislative in nature, as is the section dealing with war and peace and how Muslims should act in these situations. Altogether this *sūrah* is among the most important and fundamental for Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

The *sūrah* also deals with the status of the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) and those Jews who turned against the Islamic community in Madinah after the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), in which the Muslims suffered defeat at the hands of the Quraysh. Moreover, there are many verses in this *sūrah* dealing with those Jews who denied both Christianity and Islam and the Christians who divinized Jesus (vv. 44–55, 153–73). The most sensitive verses from the point of view of relations between Christianity and Islam concern the Islamic view of the end of the earthly life of Jesus and the question of his crucifixion (vv. 157–59).

After a long discussion on such general religious issues, the *sūrah* ends with a verse again related to legislative matters. It seems that the Quran wants to emphasize at the termination of this long *sūrah* the inseparable relation between Islamic religious beliefs and the social behavior of Muslims based on revealed Law.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O mankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Reverence God, through Whom you demand your rights of one another, and family relations. Truly God is a Watcher over you. (2) Give orphans their property, and exchange not the bad for the good, nor consume their

1 That God created human beings *from a single soul* is also mentioned in 6:98; 7:189; 31:28; 39:6; the creation of *its mate* therefrom is also mentioned in 7:189; 39:6. Elsewhere, God's having made for human beings "mates from among themselves" or "in pairs" is considered a Divine gift for which humanity should be grateful and in awe (16:72; 30:21; 35:11; 42:11; 78:8). The present verse indicates a progression in human creation from singularity (*a single soul*, reflecting the singularity of God), to duality (*its mate*), to multiplicity (*a multitude of men and women*). The *single soul* is widely understood to refer to Adam, and *its mate* to Eve (Ḥawwāʾ). Although *soul* (*nafs*) is grammatically feminine and *mate* (*zawj*) is grammatically masculine, this does not necessarily make the correlation to Adam and Eve, respectively, problematic for most commentators (Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). The interweaving of masculine and feminine references suggests a reciprocity of the masculine and feminine in human relations and marriage, which is also implied in other verses (cf. 2:187; 30:21).

Commentators typically understand this verse as a reference to the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib as found in Genesis 2:21–23 (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z), although some modern commentators are skeptical of this association, feeling it relies too heavily on the Biblical tradition. The story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib is referenced in the canonical *Ḥadīth*, but the Quran nowhere explicitly recounts Eve's creation. *And from it* (*minhā*) *created its mate* may simply mean that the *mate* (Eve) was created of the same nature as the original *single soul* (Adam), since to be "of/from another" (*min anfus*) can mean to be of the same type or character (R; cf. 3:164; 9:128; 16:72). The fifth Shiite Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 114/732), reportedly said that Eve was created from the same superior clay as Adam (Ṭs). The statement regarding humanity's common origin from a single soul and its mate could also be meant to engender brotherly and sisterly love between all human beings and to discourage boasting about one's ancestral legacy, as all human beings are ultimately of common parentage (IK, R, Ṭ, Ṭs).

*Reverence God, through Whom you demand your rights of one another, and family relations* may be related to the pre-Islamic Arab practice of swearing upon "God and family relations." However, most favor the view that this passage instructs men to *reverence God* through obedience to His commands and to reverence *family relations* by maintaining good relations with family members. *Family relations* translates *arḥām;* the singular is *raḥim*, the primary meaning of which is "womb," derived from the same root as *raḥmah*, meaning "mercy," and the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān*, "the Compassionate." A *ḥadīth* states, "The Compassionate (*Al-Raḥmān*) created the womb (*al-raḥim*), and whoever maintains ties to it, God will maintain ties to him, and whoever cuts himself off from it, God cuts Himself off from him." Elsewhere, the imperative to worship God is paired with commands to be good to family (4:36; 17:23; 47:22; R). The first part of this verse indicates the kinship of all human beings, as they are created from the same *soul* and *mate*, while the latter part commands reverence for one's relatives. Taken together, they suggest a Divine imperative to recognize one's responsibility to all human beings as one's "brothers and sisters."

2 In the Quran and Islamic Law, *orphans* (*yatāmā;* sing. *yatīm*) refers to children who

property with your own. Truly that would be a great sin. (3) If you fear that you will not deal fairly with the orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, or four; but if you fear that you will not deal justly, then only one, or those whom your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that you will

have lost their father or both parents. The occasion for the revelation of this verse was the case of an orphan in the care of his uncle. When he reached maturity, he asked his uncle for his property, but the uncle refused him (Q, W). When the young man took the case to the Prophet, this verse came in response, commanding guardians to *give orphans their property* (i.e., their inheritances). Read in combination with v. 6, the present verse indicates that one should hold the property of orphans in trust until they reach maturity, at which point it should be given to them in full. The verse warns against exchanging *the bad for the good*, that is, defrauding orphans of their inheritance by rendering them their property in substandard goods or currency—for example, by giving them emaciated livestock (IK, Q). Alternately, it means one should not exchange the *bad* practice of consuming orphans' property for the *good* practice of preserving it (Z). The verse requires that guardians be conscientious about maintaining an orphan's property, lest they consume the orphan's property along with their own. After this verse was revealed, some guardians reportedly kept their property completely separate from that of the orphans in their care; to soften this condition, 2:220 was revealed: *if you intermingle with them, they are your brothers* (Q, Ṭ).

3 This verse makes a connection between the just treatment of orphans and just marriage practices. It can indicate simply that people should be equally vigilant concerning the proper treatment of wives and orphans (Ṭ). This means marrying only the women whom one can properly support and whose rights in marriage one can uphold. All commentators are explicit that this verse did not establish a new license for polygamy or encourage it, but rather limited the more excessive practices of polygamy common in pre-Islamic Arabia by setting four as the maximum number of wives a man can have at one time. If a man is unable to adequately provide for multiple wives or treat them equitably, he is advised to take *only one*. If providing for even one would prove difficult, he is advised to take a slave wife (*those whom your right hands possess*), because a slave wife, although entitled to kind treatment, was not owed the same financial and conjugal rights as a free wife (see v. 25). A man who takes more wives than he can provide for from his own wealth may be tempted to pilfer the property of orphans in his care to maintain his family (Ṭ). Thus the just treatment of both orphans and wives is more likely when a man is not overburdened with dependents.

A widespread interpretation of this verse, attributed to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, is that it concerns orphan girls who were vulnerable to abuse by their guardians. Since an orphan girl's guardian was often also her *wakīl*—the male guardian legally able to give her in marriage—he might seek to marry her to himself or others without her consent, seek to marry her himself for a discounted bridal gift, or refuse to marry her to anyone in order to keep her wealth for himself while mistreating her. The verse instructs men who might be tempted toward these abusive practices to marry women not in their custody and thus not vulnerable to these abuses (IK, Q, Ṭ). ʿĀʾishah asserts that v. 127, which criticizes men for wishing to marry orphan girls without giving them their bridal gifts, was a Divine clarification of the injunction in the present verse (IK).

Dealing *justly* between one's wives means treating them equitably with regard to financial support, love, companionship, and conjugal relations (Q). V. 129 states that men will never be able to deal equitably between their wives, even if they desire to do so. Some have asserted that although treating one's wives equally is an ideal one should strive for, lack of perfection in this regard does not itself nullify the legitimacy of polygamous marriage (see 4:129c). This whole verse revolves around the issue of justice; it favors neither polygamy nor monogamy absolutely, and advises the form that best facilitates the just treatment of orphans, wives, and other dependents.

not commit injustice. (4) And give the women their bridewealth as a free gift, but if they are pleased to remit unto you any part thereof, then consume it with wholesome enjoyment. (5) And give not the feeble-minded your property, which God has placed in your hands to manage, but provide for them and clothe them from it, and speak unto them in an honorable way. (6) And test the orphans until they reach the age of maturity; then if you perceive in them sound judgment, deliver unto them their property, and consume it not wastefully and in haste before they come of age. Whosoever is rich should abstain, but whosoever is poor should partake thereof in an honorable way. And when you deliver unto them their property, bring witnesses on their behalf, and God suffices as a

4 This verse establishes the legal requirement that Muslim men provide a bridal gift to the women they marry, that this must be given *as a free gift,* without condition, and that it must be given to the women themselves. It is understood as prohibiting practices meant to deprive women of their bridewealth, such as arranging to marry off widows in exchange for their bridewealth, or keeping for oneself the bridewealth of one's daughters or orphan girls in one's care (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z). However, it was legitimate for husbands to accept and *consume . . . with wholesome enjoyment* any part of the bridewealth that their wives were willing to give them, as long as it was given freely and without compulsion.

5 *The feeble-minded* (*sufahāʾ*) here refers to dependents unable to care adequately for themselves or manage property. Although the verse instructs one not to give one's own property to the feeble-minded, it may pertain also to the property of the feeble-minded themselves, whose wealth should be managed for them by their guardians (Ṭ; cf. 2:282). Some have suggested that *the feeble-minded* refers to women and minors (Ṭ), who should not be entrusted with property, lest they lose or corrupt it. But such an interpretation contradicts vv. 2 and 4, which command that women and orphans be given their property, and is not upheld by Islamic Law, which essentially gives women full control of their property as acquired through bridewealth, inheritance, other gifts, and earned income. Moreover, *feeble-minded* (*sufahāʾ*) is rendered in the masculine plural in Arabic, rather than the more specific feminine plural, and so clearly refers to individuals of either gender who are mentally incompetent, not to women in particular (Q, Ṭ). Some have said that *feeble-minded* refers only to those whose mental condition requires their confinement (Q, Ṭ). This verse may also prohibit Muslims from entrusting their property to non-Muslims, who would not recognize or be sufficiently aware of Islamic laws governing financial matters, such as the prohibition against usury (Q).

6 *Sound judgment* is understood as possession of a correctly functioning rational faculty, a healthy and upstanding character, an understanding of how to manage property, and sound religion to the degree that one no longer requires custodial care (Ṭ). The *age of maturity* is considered by many to be eighteen for males according to Islamic Law, but should they not manifest *sound judgment* by this age, some jurists indicate that one may withhold their property from them for, at most, another seven years (Z). Others put the age of maturity at fifteen or seventeen (Q). Some have said that it should be the age at which one is considered morally responsible rather than a simple biological threshold, such as puberty (Ṭs). Testing their judgment may include giving them some money and observing how they manage it (Q). There is debate about whether the requirements for giving the orphans their property include both physical maturity and the development of sound judgment or if either alone suffices (Q).

Reckoner. ⑦ Unto the men a share of what parents and kinsfolk leave, and unto the women a share of what parents and kinsfolk leave, be it little or much—a share ordained. ⑧ And when kinsfolk, orphans, and the indigent are present at the division, make provision from it for them and speak unto them in an honorable way. ⑨ Let those who would dread if they left behind their own helpless progeny have fear; let them reverence God and speak justly. ⑩ Truly those who consume the property of orphans unjustly only consume fire in their

The wealthy should *abstain* from the orphans' property, but those who are in straitened circumstances can *partake thereof in an honorable way,* meaning that they can take only as much as they need for necessities—particularly food—and it is considered a loan that must be repaid, even posthumously (Ṭ; cf. 2:152; 17:34). The guardian may benefit from the milk of the orphan's livestock, the fruit produced on the orphan's land, or the services of the orphan's riding animals as long as he uses the property in a way that maintains and does not diminish its worth and he does not seek to profit monetarily by it. According to some, however, even this limited permission to consume orphans' wealth was abrogated by v. 10 (Q). The command to *bring witnesses* when giving orphans their property is generally considered mandatory, and some suggest that one should bring witnesses whenever one takes a loan from the orphan's property (Q).

7 In pre-Islamic Arabia only adult men were entitled to inherit. This verse was revealed with regard to the situation of a widow with three daughters left destitute by her husband's male heirs (W). The verse establishes that both men and women are legally entitled to a fixed and mandatory share of the wealth of their deceased relatives. Specific rules for apportioning the estate to the male and female heirs follow in vv. 11–13.

8 Commentators debate whether this verse is still legally binding or has been abrogated and how it should be reconciled with the establishment of specified shares of inheritance for various relatives in vv. 11–13. Many consider the present verse legally binding—although some admit it is largely ignored—and also indicate that that what is given to *kinsfolk* (meaning those without a legally prescribed share of the inheritance), *orphans, and the indigent* is at the discretion of the legal heirs (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). This may mean giving them a share of the estate or providing food for them from the inherited property (Q, Ṭ). Other opinions hold that this verse was abrogated by vv. 11–13 or that it refers to that portion of one's wealth (one-third) that one can bequeath to other than one's legal heirs prior to death (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). According to some, making such provision from the inheritance is a recommended but not required practice (Q, Ṭs, Z).

9 Those who are dividing up their inheritance while still alive or making their final bequests should keep their minor children uppermost in their mind and be careful to leave them an amount sufficient for their provision (Ṭ). Those present when a man is near death should also avoid encouraging him to make other bequests that would significantly reduce the money that would go to his children (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Alternately, it may mean that those making their bequests should think about making some provision for the orphans, since they would fear for the fate of their own children, should they become orphans and be dependent on the kindness and generosity of others (JJ, Ṭs). This verse was revealed prior to the verses that detail fixed shares of the inheritance for one's children (Q).

10 This metaphor of self-destruction through greed suggests the threat of Hellfire that awaits the unjust. It is sometimes connected to a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet describes a vision of Hell he received; in it those who wrongly consumed the orphans' property had flames emerging from their bodies (Q, Ṭ, Z). Considering the context, this may be a warning to those making their bequests who have wrongly used the property of

bellies, and they will burn in a blazing flame. (11) God enjoins upon you concerning your children: unto the male a share equal to that of two females; but if there are only daughters, two or more, then unto them is two-thirds of what he leaves; if only one, then unto her a half. And unto his parents—each of the two—a sixth of what he leaves if he has a child; but if he has no child and his parents are his [only] heirs, then unto his mother a third; and if he has brothers, then unto his mother a sixth, after paying any bequest he may have bequeathed or any debt. Your parents or your children—you know not which of them are nearer to you in benefit. [This is] an obligation ordained by God. Truly God is

orphans (that they should return it at this time) or a warning to the disbelievers who refused to allow women and children to inherit (Q). On the basis of this verse, usurping the wealth of orphans is considered one of the most grievous sins.

**11** V. 7 made it clear that wives and children were to receive a portion of the inheritance of the deceased, contrary to pre-Islamic practice, and vv. 11–12 clarify and quantify the portion of the inheritance to which children, parents, siblings, and spouses are legally entitled. This verse was reportedly revealed in reference to a woman and her daughters who had been denied a share of her husband's inheritance (the same or a similar case mentioned in connection with v. 7) or to a dying man who asked the Prophet how to apportion his inheritance (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, W). When the verse was first revealed, there was much resistance to it among the Prophet's followers, who were stunned that women and minor children, who could not fight and were not entitled to shares of booty obtained in battle, should inherit a significant portion from their husbands and fathers (IK, Q, Ṭ). Although women have an unquestionable right to inherit according to the Quranic injunctions here, sons and daughters do not inherit equally. This discrepancy was justified by the fact that men were ideally the sole providers for their families (IK). Regarding the statement *But if there are only daughters . . . unto them is two-thirds of what he leaves,* some early authorities held that the remaining third should go to any grandsons from a deceased male child (Q).

The part of this verse that assigns a legal portion to parents abrogates an earlier practice that allowed legal shares of the estate to go to children, but not to parents, who previously could acquire a share of their children's estate only through a specific bequest on the part of the deceased (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Although the portion for male children is twice that for female children, here, the explicit portion for the two parents is equal. However, a custom that continued into the Prophet's time assumed the father of the deceased to be the nearest kinsman. This meant that after all shares had been legally apportioned, including the sixth shares to each parent, the father would receive anything that remained in addition to his sixth share (IK, Ṭ). A different Shiite opinion, however, holds that if the deceased leaves only a daughter and parents, the daughter gets half of the estate and each of the parents receives a sixth, but that the daughter, rather than the father, will then further inherit whatever remains after the shares have been apportioned (Ṭs). If the deceased's only heirs are parents, the mother is explicitly entitled to a third. No explicit share is mentioned for the father, because it is understood that, as the nearest kinsman, he would inherit the remainder, in which case he would effectively inherit two-thirds of the estate, twice the share of the mother (IK, Q, Ṭ).

Early authorities generally agreed that the parents' portion is calculated after payment has gone to the spouse or spouses of the deceased, with the mother inheriting a third and the father

Knowing, Wise. (12) And unto you a half of what your wives leave, if they have no child, but if they have a child, then unto you a fourth of what they leave, after paying any bequest they may have bequeathed or any debt. And unto them a fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child, then unto them an eighth of what you leave, after paying any bequest you may have bequeathed or any debt. If a man or woman leaves no direct heir, but has a brother or sister, then unto each of the two a sixth; but if they are more than two, they share equally a third, after paying any bequest he may have bequeathed or any debt, without harm to anyone—a duty ordained by God, and God is Knowing,

two-thirds (IK, Z) of what is left. The Shiite view and a minority Sunni view, however, hold that the mother receives a third of the total estate, and that the father receives whatever remains after the shares of spouse and mother have been apportioned (Ṭs). The mother is entitled to a third, even if the deceased has a sibling (either a full or a half sibling), as long as it is only a single sibling, but if there is more than one sibling, the mother's portion is reduced to a sixth (Ṭ). Some commentators say that only the mother's portion is reduced in the case of siblings, not the father's, because the father, unlike the mother, has the responsibility of providing for these siblings financially, including the means for them to marry, or because the mother's other sixth is meant to go to the siblings. However, it is more likely that the reduction of the mother's share is mentioned explicitly, because it is only in the case of siblings who have no father that siblings may inherit at all (Ṭ). A number of traditions indicate that siblings never inherit when the father of the deceased is alive. Therefore, if the deceased is survived by both parents and also siblings, the mother receives a sixth and the father the remaining five-sixths (Z).

All the foregoing shares are payable only after the payment of *any bequest . . . or any debt.* Although *bequest* is mentioned first, Prophetic tradition and communal consensus indicate that debts are to be paid first, then bequests (which are not to exceed a third of the remaining), and finally the shares of the legal heirs (IK, Ṭ). The shares to children and parents are apportioned by Divine Decree rather than by individual bequest, because *you know not which of them are nearer to you in benefit*—that is, you do not know which of them will benefit you most in the Hereafter or in this life (IK, Ṭ, Z). As these portions are established by God, they should not be seen as a gift on the part of the deceased. Rather, upon death, all property returns to God (He is the "Inheritor"; see 15:23); these injunctions can therefore be understood as a Divine redistribution of the wealth of the deceased. This and the following verse establish specific injunctions, not only general principles, concerning the economic aspect of Muslim life. The specificity of these Quranic injunctions led to a whole science called the "science of inheritance" and played an important role in the development of the science of algebra by Muslim mathematicians.

12 The reduction of the husband or wife's share of the spouse's estate applies in the case of the existence of children or grandchildren (IK). If the deceased has more than one wife, they divide the portion allotted for the wife equally among themselves (IK, Q, Z). Dying without a *direct heir* (*kalālatan*) means dying without having a father or grandfather and without any children, or dying without one or the other (Ṭ). In such a case, when there is more than one sibling (from the same mother), they share a third of the estate, divided into equal shares, irrespective of gender (IK, Ṭ). One should note, however, that v. 176 reestablishes the gender disparity among sibling shares by specifying that a brother inherits twice the share of a sister. The apportioning of the inheritance through bequest and Divine Decree should be done without

Clement. (13) Those are the limits set by God: whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, He will cause him to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein. And that is the great triumph. (14) But whosoever disobeys God and His Messenger, and transgresses His limits, He will cause him to enter a Fire, abiding therein, and he shall have a humiliating punishment. (15) As for those of your women who commit an indecency, call four witnesses among you to bear witness against them. And if they bear witness, then confine them to their houses until death takes them, or until God appoints for them another way. (16) And if two of those among you are guilty thereof, punish them both;

harm or prejudice to any heir. Prophetic tradition forbids bequeathing, separately, a portion of one's estate to those who are already guaranteed a specific legal share—for example, making a separate bequest to a particular son or daughter in addition to his or her Quranically ordained share (IK, Q)—as this may be done to favor one child or heir over another. Causing harm in this way is considered a major sin (*kabīrah;* IK, Ṭ). The very specific rulings regarding inheritance in various schools of Islamic jurisprudence are based on different interpretations of such Quranic verses, complemented by the *Ḥadīth.*

13–14 The rules for dividing and apportioning the estate of deceased believers is identified as being among *the limits set by God* (*ḥudūd Allāh*). It is thus clear that such apportioning is mandatory, not merely recommended, and that failure to comply places one in a state of disobedience that may lead to eternal perdition, while complying brings heavenly reward.

15 Committing *an indecency* (*fāḥishah*) here refers specifically to adultery and fornication (*zinā;* IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). This verse deals only with women who commit these acts, and the ruling here apparently applies to both married and unmarried women, although some commentators suggested that it applied only to married women (Ṭ). The verse also applies only to Muslim women; it does not apply to non-Muslim women, even if they are married to Muslim men (Q). It establishes the need for four eyewitnesses as a special and mandatory condition for a conviction of adultery or fornication. Most commentators indicate that these witnesses need to be male (Ṭ), and Islamic Law establishes that they must also be mentally and religiously sound and of the age of legal responsibility, usually considered to be puberty, and cannot have themselves been convicted of any major sin or crime (see commentary on 24:4–9). Although the present verse may appear to make it the responsibility of the husband to procure four witnesses, most agree that it also establishes guidelines for judges and legal authorities in their prosecution of such cases (Ṭs).

The punishment established here is confinement to the home until death or *until God appoints . . . another way.* This other way is usually considered to be a reference to the *ḥadd* punishment of one hundred lashes (and, according to one *ḥadīth,* also banishment for a year) that would later be established for both male and female fornicators explicitly in 24:2 as well as to the punishment of stoning for married male and female adulterers, which is not Quranic, but based on a reported Prophetic precedent (see 24:2c). These later developments are usually considered to abrogate the ruling in the present verse (IK, Ṭ). However, some suggest that this ruling may be combined with that in 24:2, so that after the *ḥadd* punishment has been administered, the female fornicator should be confined to her home until death or until God provides her *another way,* that is, marriage, which would inhibit further fornication (Z). (Cf. 24:3, which allows marriage for fornicators, provided that they marry only other fornicators.)

16 The meaning of *two of those among you* is debated. Most commentators and jurists consider

but if they repent and make amends, then let them be. Truly God is Relenting, Merciful. (17) God only accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and then turn quickly in repentance: these are the ones unto whom God relents, and God is Knowing, Wise. (18) And repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly now I repent," nor from those who die as disbelievers. For those We have

it a reference to the male and female who commit an act of fornication or adultery. Some say that it refers specifically to unmarried fornicators and that the preceding verse refers specifically to married adulteresses (Q, IK, Ṭ). Others suggest that since the pronoun and the verb are in the masculine dual form, it may refer to those guilty of a homosexual act between two men (IK, JJ)—sometimes adding that the previous verse may refer to those guilty of female homosexual acts (Z)—but there is significant doubt about this interpretation. Some combine vv. 15–16 to mean that "confinement" and "punishment" are prescribed for female fornicators, and "punishment" alone is prescribed for male fornicators here (Q).

*Punish* here translates *ādhū*, which can mean to harass, hurt, or insult. In this context, it is usually interpreted to mean a stern public rebuke, rather than a corporal punishment (Z), although some say it may also include a mild beating (Q, Ṭ). In either case, commentators widely agree that this verse and the previous one were abrogated by the prescribed punishment of lashing for fornication in 24:2 and the reported Prophetic precedent of prescribing stoning for married adulterers (Q, Ṭ). However, repentance and a return to rectitude is said to avert the punishment from the perpetrators (Ṭ, Z), because "one who repents of a sin is as one who has not sinned" (IK). Some maintain that this applies only to this punishment, but not to the *ḥadd* punishment for fornication revealed in 24:2 (Q).

17–18 Cf. 6:54; 16:119. Doing *evil* here may include a general state of disbelief (*kufr*) as well as particular acts of disobedience (Q). *Those who do evil in ignorance* seems to suggest those who sin unintentionally, but most commentators broaden it, either claiming that it refers to anyone who sins, even purposefully, while being ignorant of the full repercussions or Divine punishment it entails (Q, R, Ṭ) or asserting that anyone who commits an act of disobedience to God is, effectively, in a state of ignorance (Q, R, Ṭ). See, for example, 12:33, where Joseph fears that by sinning he may become one of *the ignorant*, and 12:89, where the woman who attempted to seduce Joseph, identified in Islamic tradition as Zulaykhā, is said to have been in a state of ignorance, although she clearly seduced him with intention. Some even argue that it must refer to sins committed intentionally, since unintentional sins do not require repentance at all (R).

There is also debate about how *quickly* one must *turn . . . in repentance* to be eligible for Divine Forgiveness. As is made clear in v. 18, it must precede death. Some say repentance must occur while one is still in a state of health; others, that it must be prior to the certainty of death; still others, that it must simply be before death itself (IK, R, Ṭ). The broadening of the time frame seems justified by a *ḥadīth* that states, "The door of repentance is open until the sun rises from the West"; or by a *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*) in which God states (with some variations) in the first person, "I will not prevent the repentance of a son of Adam while the spirit remains in him" (Q, Ṭ). However, insofar as true repentance requires making amends and demonstrating that one will not return to the sinful behavior, one should repent while one is still in a state of mental lucidity, physical capability, and moral responsibility rather than when one is very near death or has a debilitating disease (Q, Ṭ). If the repentance cannot be deemed "quick," the sinner can still hope for forgiveness from God (cf. 9:102), but cannot count on it with certainty (R).

Most hold that true repentance requires abstaining from that particular sin in the future, although Muʿtazilites, one of the two major schools

prepared a painful punishment. (19) O you who believe! It is not lawful for you to inherit women through coercion, nor to prevent them from marrying [again], that you may take away some of what you have given them, unless they commit a flagrant indecency. And consort with them in a kind and honorable way; for if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing in which God has placed

of Sunni theology, held that it required abstaining from sin in general thereafter (Q). It is not correct to say that God is obligated to accept repentance under these conditions, but rather that He has promised to do so in myriad verses and He is true to His Promise (Q, R). If He can be described as "obligated" to forgive, He is obligated only by Himself (see 6:12, where it says that God has *prescribed Mercy for Himself*), not in response to human action. Some maintain that this verse was abrogated by vv. 48 and 116, in which all sins other than idolatry are open to the possibility of Divine Forgiveness (Ṭ). Repentance of a major sin does not necessarily avert the worldly punishment prescribed for it (Q).

19 In pre-Islamic Arabia (particularly in Madinah, according to some), as in other tribal systems, a woman could be inherited by the male relatives of her deceased husband. This meant that she effectively belonged to them: they could either marry her to one of their own or someone else (and keep her dowry) or prohibit her from remarrying at all unless she forfeited any money she received from her husband. In either case, they would keep the dowry and/or inheritance she had received from her deceased husband within the family (JJ, Q, Ṭ), which seems to have been the primary motivation for this practice. This verse explicitly prohibits this practice; however, and was reportedly revealed in response to the case of a Madinan woman whose stepson claimed to inherit her upon her husband's death (Ṭ, W; see v. 22, where marriage to the former wives of one's father are forbidden under any circumstances). This verse, in connection with vv. 11–13, clearly establishes that women are subjects and not objects of inheritance—inheritors themselves, rather than part of what is inherited. Alternately, *It is not lawful for you to inherit women through coercion* could be read, "It is not lawful for you to inherit *from* women through coercion," perhaps referring to a version of the practices cited above in which a relative of the woman's deceased husband would confine her to his home and prevent her from remarrying until she died, at which point he would inherit her property (Q).

*To prevent them from marrying* renders *taʿḍilūhuna*, which may also mean "to treat harshly." However, the same verb appears in 2:232, where it clearly refers to an attempt to prevent women from remarrying after divorce. If one considers the full semantic range of the word, it can be seen that the Quran is prohibiting any attempt to unlawfully retrieve property that has been given to a woman by her husband. It may be directed at (1) the heirs of a deceased man, who may attempt to prohibit his wife from remarrying, lest she thereby transfer any property she has received from her husband to a new family; (2) a husband who seeks to prevent a wife whom he has divorced from remarrying (since in pre-Islamic times a man could draw up an official document preventing a wife he had divorced from remarrying without his explicit consent, in order to get her to ransom herself by returning part of her bridewealth); or (3) a husband who wishes to divorce his wife, but instead treats her harshly in an attempt to force her to ransom herself through a return of some of her bridewealth (i.e., to exercise the option of *khulʿ* divorce, in which a woman seeks a divorce in exchange for returning some or all of her bridewealth; cf. 2:229).

The verse makes an exception in the case of a woman who has committed *a flagrant indecency*. Although *flagrant indecency* in v. 17 refers to adultery specifically, some argue that the term here might also apply to the case of a wife who has behaved with extreme *discord and animosity* (*nushūz*) toward her husband (Q, Ṭ, Z; see v. 34). If *flagrant indecency* here refers solely to adultery, then this verse would seem to be abrogated by the verse that establishes a public *ḥadd* punishment

much good. (20) If you desire to take one wife in place of another, even if you have given to one of them a great sum, take back nothing from it. Would you take it by way of calumny and manifest sin? (21) And how can you take it back, when you have lain with one another and they have made with you a solemn

for fornicators and adulterers. Men are urged to *consort* with their wives *in a kind and honorable way*—that is, to treat them with kindness and familiarity (the Prophet's tender relations with his wives is cited as an example [IK]), to fulfill the rights they are owed, and to make themselves pleasing to their wives, as they would want their wives to make themselves pleasing to them (Q). *It may be that you dislike a thing in which God has placed much good:* see 2:216, where a similar statement is made to those who dislike fighting in the way of God.

20 A husband is not permitted to reappropriate any of the bridewealth he has given to his wife, regardless of how great its value might be, should he desire to divorce her and marry another. Nor is he permitted to use *calumny* (e.g., by falsely accusing her of the kind of *flagrant indecency* that would allow him to attempt to retake some of the bridewealth, according to the preceding verse) or *manifest sin* (unjust treatment) in order to coerce her into giving back her bridewealth to ransom herself. *Great sum* translates *qinṭār,* a word of non-Arabic origin denoting a large measure or a hundredweight (cf. 3:14, 75). This verse indicates the permissibility of giving large sums of money or property to women in marriage. According to a well-known report, the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, tried to restrict bridal gifts to 400 *dirhams*. However, a woman challenged him on this, citing this verse as evidence that the Quran placed no limits on the amount of money a man could offer his bride. ʿUmar conceded the point and retracted the restriction (IK, Z). Cf. 2:229, where a husband is similarly instructed not to take back any of his wife's bridewealth when he divorces her, but an exception is made in a case where the couple fear that they cannot *uphold the limits set by God*. In the latter case the wife may give back some of her bridewealth in order to *ransom* herself. This is exactly what is known as *khulʿ* divorce in Islamic Law and usually requires the consent of the husband.

21 *Lain with* (*afḍā ilā*) literally means to come upon someone, usually in a private or intimate manner. It is an indirect reference to the husband and wife having had intimate sexual contact or intercourse (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs) or to their having been alone together or having lain under a single cover (Q, Ṭs). For Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), founder of the Ḥanafī school of law, for the couple to have been alone together is sufficient to entitle a woman to the full bridal payment, although for al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), founder of the Shāfiʿī school of law, this entitles her to only half (Q). Although v. 19 allows the husband to reclaim some of the bridewealth if the wife is guilty of *flagrant indecency,* the Prophet reportedly refused to allow a husband to reclaim the bridal payment in two cases: in one, a man had accused his wife of indecency and they had been separated through mutual cursing (see 24:6–9); and in another a groom learned that his new bride was pregnant by another (IK). A husband can accept back some or all of the bridewealth in the case of *khulʿ* divorce (2:229), since in that case it is the wife who is seeking the divorce.

The word *covenant* (*mīthāq*) is occasionally used in the Quran to refer to agreements between human beings, such as treaties (4:90–92; 8:72), but more frequently designates spiritual agreements between God and the Israelites (2:63, 83–4; 4:154; 5:12, 70; 33:8), the prophets (3:81; 33:7) or the believers (13:20; 57:8). The *solemn covenant* here refers to the covenantal words the groom utters during the marriage ceremony. It may refer to the groom's assent to the charge, sometimes issued by the bride's guardian, that he keep his new wife honorably or release her virtuously—language derived from 2:229–31 (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z) or simply to his verbal acceptance of the marriage (Q, Ṭ, Z). Others consider the *solemn covenant* a reference to the Prophet's statement in his sermon at the Farewell Pilgrimage: "Be reverent with regard to women! Truly you take them as a trust from God, and their private parts are made lawful for you by the Word of God" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

covenant? (22) And marry not those women whom your fathers married, save for what is past. Truly it was indecent and loathsome, an evil way. (23) Forbidden unto you [as wives] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your fathers' sisters, your mothers' sisters, your brothers' daughters, your sisters' daughters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, the mothers of your wives, the stepdaughters in your care—born of your wives with whom you have consummated marriage, but if you have not consummated the marriage with them, then there is no blame on you—and the wives of your sons who are from your loins, and two

22 The pre-Islamic Arabs reportedly recognized the same prohibitions concerning marriage partners as those stipulated in the Quran, except that they would marry their father's wives (i.e., their stepmothers) and allowed marriage to two sisters. Vv. 22–23 prohibit these two practices, respectively (IK, Ṭ). According to some reports, after the revelation of v. 19 (*It is not lawful for you to inherit women through coercion*), some Muslim men continued to marry the wives of their fathers, as long as the women consented. This verse established an absolute prohibition on the practice, even without coercion (Q).

This verse was reportedly revealed in regard to four different cases in which a man desired to marry the wife of his deceased father. According to one report, Qays, the son of Abu'l-Qays ibn al-Aṣlat (a Madinan Muslim) wished to marry his father's wife. The widow felt it was improper and consulted the Prophet, after which this verse was revealed banning the practice absolutely (IK, Q, W).

The ban on marrying the wives of one's father applied even if the woman's marriage to the father was never consummated (Ṭ); conversely, the ban applied to any woman with whom one's father had had sexual relations, even outside of wedlock, since *married* (*nakaḥa*) can also refer to sexual relations in general (Q, Ṭs). An exception is made only for women who had relations with one's father prior to Islam (Q).

Marrying the wife of one's father is *loathsome*, because it is hateful to God and because the practice may engender feelings of loathing for one's father (IK). Al-Rāzī considers the description of this practice as *indecent and loathsome, an evil way*, to refer to the fact that it is repugnant from an intellectual, legal, and customary point of view. The verse may also be read, "And marry not women in the manner that your fathers married," suggesting a general prohibition against any pre-Islamic marriage custom that contradicts Islamic principles (Ṭ).

23 In addition to wives of their fathers (v. 22), Muslim men cannot marry their *mothers*, including grandmothers; their *daughters*, including granddaughters; or their *sisters*, including both full and half siblings (Q). Al-Shāfiʿī suggests that a man's biological daughter born out of wedlock might not be subject to this prohibition, but all other schools of law prohibit marriage to any biological daughter (IK).

A *milk-mother* is a wet nurse, a woman who nurses a child, but who is not the child's biological mother. The Quran permits parents to pay a wet nurse to suckle a child (2:233; 65:6). Milk-siblings (here *milk-sisters*) are otherwise unrelated persons who, as infants or children, were wet-nursed by the same woman. Relations established through suckling had a legal status similar to blood relations. Thus a woman who nursed a man when he was a child is *maḥram* to him—meaning that she does not need to cover in front of him and he can never marry her. These same permissions and prohibitions apply to the biological children of the wet nurse and her husband and to others she has nursed (Z). Two exceptions are that a man can marry the sister of his milk-son or the mother of his milk-brother (Z). There is some debate as to how long a child must nurse for the milk relationship to be established. ʿĀʾishah maintained that a verse had been

sisters together, save for what is past. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (24) And married women [are forbidden unto you] save those whom your right hands possess; thus has God prescribed for you. Lawful unto you are all others whom you would seek in marriage with gifts from your property, in honest wedlock and not in fornication. And those women whom you enjoy thereby, give unto them their bridewealth, as an obligation; but there is no blame on you for what

revealed requiring ten sucklings for the establishment of milk relations, but this was later changed to five (IK, Q). A more widely transmitted report states that "one or two sucklings" do not establish legal milk relations, which led some to claim that at least three sucklings were required. On the basis of other *aḥādīth,* al-Shāfiʿī required that a child be suckled at least five times (IK, Q), whereas the Twelver Shiite school requires fifteen (or, variously, ten; Ṭs). For most legal scholars, the nursing has to occur within the first two to three years of the child's life (IK, Q, Ṭs).

There was a dispute about whether the exception made for marrying stepdaughters (*rabāʾib,* sing. *rabībah*) who were born of wives with whom one had not consummated the marriage also applies to marrying the mothers of such wives. The consensus of the community is that the exception only clearly applied to stepdaughters (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Nonetheless, some early authorities reportedly held that only when one had consummated marriage with a woman was one prohibited from marrying her mother (IK). Some reportedly read the verse with the following addition: *and the mothers of your wives* "with whom you have consummated marriage" (Z). As in the discussion of v. 21, some early scholars debated the extent of intimate contact that legally constituted consummation (Q, Ṭs, Z). Some viewed any intimate contact with a woman as prohibiting marriage to her daughter, although the Shāfiʿī school held that the prohibition pertained only in the case of marriage (Q).

The terms *rabībah* for "stepdaughter" and *rabīb* for "stepson" are said by some commentators to derive from the fact that a stepparent often undertakes the raising (*tarbiyah*) of stepchildren (Q, Ṭs), an idea further emphasized by the phrase *in your care* (*fī ḥujūrikum*). A minority tradition suggests that this means that stepdaughters not living with their stepfathers are potential marriage partners. But most understand this not as a condition (*sharṭ*) of the prohibition (IK, Q, Ṭs), but merely as a description of the close family contact one normally has with a stepchild, which is precisely what makes stepchildren forbidden as marriage partners (Z).

As with the prohibition against marrying the former wives of one's fathers, the prohibition against marrying former wives of one's sons applies regardless of whether the marriage was consummated or not (Ṭ). The prohibition is limited to the wives of *your sons who are from your loins,* which includes the wives of one's milk-sons (i.e., the wives of men who had been nursed by one's wife), but excludes adoptive sons. Some commentators connected this verse to the Prophet's marrying the former wife of his adopted son, Zayd ibn Ḥārithah. Since Zayd was an adopted son, not a son *from his loins,* the marriage was permissible (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z; see also 33:4, 37, 40). Marrying two sisters is forbidden, *save for what is past,* meaning that such marriages arranged prior to the revelation of this verse could stand (Q). However, the Prophet reportedly ordered men who desired to enter Islam, but had two sister wives, to divorce one (IK).

24 *Married women* translates *muḥṣanāt,* which can also mean "chaste women." It derives from *aḥṣana,* meaning "to fortify or make inaccessible"; see 21:91; 66:12, where Mary is described as a woman who *preserved her chastity* (*allatī aḥṣanat farjahā*). Married or chaste men are described as *muḥṣinīn,* "preservers of chastity" (vv. 24–25), but married or chaste (and sometimes "free" as opposed to "slave") women are usually described as *muḥṣanāt* (using the passive parti-

ciple) to signify that they have *been made* inaccessible, usually by marriage (cf. v. 25, where it means in two instances "chaste (slave) women" and "free women"; and 5:5; 24:4, 23, where it means "chaste women"). Most agree that here it refers specifically to married women. Thus the Quran forbids marrying women married to other men, save for slave or captive women, *those whom your right hands possess.*

This verse was reportedly revealed regarding women captured during the Battle of Ḥunayn (8/630), whom the Muslims were concerned about having sexual relations with, or marrying, as they were wives of the defeated tribesmen. This verse was then revealed, indicating that a Muslim man could have sexual relations with or marry them even without a formal divorce from their previous husbands, as long as they waited one month to ensure they were not pregnant by their former husbands (IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Other reports say this verse was meant to forbid the Muslims in Madinah from marrying women who had come as Emigrants to Madinah, but were still married to idolaters in Makkah, since their husbands might later become Muslims themselves and seek to reunite with their wives (Ṭ). Some commentators extended this exception to slave women, indicating that if a man purchased a married slavewoman, his purchase effectively divorced her from her husband, and he was thus allowed to have sexual relations with her (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Others questioned this, citing a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet demonstrating the opposite precedent (IK, Q, Ṭ) and claiming that *those whom your right hands possess* here refers exclusively to female war captives (IK, Ṭs).

Alternately, some consider the present verse to be a continuation of v. 3: *Marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, or four: but if you fear that you will not deal justly, then only one, or those whom your right hands possess.* According to this interpretation, *muḥṣanāt* refers to women whom one might marry beyond the limit of four, which would be completely forbidden, unless they were slave women (IK, Ṭ). Some argue that the purpose of this verse was to forbid illicit sexual relations (*zinā*) generally, allowing sexual relations only with those whom a man literally "possessed the right to" (*malaka*) through either marriage or slavery (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Still others claim that *muḥṣanāt* here includes all its possible referents: married, free, or chaste women, either Muslim or from among the People of the Book (Ṭ). Thus sexual relations with all such women are forbidden save through proper marriage, the only exception being for slave or captive women who were neither Jewish nor Christian (Ṭ).

*All others* are those with whom marriage has not been forbidden in vv. 22–23, and they must be married *with gifts from your property,* that is, by rendering the agreed-upon bridal gift. Although some traditions suggest that the bridal gift may be rendered as a service (e.g., promising to take the bride on the *ḥajj*), others say that the explicit mention here of *gifts from your property* means that the bridal payment should be quantifiable money or goods (Q).

The Arabic term for the bridal payment here is *ujūr,* meaning literally "wages"; elsewhere *ṣaduqāt* (v. 4) or *farīḍah* (lit. "obligation," 2:236–37) is used. In Islamic legal discourse, the bridal payment is generally referred to as *mahr/muhūr,* but this term is not Quranic. A widely reported early interpretation of this part of the verse connected it with the practice of temporary marriage (*mutʿah*). *You enjoy* (*istamtaʿtum*) is etymologically related to *mutʿah,* the technical term for temporary marriage. A number of prominent early authorities, including al-Suddī, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. between 19/640 and 35/655), and Ibn ʿAbbās, recited this verse with an additional phrase: *And those women whom you enjoy thereby* "for a term appointed," *give unto them their bridewealth* (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs).

Ibn ʿAbbās and Shiite commentators considered this verse, with or without the addition, to be a reference to *mutʿah*—a practice still legitimate in Shiite Islam, but considered by most Sunnis to have been forbidden by the Prophet at the end of his life or, according to most, by the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Shiites claim that no verse in the Quran specifically abrogates it and that the Prophet never forbade it (Ṭs, Ṭū). The earliest Shiite commentaries attribute the verse's interpretation as a reference to *mutʿah* to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (Qm). Those who connect the verse to *mutʿah* argue that the passage *And those women whom you enjoy thereby, give unto them their bridewealth* cannot refer to permanent marriage, because in permanent marriage at least half of the bridal payment must be paid even if the marriage is never consummated and so is not contingent on a man "enjoying" his wife, as this verse indicates (Ṭs, Ṭū); they also understand the next clause, *but there is no*

you agree to after the obligation. God is Knowing, Wise. (25) And whosoever among you has not the means to marry free, believing women, then [marry] the believing young women among those whom your right hands possess; God knows best your faith, the one of you is as the other, so wed them by the permission of their people, and give unto them their proper bridewealth, as married women, not as fornicators or paramours. And when they are married, should they commit an indecency, they shall be liable to half the punishment of free women. This is for the one among you who fears he will sin, but it is better for

*blame on you for what you agree to after the obligation* (has been fulfilled), as meaning that a couple may extend their temporary marriage beyond the established term if they both agree (IK, Ṭ).

Al-Ṭabarī rejects this altered reading, because of the absence of the added phrase in the standard Quranic codex, and does not accept the interpretation of the verse as referring to *mutᶜah,* as he considers the practice to have been decisively forbidden by the Prophet (Ṭ). Ibn Kathīr accepts the verse's reference to *mutᶜah,* but claims that its ruling regarding *mutᶜah* was abrogated, although he notes that Ibn ᶜAbbās continued to consider it legitimate in cases of necessity (*ḍarūrah;* IK). Al-Zamakhsharī notes Ibn ᶜAbbās' interpretation of this verse as a reference to *mutᶜah,* but reports that Ibn ᶜAbbās repented of his support for *mutᶜah* on his deathbed (Z). Others consider the verse's ruling regarding *mutᶜah* to be abrogated by the verses on inheritance, since there is no inheritance for a temporary wife (Q), although the children of such a marriage do inherit. For those who read the verse as applying only to permanent marriage, *there is no blame on you for what you agree to after the obligation* (has been fulfilled) means, as in v. 4, that a variety of other financial arrangements and gifts, when agreed to by husband and wife, are legitimate once the stated bridal payment has been rendered (IK, Ṭ). The husband's inability or failure to pay for his wife's maintenance, for example, does not invalidate the marriage or nullify his right to sexual relations with his wife.

25 *Free, believing women* uses *muḥṣanāt,* discussed in 4:24c, to denote "free" women as opposed to slave women. A minority variant reading has *al-muḥṣināt*—denoting the active rather than passive participle—indicating that such women actively make themselves sexually inaccessible, or chaste (Q, Ṭ). Although the previous verse was interpreted to make permissible sexual relations with captive or slave women, this verse indicates the permissibility of fully marrying slave women, but those belonging to others, not one's own (Q, Ṭs). However, given that the word for "marry" (*yankiḥa*) can also mean to have sexual relations, some interpreted this verse to mean that a man unable to marry a free woman could have sexual relations with his slave woman (Z), although this seems to be a minority view.

Most understood this verse to mean that a man could fully marry a slave woman if he was unable to marry a free, believing woman for lack of financial *means,* or if he *fears he will sin,* which some commentators interpret as a lack of patience to withstand the frustration of one's sexual desires (IK, Q). Most understood this permission as applying only in cases of necessity (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), because of the difficulties inherent in a slave woman's having both a master (for she remains someone else's slave) and a husband, and also because the children produced by the union were legally subject to the woman's master (Q). Given the undesirable consequences of this situation, some said it was preferable to marry a free Jewish or Christian woman rather than a Muslim slave woman (Q, Z).

The verse is also understood as limiting such marriages to *believing* slave women, thus prohibiting marriage to idolatrous slaves (Q; cf. 2:221). Al-Ṭabarī maintains that Jewish and Christian slave women are likewise forbidden as marriage partners by this verse, a position also taken by

you to be patient. God is Forgiving, Merciful. (26) God desires to make [this] clear unto you, and to guide you to the traditions of those who went before you, and to relent unto you. And God is Knowing, Wise. (27) God desires to relent unto you, but those who follow lusts desire that you go tremendously astray. (28) God desires to lighten [your burden] for you, for man was created weak.

Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Twelver Shiite Law (Ṭs), although others assert that Jewish and Christian women—slave or free—were permissible as wives (Ṭ, Z; cf. 5:5). Although the permission to marry slave women is a mercy from God, *it is better . . . to be patient* and await a change in circumstances. Some legal scholars placed additional restrictions on this practice, such as limiting the number of slave wives, prohibiting a man from having both a slave and a free wife, and requiring the dissolution of a man's marriage to a slave wife upon his marrying a free one (Q).

*God knows best your faith* articulates the Islamic principle that the inner reality of faith can be determined only by God. Membership in the Muslim community was therefore based solely on one's testimony of faith (*shahādah*) and outward compliance with the required practices of Islam (see 49:14c). Thus a slave woman who claimed to be a believing Muslim had to be accepted as such and could be married by a free Muslim man. Although the distinction between slave and free remained, a slave woman's Islamic faith placed her in the same spiritual rank as other Muslims—*the one of you is as the other*—asserting the spiritual equality between all Muslims before God, regardless of social or worldly status (Q, Ṭs, Z).

Marrying such slave women had to be done according to proper procedures: they were to be *wed . . . by the permission of their people,* that is, their masters (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), and with *proper bridewealth* (Ṭ). Some viewed the bridal payment as belonging fully to the married slave woman, but most thought her master was entitled to it (Q, Ṭs, Z). Slave women were to be married *as married women, not as fornicators,* the latter referring to those who openly engage in sexual misconduct, or as *paramours,* referring to those who have illicit sexual relations with a single partner discreetly (Ṭ, Q, IK). In pre-Islamic Arabia open fornication was proscribed, but secret sexual misconduct was tolerated; the Quran clearly forbids both (cf. 6:151), but some reports note that the former is a worse sin because of its greater negative social consequences. After the slave women *are married,* they are liable to punishment for *an indecency,* meaning sexual misconduct, but only to half the punishment imposed on free women—that is, fifty lashes instead of a hundred (see 24:2). The halving of the punishment may reflect the greater vulnerability of slave women or their lower status. See, for the opposite example, 33:30, in which the women of the Prophet's household, given their superior status, are liable to double the punishment for sexual misconduct.

26–28 The prohibitions and permissions regarding marriage detailed in vv. 22–25 are considered to be a reinstatement of marital laws established by previous prophets (Ṭ, Z). *Those who follow lusts* (v. 27) may refer explicitly to fornicators or more generally to those who follow their desires instead of the prescriptions of religion. Minority traditions suggest that these may be references to the People of the Book, particularly Jews, or Zoroastrians, who reportedly had a less restrictive view of legitimate marriage partners (Ṭ); the latter permitted marriage to nieces, for example. *God desires to lighten [your burden] for you*—that is, by allowing men of insufficient means to marry slave women—*for man was created weak*—that is, with a generally weak capacity to resist sexual desire and attraction to women for long (Ṭ). The Quran mentions that God *lightened the burden* for Muslims in other ways (8:66); and similar accommodations for human weakness are implied in permitting sexual relations between spouses on the nights of Ramadan (2:187) and in God's reducing the number of daily prayers at the Prophet's request during the Night Journey (IK). The Quran states that God *desires ease* for His servants (2:185), and other verses indicate that the religious obligations of Muslims are easier than

(29) O you who believe! Consume not each other's wealth falsely, but trade by mutual consent, and slay not yourselves. Truly God is Merciful unto you. (30) And whosoever does that in enmity and injustice, We shall cause him to burn in a Fire; and that is easy for God. (31) If you shun the grave sins that you are forbidden, We shall absolve you of your evil deeds and cause you to enter at a

those of earlier communities (7:157) and those they impose on themselves (3:93). Ibn ʿAbbās considered vv. 26–28 to be among the eight important verses in this *sūrah* that demonstrate God's Mercy toward human beings (the others are vv. 31, 40, 48, 110, 147; R, Z).

29–30 *Consume not each other's wealth falsely* means that people should not seek to obtain wealth through means expressly forbidden in the Quran, including usury (*ribā;* 2:275–78; 3:130; 30:39), gambling (2:219; 5:90–91), and fraudulent mercantile practices (7:85; 17:35; 55:8–9; 83:1–3); such practices are presented as one of the key vices of the destroyed the people of the prophet Shuʿayb (11:84; 26:181–83). The command *slay not yourselves* was traditionally understood to mean that Muslims should not slay one another, as they are all members of the same religious community (cf. 4:92–93; 17:33). Except in certain cases where blood money can be given in place of punishment, the penalty prescribed for slaying a fellow believer is death, indicating that if a believer kills a fellow believer, it is as if one has slain oneself (Ṭ). Since the verse commands Muslims *slay not yourselves* (*anfusakum*), it also indicates that suicide is forbidden (Q). *And whosoever does that in enmity and injustice*—that is, whoever kills a fellow believer or, some say, transgresses any of the major rules established to this point in the *sūrah*—shall have Hellfire as a reward.

31 The Quran here makes a distinction between *the grave sins* (*kabāʾir*) and comparatively minor *evil deeds* (*sayyiʾāt*), promising that avoidance of the former will entail forgiveness for the latter. This is one of many Quranic examples of God's merciful judgment of human beings and of His compensation and compassion for their inherent moral flaws. The Quran never explicitly identifies particular sins as either major or minor. Some maintain that *the grave sins* are transgressions of any of the moral laws established to this point in the *sūrah* (Ṭ). Other reports list seven *grave sins*. According to al-Ṭabarī, a widely cited list attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib includes associating other gods with God (*shirk*); killing a soul that God has not made it lawful to kill; slandering a chaste woman; consuming the wealth of orphans; usury; fleeing the battlefield; and returning to the Bedouin life after settling (settling and renouncing the Bedouin life were closely connected with adopting the Islamic religious and social lifestyle). All of these are denounced in the Quran, but other sins, such as theft, which are similarly denounced in the Quran, are missing from this list; and although the false accusation of fornication is listed as a major sin, fornication itself is not, nor is adultery.

Alternate lists of seven sometimes omit *shirk* (perhaps for its obviousness) and the return to the Bedouin life, but include false testimony, disobeying one's parents (Ṭ), or fornication (Z). Variant lists include apostasy, despairing of God's Mercy, and witchcraft (Ṭ, Ṭs). Al-Ṭabarī considered the most authentic list to be found in a *ḥadīth* that identifies four major sins: *shirk*, killing someone, disobedience to parents, and false testimony (Ṭ). Ibn ʿAbbās maintained that no sin was minor, as long as one persisted in it, and no sin was a grave sin, as long as one repented (Aj, Ṭs, Z). Still others say that the *grave sins* include all that God has explicitly forbidden in the Quran or any sin for which God's curse or a worldly or otherworldly punishment has been specified (Ṭ). Some argue that all acts of disobedience to God are *grave sins* and none can be considered "minor" except in relation to other sins (Ṭs), although if this were so, the Quranic differentiation between *grave sins* and *evil deeds* here and elsewhere (18:49; 49:7; 54:53) would be meaningless (R). Al-Rāzī suggests that *grave sins* may indicate varieties of *kufr* (disbelief), that is, disbelief in God, the prophets, the Last Day, or the Sacred Law. This would be

noble gate. (32) And covet not that by which God has favored some of you above others—unto men a share of what they have earned, and unto women a share of what they have earned—but ask God for His Bounty. Truly God is the Knower of all things. (33) To each We have appointed heirs for what parents and kinsfolk leave. Those to whom you have given your oath, give them their share. Truly

consistent with v. 48, which states that God forgives all sins except *shirk* (idolatry; R).

Those who avoid these sins will be absolved of their *evil deeds*—that is, minor sins (Ṭ)—and be made *to enter at a noble gate,* which might also be translated "to enter with a noble entry." Some consider God's forgiveness of the lesser sins to be the result of an "excess of reward" for having avoided major ones (Z). Al-Rāzī, however, does not view acts of obedience or disobedience as necessitating specific rewards or punishments that could be weighed against one another and rejects the implication that failure to avoid the grave sins necessarily means that lesser sins will not be absolved. Rather, he emphasizes God's free and abundant Mercy toward human beings. Although Sufi commentators agree that the truly great sin is *shirk* (idolatry), they consider *shirk* to also mean an excessive attachment to worldly things, and even the assertion of the independent existence of one's own soul in a way that would obscure pure devotion to and utter reliance upon God. Hence the Sufi saying, sometimes attributed to Rābiʿah al-ʿAdawiyyah (d. 183/801): "Your existence is a sin to which no other sin can be compared!" (K, Qu).

32 *God has favored some . . . above others* in worldly provision, and this inequality engenders moral challenges—wealth and poverty, for example, challenge human beings to be generous and humble, respectively—and moral trial comes through both good things, such as wealth and children (64:15), and hardship (21:35). The assertion that God is the *Knower of all things* suggests that this differentiation is a matter of Divine Wisdom (Z). This verse was reportedly revealed either after the Prophet's wife Umm Salamah or some other women complained that men received twice the share of inheritance (see vv. 11–12, 176) and had the possibility of attaining greater spiritual reward for their participation in *jihād* (v. 95), or after some men expressed the desire that their reward in the next life be double that of women, even as their share of inheritance in this life is doubled (IK, Ṭ, W, Z), and some women wished that their burden in the next life would be half that of men's, like their share of the inheritance (Ṭs). Mujāhid notes that this verse was revealed in response to these complaints, along with either 33:35 (Ṭ) or 3:195 (IK), both of which indicate an otherworldly reward for righteous men and women explicitly and without differentiation (Ṭ).

Rather than desiring what has been given to others, which can lead only to envy, every individual should *ask God for His Bounty* (Ṭ), which may include worldly goods, but which also refers to the bounty of faith and worship that leads to reward in the next life (Ṭ). A *ḥadīth* further encourages believers: "Ask God for His Bounty, for truly He loves to be asked" (Ṭs).

33 *Heirs* translates *mawālī,* which is etymologically related to *awliyāʾ* ("friends," "allies"; sing. *walī*). Both terms are employed throughout the Quran to refer to various close relationships, including inheritance, kinship, servitude, friendship, and alliance. Here the term is a clear reference to *heirs* among one's kinsfolk (Ṭ), indicating that kin relations are the legitimate heirs (*heirs for what parents and kinsfolk leave;* Z), but also that others to whom one has given one's *oath*—that is, with whom one has made a pact of alliance—should be given *their share* of inheritance. This verse was revealed in regard to the reportedly common practice in Arabia of men adopting others as their sons in order to allot them some of their inheritance (Q, Ṭ, W) or the practice of two men entering into an agreement by which each would inherit from the other and avenge the other if one of them was killed (IK, Q, Ṭ). The famous "brothering" (*muʾākhāh*), in which the Prophet established relations of "brotherhood" entailing inheritance between pairs of Makkan Emigrants and Madinan Helpers shortly after coming to

God is Witness over all things. (34) Men are the upholders and maintainers of women by virtue of that in which God has favored some of them above others and by virtue of their spending from their wealth. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [their husbands'] absence what God has guarded. As for those from whom you fear discord and animosity, admonish them, then leave them in their beds, then strike them. Then if they obey you,

Madinah, was an early Islamic version of such an alliance, but one with a spiritual and communal purpose. A minority understand this verse specifically in reference to this event (IK, Ṭ), while most consider the verse to be an abrogation of earlier forms of Arabic inheritance that allowed for inheritance between non-kin relations.

Islamic inheritance was limited to blood kin who were assigned specified shares of the estate in vv. 11–12. The primacy of kin relations in inheritance was also established in 8:75 (Q, Ṭ), abrogating 8:72, which could be interpreted as allowing inheritance between the Emigrants and the Helpers (Ṭ). Some have understood the present verse to mean that, although such alliances between nonkinsfolk should no longer be made and kinsfolk are now the only legitimate heirs, pacts of alliance that had been made in the past should be respected (IK, Ṭ, Z). Others say that the share that this verse directs Muslims to give to those to whom they have made an *oath* refers to granting them a share among the bequests that they might make for up to one-third of their estate prior to its division among legal heirs; or it means rendering them the mutual support and counsel, but not the monetary inheritance, that the pact originally stipulated (IK, Q, Ṭ) A minority view counted one's freed slaves among one's *mawālī* and thus, according to this verse, among one's legal heirs, but most consider that it is only a master who might inherit from a freed slave, but not vice versa (Q).

. 34 This verse is the clearest statement of a man's role and authority in the marital relationship as head of the household in relation to his responsibility to provide for his wife. Other verses suggest mutuality in the relationship between husband and wife (2:187, 233), but this verse indicates a hierarchy from a certain perspective between the two, at least on the social plane (see also 2:228). This verse identifies men as the *upholders and maintainers* (*qawwāmūn*) of women (the Arabic may also be translated "managers" or "guardians," although not in the sense of guardians over minors or the mentally incompetent), and this has traditionally been understood to mean that men are entitled to expect certain kinds of behavior on the part of their wives and that they have the right and duty to supervise, educate, and discipline them (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs) or to command or prohibit them (Z).

Men have this position *by virtue of that in which God has favored some of them above others,* which, because it repeats the almost identical phrasing in v. 32, likely refers to men's greater share in inheritance relative to women, *and by virtue of their spending from their wealth,* that is, to support the women. Thus many interpret the verse as referring to the greater financial assets of men and their spending of these assets on the bridal gift and maintenance for their wives (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭb)—that is, these additional assets constitute a favor (combined with responsibility) God gives to men, but one that, in principle, comes back to women in the form of marital support (Q).

For Ibn ʿAjībah, this is "acquired" authority, since men's more authoritative position in the marital relationship is "acquired," at least in part, by their fulfillment of the duty to support the women of their family including, but not limited to, their wives. Many commentators and the Mālikī and Shāfiʿī legal schools considered men's authority and financial responsibility in marriage to be directly linked (Ṭs), so that a man who did not support his wife could no longer claim authority over her (Q), although for al-Qurṭubī such a situation constituted a nullification of the marriage contract. Many commentators also claimed, however, that the "favor" that God has given to men includes spiritual and worldly distinctions not necessarily related to financial matters.

Among the distinctions they consider to have been given, if not exclusively, at least in many cases in greater measure to men are intelligence, authority, strength, and the responsibility for *jihād*; some also assert that all prophets and most scholars and religious authorities were men (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭs, Ṭb, Z). However, this is reading much into a verse that is located among, and echoes the language of, verses dealing specifically with inheritance and marital support and is more naturally read as a continuation of these discussions specifically.

Righteous wives are those who are *devoutly obedient* (*qānitāt*), that is, obedient in a spiritual or religious sense. Given the context of the verse, most commentators gloss *qānitāt* here as women who exhibit obedience (*ṭāʿah*) generally, including or especially to their husbands (IK, Q, Z). However, it should be noted that all other instances of *qānit* in the Quran denote obedience to and worship of God, not human beings (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 16:120; 33:31, 35; 39:9; 66:12). Given its wider Quranic usage, *qānitāt* could be translated "pious" or "devout" women, in which case the term is not necessarily meant as a direct reference to a woman's obedience to her husband. But insofar as obedience to one's husband—within rational and religious limits—was considered to be religiously proper for a woman in marriage, some commentators suggested that *devoutly obedient* describes a wife who is obedient to both God and husband (Aj, Ṭs). Many connect the two by indicating that the husband has a moral duty to guide and discipline his wife toward proper religious devotion (Q, Ṭ). Righteous women also guard *what God has guarded*—that is, their chastity and their husbands' property (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z), both of which God has made inviolable (*has guarded*) and both of which they have a duty to protect in their husbands' absence. Again, although these are a woman's responsibilities to her husband, they are presented here primarily as her responsibilities toward God—she is protecting what He has made inviolable. Some say *guarding . . . what God has guarded* means that a woman should guard herself as God has guarded her through various protections that He, and not the husband, has established on her behalf (Ṭb, Ṭs, Z).

*Those from whom you fear discord and animosity* refers to those who have demonstrated these things through their actions. To *fear* here means to "know" (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs); in other words, it refers to demonstrated hostility, not merely the suspicion thereof. *Discord and animosity* collectively translates *nushūz*, which comes from a root meaning "to rise up" or "to be elevated" (cf. 58:11). It thus connotes an attitude of high-handedness, haughtiness, or arrogance. *Nushūz* is explained by different commentators as referring to various inappropriate behaviors on the part of the wife, most commonly, some form of disobedience toward the husband, which may include immodest behavior toward other men, coming and going without regard for the husband's wishes, arrogant disregard for—or resistance to—the rights of the husband, loathing the husband, abandoning his bed, or desiring to leave him (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). This last seems more consistent with the use of the term in v. 128, which discusses the situation in which a woman fears *nushūz* from her husband and where the term is usually interpreted as referring to cruel treatment, aversion, or loss of affection.

In the face of a woman committing *nushūz*, a husband is given a set of three sanctions to correct her behavior. These three sanctions are commonly understood as progressive (Q, Ṭb, Z), meaning that husbands should begin with verbal correction (*admonish them*); that is, they should remind their wives of their religious duties and obligations in the marriage (Q, Ṭ). If this does not succeed in changing the wife's behavior, men may *leave them in their beds*, usually understood to mean refraining from sexual relations with them. A minority tradition indicates that it means to remain aloof from them and refuse to speak with them, and some permit men to have sexual relations with their wives without speaking to them in this situation (IK, Ṭ). However it is interpreted, such staying away from one's wife should last no longer than one month, following Prophetic precedent (Q). Because refusing to share the bed of a wife who is already averse to her husband may serve to encourage or reward, rather than deter, her negative demeanor toward her husband, some commentators argue that this sanction should be meted out simultaneously with the third sanction, "striking" her (Ṭ).

This last sanction is directly related to the occasion for the revelation of the verse, as it was reportedly revealed in relation to a woman or her family who came to the Prophet, complaining that her husband had hit her. The Prophet immediately ordered retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*; 2:178; 5:45)

seek not a way against them. Truly God is Exalted, Great. (35) And if you fear a breach between the two, then appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people. If they desire reconciliation, God will bring about agreement

against the husband. This verse was then revealed, allowing a husband to strike his wife in certain circumstances, and the Prophet aborted the retaliation, saying, "I wanted one thing and God wanted another" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, W, Z). Perhaps considering the Prophet's own dislike of husbands striking their wives as suggested in this widely transmitted report as well as reports indicating that he never struck his own wives, commentators generally indicate that striking one's wife is to be used only as a last resort, and some prominent legal scholars, including al-Shāfiʿī, considered it something to be avoided (R). Some have indicated that it is justified only as a means of avoiding the more socially painful consequence of divorce—an interpretation consistent with the following verse, which stipulates that serious effort should be expended to try to reconcile and avoid divorce.

The commentators are unanimous in asserting that to *strike* here refers only to a moderate and noninjurious form of physical force—"without violence" (*ghayr mubarriḥ*), using language found in a *ḥadīth* on this same issue (Q), and "without leaving a mark" (*ghayr muʾaththir;* IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). This is based on a *ḥadīth* that lists the rights that a woman is owed from her husband: "That he feed her and clothe her, that he never strike her in the face or mar her beauty, and that he not abandon her, save in the house" (Ṭ). Some commentators assert that this "striking" should not even cause pain (Aj). Ibn ʿAbbās explained that it means hitting with a *siwāk* (a thin, flexible twig chewed on for dental hygiene; Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Islamic Law prohibits injurious violence against one's wife, and some schools of Islamic Law consider it a legitimate reason for which a woman can seek a divorce.

Some recent interpretations of *strike them* seek to avoid the sense of physical hitting entirely by invoking alternate idiomatic meanings of *ḍaraba* ("to strike"), arguing that the verb can mean simply to leave the wife, given other Quranic usages of *ḍaraba,* such as *ḍaraba fi'l-sabīl* (v. 94), which means to set out on a path, or *ḍaraba fi'l-arḍ,* which means to journey (2:273; 3:156; 4:101; 5:106; 73:20). Such interpretations are not entirely convincing, however, since the wider semantic range of *ḍaraba* they invoke is activated only by various prepositions and syntaxes not found in the present verse. To use an analogous example in English, "strike him" is unambiguous in its meaning, even if "strike a balance" or "strike a pose" are other idiomatic uses for the verb "to strike." Moreover, the occasion of revelation is widely held to be the issue of a man's right to strike his wife, and so one would expect the verse to address this issue specifically. It should be reiterated, however, that none of the classical commentators or Islamic legal scholars viewed this verse as a license to commit serious physical violence or inflict bodily harm on one's wife; and given the steps one needed to take before reaching the point of "striking" one's wife, it may be viewed as a ban on beating one's wife in anger.

Finally, commentators note that these sanctions are understood to be strictly for the purpose of altering the wife's behavior, not for punishment, and they are to be abandoned once she has ceased the problematic behavior (Ṭ, Q, Z). *Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them:* if the wife returns to obedience to Islamic Law, then the husband has no right to act maliciously or harmfully toward her. If the woman repents of her behavior, it should be as if it never happened (Aj); and even if she agrees to obey while retaining feelings of aversion for her husband, he has no right to punish her for this, for she has no religious obligation to love her husband (Aj, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

35 If the problems between a husband and wife cannot be resolved between them, or if a husband cannot resolve his problem with his wife's conduct through the means recommended above, two arbiters should be appointed. The arbiters should be trusted relatives of each spouse, since they are more familiar with the situation and have the interests of their respective family members at heart. The arbiters are charged with determining, if possible, which spouse is at fault and recommending either terms of reconciliation or a mutually agreed-upon divorce. The extent of the arbiter's power to reconcile or separate the

between them. Truly God is Knowing, Aware. (36) Worship God, and ascribe not partners unto Him. And be virtuous toward parents and kinsfolk, toward orphans and the indigent, toward the neighbor who is of kin and the neighbor who is not of kin, toward the companion at your side and the traveler, and toward those whom your right hands possess. Truly God loves not one who is a vainglorious boaster, (37) those who are miserly and enjoin people to be miserly, concealing what God has given them from His Bounty. We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. (38) And those who spend their

married couple is unclear. Some have suggested they bring their recommendations to the local authority for implementation; others have felt they have the power to reconcile or dissolve the marriage upon their own agreement; still others felt that any action taken has to be with the consent of the two spouses (Z). A report from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib indicates that the two arbiters should have the power to dissolve the marriage upon their agreement, but that this power must be delegated to the arbiters by the married couple in advance. If the arbiters recommend separation and the wife is found to be at fault or their differences are simply irreconcilable, the wife might be asked or pressured to return part of her bridewealth to effect a mutual divorce, as in 2:229: *If you fear that they will not uphold the limits set by God, there is no blame upon the two in what she may give in ransom;* some indicate, however, that such a decision remains ultimately in her hands (Ṭ). *If they desire reconciliation, God will reconcile them* may refer to the arbiters (Ṭ), to the spouses, or both (Z).

36 This is one of several verses that place virtue toward parents immediately after the command to worship none but God (see also 2:83; 6:151; 17:23; 31:13–14) and enjoin kindness toward parents generally (46:15; 29:8). The Arabic word here used to denote virtuous behavior is *iḥsān,* which comes from a root meaning "beautiful"; various derivations from the root denote virtue, moral beauty, and goodness or doing what is beautiful and good. In relation to parents it has the meaning of filial piety. The list provided here of those to whom one should be virtuous, kind, and charitable is similar to other such lists in the Quran (cf. 2:83, 177, 215; 9:60; 16:90; 17:26; 30:38).

Although the *neighbor who is of kin* is generally considered to refer to one's family members, a minority tradition identifies it as a reference to Muslims generally, that is, those to whom one is close in religion. The *neighbor who is not of kin,* or *al-jār al-junub,* may mean nonfamily members or friends, but also those who are distant from oneself geographically or in religion. The word *junub* relates to something that is distant; the state of ritual impurity brought about by sexual relations is also referred to as *junub* (4:43), meaning distance from prayer, as one cannot pray until purifying oneself. This verse also enjoins virtue toward slaves (*those whom your right hands possess*), which may mean freeing them, an act repeatedly recommended as a form of expiation (cf. 4:92; 5:89; 58:3; 90:13), or simply treating them well.

The *companion at your side* may refer to one's traveling companion or more specifically to one's wife. The verse thus enjoins kindness and virtuous behavior as a rule toward all, particularly toward those over whom one might have a certain power because they are dependents (elderly parents, needy family or orphans, wives) or lower in social status (orphans, non-Muslims, slaves). Al-Qurṭubī asserts that similar enjoinders to kindness toward others are found in all Divinely revealed books and can, in fact, be known through one's intelligence even without a scriptural command.

37–39 Many verses enjoin spending wealth for the good of others; and miserliness (*bukhl* or *bakhal*) is morally reprehensible, not only because it manifests a lack of charity, but also because it conceals *what God has given ... from His Bounty,* indicating ingratitude for or even rejection of this Divine bounty. Such miserliness can be directly

wealth to be seen of men, and believe not in God or the Last Day. Whosoever has Satan for a companion has an evil companion indeed! (39) What harm would it have done them were they to believe in God and the Last Day, and spend of that which God has provided them? God knows them well. (40) Truly

linked to disbelief, *kufr,* since *kufr* also connotes both "covering over, concealing" and "ingratitude"—hence the reference to the punishment of the *disbelievers* (or "the ungrateful" or "those who cover over"; *kāfirīn*) at the end of v. 37 (IK, R). Bounty (*faḍl*) connotes wealth beyond what one needs, and the morally appropriate way to deal with such excess is to expend it in pious ways, as elucidated in the previous verse; cf. 3:180; 9:76; 17:100; 25:67; 57:24; 92:8. "Miserliness" may also connote greed for the wealth of others and so lack of contentment with what God has provided (Ṭ, Z).

Some early commentators indicated that these verses were addressed to the Jews of Madinah, who were "miserly" with their scripture and "concealed" some of the knowledge that God had bestowed on them in the Torah (R, Ṭ, Z). This interpretation, though found in many sources, seems to take the verse out of its obvious context as part of an explicit discussion about how to appropriately spend one's wealth, and thus seems rather unlikely. Some commentators see the verse as criticizing "miserliness" in both wealth and knowledge. The verse also criticizes those who spend in charity, only *to be seen of men.* These verses may be addressed to the Madinan hypocrites who feigned belief in Islam for self-serving purposes. For other critiques of hypocritical, pious ostentation, see 2:264; 4:142; 8:47; 107:4–7.

**40** This verse is one of many affirming that God does not engage in even the slightest injustice (see also 3:117; 11:101; 16:33, 118; 43:76). Some commentators assert that it is impossible to attribute injustice to God, as to be unjust means to transgress boundaries or the rights of others, and since God is Creator, He has no boundaries. Rather, it is He who establishes these rights and boundaries and so cannot be said to transgress them; according to certain theologians, He is capable of injustice, but proscribes it for Himself (R, Qu; cf. 6:12, 54, where He *has prescribed Mercy for Himself*).

*Mote's weight* translates *mithqāl dharrah,* which conveys something so small that it has no apparent weight at all (Ṭ; cf. 10:61; 34:3,22; 99:7–8). *Dharrah* can also mean "particle," "speck," or "atom" and is frequently glossed as referring to the tiniest of red ants or the smallest of seeds. The idea that God "multiplies" *a good deed* (*ḥasanah,* related to *iḥsān*)—that is, multiplies its reward (Ṭ, Q)—is an important aspect of God's Justice and Mercy. God does not necessarily reckon as we reckon, and in His Mercy He reckons good deeds beyond their actual "weight"; see 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof;* and 2:245, 261; 57:11, 18; 64:17, where the money spent in good works "multiplies." Here the factor by which good deeds are multiplied is not specified, implying that God multiplies good deeds beyond measure.

According to Ibn Masᶜūd, on the Day of Judgment God settles all claims that one person might hold against another by granting the claimant the good deeds of the debtor. After all such debts and claims have been rectified, if individuals still have a *mote's weight* of good to their credit, God multiplies it and they enter the Garden. However, if the claims against them far exceed their good deeds, they will perish (Ṭ). A tradition attributed to Abū Saᶜīd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693) claims that eventually God will remove from Hellfire all those with a *mote's weight* of good to their credit (Q), and many Ashᶜarite theologians adduced this verse to argue that God would eventually remove all believers from Hellfire and that the reward for good deeds could not be nullified by the punishment for evil ones. Conversely, Muᶜtazilites used the earlier part of the verse to assert that, since God does no injustice, all injustice originates from human beings, thus supporting their doctrine that human beings, not God, are the authors of their own deeds (R).

Al-Rāzī makes a distinction between the multiplied reward God bestows for virtuous deeds and the *great reward* He bestows *from His Presence* at the end of the verse. The former is a reward

God commits not so much as a mote's weight of wrong: if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and grant from His Presence a great reward. (41) How will it be when We bring forth a witness from every community, and We bring thee as a witness against these? (42) On that Day those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger will wish that they were level with the earth, and they will conceal no account from God. (43) O you who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are uttering, nor in a state of ritual impurity—unless you are passing through—until you have washed. But if you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you has come from satisfying a call of nature, or you have touched women, and you find no water, then resort to clean earth, and

for the physical acts one accomplishes in life; the latter refers to the "pleasure that is only obtained through direct vision [of God], being immersed in love and true knowledge"; it cannot be the reward for merely physical acts of obedience, but is only made possible by what God deposits in the "soul sanctified through [Divine] illumination, purity, and light." The former grants "bodily happiness"; the latter provides "spiritual happiness."

**41** Cf. 16:89. As God sends a prophet to every community, this prophet stands as a witness on the Day of Judgment to his own community's acceptance or rejection of his Divine message (cf. 16:84; 28:85; 57:19; also 4:159, where Jesus is said to be a witness against the People of the Book generally). Several verses assert that the Muslim community will collectively serve as witness over earlier communities, or for all of humanity, and that Muhammad will be a witness over the Muslims (2:143, 22:78), and also their intercessor (Qu). Although Islamic tradition views each prophet as the witness over his own religious community for all generations, the Prophet Muhammad reportedly implored God, "[I am] a witness over them so long as I remain among them, but when Thou takest me to Thyself, it is Thou who art the Watcher over them, and Thou art Witness over all things," directly invoking the words Jesus speaks in 5:117. Some interpret the articulation of the Prophet's role as witness in the present verse as a rebuke directed at the disbelievers of his own time, against whom he would stand as witness on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet was reported to have wept upon the recitation of this verse, contemplating the weight of this responsibility (IK, Q).

**42** *On that Day*—that is, the day the prophetic witnesses will be called forth (v. 41)—the disbelievers and disobedient will be so terrified of being held to account that they will long to be *level with the earth,* that is, to be unnoticeable and so not accountable, in fact, to be nothing, for to be dust would be preferable to being punished in the Fire. This is similar to the lament of the disbelievers in 78:40: "*Oh, would that I were dust!*" The disbelievers' wish to be *level with the earth* may also connote a desire that the earth devour them or cave in below them, for the earth is the active subject in the Arabic construction here. The Quran is emphatic about the impossibility of concealing anything from God, for even if people seek to lie about what they did in life, their own body parts will testify against them on the Day of Judgment (24:24; 36:65; 41:20–22).

**43** In Islamic Law, drinking alcohol or ingesting any intoxicating substance is forbidden. However, four verses address the consumption of wine or intoxicating drinks, and only one of them bans wine explicitly. The earliest of the four, 16:67, refers to the "strong drink" that people derive from the fruit of the vine as a sign of God's merciful provision for human beings and contains no indication of wine's harmful properties. In 2:219 it says that in drinking wine and gambling there is *great sin, but [some] benefits.* The present verse can be seen as a gloss on this, instructing Muslims to avoid drunkenness at the times of

prayer. Finally, 5:90 instructs Muslims to avoid wine and gambling entirely, as they are *of Satan's doing*. Although only this last verse amounts to an absolute prohibition against the consumption of alcoholic drink, Islamic jurisprudence, basing itself upon Prophetic sayings (*aḥādīth*) and practice (*Sunnah*), has consistently viewed this last revealed verse as the authoritative one that abrogates the legal implications of the other three.

In the present verse, believers are asked to *draw not near unto prayer* in a state of drunkenness, that is, not to approach the prayer itself or the mosque (*ṣalāh/ṣalawāt,* or "prayer(s)," can also connote the place of prayer; cf. 22:40), or prepare themselves for prayer until they are sober and know what they are reciting. This part of the verse was reportedly revealed when some Companions of the Prophet attempted to pray after having drunk wine (when it was still permissible) and incorrectly recited a Quranic passage during the prayer (W, Z). After this verse was revealed, Muslims would drink wine only after they had completed the evening prayer (*ʿishāʾ*), and they continued this practice until wine was forbidden (Q). A minority tradition extends the meaning of "drunkenness" (*sukārā*) to include excessive sleepiness that would similarly impair one's ability to pray properly. Such an interpretation would mean that the verse was not entirely abrogated by the later prohibition against drinking wine (Q, Ṭ).

*Ritual impurity* translates *junub,* which denotes major ritual impurity and derives from a root meaning to be distant from something; in this case, one should keep oneself distant from prayer—and places of prayer—until one has properly purified oneself, just as one should avoid these when intoxicated. According to legal scholars, the state of *junub* also prohibits one from touching or reciting the Quran. *Until you have washed* refers to completing the major ritual ablution, which requires full immersion (as in a bath or shower). An exception is made for those *passing through,* that is, travelers in a state of *junub* who need to seek shelter temporarily in a mosque, or those Companions of the Prophet who needed to pass through the mosque to go out of their homes, because their homes were adjacent to the mosque in Madinah (Q).

This verse also establishes an important easing of the rules of ritual purity by allowing the substitution of *clean earth* for water in circumstances where one is ill (and so unable to look for water or in fear that washing with water will increase one's illness) or on a journey and unable to find water (see also 5:6 for a nearly identical set of injunctions related to purity). This part of the verse was reportedly revealed when the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah lost a necklace while journeying with the Prophet and a group of Muslims. The Prophet ordered the group to make camp at the site, so that people could look for the lost necklace. There was no water at the site, and people began to complain that they were unable to wash for prayers. When the time for the dawn prayer came, this verse was revealed allowing ritual purification with *clean earth* (W).

This way of performing the ritual ablution came to be known as *tayammum,* from the verb *tayammamū* (*resort to*), employed in this verse, and is most commonly performed using a clean piece of rock. A *ḥadīth* refers to the *tayammum* when it lists God's having made dust (*turāb*) purifying for the Muslims as one of the blessings with which God favored Muslims over other peoples (Q). The term used for *earth* (*ṣaʿīd*) in *clean earth* may denote high, hard, or rocky ground. However, the term for *clean* (*ṭayyib*) may also mean "good," "pure," or "wholesome," so some suggest that it refers to arable soil (Q). Al-Ṭabarī asserts that it refers to any pure or clean part of the surface of the earth. In either case, the dust (*turāb*) that attaches to one's hands when striking the "earth" is the purifying substance, as is made clear in the *ḥadīth* above. Precious metals and gems are not suitable as sources of *clean earth* for the *tayammum.*

There are differences among the legal schools as to whether the absence of water is a condition for the acceptability of the *tayammum;* how extensively one has to search for water; how ill one has to be before resorting to the *tayammum;* whether the *tayammum* removes the impurity or merely makes it temporarily acceptable for a Muslim to pray; and whether the prayer has to be repeated if water is found before the prescribed time of the prayer has elapsed (Q). They also disagree about the extent to which one would have to "touch women" in order to become impure. Some argue that this refers only to sexual intercourse, while others claim it means touching of any kind, regardless of whether the touching excited sexual desire (Q). Legal instructions for the *tayammum*

wipe your faces and your hands. Truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving. (44) Hast thou not considered those who were given a portion of the Book, who purchase error, and wish that you too should stray from the path? (45) God knows best your enemies. God suffices as a Protector, and God suffices as a Helper. (46) Among those who are Jews are those who distort the meaning of the word, and say, "We hear and disobey," and "Hear, as one who hears not!" and "Attend to us!" twisting their tongues and disparaging religion. And had they said, "We hear and obey" and "Listen" and "Regard us," it would have been better for them and more proper.

require one to make the *niyyah* or intention to perform the *tayammum* then to touch the earth or rub a piece of stone twice, once to wipe the face and again to wipe the hands.

44–45 The question is addressed to the Prophet, asking rhetorically if he has not *seen*—that is, been informed of—*those who were given a portion of the Book*. Most take this as a reference to the Jews, although they are not explicitly mentioned here. Nonetheless, this opens a sequence of verses critical of the Jews of Madinah and their response to the Prophet's message. To *purchase error* is one of many mercantile metaphors used to describe the foolishness of acquiring transitory worldly gain by surrendering or "selling" things of spiritual value (see 2:16, 86, 175, and similarly 3:177; 4:74; 5:44; 16:95). *Purchasing error* here refers to the Madinan Jews' rejection of the Prophet's message, despite their having knowledge of the spiritual truth in their *portion of the Book*. The verse also criticizes them for trying to draw the Muslims into error as well by seeking to discredit the Prophet (Ṭ). The verse advises Muslims that such people are their spiritual *enemies*, against whom God is their sufficient *Protector* and *Helper*. It is reiterated elsewhere that God is the only true *Protector* and *Helper* (see 2:107, 120; 4:123, 173; 9:74, 116; 29:22; 33:18, 65; 42:9, 31; 48:22).

46 Here the phrase *are those who* has been added in the translation, as it is assumed by most commentators to be elided in the Arabic. An alternate interpretation, favored by al-Ṭabarī, reads this as a continuation of the rhetorical question in 4:44: *Hast thou not considered those who were given a portion of the Book . . . Among those who are Jews distort the meaning . . .* (*those who were given a portion of the Book* is the subject of the sentence; *distort,* the verb beginning the predicate). In either reading, the Jews of Madinah are the particular object of the criticism in 4:44–55. Ibn Kathīr reads this as a general condemnation of Jews, although the historical context is primarily the Prophet's conflict with the Madinan Jews. Here the criticism (repeated in 2:75; 5:13, 41) is that they *distort the meaning of the word* (lit. "they distort words from their places or contexts"). This may mean that they distort the words of the Torah (IK, Q) or that they rearranged the words of scripture (Z). A minority reading suggests it is the words of the Prophet that they distort (Q).

The verse criticizes their mocking remarks to the Prophet. They acknowledge having received the Prophet's message (*We hear*), but assert their defiance of it (*and disobey*). They command the Prophet to *hear*, but then mock that he *hears not.* Alternate translations could be "Hear, may you hear not!" (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), which would clearly make it a curse or imprecation, or "Hear, may you not be heard!" that is, may your words or call not be accepted (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). They are further accused of issuing the command *Attend to us* (*rāʿinā*), which might mean simply "Pay attention to us" or "Consider us," but they alter the pronunciation or tone of the command, *twisting their tongues,* so that it becomes condescending and disparaging in connotation; and in disparaging the Prophet, they are *disparaging religion.* Some suggest that their deliberate mispronunciation of the word made it sound like a derogatory term in Hebrew (Z). They should have said, *Listen* and *Regard us* (using a different term, *unẓurnā;* see 2:104). For

But God cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not, save a few. (47) O you unto whom the Book has been given! Believe in what We have sent down, confirming that which is with you, before We blot out faces and turn them backwards, or curse them as We cursed those [who broke] the Sabbath. And the Command of God shall be fulfilled. (48) Truly God forgives not that any partner

their insolence and denial, *God cursed them,* so that *they believe not, save a few.* This may also be translated "they believe not, save a little" (Q); cf. 2:88. Elsewhere the Quran pronounces a curse on any who conceal Divine Revelation or torment the Prophet (2:159; 33:57), two charges leveled here against the Madinan Jews.

47 This passage calls on the People of the Book, but more specifically the Jews of Madinah, to believe in the revelations given to the Prophet, as they are said to confirm the previous scriptures given to the Jews (see, e.g., 2:89; 3:81; 6:92; 46:12). If not, a warning is issued that God will *blot out faces and turn them backwards.* Since the face is a symbol for or a manifestation of the state of the individual soul, Divine punishment is often said to be meted out upon faces (see, e.g., 3:106; 8:50; 20:111; 88:2). Some say *blot out faces* means that their facial features, notably their eyes, will be removed, so they will be blinded (Q); *turn them backwards* means that their eyes will be placed behind their heads, rendering them incapable of seeing what is before them, so that they have to walk backwards (Ṭ). Others say it is metaphorical, meaning they will be blinded to the path to truth and so turned back toward error (Q, Ṭ). It further warns that He may *curse them* as He *cursed those [who broke] the Sabbath;* see 2:65, where God curses Sabbath violators by saying, *Be you apes, outcast.* The present verse may thus suggest that the Madinan Jews will be cursed in this same manner for deriding the Prophet (Q, Ṭ). Several Madinan Jews reportedly converted to Islam after the revelation of this verse (Ṭ), and their conversion served to avert the punishment, threatened in this verse, from the Madinan Jews as a whole (Q). Others assert that the verse alludes to the Jews' eventual exile from much of Arabia (Q, Ṭ, Z).

48 The sin of *shirk,* ascribing partners to God in worship or in His role as Creator, is considered to be the only sin God will not forgive (see also v. 116). Although this term is often associated with idolatry in the crass form of worshipping humanly constructed idols—and indeed *mushrikūn,* the active participle from the same root, is often translated "idolaters"—it can also refer to those who worship human authorities, false deities, angels (see 17:40c; 53:26–27), jinn (6:100; 34:41), or natural phenomena (6:76–78) as having independent influence and authority over the world or human destiny. The sin of *shirk* could also be broadened to include subtler ways of setting up "equals" with God, such as loving or fearing anything but God. The present verse compelled many to examine their own hearts and excise all such forms of "hidden *shirk*" (Aj, Qu).

Some say that this verse was revealed, in part, to clarify the assertion in 39:53 that *God forgives all sins,* making an exception for *shirk* (Ṭ). However, the possibility of forgiveness for *shirk* is precluded only for one who dies unrepentant (Z; see 67:10–11c). The verse does not guarantee forgiveness for sins other than *shirk,* but allows for its possibility (Ṭ). ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib reportedly said that this verse gave him the greatest hope (Q), and Ibn ʿAbbās considered it one of the eight most important verses about forgiveness (see 4:26–28c).

Some have seen this verse as a continuation of the warning issued to the Madinan Jews in v. 47 and even claim that it indicates that Jews can be considered *mushrikūn,* although this has never represented the general opinion among Muslim scholars. Nonetheless al-Rāzī argues syllogistically that since v. 47 warns that the Jews' failure to believe in the message of the Quran will bring certain punishment, this failure to believe is de facto an "unforgivable sin"; since the only unforgivable sin is *shirk,* their failure to believe in the Quran is tantamount to *shirk.* However, this interpretation

be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will, for whosoever ascribes partners unto God has surely fabricated a tremendous sin. (49) Hast thou not seen those who deem themselves pure? Rather, it is God Who purifies whomsoever He will, and they shall not be wronged so much as the thread of a date stone. (50) See how they fabricate lies against God!

collapses the categories of *shirk* and *kufr* into one, whereas the two are distinct in the Quran and Islamic Law.

In the Quran, Jews and Christians are clearly identified as religious practitioners separate from the *mushrikūn* (see 22:17; 98:1c), even if it sometimes suggests they might be guilty of something that approximates *shirk* (cf. 5:72; 9:30). In other places Jews and Christians are explicitly included in the category of "those who believe in God and the Last Day" and who may, therefore, enjoy a blessed Afterlife (2:62; 5:69). This clearly shows that Jews cannot be considered to be *mushrikūn*—that is, those who take partners unto God in worship—since that unforgiveable sin would necessarily bar them from such blessings in the Hereafter. This verse can also be read as a mitigation rather than an intensification of the threat to the Madinan Jews: if v. 47 threatens punishment for the Jews' failure to believe in the Quranic message, v. 48 could be read as offering hope that all other sins—perhaps even a failure to believe in the Quran and the Prophet on the part of the Jews (essentially *kufr*, or disbelief, but short of *shirk*)—are open to possible forgiveness. It is only *shirk*, theologically and legally distinct from *kufr*, that cannot be forgiven.

Most early commentators read this verse as a general statement of hope to the believers concerning God's willingness to forgive rather than as a particular threat to the Madinan Jews. Ibn ʿUmar reports that upon the death of a fellow Muslim who he and others knew had committed a great sin, they bore witness that he was among the people of Hell. When this verse was revealed, they ceased to do so, as they realized that even great sins were open to Divine Forgiveness (Th).

**49–50** These verses continue the criticism of the Madinan Jews (Q) or more likely of the People of the Book in general (Z) who *deem themselves pure*. Most commentators see this as a reference to spiritual assertions the Jews or the People of the Book are said to make elsewhere in the Quran, particularly their declaration that they are the children and the beloved of God (5:18) and that they have an exclusive claim on Paradise (2:111; Q, Ṭ, Z). Some say that it refers to a group of Madinan Jews who approached the Prophet, claiming that they were free of sin, that what they did during the day was forgiven at night (Q, Ṭ, W, Z), or that they could absolve one another of their sins through intercession (Q, Ṭ), although the Quran does not attest to any such claims being made explicitly by the People of the Book. The Quran warns people in general not to consider themselves pure (53:32). God alone knows those who are truly pure and those who are not.

*They shall not be wronged so much as the thread of a date stone* indicates that God does not treat people unjustly even in the slightest way (cf. 4:77, 124; 17:71; 19:60). *The thread of a date stone* renders *fatīl*, which might also mean the bit of soil that one can find by scraping between one's fingers; in either case, it is a common Quranic metaphor for insignificance.

Such assertions of purity and sinlessness are said in v. 50 to be *lies against God*, a sin in itself. The claim of purity for one's soul is unacceptable in Islam. Even the falsely accused prophet Joseph asserted, when the treachery of his would-be seductress was revealed, *But I absolve not my own soul. Surely the soul commands to evil* (12:53). Claims of purity for oneself were particularly odious to the Sufis, who warned that the carnal soul (*nafs*) was not the locus of purity in the human being, that being pleased with one's own soul extinguished the lights of certitude (Su) and was the source of disobedience and heedlessness (Aj), and that anyone who was persuaded by others' high opinions of their purity or by their own high estimation of themselves was veiled in ignorance (Qu).

That suffices as a manifest sin. (51) Hast thou not considered those who were given a portion of the Book, who believe in idols and false deities, and say of those who disbelieve, "These are guided more rightly than those who believe." (52) They are those whom God has cursed, and whomsoever God curses, thou wilt not find for him any helper. (53) Or have they a share in sovereignty? If they did, they would not give men so much as the speck on a date stone. (54) Or do they envy men on account of what God has given them of His Bounty? We gave the House of Abraham the Book and Wisdom, and We granted them a mighty

51–52 Some of *those who were given a portion of the Book*—that is, some among the Jews and Christians—are here criticized for believing in *idols and false deities* (*al-jibt wa'l-ṭāghūt*). *Al-jibt* appears only in this verse; *al-ṭāghūt*, however, appears in several other verses and denotes a variety of false sources of authority, false objects of worship, and false causes (cf. 2:256c; 4:60, 76; 5:60; 16:36; 39:17).

Some identify *al-jibt* and *al-ṭāghūt* as two idols of the Quraysh, although others consider *al-jibt* to refer to idols and *al-ṭāghūt* to soothsayers (Ṭ). It is also widely reported that these terms refer to two leaders of the Madinan Jews, Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab (and perhaps other Madinan Jewish delegates), who visited the Makkans after Badr or Uḥud. When the Makkans insisted that they were good people who provided for the Kaʿbah pilgrims and maintained ties of kinship, while Muhammad turned away from the Kaʿbah and severed his ties of kinship, Kaʿb and Ḥuyayy declared that the Makkans (*those who disbelieve*) were *guided more rightly than those who believe* (JJ, W). At the request of their hosts, the Jews reportedly paid homage to the idols *al-jibt* and *al-ṭāghūt* to convince the Makkans that they were willing to support them against the Prophet (Ṭ). Other reports identify *al-jibt* as a soothsayer and *al-ṭāghūt* as Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf (Ṭ); still others identify *al-jibt* as sorcery and *al-ṭāghūt* as Satan, or the reverse (Ṭ). Al-Zamakhsharī identifies Kaʿb and Ḥuyayy as believers in *al-jibt* for acceding to their hosts' request to bow down to idols and as believers in *ṭāghūt* for obeying Satan in seeking to form an alliance against the Prophet.

*Al-jibt wa'l-ṭāghūt* can also be taken to refer to all false objects of worship or false authorities to whom people turn instead of to God, whether idols, other human beings, or Satan (Ṭ), and so has a general application beyond the historical context of its revelation. Being *cursed* by God is said to mean being exiled from His Mercy (Ṭ, Ṭs).

53 This verse poses a rhetorical question whose answer is negative, meaning that *they* (the Madinan Jews) do not have a *share in sovereignty* (Q, Ṭ, Z). This is usually understood to mean a lack of earthly authority, although some see it as meaning spiritual authority (Z). The verse asserts that if they did have a *share in sovereignty*, they would deny their subjects, with regard to their rights (Q), even *so much as a speck on a date stone* (*naqīr*). *Naqīr*, which might also mean the inner pith of the date stone, is also used in v. 124 as a metaphor for insignificance. Al-Qurṭubī notes that the verse begins with the conjunction "or," which does not seem to be connected with anything prior to it. He therefore suggests that something has been elided in the text and that the full meaning is "Are they more deserving of prophecy than him unto whom it has been sent, *or have they a share in sovereignty*?"

54 Again addressing the Jews of Madinah, this verse asks if they *envy* the *Bounty*—that is, the prophecy—that *God has given* to the Prophet, or to the Arabs through the Prophet (Ṭ); cf. 2:90, 109, 213; 3:19; 42:14; 45:17, where differences among the religious communities are said to be the result of envy. It suggests that the envy of the Madinan Jews toward the Muslims prevented them from accepting the Prophet's message as a confirmation of their own scripture

sovereignty. (55) Among them are those who believe in him, and among them are those who turn away from him. And Hell suffices as a blazing flame! (56) Those who disbelieve in Our signs, We shall surely cause them to burn in a Fire. As often as their skins are consumed, We shall replace them with other

(IK). Al-Qurṭubī cites a *ḥadīth* that says, "Envy consumes good deeds as fire consumes wood"; and the Prophet reportedly said, "I have not seen any oppressor who more resembles the oppressed than the envier" (Q). Envy is considered a sin against God, as it shows a lack of contentment with what one has been given by Him; it is said to have been the first sin committed in the celestial realm (referring to Satan's envy of Adam; see 7:11–13) and the first committed on earth (referring to Cain's envy of Abel; see 5:27–31; Q).

This verse further asserts that God has given the *House of Abraham* revelation and inspiration: *the Book and Wisdom* (cf. 57:26). The *Book* is said to refer to *the scriptures of Abraham and Moses* (87:19) as well as to the Psalms (*al-Zabūr*) and the Gospel (Ṭs), while the *Wisdom* refers to Divine inspiration that did not take the form of a written "book" (Ṭ). God is also said to have given the House of Abraham *a mighty sovereignty* (*mulk*). In 2:124, Abraham is made an *imām for mankind,* a term that generally denotes religious authority, but can also mean political authority. *Mulk* here most likely refers to the kingdom of David and Solomon (Ṭ) or the combination of worldly and spiritual authority that they enjoyed (Ṭs).

Others assert that the *Bounty* for which the Jews of Madinah envied the Prophet included the Quranic permission he received to marry women without a specified limit (33:50), thus exceeding the limit of four wives allowed other men (Ṭ). According to this interpretation, the reference to the *sovereignty* God bestowed upon the House of Abraham later in the verse is meant to remind the Jews that their own forebears, David and Solomon, possessed not only mighty kingdoms, but many wives as well, far exceeding the number of wives the Prophet married (Z). The invocation of the *House of Abraham* may also indicate that the Prophet and his forefathers could be considered, along with the Jews, to be the rightful heirs to Abraham's legacy of Divine Revelation and Sovereignty (Z), given the Quranic story of Abraham's establishment of his descendants and his religion in Arabia, specifically Makkah, through his own efforts and those of his son Ishmael (cf. 2:125–29; 14:35–37; 22:26–29).

According to Shiite interpretations, based on a report attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the *men* who are envied in this verse are the Prophet and his family: the *Bounty* for which the Jews envy the Prophet is prophecy, and the *Bounty* for which they envy the Prophet's family is the spiritual authority (*imāmah*) that was granted to them (Ṭs).

55 Among the Jews of Madinah, there are *those who believe in him,* that is, in the Prophet and in his revelation as a confirmation of their own, and there are *those who turn away from him. Him* here might also refer to Abraham (Q, Ṭs, Z). Alternately, *Among them are those who believe in him* may be translated, "Among them are those who believe in it," where "it" refers to the Quran (Q). *And Hell suffices as a blazing flame* indicates that although the worldly punishment with which the Jews were threatened in v. 47 was averted when some of them accepted the Prophet's message, the punishment of those who continued to disbelieve was deferred to the Hereafter, where they will suffer in Hell (Ṭ, Ṭs).

56 The image of the skins of those in Hell being *consumed* (*naḍijat,* lit. "roasted") repeatedly and indefinitely, conveys the unending nature of the punishment. This is also among a number of verses that are understood by some commentators as suggesting that the pleasures and torments of the Afterlife as described in the Quran are meant to be taken literally rather than as metaphors for spiritual reward and punishment. Others say that *skins* refers to the *garments made of pitch* (14:50) that those in Hell will wear (Ṭ, Q) These are replaced as they are burned up, so that the condemned can be set alight again and again. The constant renewal of their skins has also been understood as indicating a continuous change in the attributes of those in Hell without any change in their essence.

skins, that they may taste the punishment. Truly God is Mighty, Wise. (57) But for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall cause them to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein forever. There they shall have spouses made pure, and We shall cause them to enter plenteous shade. (58) God commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners and, if you judge between men, to do so with justice. Excellent indeed is the instruction

57 Cf. v. 122. To *believe* and to *perform righteous deeds* are frequently mentioned together as the basic criteria of those who deserve Paradise (see, e.g., 2:25; 5:9; 7:42; 30:15; 31:8; 32:19). *With rivers running below* is one of the most common characteristics of the paradisal Garden, and the image of ample *shade* is also found in many paradisal descriptions (13:35; 36:56; 56:30; 76:14; 77:41). A *ḥadīth* states, "There is a tree in the Garden such that one could ride in its shade for a hundred years without leaving it" (IK, Ṭ). The presence in the Garden of *spouses made pure* is likewise common (2:25; 3:15), and these spouses may be the same as the *maidens* said to await the righteous there (cf. 37:48; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22; 78:33). The commentators explain the purity of these spouses as meaning that they are free of all suspicion, of all forms of ritual impurity, of all impure bodily fluids and waste, and of the reproductive functions of menstruation and pregnancy that characterize earthly women (IK, Ṭ), as well as of all vileness, imperfection, and sin (IK). Other verses indicate that the righteous among one's earthly spouses will join one in the Garden (13:23; 36:56; 40:8; 43:70), and so another possible meaning of *spouses made pure* might be earthly spouses now purified in the paradisal state.

58 Cf. 2:283; 23:8. Note also that one of the critiques made of some of the People of the Book is that they would be reluctant to return a trust (3:75). This verse begins a section (vv. 58–70) whose theme is the nature of authority. According to one report, this verse was revealed at the time of the conquest of Makkah. When the Prophet entered Makkah, he asked ʿUthmān ibn Ṭalḥah for the key to the Kaʿbah, which was in his possession. ʿUthmān initially refused, but it was eventually taken from him. The Prophet's uncle ʿAbbās sought to become the new keeper of the Kaʿbah key, as he was already in charge of providing water for pilgrims to the shrine. But when this verse was revealed, the key was returned to its original keeper, who, upon learning of the revelation, proclaimed his belief in the prophecy of Muhammad (IK, Q, Ṭ, W).

Without denying the particular historical context of the verse, most commentators interpret it more broadly, understanding *return trusts to their rightful owners* as a command to all trustees in both worldly and spiritual matters (Q, Z). Some take this as a command to obey those exercising legitimate authority—a command made more explicitly in v. 59—but it is more likely addressed to ruling authorities themselves, who should distribute among their people the charitable funds and spoils of war with which they have been entrusted (Ṭ). This interpretation better fits the context, as the next clause, commanding those who *judge to do so with justice,* seems to be addressed to authority figures rather than their subjects. This interpretation also makes vv. 58–59 a reciprocal pair: v. 58 commands ruling authorities to treat their subjects with justice, and v. 59 requires obedience to those authorities on the part of their subjects (Ṭ).

Nonetheless, the verse is best understood as a general command to all who hold a "trust" of any kind, including deposits and securities as well as things borrowed or found (Q). The singular "trust" (*amānah*) is also used to denote the moral and spiritual responsibility humanity has accepted from God (33:72), and many commentators claim that, in the present verse, the command to *return trusts* also means fulfilling religious obligations, such as prayer and fasting (IK, Q). Shiite tradition also interprets this and the following verse in relation to the Shiite Imams. The fifth and sixth Imams, Muhammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, interpreted *return trusts to their rightful*

God gives you. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing. (59) O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you differ among yourselves concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day. That is better, and fairer in

*owners* as a command to the Imams that they render the imamate to their rightful successors—a reference to the principle of *naṣṣ*, or designation, by which each Imam declares his successor before his own death (Ṭs, Ṭu).

The command to *judge . . . with justice* should also be understood to have a general application, insofar as all human beings can be said to be both in charge of and responsible for something and so can be said to have authority over some matter (even if it is simply their own family or body), which they should execute justly (Q). The Divine Names *Hearing* and *Seeing* are also paired elsewhere (cf. 4:134; 22:61, 75; 31:28; 58:1) and together reinforce the notion of God's Omniscience. The primacy of *Hearing* over *Seeing* may be linked to the primacy of sound in the creation of the world (God "speaks" the world into being through the command "Be!"; see, e.g., 2:117) and in the transmission of Divine Revelation as spoken word in Islam.

59 Cf. 3:32; 5:92; 24:54; 47:33; 64:12. Some interpret the command to *obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you* as indicating that obedience to the Prophet is tantamount to or a means of obedience to God (Ṭ; cf. v. 80) and that obedience to those the Prophet has placed in authority is tantamount to obedience to the Prophet. A *ḥadīth* makes this clear: "Whoever obeys me has obeyed God, and whoever obeys my commander has obeyed me; whoever disobeys me has disobeyed God, and whoever disobeys my commander has disobeyed me" (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Most understand *obey the Messenger* as commanding obedience to the Prophet, both during his lifetime and posthumously, by following his *Sunnah* (Ṭ; cf. 3:32c; 33:21c).

A larger question surrounds the identity of *those in authority among you*. For some, this refers to the commanders the Prophet sent on military campaigns. One report connects this verse to an incident where ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, an early Companion of the Prophet, granted amnesty to a man during a military campaign without consulting the designated commander, Khālid ibn al-Walīd, who was angered by this and refused to honor the amnesty. The two men took the dispute to the Prophet, who upheld the amnesty granted by ʿAmmār, but instructed him never again to disregard the authority of his military commander (IK, Ṭ, W). Others identify *those in authority among you* as Muslim religious and legal scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), because of their knowledge of the Qurʾan and the *Sunnah*, through which God and the Prophet are obeyed (Q, Ṭ). Still others consider this a reference to the Companions of the Prophet in general or Abū Bakr and ʿUmar (the first two Caliphs) in particular (Q, Ṭ).

The general nature of the command to obey *those in authority* may suggest that even imperfect leaders should be obeyed. Some commentators cite a *ḥadīth* that indicates that one will be rewarded for obeying those in authority, regardless of the virtue of their character and rule (IK, Ṭ). The general statement this verse makes about obedience to authority has led some Muslims to view obedience, even to unjust rulers, as preferable to the chaos and social harm that may result from a revolt, and a well-known tradition states, "One day of anarchy is worse than a thousand years of tyranny." Other traditions, however, forbid Muslims from obeying a leader who commands an act of disobedience toward God. Thus many argue that the command to obey *those in authority among you* applies only to just rulers who command obedience to God (Z). ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib observed that since this verse was immediately preceded by a command to rulers that they *return trusts to their rightful owners* and *judge between men . . . with justice*, the present command to obey *those in authority among you* refers only to those who rule justly (Q).

If individual Muslims or a group of Muslims disagree with an authority, they are to *refer* the

outcome. (60) Hast thou not seen those who claim that they believe in that which was sent down unto thee and in that which was sent down before thee, desiring to seek judgment from false deities, although they were commanded not to believe in them? But Satan desires to lead them far astray. (61) And when it is said unto them, "Come to what God has sent down and to the Messenger," thou seest the hypocrites turn from thee with aversion. (62) How will it be when misfortune befalls them because of what their hands have sent forth? Then they will come to thee, swearing by God, "We sought naught but virtue and harmony." (63) They are those whom God knows what is in their hearts. So

matter *to God* by consulting the Quran or to *the Messenger* by bringing the matter to him personally (as Khālid and ʿAmmār did in the above report) or by consulting his *Sunnah* (Q, Ṭ, Z). This is among a number of verses that establish the importance of obeying the Prophet or following his example even in matters not addressed by the Quran (cf. 3:31; 4:83; 24:63; 33:21). Some might argue that the command to *refer* disagreements *to God and the Messenger* limits Muslims to consulting only these two sources, the Quran and the *Sunnah,* rather than the interpretations of scholars or religious authorities, but this view is not consistent with v. 83, which recommends Muslims refer such matters *to the Messenger and to those in authority among them* (Q).

Shiites interpret *those in authority among you* as a reference to the Shiite Imams and proof of their spiritual infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*), for they claim that God would only demand obedience to one preserved from religious error (Ṭs). Shiite commentators also extend the command to refer differences *to God and the Messenger* to apply to the Imams as well, because for Shiites the Imams "stand in the place of the Messenger after his death" (Ṭs). In the Sufi tradition, *those in authority among you* can also refer to Sufi *shaykhs*, or guides (Aj, Qu, Su), as well as to the "gnostics," that is, those who have sought out and acquired spiritual knowledge of God (Aj).

60–61 For a discussion of *false deities* (*ṭāghūt*) as false authorities, see 4:51–52c. Vv. 60–65 were reportedly revealed in response to a dispute between a Madinan Jew and a Madinan hypocrite (see commentary on 3:167; 63:1–8). By some accounts, the hypocrite was a former Jew who claimed to have embraced Islam. The Jewish man wanted to take their dispute to the Prophet, knowing that he would judge honestly, but the hypocrite convinced him to take the dispute to a local soothsayer or to the Madinan Jewish leader Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf. In v. 60, the men are chastised for seeking judgment from false authorities, instead of the Prophet (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, W), because *they were commanded not to believe in them* (cf. 2:256). The last line of v. 60 implicates Satan, not God, in their having been led astray, and for some this serves as a refutation of the predestinarian theological view (*jabr*) that holds that God chooses to guide or mislead certain people (Ṭs, Ṭū). When this hypocrite and others like him are called *to what God has sent down and to the Messenger,* they *turn* away from the Prophet. *The hypocrites turn from thee* could also be translated, "the hypocrites bar [others] from thee," referring to the hypocrite's rejection of the Jew's suggestion that they take their dispute to the Prophet. The behavior of the hypocrites who *turn* away when they are called to *what God has sent down* is contrasted by the description of the believers in 24:51, who, *when they are called unto God and His Messenger, . . . say, "We hear and we obey."* For some, the present verse is a rebuke to all those who seek judgment outside of the Quran and the *Sunnah* (IK) or a general prohibition against seeking judgment from anyone who does not judge by God's Law (Ṭs, Ṭū).

62–63 The judgment wrongdoers receive in the next life is the result of *what their hands have*

turn away from them, and admonish them and speak to them about their souls with penetrating words.(64) We sent no messenger, save that he should be obeyed by God's Leave. If, when they had wronged themselves, they had but come to thee and sought forgiveness of God, and the Messenger had sought forgiveness for them, they would surely have found God Relenting, Merciful.(65) But no, by thy Lord, they will not believe until they have made thee the judge between them in their disputes, and find no resistance in their souls to what thou hast

*sent forth,* an idea repeated over a dozen times in the Quran to emphasize that human beings are solely responsible for their fate in the Hereafter. Their actions are *sent forth,* to be confronted on the Day of Judgment (cf. 2:95; 5:80; 8:51; 18:57; 59:18; 62:7; 78:40; 82:5; 89:24). Here, however, the suggestion is that the misfortunes generated by their wrongdoing might also be visited upon them in this life (R). When confronted with their sins, the disbelievers, instead of repenting, defend their actions, saying, *We sought naught but virtue and harmony,* either deceptively or in self-delusion (cf. 2:11–12; 9:107). *God knows* the hypocrisy they hide *in their hearts.* The Prophet is instructed to *turn away* from the disbelievers—that is, to avoid openly punishing them; he is to *admonish them* and seek to persuade them *with penetrating words* rather than confronting them aggressively with force. *Turn away* here may also mean to refuse to accept their excuses (Ṭs). Some say that these two verses refer to a group of hypocrites who built another mosque just outside Madinah. Ultimately, this was revealed to the Prophet to be a challenge to his authority and a threat to his person, as they may have been using it to plot against him, and the mosque was destroyed. Yet, those who had built it claimed they did so only seeking *what is best* (9:107; Q). The verses may also continue the discussion of the two disputants seeking judgment, who excused their behavior by claiming that their intention was only the promotion of *virtue and harmony* (JJ).

64 This verse continues the discussion of the two men who *wronged themselves* by seeking judgment from someone other than the Prophet, stressing the necessity of obeying prophetic messengers: God sent them for no other purpose. For Muʿtazilite thinkers, this was proof that it was God's Will that prophets be obeyed by all, and that He did not, as certain predestinarian thinkers asserted, intend that anyone disobey them or be misguided concerning them. For Ashʿarite commentators, like al-Rāzī, however, much hinges on the statement that the messengers are obeyed *by God's Leave.* They see this as a strong proof of their theological position that obedience or disobedience on the part of any person exists *by God's Leave,* not solely through the moral choices of the individual. That God intended the messengers to be obeyed is also seen as affirming their spiritual infallibility (R). The verse further suggests the intercessory role of the Prophet, for it asserts that if these two men *sought forgiveness of God* for themselves, the Prophet would also seek forgiveness for them, and they would then find God *Relenting* and *Merciful.* However, the Prophet's seeking forgiveness for them is dependent upon their own repentance. In the Quran prophets often seek forgiveness for their people: the Prophet Muhammad is told to seek forgiveness for his followers (3:159; 24:62); Jacob agrees to seek forgiveness for his sons (12:97–98); and Abraham seeks forgiveness for his father (19:47; 60:4). But where there is no corresponding attitude of repentance on the part of those for whom forgiveness is sought, the prophet's efforts on their behalf are said to be both inappropriate and ineffectual (see 9:80, 113–14; 63:5–6). The angels are also said to seek forgiveness for the believers (40:7) and *for those on earth* (42:5). For a further discussion of intercession (*shafāʿah*) and seeking forgiveness for others (*istighfār*), see 2:48c; 2:255c.

65 People cannot be considered believers until they make the Prophet the *judge between them in their disputes* and have no doubt or unease about

decreed, and surrender with full submission. (66) And had We prescribed for them, "Lay down your lives" or "Leave your homes," they would not have done so, save a few. And had they done what they were exhorted to do, it would have been better for them, and a stronger confirmation. (67) Then We would surely have granted them, from Our Presence, a great reward, (68) and We would surely have guided them unto a straight path. (69) Whosoever obeys God and the Messenger, they are with those whom God has blessed, the prophets, the truthful ones, the witnesses, and the righteous. What beautiful companions they are! (70) Such is the Bounty from God, and God suffices as

his judgments (Ṭ). One report connects this verse to the case of a dispute brought to the Prophet for judgment by the Prophet's early Companion and cousin al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām (d. 36/656) and one of his neighbors concerning the use of a water channel. The neighbor was unhappy with the Prophet's ruling and suggested that he had favored al-Zubayr, because al-Zubayr was his cousin. This verse was revealed, chastising his critical attitude toward the Prophet's judgment (Ṭ, W). However, it seems more likely that the verse continues the discussion of the incident addressed in vv. 60–64, although it may also have been invoked in relation to the incident with al-Zubayr.

66–68 *Lay down your lives* translates *uqtulū anfusakum,* which could also be rendered "slay yourselves" or, metaphorically, "mortify yourselves" (in the sense of killing your vain desires), as it is in 2:54, which refers to God's command through Moses to the Israelites after the golden calf incident. Some see the present verse as addressing the Jews and as referencing the command in 2:54 as a way of suggesting that few of those in the Prophet's time would have fulfilled such a command (Ṭ). The verse suggests that they would also have been unwilling to follow a Divine command to *leave your homes,* a command that tested many earlier prophets and prophetic communities, as well as Muhammad's. It was, in part, the willingness of the Prophet's Makkan followers to leave their homes and families and migrate to Madinah that earned them the high religious status of "Emigrants" that they were afforded in the first Muslim community. And in the Madinan period, prior to the conquest of Makkah, leaving one's home and family and migrating, or making *hijrah,* to Madinah was a requirement of full membership in the Muslim community (8:72).

Some see the present verse as continuing to address specifically the two men who sought judgment from someone other than the Prophet referenced in vv. 60–65 (Ṭ), although it may speak in general to all those whose claims of belief were questionable, whether they were certain Jews, Madinan hypocrites, or others. Had they done as they were told (which, in context, likely means to consult God and the Prophet in their affairs; see v. 59), *it would have been better for them,* in this world and the next, and would have been *a stronger confirmation* of their faith. It would have better convinced others of their sincerity and given them greater resolution in their own beliefs and actions, since the resolution of the hypocrite is always weak (Ṭ).

The *great reward from Our Presence* (*min ladunnā*), also mentioned in v. 40, has been understood as a spiritual reward received from God's very Presence that surpasses any physical reward or delight one can experience. It is sometimes associated with the vision of God or with being completely overwhelmed by love and knowledge of Him (R on 4:40). For *straight path,* see 1:6c.

69–70 Cf. 4:59 and commentary. Those who are obedient are among *those whom God has blessed,* that is, those who have been granted guidance and success in this life and Paradise in the next (Ṭ). Moreover, the verse indicates that they

Knower. (71) O you who believe! Take your precautions; then go forth in companies or go forth all together. (72) Among you indeed is one who would tarry; then, if misfortune should befall you, he would say, "God has blessed me, in that I did not accompany them." (73) But should a bounty come to you from God, he would surely say—as if there had been no affection between you and him—"Oh, would

shall have the company of the most excellent in Paradise, including the prophets. This verse was reportedly revealed when some of the Prophet's Companions expressed dismay at the thought that those who so enjoyed the Prophet's company on earth would be denied it in the Hereafter since, as a prophet, Muhammad would be exalted far above them. This verse made clear that the obedient shall have the company of their prophet after death (JJ, Ṭs, W, Z). According to several *aḥādīth*, the Prophet assured his followers that if they love God, the Prophet, and the righteous, although they may have fallen short in their own works, they shall be "with those whom they love" in the next life.

The *truthful ones* (*ṣiddīqīn*), which might also be translated "the sincere," are those who believe in and follow the prophets in complete sincerity (Ṭ) or the most morally excellent among their companions (JJ; Z); in later usage, *ṣiddīq* came to denote something that approximates "saint." The Prophet's close Companion and the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, was given the epithet *al-Ṣiddīq* (the Truthful One), in part because he affirmed the truthfulness of the Prophet's account of his miraculous Night Journey when many others doubted it, just as he believed in the first revelation.

*Witnesses* (*shuhadāʾ*) could also be rendered "martyrs" and is sometimes glossed as meaning those who die in the way of God (Ṭ). However, limiting *witnesses* to those killed for the sake of religion does not seem consistent with the wider Quranic usage, as the term is also mentioned in the context of bearing witness to Divine covenants as well as testifying to the truth in a legal, religious, or spiritual matter. Al-Rāzī argues that the word refers to all who bear witness to the truth of religion, whether they do so by proof and argument or with sword and shield (R).

*The righteous* (*ṣāliḥīn*) refers to those who do what is right both publicly and in secret (Ṭ). This passage echoes 57:19, where those who obey God and the Messenger are themselves described as the *truthful* (*ṣiddīqūn*) and *witnesses* (*shuhadāʾ*), whereas in the present verse it is said that those who are obedient shall be *with* the *truthful* and the *witnesses*. According to a Shiite report, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq considered *the truthful ones* and *the witnesses* as references to the Imams, and *the righteous* as a reference to their followers (Ṭs). Al-Rāzī sees vv. 68–69 as forming a commentary on 1:6–7, in which the believers pray to be guided upon the *straight path* and placed among those *whom Thou hast blessed;* the answer to this prayer is that those who obey God and the Prophet shall be granted both (R).

71 *Take your precautions* instructs the Muslims to take up arms or otherwise prepare themselves against their enemies. The commentators are clear that preparing oneself in this way does not signify a lack of trust in God, and in connection with this verse they frequently cite a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet instructed a man, "Tether [your camel], then place your trust in God" (Aj, Q, R). For al-Qushayrī, taking such precautions means fleeing from all that is other than God. To *go forth in companies* means to go out to the enemy as separate military units or raiding parties, whereas *go forth all together* refers to the Muslims going to battle as a single army, under the leadership of the Prophet (Ṭ).

72–73 Among those who *would tarry* is said to be the Madinan hypocrite ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, who held back from joining the Prophet's army at the Battle of Uḥud (3/625). He and other Madinan hypocrites lagged behind, so that they would not arrive in time to join the Prophet's army in battle. If *misfortune should befall* the Prophet's army, they would consider it providential that they were not with them (JJ). *But should a bounty come . . . from God*—that is, should the Prophet's army win the battle—they would lament that

that I had been with them, so that I had attained a great triumph!" (74) Let them fight in the way of God, those who would sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. And whosoever fights in the way of God—whether he is slain or victorious—We shall grant him a great reward. (75) And what ails you that you fight not in the way of God, and for the weak and oppressed—men, women, and children—who cry out, "Our Lord! Bring us forth from this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from Thee a protector, and appoint for

they could not share in the honor and the spoils of the victory. Al-Rāzī notes that some commentators gloss *one who would tarry* (*yubaṭṭiʾanna*) as "one who would weigh down [the Muslim army] with hesitation and delay" and connect it with 9:38 (*O you who believe! What ails you, that when it is said unto you, "Go forth in the way of God," you sink down heavily to the earth?*), since to "slow down" or "weigh down" is a common meaning of *yubaṭṭiʾanna*. Al-Rāzī, however, disagrees with this interpretation, since the verse suggests that the hypocrites simply lag behind so as to avoid the battle rather than to slow down the Muslim army.

74 *Fighting in the way of God* means fighting for His religion and His commands and calling others to it (Ṭ). Cf. 22:39–40, where the first command given to the Muslims to fight indicates that the right to fight is granted for the protection of all those who remember God. Selling *the life of the world for the Hereafter* is one of several mercantile metaphors used to describe the sacrifices one should make for God. Cf. 2:207; and also 9:111, where it is said of the believers who fight in the way of God that *God has purchased . . . their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs.* By contrast, in 2:86 those Israelites who had broken the covenant are described as having *purchased the world at the price of the Hereafter.* Some commentators have interpreted the verb *sell* (*yashrūna*) here as meaning, by contrast, "purchase" (usually *yashtarūna*), so that the verse would be translated, "Let them fight in the way of God, those who would purchase the life of this world for [the price of] the Hereafter" (R, Z). In the latter interpretation, the statement is addressed to the hypocrites and those *who would tarry* (v. 72), who prefer the life of this world over that of the next, and who are admonished to *fight in the way of God.*

75 This verse indicates that fighting to relieve the oppressed is a legitimate basis for religious warfare (Q; also see 2:191–93; 8:39; and the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran"). However, this verse is widely reported to relate specifically to those Muslims residing in Makkah who were oppressed and mistreated by their relatives and prevented from migrating to Madinah and so cried out to be "brought forth," or delivered, *from this town,* that is, Makkah (IK, JJ, Q, R, Ṭ, Z). This verse urges the Muslims to fight to aid and liberate their suffering fellow Muslims in Makkah. *Weak and oppressed* collectively translates *mustaḍʿafūn,* which denotes both meanings. Cf. vv. 97–98, where certain wrongdoers seek to excuse their actions after death by claiming that they were *weak and oppressed* (*mustaḍʿafūn*) in the land. Their excuse is not accepted, but in v. 98 an exemption is given to those who were truly *weak and oppressed among the men, women, and children.* Ibn ʿAbbās claimed that he and his mother were among the *women and children* who were *weak and oppressed* in Makkah and who were thus excused by v. 98 (IK, Q, Z). Children are mentioned among the oppressed to make clear the extent of the cruelty of the Makkan idolaters, who would reportedly torture children in an effort to make their parents desist from their Islamic faith (R, Z); *children* here might also be a metaphorical reference to Muslim slaves, who were likewise incapable of leaving Makkah to join the community in Madinah (Z).

The *weak and oppressed* Muslims of Makkah cry out for a *protector* (*walī*) and a *helper;* their prayer is answered when the Prophet and his

us from Thee a helper." (76) Those who believe fight in the way of God, and those who disbelieve fight in the way of false deities. Fight, therefore, against the allies of Satan. Surely the scheme of Satan is ever feeble. (77) Hast thou not seen those unto whom it was said, "Restrain your hands, and perform the prayer, and give the alms." But when fighting was prescribed for them, behold, a party of them feared men, even as they should have feared God, or with greater fear, and they said, "Our Lord! Why hast Thou prescribed fighting for us? If only Thou wouldst grant us reprieve for a term nigh." Say, "Scant is the enjoyment of this world, and the Hereafter is better for those who are reverent, and you shall not

army take control of Makkah in 8/630. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet reportedly appointed ʿAttāb ibn Asīd (or Usayd) to redress the injustices suffered by the Muslims in Makkah before its conquest (JJ, Ṭ, Z). This verse also highlights the importance and effectiveness of supplicating God for one's needs, for when the oppressed of Makkah cried out to God for relief, He answered them in full (Ṭs). Some say that when the oppressed of Makkah supplicated God for relief, they specifically mentioned the suffering of their children to call down more effectively God's Mercy upon them (Kā, Z). Ibn ʿAjībah reads this verse as encouraging all spiritual seekers to strive and fight against the baser human passions that oppress and weaken the true lights and mysteries of the spirit within. Like the oppressed of Makkah, these inner lights remain imprisoned in the carnal soul unless one fights to liberate them from the chains of base desire and spiritual heedlessness.

76 To *fight in the way of God* here, as elsewhere, indicates to fight for the cause of justice and goodness, in obedience to God and in accordance with His Law (*Sharīʿah*). The disbelievers, by contrast, fight for *false deities,* which translates *ṭāghūt* (see 4:51–52c). According to al-Rāzī, God does not ordain the means or tactics for fighting, but only the proper intention and aim: the fighting must be for God alone. Fighting for any other reason—such as pride or a desire for spoils—amounts to fighting for *false deities* (R, Ṭs). In this verse, *false deities* is widely glossed as Satan (Ṭ), given the following exhortation to fight *the allies of Satan* (i.e., his "protectors" or "friends," *awliyāʾ*). If the disbelievers are the allies (*awliyāʾ*) of Satan, the believers have God as their Protector or Ally (*Walī;* R). The feebleness of Satan's guile lies in the fact that his allies fight out of fear or jealousy of the believers, while the believers fight for God and with hope for Paradise, and if they neglect to fight, they do so in fear of Divine retribution. Moreover, the disbelievers fight in doubt and fear of death, as they have no hope of reward in the Hereafter, and this makes them weak (Ṭ, Ṭs). The *scheme* (*kayd*) of *Satan,* or elsewhere of the disbelievers, is both intrinsically weak and rendered feeble and ineffectual by God (cf. 3:120; 8:18; 52:46).

In the inward, spiritual fight against the base passions of the soul, true believers stand with God against the lower elements of their own souls, whereas disbelievers are allies of their own lower souls against God (ST). For Ibn ʿAjībah, fighting in the way of God means striving only to attain God's Presence; whereas striving in one's action for any worldly or otherworldly gain removes one from the ranks of the "allies" or "friends" (*awliyāʾ*) of God. Muslims who fight for the otherworldly reward of Paradise are still "believers," but the true *awliyāʾ* strive for God alone (Aj).

77 *Those unto whom it was said, "Restrain your hands . . ."* refers to a group of Muslims of Makkah who were told to refrain from fighting the disbelievers in Makkah while they (the Muslims) were still resident there (JJ) and to simply *perform the prayer, and give the alms*—the only two religious duties incumbent upon them at that time. Al-Rāzī asserts that the verse makes clear that prayer and alms, which demonstrate

be wronged so much as the thread of a date stone." (78) Wheresoever you may be, death will overtake you, though you should be in towers raised high. And if good befalls them, they say, "This is from God," but if evil befalls them, they say, "This is from thee." Say, "All is from God." What is with these people that they scarcely understand any tiding? (79) Whatever good befalls thee, it is from God,

the proper attitude toward God and His creation, respectively, must precede striving or fighting in the way of God. Some list several prominent Companions among the group referenced here who came to the Prophet complaining of their humiliation at being unable to fight to redress the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the disbelievers. The Prophet responded that he had been commanded to forgive, not to fight (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, W). Ibn Kathīr notes that the lack of permission to fight the disbelievers in Makkah was both because Makkah was a sanctuary that was supposed to remain free of violence and because the Muslims were yet small in number. However, the granting of permission to fight after the move to Madinah likely has less to do with the strength of the Muslims at that time, for when fighting was initiated in Madinah, the Muslims were still few and inadequately equipped in comparison to the Makkans. It likely has more to do with their having left the sacred precinct of Makkah and with the growing extent of the injustices that the Muslims had endured at the hands of the Makkans.

When fighting was eventually prescribed for them once they were in Madinah, some of this same group were reluctant (cf. 47:20), fearing to face their enemies in battle *even as they should have feared God,* and they thus asked God to postpone this obligation for them until *a term nigh,* that is, until they could die a natural death (Ṭ). Their reluctance is explained as being the result of fear, not of religious doubt (Q, Z). Nonetheless, the attribution of such reluctance to the Muslim believers, some of whom were prominent Companions, seemed untenable to many commentators, and they considered this verse to be referring to others.

Mujāhid reads vv. 77–83 as referring to the Jews, who refused to fight when commanded (5:21–24; IK, Ṭ). Al-Rāzī considers the possibility that the verse simply refers to the natural fear of death that all human beings, even the Companions, occasionally experienced, but asserts that the verse more likely addresses the Madinan hypocrites, since the degree of resistance to the Divine command manifest in this verse is unlikely to have come from believing Muslims. He suggests that this verse addresses the same group of hypocrites whose negative spiritual attitude is criticized in v. 78. Those fearful of fighting are admonished that the *enjoyment of this world* is *scant* and perishes; the *Hereafter is better* and is everlasting, more plentiful, and surer (R, Ṭ). *You shall not be wronged;* that is, God will not neglect to reward such people for whatever good they have done, despite their reluctance toward fighting (Z), *so much as the thread of a date stone* (*fatīl;* see 4:49–50c).

78 *Towers* (*burūj*) *raised high* refers to tall and seemingly impenetrable fortresses, according to most, but some claim that it refers to the "towers" or "constellations" (*burūj*) in the heavens (cf. 15:16; 25:61; 85:1; Q, R, Ṭ, Z). The verse addresses the attitude of Madinan hypocrites and those Jews who were reluctant to join the Muslims in battle. When some Muslims were killed at Uḥud, those who had stayed behind asserted that, had the slain Muslims remained with them, they would not have been killed (W). It also encourages the believing Muslims who were reluctant to fight because they *feared men, even as they should have feared God* (v. 77) to fight without fear of death (R), for death is always before them, wherever they might be, and death in the way of God brings eternal happiness (R, Ṭ; cf. 33:16). The verse indicates that everyone has an allotted time in this world, and once that time has elapsed, death cannot be escaped; if one is not killed in battle, for example, one will die some other way (Q).

*If good befalls them*—that is, certain Jews or hypocrites of Madinah—they claim that it is a

blessing from God, *but if evil befalls them,* they blame it on the Prophet. A drought occurred in Madinah shortly after the Prophet's arrival there, and some Madinan Jews reportedly blamed it on the Prophet's coming (JJ, Q). Others say that Madinah was thriving at the time of the Prophet's coming to the city; but with the rise of the resistance of the Jews and hypocrites toward the Prophet, God withheld some of the bounty, as he had done in the case of other prophets (R; cf. 7:94: *We sent no prophet to a town but that We seized its people with misfortune and hardship, that haply they would humble themselves*). However, other commentators say that the present verse refers to those who, when they fought on the side of the Prophet, if they were victorious (as at the Battle of Badr in 2/624), would consider it a blessing God had ordained for them; but when they met with defeat or injury (as at the Battle of Uḥud in 3/625), would blame their failure on poor leadership on the part of the Prophet (Q, R, Ṭ). Cf. 7:131 and 27:47, where people accuse Moses and Ṣāliḥ, respectively, of bringing misfortune and ill-omen.

However, this verse asserts that *all is from God,* both victory and defeat, blessings and afflictions—He favors people with the former and tries them with the latter, and all takes place according to His Decree (Ṭ). In 7:198, however, it is asserted that God tries people with both good and evil. Al-Zamakhsharī, a Muᶜtazilite, argues that blessings and afflictions are not only for the purpose of Divine favor and trial, but also represent a Divine response to obedience and disobedience, respectively; al-Rāzī, however, argues that obedience and disobedience are also *from God,* supporting the Ashᶜarite view, which emphasizes Divine agency in the creation of human moral acts (see the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy").

79 Note that the verse is addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad, but is meant for his community, and indeed for human beings in general. This verse seems in some ways to contradict v. 78, which asserts that *all is from God* (v. 78)—the good and the evil. Here, the good one enjoys is from God (cf. 16:53), which He gives as a blessing or a trial from His Wisdom (Z). But the evil one experiences *is from thyself* (cf. 3:165), in the sense that one has earned it through disobedience and sin (Ṭ, Z), although some indicate that it nonetheless occurs through God's Decree (Ṭ). See 42:30: *Whatever misfortune befalls you is because of that which your hands have earned; and He pardons much;* and 3:117; 10:44; 29:40; 30:9, where the Quran asserts that God does not wrong people, but rather they wrong themselves.

Some say that the present verse refers to the defeat the Muslims suffered at Uḥud, which was brought about when some of the Muslims disregarded the command to hold back from pursuing the fleeing Makkans (Q; cf. 3:152–53). If v. 78 affirms the view that all things originate with God, this verse suggests that some evil—including the spiritual evil of failing to believe, or being led astray—is brought about in response to human disobedience. The Muᶜtazilite al-Qāḍī ᶜAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) notes the apparent conflict between this verse and the previous one and resolves it by claiming that when the *evil* refers to sin and disobedience, it is from oneself, but when it refers to adversity and misfortune, it is from God (R).

However, others assert that *good* and *evil* in this context do not refer to acts of obedience or disobedience (as they do elsewhere), but only to good and bad fortune, since the verse speaks of the good and evil that *befalls* one, not the good and evil that one commits (Q). Al-Rāzī argues that even belief is a gift from God, since it is a "good," and all good *is from God;* by extension, then, disbelief is from God as well—if God has power over the one, He has power over the other (R). As for *whatever evil befalls thee, it is from thyself,* al-Rāzī and others read this as a rhetorical question, meant to demonstrate that the opposite is true, so that it should read, "Whatever befalls thee, is it from thyself?" (Q, R).

Others emphasize that all goodness comes from God as a free and undeserved gift, or bounty (*faḍl*); whereas all evil is acquired or earned through human actions (Qu; Rb). al-Kāshānī reconciles the apparent contradiction in vv. 78–79, by indicating that, although everything comes from God insofar as He is the active cause (*al-sabab al-fāᶜilī*) of all things, human beings are the passive or receptive cause (*al-sabab al-qābilī*) of evil, through their own receptivity to it. *We sent thee*—that is, the Prophet—as a *messenger unto mankind,* which indicates the universal scope of his prophetic mission (Z; see also 7:158; 21:107; 34:28).

and whatever evil befalls thee, it is from thyself. We sent thee as a messenger unto mankind, and God suffices as a Witness. (80) Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God, and as for those who turn away, We have not sent thee as their keeper. (81) They profess obedience, but when they leave thee, a party of them conspire by night [to do] other than what thou sayest. But God records what they conspire by night. So turn away from them and trust in God. God suffices as a Guardian. (82) Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein.

80 Regarding obedience to God and the Messenger, and the relationship between them, see 3:32, 132; 4:59; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 24:54; 33:33; 47:33; 49:14; 58:13; 64:12. The statement that the Prophet is not the *keeper* of those to whom he delivers the message is found in various places in the Quran; see 6:107; 11:86; 42:6, 48. For similar statements, see 6:66; 10:108; 17:54; 39:41.

81 This verse concerns either the Madinan hypocrites (JJ) or those Muslims who were reluctant to fight with the Prophet out of fear (T). *Conspire by night* translates *bayyata,* which means to do something (usually secretly) at night. Rather than "scheming," the word may simply mean that they reneged on the vows they had made to the Prophet when they went away from him at night (T). The verb *bayyata* may also mean simply to give much thought and contemplation to something (R); in this case, it would mean that the hypocrites pondered the benefit or harm to themselves in following the Prophet's commands before deciding if they should obey them as they had promised to do (Q). *God records* (lit. "writes") what they do at night in the book of their deeds (Z), or He *records* it by mentioning it in this verse of the Quran (R). *Turn away from them* means to leave them as they are, without disputing or seeking vengeance against them (Z; see 4:62–63c), and without revealing their night scheming (R).

82 *Do they not contemplate the Quran* (cf. 47:24) is meant here to indicate that if those who *conspire by night* (v. 81) were to contemplate the Quran, they would understand the Divine provenance of the Prophet's commands (T); if the Quran were of human composition, *they would have found much discrepancy*—that is, inconsistency, shortcomings, self-contradiction, and falsehoods (cf. 41:42)—*therein* (Q, T, Ts). Although there are different recitations (*qirā'āt*) of the Quran, different numberings of the verses, and even different legal rulings found in the abrogated (*mansūkh*) and abrogating (*nāsikh*) verses (regarding abrogation, see 2:106c), all of these apparent differences are considered to be true in themselves (Ts).

The fact that the Quran includes both the abrogated and abrogating verses indicates that the Prophet did not seek to conceal these differences or to "revise" or "refine" the Quranic message to create a superficial consistency. This verse represents one of several challenges the Quran poses to its detractors in order to convince them of its Divine origin. Elsewhere the Quran challenges those who disbelieve to produce a single *sūrah* like it (2:23; 10:38), suggesting that they will be unable to do so.

But this verse can also have a more general application. For some, the assertion that there is no *discrepancy* in the Quran should discourage people from arguing over the meaning of the Quran's difficult, ambiguous, or symbolic verses (cf. 3:7). Ibn Kathīr argues that one should understand and interpret difficult verses in such a way that they are consistent with those that are clearly understandable, since there is no *discrepancy* in the Quran's message. According to a widely reported *ḥadīth,* the Prophet became visibly angry when he witnessed some of his Companions arguing loudly using different verses of the Quran against one another and warned that previous religious communities had been destroyed by such disputes (IK). Others, however, consider this verse

(83) And whenever tidings come unto them, whether of security or fear, they spread it about, whereas had they referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those of them whose task it is to investigate would have known it. Were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, you would surely have followed Satan, save a few. (84) So fight in the way of God. Thou art accountable only for thyself, and urge on the believers. It may be that God will restrain the might of the disbelievers, for God is stronger in might and more

as giving license and encouragement to pondering the Quran in search of its meaning, thereby invalidating simple, unthinking imitation of others' opinions (*taqlīd*) regarding the Quran, and legitimizing the use of analogical reasoning in its interpretation and application (Q, Ṭs).

83 This verse, like vv. 77–82, addresses the doubts and inappropriate actions of the Madinan hypocrites and/or those Muslims whose faith was weakened by adversity (JJ); or it specifically refers to those who *conspire by night* in v. 81 (Ṭ). These people would spread rumors of the success or defeat of the military parties the Prophet had sent out, leading to apprehension and perhaps misinformation among the Muslims. By spreading the information so indiscriminately, they also risked allowing this information to fall into the hands of their enemies (Ṭ, Z); since they sometimes attributed these reports to the Prophet, if they turned out to be false, the Prophet's credibility would suffer (R). In addition to the general meaning, this verse likely refers specifically to the events leading up to what is known as the "Lesser Badr," when rumors of a large Makkan army spread fear among the Muslims (see 4:84c). As in all difficult matters, they should have first *referred* these reports *to the Messenger* and *those in authority* (v. 59), who could properly ascertain the truth of the tidings (Z). *Those in authority* may refer to the Prophet's close Companions (JJ, Z), his commanders (R, Ṭ), or those possessed of intellect and religious understanding (R, Ṭ). It is their responsibility to *investigate* such reports by making appropriate inquiries (Ṭ). For Shiites, *those in authority among them* refers to the Shiite Imams (Ṭs). Al-Rāzī sees this verse as legitimizing the practice of analogical reasoning, *qiyās,* by which rulings on new situations or issues are derived from existing rulings; *qiyās* is a kind of "investigation," and the people of religious authority and knowledge have been delegated this task by this verse, according to his reading.

*God's Bounty* and *His Mercy* may refer to His sending the Prophet and the Quran, through which the believers are rightly guided and have not *followed Satan* (R, Z). *God's Bounty* and *Mercy* may also refer to the victories God had granted the believers; without them, even the believers might have *followed Satan, all save a few* who possessed keen insight and unshakeable resolve (R). The *few* may also refer to those possessed of religious authority and understanding (*whose task it is to investigate*). Some consider *all save a few* to qualify other statements earlier in the verse, so that it might be read *they spread it about . . . all save a few* (Ṭ). The believers and the Prophet Muhammad are elsewhere reminded of how much they owe to *God's Bounty* and *His Mercy* in saving them from both physical and moral harm (cf. 2:64; 4:113; 24:10, 14, 20, 21).

84 The command to *fight in the way of God* is made both to the Muslim believers and to previous religious communities in the Quran; see 2:190, 244; 3:167; 4:74. *Thou art accountable only for thyself* are words spoken to Muhammad; see 24:54; 4:80c, where it is stated that the Prophet is not the *keeper* of those to whom he brings the message. Also see 5:25, where Moses similarly asserts that he has *no power over anyone save* himself and his brother. From this verse the Prophet understands that he has been instructed to *fight in the way of God,* regardless of how many join with him or hold back, for it is God Who will grant him victory, not his army (Z). *God is stronger in*

severe in punishment. (85) Whosoever intercedes for a good cause shall receive a share of it; and whosoever intercedes for an evil cause shall share in its burden; and God is Sustainer of all things. (86) And when you are offered a greeting, respond with a greeting that is better, or return it; surely God takes account of all

*might and more severe in punishment* than the disbelievers, in this case, the Makkans.

Some say that this refers to the would-be battle known as the "Lesser Badr." After the Muslims' defeat at Uḥud, the Qurayshī leader, Abū Sufyān, and the Prophet agreed to meet the following year at Badr for another military contest. When the time came, Abū Sufyān was reluctant to go and sent a spy to spread disinformation in Madinah about the overwhelming Makkan force that awaited them at Badr in order to dissuade them from going to battle (this is possibly what v. 83 is referring to when it castigates the spreading of rumors about the *security or fear* of the Muslims in relation to their enemies). After the defeat at Uḥud and as false rumors of a massive Makkan army spread, most Madinans were reluctant to join the Prophet for this battle. The Prophet reportedly declared, "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, I shall go forth, even if alone!" (JJ). The Prophet thus went forth with only seventy men to meet Abū Sufyān's army, but when they arrived at the agreed-upon place, no one was there, and the campaign was aborted (R).

85 *Whosoever intercedes for a good cause* by aiding individual Muslims, protecting their rights, defending them, or supplicating God on their behalf (Z) will receive a *share of* the good that is brought about. For the spiritual implications of intercession, see 2:255c. Although this verse applies to intercession in general, many commentators understand it in the context of the battles between the Madinan Muslims and the Makkans spoken of in the previous verses. *Whosoever intercedes for a good cause* by supporting and equipping the Muslim army shall receive a *share of* the reward for participating in the religious cause; and *whosoever intercedes for an evil cause* by supporting or equipping the army of the enemies of religion shall receive a *share* of *its burden,* that is, of the punishment of those who fight on their behalf (Ṭ). Given the context of the two previous verses, it may mean that when the Prophet calls his community to *fight in the way of God,* he shares in the reward they will receive for answering the call, although, as v. 84 makes clear, he will not be held accountable if they do not. In this reading, those who intercede *for an evil cause* refers to the Madinan hypocrites who tried to dissuade the Madinans from responding to the Prophet's call (R). The Divine Name *Sustainer* (*Muqīt*) literally means "Nourisher," and many commentaries gloss it as "Powerful," "Preserver," or "Witness" (Q, Ṭ).

86 When one is offered a greeting (*taḥiyyah*), which is usually understood to be the proper Islamic greeting, "Peace be upon you (*al-salāmu ʿalaykum*)," one should *respond with a greeting that is better,* such as, "And upon you be peace, and the Mercy of God, and His Blessing," or simply *return it,* that is, respond in a similar manner by saying, "And upon you be peace (*wa-ʿalaykum al-salām*)," or simply, "And upon you." Cf. 6:54; 7:46; 10:10; 11:69; 13:24; 14:23; 15:52; 16:32; 19:62; 25:75; 33:44; 39:73; 51:25; 56:26, where this greeting is attributed to or enjoined upon the believers, the prophets, the people of Paradise, or the angels.

Note that in 33:56 believers are told to offer greetings of peace to the Prophet, and Muslims continually do this throughout their prayers and devotions. Peace (*al-Salām*) is also one of the Divine Names (59:23), and thus God's Name is effectively invoked at both the beginning of the initial greeting (*al-salāmu ʿalaykum*) and the end of its appropriate response (*wa-ʿalaykum al-salām;* R). A *ḥadīth* says, "Peace is among the Names of God that He has made manifest on earth; so spread it among yourselves" (ST). God Himself issues greetings of peace upon the people of Paradise (36:58) and upon the prophets (11:48; 37:79, 109, 120, 130).

Returning a greeting of peace is incumbent upon all Muslims as a matter of religious practice (Aj, R). A *ḥadīth* informs believers that spreading greetings of peace along with sharing food with others, maintaining family relations, and praying

things. (87) God, there is no god but He. He will surely gather you all unto the Day of Resurrection, about which there is no doubt. And who is truer than God in speech? (88) What is with you that you are [divided into] two groups concerning the hypocrites, when God Himself has cast them back for that which they have earned? Do you seek to guide those whom God has led astray?

in the middle of the night are acts that will grant one Paradise (R). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, if a man passes by a group of Muslims and gives them greetings of peace but receives no response, "The Holy Spirit is removed from them, and the angels return the man's greeting" (R, Z). One *ḥadīth* says, "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, you will not enter the Garden until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Should I not tell you that which, if you do it, will make you love one another? [It is] to spread greetings of peace among yourselves" (IK). In general, a younger person should initiate the greeting to an older person; a smaller group should initiate the greeting to a larger one; a passer-by should initiate the greeting to one who is sitting or standing by (R, Z); and a person visiting someone's home should greet the hosts before entering (24:27; R). Offering a greeting of peace is sometimes optional—and in some cases may even be inappropriate, as when a person is engaged in something more important, such as praying (Q, R)—but responding to one is required (IK, Q, R, Ṭ).

Some commentators suggest that responding to a greeting with one *that is better* is appropriate when the original greeter is a fellow Muslim, but if the original greeter is a non-Muslim, one should simply *return* the greeting in a similar manner (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). A few commentators assert that one should not greet disbelievers or those who engage in immoral or inappropriate behavior at all (JJ, R), but this seems to conflict with Quran 25:63; 28:55; and 48:39, which all suggest a greeting of peace as the proper response to such persons. When one is in the presence of non-Muslims or even wrongdoers, some suggest offering a conditional greeting, such as the one Moses gave in the presence of Pharaoh, *Peace be upon him who follows guidance!* (20:47; Z). Most commentators, however, understand the present verse as requiring Muslims to accept and respond in kind to any greeting of peace that they are offered, even if offered by a disbeliever (IK, R) or by an unknown person in a situation of warfare, since there is little harm in accepting and reciprocating a greeting of peace (R); see 8:61: *And if they incline toward peace, incline thou toward it, and trust in God.*

Despite the requirement to respond to such a greeting, many assert that, according to tradition (*sunnah*), a Muslim should not initiate the greeting with a non-Muslim (IK, Q, R,). Yet, it is important to remember the Quranic precedent of the prophet Abraham, who initiated a greeting of peace to his father, although his father was an idolater who threatened to persecute him (Q); cf. 19:47. The word for *greeting, taḥiyyah,* is derived from the root meaning "life" and originates in the pre-Islamic practice of greeting people with the statement, "May God give you life (*ḥayyāka'Llāh*)." In the canonical prayer, Muslims say, "All salutations belong to God (*al-taḥiyyātu li'Llāh*)," which means that all security from harm comes from God (Q, R). *Surely God takes account of all things,* that is, He is *Ḥasīb,* the one who takes account; in this case the meaning is that He takes account of even the small things one does, such as extending proper greetings. But *ḥasīb* can also mean one who suffices, as in the etymologically related Quranic phrase *ḥasbī Allāh,* meaning *God suffices me* (39:38).

87 This is one of many assertions of God's Oneness (cf. 2:163, 255; 3:2, 6, 18, 62; 6:102, 106; 7:158; 9:31; 16:2; 20:8, 14, 98; 23:116; 27:26; 28:70, 88; 35:3; 39:6; 40:3, 62, 65; 44:8; 59:22–23; 64:13; 73:9). For the idea that human beings shall be gathered together *unto a Day* or at *the Hour* about which *there is no doubt,* see 3:9, 25; 6:12; 18:21; 22:7; 40:59; 42:7; 45:26, 32. *And who is truer than God in speech* also appears in v. 122, although the word for *speech* in the present verse is *ḥadīth,* and in v. 122 it is *qīl.*

88–90 These verses have been reported to concern different incidents or a set of similar incidents in the Islamic community's early Madinan

Whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him. (89) They wish that you should disbelieve, even as they disbelieve, that you may be on a level with them. So take them not as protectors till they migrate in the way of God. But if they turn their backs, then seize them and slay them wherever you find them, and take no protector or helper from among them, (90) save those who seek refuge with a people with whom you have a covenant, or those who come to you with hearts reluctant to fight you, or to fight their own people. Had God willed, He could have given them authority over you, and then surely they would have fought you. So if they withdraw from you, and do not fight you, and offer peace,

years. All of these incidents involve a group of professed believers in Islam who either refuse to settle in Madinah, refuse to remain there, or refuse to meet their obligations (namely, to *fight in the way of God;* v. 84) as Muslim residents of Madinah. One account of the revelation of this verse relates it to a group of Muslims, resident in Madinah, who set out with the Muslims for the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), but then decided to return to Madinah (IK, Q, Ṭ, W, Z). Also see 3:167, where this same group claims, disingenuously, *Had we known there would be fighting, we would have followed you.* The Prophet's Companions divided into *two groups* over what to do with them; some wanted to kill the deserters, and others wanted to let them be (IK, R, Ṭ). These verses were then revealed, indicating that God Himself had removed them (*cast them back*) because of their own misdeeds; thus they reverted to the status of idolaters whose lives and property were no longer protected (Ṭ). This context does not seem to fit vv. 89–90, however, which are addressed to a group of "hypocrites" who had left Madinah entirely or were resident outside it.

Other accounts connect this verse more plausibly to a group of Makkans who came to Madinah and embraced Islam, but then left the city after seeking the Prophet's permission to do so and never returned (Ṭ, W, Z) or left the city after having committed crimes against the believers (R). In another account, they claim to have left Madinah to avoid a plague that had broken out there (Q, Ṭ). But in v. 89, their hypocrisy and disbelief are exposed, and the Muslims are warned not to take them *as protectors* (*awliyāʾ*) *till they migrate in the way of God,* that is, until they commit to settling in Madinah. *But if they turn their backs*—that is, if they turn against the believers as, according to one report, they did by eventually choosing to settle with the idolaters (Ṭs, Z)—they should be considered enemies, and the Muslims are instructed to *seize them and slay them wherever they find them.* However, some reports say that this group eventually sought shelter with another group who had a treaty with the Prophet (Ṭ). Thus v. 90 offers this exception: *save those who seek refuge with a people with whom you have a covenant.*

The present verses are also sometimes said to refer to a group of Makkans who claimed to be Muslim, but were secretly aiding the idolaters. When they approached Madinah, a group of Companions wanted to kill them, while another argued against killing a group of people who (they thought) believed as they believed, even if they had not committed to living in and fighting for the Madinan community. The Prophet took no clear stand on the issue, and then this verse was revealed, indicating their hypocrisy (IK, Ṭ). These verses may also concern a group of people residing in Makkah who claimed to be believers in Islam, but did not migrate to Madinah (Q, R, Ṭ, Z), indicating that such people cannot be considered the *protectors* (*awliyāʾ*) of the Muslims until they migrate to Madinah (Ṭ). Cf. 8:72, where only those who *believe, and migrate, and strive with their wealth and themselves in the way of God, and those who sheltered and helped*—that is, the Anṣār, the

God allows you no way against them. (91) You will find others who desire to be secure from you, and secure from their own people, yet whenever they are tempted back to hostility, they are plunged back into it. So if they withdraw not from you, nor offer you peace, nor restrain their hands, then seize them and slay

natives of Madinah who had embraced Islam—*are protectors* (*awliyāʾ*) *of one another.* However, the situation addressed in vv. 88–90 concerns not half-committed Muslims, but disbelievers putting on an air of belief, who *wish that you should disbelieve, even as they disbelieve.* In this case, the Muslims are similarly told that they are not obligated to them *till they migrate.* But if the disbelievers *turn their backs*—that is, renounce their religion—then they can be seized and slain wherever they are found. The exception to this course of action again involves the Prophet's treaty obligations, as it does in 8:72, but in a different way: if such false believers (hypocrites) *seek refuge with a people with whom* the Muslims *have a covenant* and *withdraw... and do not fight,* then no permission is granted to fight them.

In any of these cases, v. 88 indicates that it is God who has *cast them back* from their claims of belief and returned them to the status of disbelievers because of their deeds; thus neither the Prophet nor the Muslims can expect to be able to guide them back, for *whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him.* For some the statement that God *cast them back for that which they have earned* and that they are thereafter *led astray* supports the view that a failure to believe, or being led morally astray, is a Divine punishment that comes as a consequence of disobedience (Ṭs). Those with an Ashʿarite perspective stress the overpowering influence of the Divine "leading astray" suggested here and understand the assertion in v. 88 that *whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him* to indicate God's ultimate power over human moral fate (Q, R).

Vv. 89–90 address how the Muslims in Madinah should deal with those who leave the community or have been *cast back* to disbelief. If such people openly *turn their backs* on the Muslims, the Muslims are instructed to *seize them and slay them,* for they are now to be considered enemies. But if they seek refuge with a treaty people or if they *have hearts reluctant to fight*—that is, they are neither with you nor against you (IK)—and under these conditions *withdraw, do not fight,* and *offer peace,* then the Muslims have *no way against them* and should let them be. The Quran forbids Muslims from fighting those who do not fight or harm them and urges them to agree to peace when their opponents seek peace (2:190; 4:94; 8:61; 60:8; 49:9). Some scholars have argued that later revelations (9:5, 29) speak of fighting the idolaters and disbelievers without mention of their having initiated hostilities toward the Muslims, and thus they consider those later verses to have abrogated the present verses and other verses that instruct the Muslims to desist and make peace with those who do the same. Yet even in those later verses, the Quran leaves open the possibility of treaties and other arrangements with the disbelievers, and it seems untenable to think that these two verses (9:5, 29), revealed in the particular context of the Muslim expansion throughout the Arabian Peninsula in the final years of the Prophet's life, would abrogate the theme of maintaining peace and forbearance even in the face of one's detractors and enemies, which is ubiquitous throughout the Quran. For an examination of the issue of abrogation especially as it relates to the issue of fighting or opposing non-Muslims, see 2:256c.

**91** If the previous verse prohibits fighting hypocrites who refuse to fight the Muslims, this verse gives the believers a *clear warrant* to do so against those who turn hostile. This latter group discussed here is variously identified as a group of Makkans who came to profess their belief to the Prophet, but then returned to Makkah and idolatry (Ṭ; cf. 4:88–90c) or as the tribes of Asad and Ghaṭafān (JJ, R, Z). In this verse, *hostility* translates *fitnah,* a term with a semantic range that includes civil strife or sedition (2:191–93, 271; 8:39), temptation or trial (2:102; 3:7), and oppression. Some commentators understand *fitnah* here

them wheresoever you come upon them. Against these We have given you clear warrant. (92) It is not for a believer to slay a believer, unless it be in error. Whosoever has slain a believer in error, let him set free a believing slave and pay compensation to the victim's family, unless they remit it in charity. If he belonged to a people at war with you, but was a believer, then a believing slave is to be set free. And if he belonged to a people with whom you have a covenant, let him pay compensation to the victim's family, and let him set free a believing slave. Whosoever finds not [the means], let him fast two consecutive months as a penance

to mean that they were *tempted back* to idolatry or disbelief (Ṭ, Q) and indicate that the ease with which they returned to idolatry suggests that they were truly idolaters at heart (Q). The instruction to *seize them and slay them wheresoever you come upon them* is similarly given in relation to idolaters or those who have initiated hostilities against the Muslims (see 2:191; 4:89; 9:5). Ibn ʿAjībah typologically compares the "hypocrites" in vv. 89–91 with certain aspects of the soul. The aspect of the soul that *commands to evil* (cf. 12:53) is analogous to those described in v. 89, who are not only hypocritical with regard to their own faith, but who also have the evil intention of turning believing Muslims from their faith; whereas those described in the present verse are analogous to the wavering aspect of the soul that is always torn between obedience and disobedience. When this aspect of one's soul urges toward disobedience, it must be fought without restraint.

92 For other prohibitions against killing, see 5:32; 25:68; for its repercussions, punishment, or reparations, cf. 2:178–79; 5:45; 17:33. Several *aḥādīth* indicate how seriously God takes the killing of Muslims; one states, "The killing of a believer is graver with God than the perishing of the world itself" (Q). The present verse addresses the accidental, unintentional, or unwitting killing of a believer and was reportedly revealed when a Muslim Emigrant, ʿAyyāsh ibn Abī Rabīʿah, killed a former disbeliever who had once flogged him severely for his adherence to Islam. The former disbeliever had, unbeknownst to ʿAyyāsh, embraced Islam and had come to Madinah, where ʿAyyāsh killed him (Ṭ, W, Z). Another report indicates that this verse was revealed when the Companion Abu'l-Dardāʾ killed an enemy whom he came upon unexpectedly on the outskirts of a battle. When the man saw Abu'l-Dardāʾ, he confessed the *shahādah,* the Muslim testimony of faith in the One God and the prophethood of Muhammad, but Abu'l-Dardāʾ killed him anyway, not accepting his confession as he should have (Ṭ, Z).

In such cases, the slayer must free a Muslim slave in his possession and pay compensation (*diyah,* or "blood money") to the victim's family. The amount was set by most Islamic legal scholars as one hundred camels, or a thousand gold pieces (*dīnārs*) for those who do not own camels (Q, Ṭ), to be paid over three years by the slayer's paternal relatives (JJ) and divided among the victim's heirs with the rest of his estate according to the proportions mandated in vv. 11–12 (Z). The victim's family may *remit it* out of charity, which is in the spirit of other verses that seek to promote unity and forgiveness among Muslims even after grievous injury (e.g., the substitution of blood money for the execution of the killer in the case of an intentional killing in 2:178 and 5:45; and the swiftness of reconciling and making peace between believers fighting among themselves in 49:9). Freeing a *believing slave* is an expiation for other offenses, such as breaking a pledge (5:89) or renouncing a wife through the unacceptable pre-Islamic practice of *ẓihār* (for this practice, see 58:1–2 and commentary), and is also a praiseworthy form of charity (90:13). This form of expiation is particularly meaningful here: in response to the loss of one life, another is given a new life through freedom (Z).

Most commentators require that the freed slave be an adult who has freely chosen Islam

from God. God is Knowing, Wise. (93) Whosoever slays a believer willfully, his recompense is Hell, abiding therein. God is wroth with him, and curses him, and prepares for him a mighty punishment. (94) O you who believe! When you go forth in the way of God, be discerning, and say not unto him who offers you peace, "You are not a believer," seeking the ephemeralities of the life of this

and practices observantly (Ṭ). If the victim is a believer, but hails from an enemy clan or tribe, then a slave is to be freed in expiation, but no compensation is paid to the victim's family (Ṭ); if the victim hails from a non-Muslim clan with whom the Muslims have a treaty (such as the protected People of the Book, or *dhimmīs*), then compensation is also paid. Most agree that the victim need not be a Muslim, since Islamic Law requires compensation for the death of a *dhimmī*, although some say it is half that for a Muslim (Q, Ṭ). For those who are poor, a fast of *two consecutive months* serves as expiation in place of freeing a slave, as it does in the case of engaging in a pre-Islamic practice of divorce called *ẓihār* (58:4), but there is debate about whether this fasting eliminates the need for compensating the victim's family as well (Ṭ). In the case of *ẓihār*, feeding the poor is another possible expiation for those unable to fast, and some scholars maintain that this is also a possible expiation for unintentional killing (JJ). Although there is the possibility of a Divine relenting here, some assert that there is no such relenting for the one who kills a believer intentionally, as stated in the following verse.

93 There is some debate about what it means to kill another *willfully* and about the kind of assault or injury that would indicate that killing was the ultimate intent. Some say that in any assault with a deadly weapon, such as a sword, murder can be assumed to be the intention. Others say striking a person with a strong, heavy object (e.g., a piece of iron) can also indicate murderous intent (Ṭ). Questions arose over cases where a deliberate assault on someone using a nonlethal weapon (e.g., a wooden stick or a whip) resulted in death, although harming the victim, rather than killing him, was the actual intent. Some maintain that the perpetrator is required to pay the full compensation to the victim's family, but not liable to execution; others hold that he is liable to physical retaliation as well (Q).

Some hold that the killing of a believer intentionally is a sin for which there is no forgiveness; although others maintain the possibility of forgiveness for one who is contrite (Ṭ), a possibility clearly indicated in 25:68–71. Critics of the latter view, however, assert that the present verse was revealed after 25:68–71 and thus may abrogate the possibility of forgiveness suggested in 25:68–71 (Q); or that the possibility of forgiveness mentioned in 25:68–71 was meant only for those who committed murder and other serious offenses prior to accepting Islam (Ṭ). The Muʿtazilites, who maintained the certainty of the Divine punishments mentioned in the Quran, asserted that eternal punishment was the inevitable fate of all those who intentionally killed a believer; and one *ḥadīth* asserts that any who participate in the killing of a believer intentionally will arrive on the Day of Judgment with the words, "Despair of God's Mercy!" written on their brow (Z).

This view seems inconsistent, however, with other verses indicating that idolatry (*shirk*) is the only unforgiveable sin (vv. 48, 116) and that God accepts the repentance of His servants (see, e.g., 9:104; 20:83; 42:25). Most scholars therefore accepted the possibility of repentance and forgiveness even for an intentional killer (Q); and some asserted, based on a *ḥadīth*, that punishment of the killer in this world serves as an atonement for him in the next (Th). Al-Ṭabarī upholds the possibility of forgiveness, citing 39:53: *Say, "O My servants who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls! Despair not of God's Mercy. Truly God forgives all sins. Truly He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.* Al-Rāzī also considers forgiveness possible, arguing that if the sin of disbelief (*kufr*) can be forgiven by God, then surely killing can as well.

94 Following the strong prohibitions against killing another believer found in the previous verses, Muslims are here instructed to *be discerning* and exercise great caution that those whom

world, for with God are abundant spoils. Thus were you yourselves beforehand, but God has been gracious to you. Therefore be discerning. Truly God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (95) Those who stay behind among the believers—except for the disadvantaged—and those who strive in the way of God with their goods and lives are not equal. God favors those who strive with their goods and their lives a degree above those who stay behind. Unto both God has promised that which is most beautiful. But He favors those who strive with a great reward

they fight are truly enemies of God and the Prophet (Ṭ). To this end, they should accept the claims of belief on the part of all those they encounter, even enemies in battle, lest, it is implied, they render themselves liable to the extreme punishments God imposes upon those who kill fellow believers. And since peace is the greeting of Muslims (see v. 4:86 and commentary) and that by which they are known, anyone who *offers you peace* should not be dismissed as a disbeliever (Ṭ). The offering of peace here may also mean an offer to cease hostilities, rather than a greeting (R, Ṭ). This verse was reportedly revealed in relation to several incidents in which Muslims either pursued a man from an enemy tribe in order to kill him and take his possessions as booty, only to have him profess his belief in Islam once they had reached him, or came upon a presumed enemy who offered them a greeting of peace (Ṭ, W). In these various cases, the Muslims assumed that the man made the statement insincerely, only to save his life, and so killed him anyway and took the booty. In all these cases, the Prophet denounced the actions of his followers, and this verse was revealed to indicate that Muslims must accept a profession of belief from anyone who utters it, not reject it *seeking the ephemeralities of the life of this world,* that is, the booty they could acquire by killing the person (W).

The verse supports the Islamic idea that the true character of a person's faith is known only to God, and so human beings must accept others' claims of belief at face value. Indeed, in one of the accounts that reportedly occasioned this verse, the Prophet rebukes a Muslim for having killed a former enemy who had confessed belief because he thought his confession was insincere, asking him if he had opened his victim's heart to test the truth of his claims to belief. The killer later died, and it is said that when they tried to bury him, the earth itself repeatedly spat him out, symbolizing the ultimate and otherworldly rejection of one guilty of such a crime (R, Ṭ). In addition to warning of the harsh consequences Muslims face for rashly killing someone who may be a fellow believer, this verse also implicitly reminds Muslims that when they fight, they do so only for the sake of religion, self-defense, or the defense of the helpless (cf. 4:75), not for booty—*for with God are abundant spoils.* So once the enemy professes belief, even if insincerity is suspected, hostilities should cease (cf. 2:190–93; 4:90; 8:39; 60:8). When encountering a profession of faith from one they thought a disbeliever, Muslims are to remember *thus were you yourselves beforehand,* meaning either that previously they were disbelievers or that some of them, while in Makkah, hid their belief out of fear of persecution (R, Ṭ). The verse ends by repeating for emphasis the command that Muslims *be discerning* in these matters and reminding them that *God is Aware* of all that they do.

95 This verse, which Ibn ʿAbbās says was revealed in relation to those who fought in the Battle of Badr (2/624; Q, Ṭ), establishes the moral superiority of those believers who strive (*mujāhidūn*) and sacrifice their wealth and themselves *in the way of God* over those who *stay behind* (lit. "sit") and do not make such sacrifices, favoring the former by *a degree* (cf. 9:20). It could also be translated "in degree," allowing for the possibility that the *mujāhidūn* may be raised above others by more than one degree (as suggested by the use of the plural in v. 96, *degrees conferred by Him*). The moral nobility and reward of the *mujāhidūn* are mentioned throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:218; 5:54; 8:74; 9:41–44), and striving in the way of God is presented as a test of

above those who stay behind: (96) degrees conferred by Him, and forgiveness and mercy. Surely God is Forgiving, Merciful. (97) When the angels take the souls of those who were wronging themselves, [the angels] say, "In what state

spiritual character (cf. 3:142; 9:16; 47:31). Striving can be done with one's *goods* and/or one's life—that is, by supporting the struggle financially or physically (cf. 49:15; 61:11; but also 9:86–88, where certain wealthy men are criticized for wanting an exemption from fighting, presumably for having supported the struggle financially). This verse follows the long list of injunctions concerning fighting that begins in v. 71. Al-Rāzī speculates that the confirmation here of a great reward for those who strive in God's way was meant to counter any doubt or hesitation Muslims might feel after the severe warnings of caution about whom one could fight or kill in the preceding verses.

According to many commentators the verse was initially revealed without *except for the disadvantaged.* One of the Prophet's blind Companions (or a group of them) complained that he was unable to participate in battle given his condition. The Prophet was then overcome by a new revelation of the verse that included *except for the disadvantaged* (Q, R, Ṭ, W). The *disadvantaged* may include those with physical deficiencies or infirmities or those who lack equipment and resources (R). See 4:32c, where women in the community also complained to the Prophet about the greater spiritual reward men could earn through *jihād,* a possibility not usually open to women.

There is some debate as to whether the added clause means that *the disadvantaged* are, unlike capable nonstrivers, actually equal in merit to the *mujāhidūn* who strive in the way of God or simply that they are exempt from the obligation to do so. Al-Rāzī argues that it likely means that they are equal, since the ultimate purpose of all religious duties is "to illuminate the heart with the knowledge of God," and so to the extent that *disadvantaged* ones, who are exempt from *jihād,* can nonetheless achieve this to the same degree as the *mujāhidūn,* they are equal. This is similar to the implication in 4:32 that though women are usually unable to participate in *jihād,* they enjoy the same possibility for merit and reward through fulfilling the other religious duties incumbent upon them (see 4:32c). Others suggest that the reward of the *disadvantaged* is equal to that of the strivers, because reward in the Hereafter is based on God's favor, not solely on individual merit, and because reward accords with intention, not action (Q).

Some commentators read *those who strive in the way of God* as referring not only to those who go out into battle, but also to those who strive to *enjoin right and forbid wrong* (22:41; Su) or to those who strive against the negative tendencies of their own soul (Aj, R)—both common ethical interpretations of *jihād,* or "striving," in the Quran. However, the exemption for the *disadvantaged* in this verse suggests that here the Quran is primarily addressing physical (not just moral) struggle. To both groups—*those who strive,* and those who *stay behind* or, some say, only to the *mujāhidūn* and the *disadvantaged* who *stay behind* (Q)—God has promised *that which is most beautiful,* that is, Paradise. This reflects the fact that *jihād* is a collective rather than an individual duty—incumbent upon the Muslim community as a whole, but not upon every individual in it (R). Yet within the context of Paradise, the verse suggests that the reward of the strivers will surpass that of (capable) nonstrivers.

96 *Degrees* here seems to be an elaboration upon the *degree* or the *great reward* by which God favors the *mujāhidūn* over others in v. 95. These *degrees* may represent the level one attains in Paradise, the degrees of forgiveness or mercy received from God (R), or even the degrees of closeness to God one obtains by striving to please Him (Aj). The use of the plural *degrees* in this verse, rather than the single *degree,* as in v. 95, may indicate that while the *mujāhid* is favored in this world by a single *degree* (namely, the spoils of war he acquires thereby), he is favored many degrees or in multiple ways in the Hereafter (R); or it may indicate that the *mujāhidūn* are favored by a single degree over the disadvantaged who are unable to strive, but by *degrees* over those who *stay behind* without a legitimate excuse (Q). Alternately, it may mean that the multiple *degrees* of favor are for those who strive and sacrifice in every way: "with their lives and their wealth and their heart, [the last being]

were you?" They say, "We were weak and oppressed in the land." [The angels] will say, "Was not God's earth vast enough that you might have migrated therein?" These shall have their refuge in Hell—what an evil journey's end! (98) But not so the [truly] weak and oppressed among the men, women, and children, who neither have access to any means nor are guided to any way. (99) As for such, it may be that God will pardon them, for God is Pardoning, Forgiving.

the noblest form of striving" (R). According to a *ḥadīth,* "There are a hundred degrees in Paradise that God has prepared for those who strive in His way, the distance between each two degrees being as the distance between Heaven and earth" (IK).

97 *The souls of those who were wronging themselves* is widely considered to refer to those Makkans, such as ʿAlī ibn Umayyah and Abu'l-Qays ibn al-Walīd (IK), who claimed to accept Islam (some say hypocritically), but failed to migrate to Madinah (R, Ṭ, W). Some of these were compelled to join and fight alongside the Makkan idolaters at the Battle of Badr. The use of the gerund *wronging themselves* is meant to indicate that they were taken while in the state of wrongdoing (R), for some of them died in the battle, and when the angels came to take their souls, they offered the excuse of oppression. But the response is that oppression is no excuse for believers who neglected the difficult, but possible, solution of emigrating elsewhere. According to some reports, some of these Makkan believers who were compelled to fight at Badr were taken as prisoners of war by the Muslims, and 8:70 was then revealed, indicating that, in having been captured rather than killed in this state, they had the possibility of Divine forgiveness (Ṭ).

*When the angels take the souls* may also be read, grammatically, in the past tense: "When the angels took the souls." The verse can thus be understood as having both a general application and a particular, historical one (R, Z). Several verses mention the great spiritual merit and reward acquired by those who migrate for the sake of religion (2:218; 4:66–67, 100; 9:20; 16:41; 22:58; 59:9), and a *ḥadīth* indicates that those who migrate for the sake of preserving and practicing religion share a special bond with both Abraham and the Prophet Muḥammad, who were commanded to do likewise (Q, Z); but the present verse and others reflect the fact that migration to Madinah was also considered essential in order for the newly converted to attain full status within the Muslim community from the period between 622, when the Prophet migrated there, until the conquest of Makkah in 630 (cf. 4:89; 8:72). Those who did not migrate and supported the disbelievers out of purported helplessness shall, like them, have their *refuge in Hell.* The early commentator al-Suddī (d. 127/744) claims that once this verse was revealed, all those who had embraced Islam but not migrated to Madinah were considered disbelievers (*kuffār*) until they migrated (Ṭ), although this seems to be a harsher verdict on those who failed to migrate than what is found in 8:72. Al-Qurṭubī suggests that the fact that angels question them reproachfully about their state at all indicates that they were wrongdoing Muslims, not disbelievers.

98–99 Although religious oppression in their native land is not a valid excuse for those with the option to migrate elsewhere—in this case, to Madinah in particular—the Quran here offers the possibility that God will forgive those who are genuinely *weak and oppressed,* such that they lack the physical capacity or financial *means* to migrate, or are not *guided to any way;* that is, they have no knowledge of how to reach Madinah (Ṭ). Cf. 4:75 and commentary, where the believers are admonished to fight for the cause of the *weak and oppressed,* understood by some as referring to those Muslims in Makkah who were unable to migrate to Madinah. It is reported that after the midday prayer the Prophet would regularly pray for the release of the believers still trapped in Makkah among the idolaters (Ṭ, Ṭs). Ibn ʿAbbās, who claims to have been among those truly *weak and oppressed* in Makkah, says that after v. 97 was revealed, the Muslims in Madinah wrote of the verse to those in Makkah, informing them that they could claim no excuse for not migrating. So

(100) Whosoever migrates in the way of God will find upon the earth many a refuge and abundance, and whosoever forsakes his home, emigrating unto God and His Messenger, and death overtakes him, his reward will fall upon God, and God is Forgiving, Merciful. (101) When you travel upon the earth, there is no blame upon you for shortening your prayers if you fear that the disbelievers may attack you; verily the disbelievers are your manifest enemy. (102) When thou art with them and leadest them in prayer, let one group of them stand with thee in prayer, taking their arms with them. When they have performed their prostrations, let them withdraw to the rear, and let another group come that has not prayed and let them pray with thee, taking precaution and their arms. The disbelievers wish you to be heedless of your arms and your baggage that they might

they attempted to leave, but the idolaters caught up with them and tormented them, and the Makkan Muslims understood it to be a punishment from God. After this, 29:10 was revealed, criticizing their continued weakness in the face of oppression, and when the Makkan Muslims were informed of it, they despaired of their moral fate until 16:110 was revealed, indicating that if they attempted again to migrate and succeeded thereafter in joining the Muslims in striving in God's way, they would be forgiven (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī warns, however, that migrating from one's native land is difficult for anyone, and claiming that one was unable to migrate simply because it would entail hardship is not acceptable; the excuse of weakness and oppression is acceptable from only those in circumstances that truly prevent them from migrating.

100 For other verses on the reward that accrues to one who migrates for the sake of religion, see 2:218; 4:66–67; 9:20; 16:41; 22:58; 59:9. Here, the Quran seeks to lessen the hesitation some believers might feel about migrating by indicating that for those who succeed, there will be the earthly rewards of finding *many a refuge and abundance,* and for those who die in the attempt, there will be reward with God in the next life. *Many a refuge* translates *murāgham,* which may also mean "many wide-open spaces," "much freedom to roam" (Ṭ), or "many paths by which to leave" (Z). In connection with this verse or the previous ones, some commentators relate the account of an elderly Muslim in Makkah who, upon hearing of the warning in v. 97 to those who do not emigrate, instructed his sons to aid him in leaving Makkah, though he was infirm and had to be carried on a bed. He is said to have died en route to Madinah (Ṭ, W). Upon hearing of his death, some Muslims suggested his reward would have been greater had he reached Madinah, while the Makkan disbelievers mocked his fate; this verse was thus revealed indicating that God Himself undertakes the reward of such a person (R, Z).

According to al-Zamakhsharī, the Divine reward mentioned in this verse applies to anyone who dies while traveling away from home for any religious purpose, including seeking knowledge, making the *ḥajj,* participating in *jihād,* escaping religious persecution, cultivating asceticism, or seeking lawful provision. This interpretation suggests that there is something spiritually edifying or meritorious in undertaking the hardships of traveling for any good purpose, and the Quran encourages its readers to *journey upon the earth* to learn about God's creation and the moral fate of others (see, e.g., 3:137; 6:11; 16:36; 27:69; 35:44) and suggests that it may be a mode of acquiring spiritual understanding (18:60–82). In *Sūrah* 106, the safe journeys of the Quraysh in summer and winter are mentioned as a Divine favor.

101–2 These verses contain accommodations in religious practice for those who are traveling (cf.

assault you all at once. There is no blame on you if you lay aside your arms when you are troubled by heavy rain or illness. But take your precaution. Surely God has prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. (103) When you have completed the prayer, remember [and invoke] God, standing, sitting, or lying on your sides. Then when you are secure, observe proper prayer, for prayer at

2:184–5; 4:43; 5:6). One may shorten or alter the performance of the canonical prayers specifically in the situation of fear of enemy attack; it was widely understood, on the basis of Prophetic precedent, that those traveling a substantial distance could also shorten those canonical prayers consisting of four cycles of recitation and prostration (*rakaʿāt*) to two cycles. When someone questioned why the Muslims continued to shorten their prayers when traveling, even when they were in no danger, the Prophet said, "It is a charitable gift God has given you; so accept His charity!" (Ṭ). However, some question remained as to whether this accommodation applied to all travelers or only to those who feared enemy attack. According to one report, the first part of v. 101, *When you travel upon the earth, there is no blame on you for shortening your prayers,* was revealed in response to a group of merchants who traveled on business and asked the Prophet about how they should pray on their journeys. Later, however, when the Muslims were in danger of being attacked by the idolaters while on a military campaign, the remainder of the verse was revealed along with v. 102, indicating the ways in which Muslims should take caution and keep guard when saying their prayers while in danger of attack (Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī indicates that separating the two parts of v. 101 in this way is grammatically problematic.

However, there do appear to be two different alterations to the canonical prayer suggested in these two verses. The first is simply a shortening of the prayer from four to two cycles—an accommodation based upon Prophetic *Sunnah* that applies to all travelers and is known as the "traveling prayer" (*ṣalāt al-safar*; Q). The second, described in detail in v. 102, is the "prayer of fear" (*ṣalāt al-khawf*), which is performed while armed. The standing and bowing portions of the prayer are performed together by the prayer leader and all the lines of those following him; but during the prostration (*sujūd*), the front line prostrates along with the prayer leader, while the back line stands guard and prostrates only after the others have stood up. They then alternate positions. Thus the prayer leader prays two cycles of prayer, but each line prostrates with the prayer leader during only one of the prostrations, standing guard during the other.

Some say that when the Prophet and his Companions prayed the "prayer of fear," one line would pray along with the Prophet for two cycles of the prayer, while the other stood guard; then they would alternate, so that the Prophet prayed a total of four cycles of prayer, but each line participated in only two of them (Ṭ). This verse was reportedly revealed when the Prophet and the Muslim army were facing an army of Makkan idolaters at ʿUsfān, led by Khālid ibn al-Walīd, who was at that time one of the fiercest Makkan warriors against the Prophet and his community. When the idolaters saw the Muslims praying the midday (*ẓuhr*) prayer, they decided to attack them while they were in the vulnerable state of praying. This verse was thus revealed between the midday and later afternoon (*ʿaṣr*) prayers, so that the defensive practice could be implemented during the *ʿaṣr* prayer and the attack avoided (Ṭ, W).

Some assert that when praying the "prayer of fear" while traveling, the two cycles normally said while traveling are halved again to one (Ṭ). For accommodations to prayer in a state of fear, see 2:239, where Muslims are allowed to pray on foot or on horseback when they fear enemy attack. Although Muslims are supposed to pray the "prayer of fear" while holding their weapons for protection, one may put them down if it becomes too difficult because of *rain or illness*. Some say this was revealed in relation to the Companion ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf, who was wounded at the time (Ṭ). The *humiliating punishment* for the disbelievers is Hellfire (Ṭ).

103 After the Muslims have finished the shortened "prayer of fear," they are instructed to

fixed hours is prescribed for the believers. (104) Slacken not in the pursuit of these people. If you are suffering, verily they suffer even as you suffer, while you hope from God that for which they do not hope. Surely God is Knowing, Wise. (105) Verily We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth, that thou mightest judge between men according to what God has shown thee. So be not an advocate for those who betray their trust. (106) And seek forgiveness of God; surely God is Forgiving, Merciful. (107) And plead not on behalf of those who betray

continue to worship by remembering and invoking God (both meanings are found in the Arabic *udhkuru ʾLlāh*)—that is, through the repeated affirmation of His Oneness, by uttering the formula of glorification (*tasbīḥ*), or by making a personal supplication to God for themselves or for victory (Q, Ṭ)—in any position that they are able to in their constrained condition, *standing, sitting, or lying* on their sides (cf. 3:191). Elsewhere, Muslims are enjoined to *remember God much* as they face battle (8:45). However, the injunction to *remember God* in these various circumstances indicates more generally the importance of the spiritual aspiration of remembering God (*dhikruʾLlāh*) at all times and serves as the scriptural basis for the Sufi teaching about invoking and remembering God at all moments of life, that is, being *dāʾim al-dhikr* (in constant remembrance). The importance of the remembrance or invocation (*dhikr*) of God is a major theme throughout the Quran. Certain passages indicate that *dhikr*, in addition to its ordinary meaning of invocation and remembrance, also refers to a specific or even somewhat ritualized form of invocation connected with prayer (2:239; 7:206; 87:15), congregational worship in sacred places (2:114; 24:36), worship during the *ḥajj* (2:198–203), and glorifications of God, often said to be uttered *morning and evening* (3:41; 7:205; 20:33–34; 33:41–42; 43:13).

But when they are *secure*, no longer in a state of fear of enemy attack, Muslims should return to the normative mode of prayer, with the full number of prayer cycles (*rakaʿāt*). The verse then reiterates that prayer at the prescribed times is incumbent upon the Muslims. Indeed, the importance of praying at fixed times is implicit in the accommodations made to the prayer in the previous two verses, since substantial changes to the length and mode of prayer may be made in order to accommodate meeting the fixed times of prayer even in cases of extreme danger. Others say that this means that once one is secure, one should finish the prayers by saying the parts that were omitted (Ṭ).

Ibn ʿAjībah also gives a spiritual meaning to this latter command, suggesting that when one has completed the physical prayer, one should immerse oneself in the "prayer of the heart" until one becomes *secure* in the Holy Presence; once *secure* in that Presence, one should perform the "prayer of witnessing and seeing," which is the "constant prayer" (see 70:22–23). Other Sufi commentators stress the distinction between the canonical prayer, done at specified times and when one is *secure*, and the practice of invoking or remembering God—that is, the "presence of the heart"—which should be constant (Qu). *Prayer at fixed hours is prescribed for the believers* is considered the scriptural basis for the obligatory canonical prayers and is often cited in daily Muslim life. These words are inscribed in many places of worship and cited in various texts.

104 This verse was reportedly revealed after the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), encouraging the Muslims to continue to pursue Abū Sufyān, the leader of the idolaters (JJ). When the Muslims complained of their weakness from the wounds they had suffered at Uḥud, the verse reminded them that the idolaters *suffer even as you suffer*, but lack the hope the Muslims have for reward in the next life (Ṭ) and for victory and Divine support even in this life, as promised throughout the Quran (IK)—a hope that should give them, in the form of strength and encouragement, an advantage that the idolaters can never have (IK, JJ, Ṭ).

105–7 These verses indicate that one of the purposes of the revelation to the Prophet was that he might *judge between men according to what*

their own selves. Surely God loves not the one given to treachery and sin. (108) They seek to hide themselves from men, but they cannot hide from God. He is with them when they conspire by night with words displeasing to Him, and God encompasses whatsoever they do. (109) There you are, pleading on their behalf concerning the life of this world! But who will plead with God on their

*God has shown* him—that is, according to what God has taught him (R). Some scholars adduce this phrase to demonstrate that the Prophet had been given permission to perform *ijtihād*—that is, to derive independent rulings from the principles and laws contained in the Quran (IK). These three verses were reportedly addressed to the Prophet in relation to an incident in which Ṭuʿmah ibn Ubayriq, a Muslim who was likely a hypocrite (*munāfiq;* R), had stolen a piece of armor and hid it among the belongings of one of the Jews of Madinah in order to avoid discovery and later accused him of the theft. The Prophet initially attempted to defend Ṭuʿmah at the behest of the latter's relatives, but in v. 105 he was warned not to defend *those who betray their trust,* and in v. 106 he was instructed to seek forgiveness for his initial willingness to do so (IK, JJ, Ṭ). V. 107 again warns against advocating for *those who betray their own selves.*

The parallelism between *those who betray their trust* in v. 105 and *those who betray their own selves* in v. 107, which both refer to the same people, reflects the Quranic idea that one's moral or immoral actions ultimately affect only oneself (see v. 111). Hence the assertion found throughout the Quran in relation to wrongdoers that God does not wrong people, but that they wrong themselves (see, e.g., 2:57; 3:117; 7:160). Here in betraying one's *trust,* one ultimately betrays oneself. The Prophet is instructed to apply the rulings of the Quran without favoritism toward anyone—even on behalf of a (perhaps nominal) fellow Muslim against a member of another religious community (R).

Because here the Quran admonishes the Prophet to avoid advocating for those who are treacherous and to seek forgiveness, a few have argued that these verses indicate that the Prophet was initially willing to advocate for the lying Ṭuʿmah, which would seem to cast doubt on the commonly accepted theological principle of *ʿiṣmah,* which holds that all prophets are protected against the commission of any major sin. Al-Rāzī responds to this argument by noting that the report of this incident indicates that, although the Prophet was concerned about the situation and willing to get involved, he took no decisive action right away, but waited for the guidance of revelation, which eventually came. The instruction to the Prophet to *seek forgiveness of God,* he further argues, may be read as an instruction to seek forgiveness for others—namely, for those who tried to persuade him to advocate for Ṭuʿmah.

108 This verse, along with vv. 109–14, continues to address the issue of those who *betray their own selves* (v. 107) through wrongdoing and treachery. They may hide their shameful actions from others (as they nearly did in the case of Ṭuʿmah), but, as the Quran frequently repeats, nothing can be hidden from God. Here and elsewhere hypocrites and wrongdoers are accused of conspiring or devising schemes *by night,* that is, in private and away from the gaze of others (see 4:81; 34:33). *God encompasses whatsoever they do* could more literally be rendered, "God is encompassing (*muḥīṭ*) of whatsoever they do"; the same or a similar phrase also appears in 3:120; 4:126; 8:47; 11:92; 41:54, where it tends to be used in an ominous way in relation to disbelievers and their wrongdoing. *Muḥīṭ* is considered a Divine Name and on its own is usually rendered *All-Encompassing* (see 85:20).

109 In *There you are, pleading on their behalf,* "you" is in plural rather than singular and thus refers not to the Prophet (who is admonished against advocating for the treacherous in vv. 105–7), but to those who would seek to defend the Ubayriq clan or others engaged in similar wrongdoing or to plead for the Prophet's support on their behalf. As the Quran emphasizes in 2:270; 3:56; 71:25, and many other places, wrongdoers will have no

behalf on the Day of Resurrection, or be a guardian for them? (110) Whosoever does evil or wrongs himself, and then seeks forgiveness of God, he will find God Forgiving, Merciful. (111) And whosoever commits a sin, commits it only against his own soul, and God is Knowing, Wise. (112) And whosoever commits an offense or a sin, and then casts it upon one who is innocent, bears the burden of calumny and a manifest sin. (113) Were it not for God's Bounty toward thee, and His Mercy, a party of them would have plotted to lead thee astray, but they lead astray only their own souls, and they can do thee no harm in the least. God has sent down unto thee the Book and Wisdom, and has taught thee what thou

advocate or defender before God on the Day of Judgment.

110 The promise of forgiveness is here likely extended to both the treacherous wrongdoers and those who would wrongfully seek to defend them (Ṭ).

111 The meaning here is that through immoral actions, one ultimately harms or wrongs only oneself, since God is not harmed by such actions and the offense given to other creatures endures only in this life. Yet, the effect of both moral and immoral actions endures for those who commit them in the form of congruous reward and punishment in the next life. Throughout the Quran, the wrongdoers are repeatedly referred to as those who *wrong themselves,* and in several places, including here, the correspondence between moral and immoral acts and their reward and punishment amounts to a kind of moral reflexivity, where actions are ultimately done only to or for oneself (see, e.g., 2:9, 272; 3:69; 6:123; 8:60; 9:34–35; 10:23; 29:6; 35:18).

112 This verse continues to address the incident involving Ṭuʿmah ibn Ubayriq, who, after committing theft, blamed it on a Jewish resident of Madinah (see 4:105–7c). Although *an offense or a sin* and *calumny and a manifest sin* may seem to be rough pairs of synonyms or nouns placed in apposition for greater effect, the commentators understand these terms as referring to different kinds of acts. They suggest various distinctions between an *offense* and a *sin: offense* refers to an error or a wrong done unintentionally, whereas *sin* denotes an intentional wrongful act (R, Ṭ); *offense* denotes a minor infraction and *sin* a major one (R, Z); or *offense* is a "victimless" sin that spiritually harms only the one who commits it, while *sin* is an action that harms another (R). Al-Rāzī asserts that those who blame another will be *burdened* both with *calumny,* meaning that they will experience great shame in this life, and with *a manifest sin,* which indicates their greater punishment in the Hereafter.

113 *God's Bounty* and *Mercy* toward *thee*—that is, the Prophet—can be understood to mean in this context that He revealed to the Prophet the true guilt of Ṭuʿmah and so prevented the Prophet from being led *astray* by Ṭuʿmah's fellow clansmen, who misrepresented Ṭuʿmah's innocence and sought to have the Prophet pardon and intercede on behalf of their guilty kinsman. In doing so, He protected the Prophet from committing an error in judgment with regard to both Ṭuʿmah and the innocent man he had accused and thereby prevented Ṭuʿmah's advocates from bringing spiritual *harm* to the Prophet. Thus God preserved the Prophet's *ʿiṣmah,* that is, his protection from sin and moral error. This verse also indicates the same moral reflexivity suggested in v. 111, for in seeking to lead the Prophet astray, they misled only themselves. According to al-Ṭabarī, Ṭuʿmah's would-be advocates knew that their attempt to solicit the Prophet's defense of Ṭuʿmah was effectively an attempt to lead the Prophet astray, since they had been warned by the prior revelation in v. 105, *be not an advocate for those who betray their trust,* and thus knew that defending the treacherous Ṭuʿmah was not acceptable to God. See also 3:69, where, in seeking to lead others astray, the disbelievers mislead

knewest not; God's Bounty toward thee is great indeed. (114) There is no good in most of their secret converse, save for him who enjoins charity or kindness or reconciliation between men. And whosoever does that, seeking God's Good Pleasure, We shall grant him a great reward. (115) But whosoever opposes the Messenger, after guidance has been made clear to him, and follows a way other than that of the believers, We shall leave him on [the path] he has taken, and

only themselves; and 39:41, where the soul's going astray is said to harm none but itself.

From a theological perspective, some understand *God's Bounty* toward the Prophet in this verse to be a reference to his prophethood; they consider *His Mercy* to be a reference either to the special aid He rendered to the Prophet or more specifically to the Prophet's *ʿiṣmah,* or moral inerrancy (R, Ṭs, Z), which mainstream Islamic doctrine attributed to all prophets. In other verses, however, *God's Bounty* and *Mercy* are used in reference to God's revelation of a particular guidance to the believers as a whole—a guidance that similarly prevents them from making serious errors of judgment—and so does not seem to relate only to the specific qualities given to the prophets (see 4:83; 24:10, 14, 20, 21). In the present verse, God protects the Prophet from being led astray by teaching him what he did not know, either in the sense of revealing to him the hidden nature of affairs and the inner intentions of people or simply in the sense of instructing him in religious Law (Z), the *Book and Wisdom* (R). The Quran elsewhere speaks of God granting various prophets both the *Book and Wisdom* (2:129, 151, 231; 3:81, 164; 4:54; 5:110; 62:2); the *Book* refers to the scripture itself, and *Wisdom* to religious knowledge and understanding more generally. For al-Rāzī, the reiteration of the greatness of *God's Bounty,* after describing His Revelation of the *Book and Wisdom* and His teaching the Prophet what he did not know, is a clear indication that knowledge is the "noblest of the bounties and virtues" that God may bestow.

114 In itself, *secret converse* (*najwā*) is morally neutral. It can be positive, as in this verse, where it may be used to enjoin *charity or kindness or reconciliation,* for which one can expect a *great reward.* But as this verse and others indicate, *secret converse* may also portend plotting and ill intentions. Cf. 58:7–10, where *secret converse* is said to be known to God, but forbidden when it is done *with a view to sin, enmity, and disobeying the Messenger.* The believers are then told to *converse in secret with a view to piety and reverence.* The next line warns that *secret converse is only from Satan,* presumably when it is ill-intentioned (see 114:4–6, in which God's protection is sought against the *stealthy whisperer,* who is Satan, or against jinn and men). A *ḥadīth* warns, "The speech of the Children of Adam always works against them, not for them, except when it is to command the right and forbid the wrong, or to invoke God" (Z). Hypocrites in general (v. 81), and Ṭuʿmah's clansmen in particular (v. 108) are also said to conspire by night (*bayyata*), and so, presumably, in secret. Here as elsewhere, the Quran praises those who do good deeds *seeking God's Good Pleasure,* meaning with pure intention, not for worldly purposes or to seek the pleasure or praise of others (Z); see 2:207, 265; 60:1.

115 This verse likely closes the discussion of the incident involving Ṭuʿmah, who is said to have returned to Makkah after his theft was revealed and abandoned Islam (R, Z). The verse thus issues a warning to those who, like Ṭuʿmah, break with the Prophet after having recognized his spiritual guidance.

*Opposes the Messenger* means to become his enemy, despite being aware that he is a prophet bringing right guidance; following *a way other than that of the believers* indicates disbelief (*kufr;* Ṭ). For al-Rāzī, this verse is evidence for the moral inerrancy (*ʿiṣmah*) of the Prophet, since if he were errant, it would not always be a punishable sin to oppose him. The legal scholar al-Shāfiʿī and some other major commentators considered this verse proof of the authority of communal consensus

We shall cause him to burn in Hell—what an evil journey's end! (116) Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will. Whosoever ascribes partners unto God has surely gone far astray. (117) They call upon only females in His stead; they call upon none but a defiant Satan, (118) whom God has cursed, who said, "Assuredly I shall take of Thy servants an appointed share, (119) and surely I shall lead them astray, and arouse desires in them. I shall command them and they will slit the ears of cattle; I shall command them and they will alter God's creation." Whosoever takes Satan as a protector apart from God has surely suffered a manifest

(*ijmāʿ*), one of the four sources of Islamic Law in the Shāfiʿī school. In making a connection between one who *follows a way other than that of the believers* and those who oppose *the Messenger,* this verse can be taken to indicate that both the Messenger and the "way of the believers" represent authoritative sources of guidance that cannot be rightly opposed (R, Z). Insofar as the verse indicates the necessity of following the Prophet and the "way of the believers," Al-Rāzī also holds that it is proof that right guidance requires external examples to be followed and cannot be based simply upon one's own intuitive knowledge or inherent sense of right and wrong.

For Shiites, however, the verse is not understood to mean that one must follow the path of the believers as individual human beings who are fallible, whose state of belief cannot be definitively ascertained, and whose status as "believers" may change over time. For leading Twelver Shiite commentators, the "way of the believers" refers to the way prescribed by the teachings of their Imams (Ṭs, Ṭū), since they considered these teachings to be Divinely guaranteed and complementary to the teachings of the Prophet.

The warning that one who opposes the Prophet and the way of the believers will be left by God *on [the path] he has taken* means that he will be left to continue on the path of error (Z) or of worshipping idols or false deities, and though he may seek the help of those deities on the Last Day, they will not avail him (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī says that some assert that this verse was abrogated by later verses such as 9:29, which enjoins Muslims to *fight those who do not believe in God . . . and who follow not the Religion of Truth* and thus takes a more aggressive stance against apostates, in this world, rather than leaving the consequences of their actions to the Hereafter.

116 See 4:48 (a nearly identical verse) and commentary.

117–19 *Females* here likely refers to the three female deities worshipped by the pagan Makkans, al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt, who are mentioned by name in 53:19–20 and whom the pagan Makkans believed to be the "daughters" of Allāh (Z). Other Makkan deities were also female, and the verse may reference them as well. One minority opinion considers *females* to be a reference to the angels that the Makkans *name . . . with female names* (53:27; Ṭ), who were also considered by the Makkans to be the daughters of Allāh (Z). The female character of these idols, deities, and "angels," referenced explicitly here and in the passages in *Sūrah* 53, was for some medieval commentators a particular reason to belittle these idolatrous practices. A number of commentators considered the female to be lowlier and closer to pure "matter" than the male (Q, R), making the Makkan worship of female idols even worthier of ridicule in their eyes.

Elsewhere, the Quran rebukes the Makkans for assigning these "daughters" to God, when they themselves were dismayed by the birth of a daughter (see 16:57–58). Minority opinions attributed to ʿĀʾishah and Ibn ʿAbbās, however, eliminated the female reference entirely by reading the word *ināth* ("females") as "idols" (*uthun* or *awthān;* Q, R, Z), both possible readings on the basis of the early consonantal text of the Quran, although this is not among the approved readings

loss. (120) He makes them promises and stirs in them desires, but Satan promises naught but delusion. (121) Such will have their refuge in Hell, and will find no refuge therefrom. (122) But for those who believe and perform righteous deeds,

of the verse according to the Islamic science of variant recitations (*qirāʾāt*). Certainly, even if the Quranic condemnation here pertains directly to the worship of these false female deities, it can be understood as extending to all false and idolatrous objects of worship.

In calling upon these *females*, their devotees are, in effect, worshipping them (R); and in doing this they are unwittingly calling upon or worshipping the *defiant Satan*, for it is Satan who deceives them into idol worship, so when they engage in that act, they obey him (Z). Al-Qurṭubī claims that each idol worshipped in pre-Islamic Arabia had its own "satan" that accompanied it, and this satan would speak by inspiring words in the idol's custodian or priestess, who would then relate them to the people. Cf. 22:3 and 37:7, which also make reference to *a defiant demon*. However, in vv. 118–19, this *satan* is identified as the one who said, *Assuredly I shall take of Thy servants an appointed share*, making it clear that "satan" here refers not to an unspecified demon (although it is presented in the indefinite form), but to the defiant Satan in the story of Adam's creation who vows to lead human beings astray; see 7:16–18; 17:62. He arouses in them *desires* (v. 119) for both good things in this world, such as long life and increased wealth, and good things in the next, such as undeserved Divine forgiveness (Z).

The practice of slitting *the ears of cattle* was part of a pagan ritual of the Makkans. They would slit the ears of female camels who had given birth five times, with the fifth offspring being male, to indicate that they should no longer be used (Z). Al-Ṭabarī says that this practice was part of the pagan ritual known as *baḥīrah*, mentioned in 5:103. For other pagan rituals concerning livestock, see 6:136–39.

V. 119 asserts that it is also by Satan's command that people *alter God's creation* which, following upon the previous reference to slitting the ears of livestock, refers to various, unacceptable forms of mutilation perpetrated on animals, but especially on human beings—including tattooing and castrating men to serve as eunuchs, practices condemned by Islamic legal scholars, but found, historically, in some parts of the Islamic world (Z). Muslims do practice male circumcision, however, and some legal schools consider female circumcision (the cutting of the skin around the clitoris), if it is limited in nature, to be *sunnah*. In general, rules regarding circumcision tend to be discussed as matters of ritual purity, rather than as forms of "altering God's creation." Neither practice is mentioned in the Quran, and the tradition on which female circumcision is based is not accepted by all; some Muslims consider female circumcision a form of bodily mutilation that should be prohibited in Islam and it is not practiced in most Islamic countries.

Another opinion understands *alter God's creation* as meaning to alter His original religion, given that God's creation and the "upright religion" are identified with each other in 30:30: *Set thy face to religion as a* ḥanīf, *in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion*. In the latter verse, both God's creation and His religion are associated with the primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) endowed by God. When the pagan Arabs performed these rituals on livestock or human beings, they were both engaging in practices not ordained by God, and so altering His pure religion, and altering the nature of these creatures, and so violating the original nature of God's creation.

120 God's promises are true, as is repeatedly asserted (see, e.g., 3:152; 4:122; 7:44; 10:4), but Satan's promises are false and *naught but delusion* (see also 17:64). In 14:22 Satan himself asserts that God's promise was true, but that he (Satan) had failed in his promises. See also 31:33; 35:5–6, where Satan is identified as the *Deluder*.

121 Hell or "the Fire" is described, perhaps with ironic intention, as a *refuge* for disbelievers and wrongdoers throughout the Quran; see, for example, 3:151; 4:97; 8:16; 13:18; 24:57; 45:34; 79:39.

We shall cause them to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein forever. God's Promise is true, and who is truer in speech than God? (123) It will not be in accordance with your desires nor the desires of the People of the Book. Whosoever does evil shall be requited for it, and he will find no protector or helper for himself apart from God. (124) And whosoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, and is a believer, such shall enter the

That those condemned to Hell will find *no refuge* is also mentioned in 14:21; 41:48; 42:47; 75:11.

**122** For the often repeated description of Paradise as a *Garden with rivers running below,* see 2:25 and commentary.

**123–24** These verses relate to the debate between the adherents of different religions as to which is better or truer. *Your desires* and *the desires of the People of the Book* may indicate the desire of the Muslims and the desire of Jews and Christians, respectively, to claim the superiority of their own religion (Ṭ; see 2:111–13). Or they may be claiming special leniency when it comes to Divine Judgment regardless of their acts because of their membership in a particular religious community (Z); for examples of such claims by the People of the Book, see 2:80; 3:24; 5:18. Another opinion asserts that the verse is directly addressing the idolaters and that *your desires* thus refers to the desire or claim of the idolaters that they will not be resurrected and punished for their deeds. Al-Ṭabarī considers the latter interpretation more likely, since *desires* here translates *amānī,* which is etymologically related to the term used for the false *desires* Satan arouses in people to lead them astray in vv. 119–20, and so should be associated with those who are actually astray (such as the Makkan idolaters), rather than with the believing Muslims. In either case, the Quran negates these claims, indicating that there will indeed be punishment and reward in the Hereafter, and it will based not solely upon membership in a particular religious community, but upon individual belief and the performance of righteous deeds, for *whosoever does evil shall be requited for it,* and *whosoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, and is a believer, such shall enter the Garden* (for similar statements about human moral potential and reward made explicitly to both genders, see 3:195; 40:40).

The condition *and is a believer* may be meant to indicate particularly a Muslim believer, as the term is used throughout the Quran to refer to believers in the Quranic message specifically; however, the Quran also asserts that anyone who *believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness* (2:62; 5:69) will have a blessed Afterlife and explicitly includes faithful Jews and Christians among those to whom this applies. It is thus possible to understand the condition of being a *believer* here in the more general sense of anyone who believes in God and the Last Day. The condition of being a *believer* is mentioned explicitly in v. 124 as a requirement for the reward of righteous deeds, but in v. 123 the punishment for evil deeds is presented as applicable to all. This reportedly troubled some of the Prophet's Companions, who feared punishment for their missteps despite their belief in Islam and found it hard to reconcile this verse with other verses that assert that minor sins may be forgiven or "removed" by good deeds (see, e.g., 4:31; 11:114). The Prophet assured them that, for believers, the hardships they suffer in life—from major calamities to suffering the prick of a thorn—will serve as expiation for their sins or, from a different perspective, that punishment for such sins was meted out through the adversities in this life, both great and small (R, Ṭ).

As the reported concerns of the Prophet's Companions would seem to indicate, such verses must be understood in the larger context of the Quran's discussion of God's judgment of human beings, a discussion that leans heavily toward affirming God's capacity to forgive and suggesting multiple compensations for human shortcoming. See, for example, 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof; but*

Garden, and they shall not be wronged so much as the speck on a date stone. (125) And who is better in religion than the one who submits his face to God, and is virtuous, and follows the creed of Abraham, as a *ḥanīf?* And God did take Abraham for a friend. (126) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and God encompasses all things. (127) They seek a

*whosoever brings an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the like thereof, and they shall not be wronged.* See also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

125 True religious superiority, however, is attained on the individual, not communal, level by submitting one's *face to God*—a symbolic expression meaning the submission of one's whole self to God—as well as being *virtuous* and following the pure *creed of Abraham, as a* ḥanīf (cf. 2:130; for *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c; 30:30c). Vv. 124–25 can be understood as bringing together the three levels of religious commitment mentioned in the famous *ḥadīth* of Gabriel: outward submission through righteous acts (*islām*), correct and sincere faith (*īmān*), and virtue (*iḥsān*) achieved through a constant awareness of God. In v. 124, otherworldly reward is promised for those who perform righteous deeds and hold correct belief; but in v. 125, being *virtuous* is connected with submitting one's *face to God,* indicating that the "best" religion is achieved by those who manifest true virtue through complete, rather than merely outward, submission to God. In the present verse, such complete submission to God is directly connected to Abraham. The Quran suggests that Muslims have an advantage over other monotheists in following the *creed of Abraham,* since the claim that Abraham was a Jew or a Christian is rejected (2:140; 3:65–67) and elsewhere Abraham and his creed are explicitly connected to the Prophet Muhammad and his religious community (2:135; 3:68; 6:61; 16:123). Moreover, in the Quran the exclusively Islamic practice of the *ḥajj* as well as the reverence for the Makkan *ḥaram* are initiated by Abraham himself (2:125–26; 3:97; 22:26–30; R).

Here Abraham is famously identified as the intimate *friend* of God (*khalīl*). Of all the laudatory comments made about Abraham in the Quran, it is his identification here as God's intimate *friend* that gives Abraham his most well known honorific title in Islam, *Khalīl Allāh.* Although this particular honorific is used primarily for Abraham, some argue that it is a quality belonging to all the prophets, including Muhammad (Ṭs). *Khalīl* indicates a friendship so close that one loves and hates whatever one's friend loves and hates and thus chooses allies and enemies in accordance with the allies and enemies of one's friend (Ṭ). The Quran indicates that this is the ideal relationship that all believers should have with God, since it warns that the enemies of God should also be the enemies of the believers, and that the believers should not take the enemies of God as their friends (see, e.g., 60:1). Abraham demonstrates this himself, according to the statement in 9:114, which says that he used to pray for forgiveness for his father, *but when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him.* Sufi authors and commentators understand *khalīl* as referring to a fullness of love (*maḥabbah*) and say that Abraham was called *Khalīl Allāh* because love of God permeated (*takhallala,* from the same root as *khalīl*) every aspect of his being (Aj; Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, faṣṣ* 5).

126 *Encompasses* here translates *kāna muḥīṭᵃᵐ* (see 4:108c). The active participle, *Muḥīṭ,* is one of the Divine Names and on its own is often translated *All-Encompassing* (85:20). In the Quran, the Divine Name *Muḥīṭ* is usually mentioned in connection with a rebuke or threat to the disbelievers or hypocrites, although when it is invoked by Muslims, as with other Divine Names, it does not pertain necessarily to Divine rebuke. Here it is used in a more universal and metaphysical sense—*God encompasses all things.* This verse closes the previous discussions of belief, hypocrisy, and idolatry and initiates a brief return, in the next four verses, to a discussion of marital issues addressed earlier in the *sūrah.*

127 This verse and v. 129 extend the discussion of orphans, marriage, and *dealing justly* with

ruling from thee concerning women. Say, "God gives you a ruling concerning them, and that which has been recited to you in the Book concerning the orphan girls—to whom you give not what is prescribed for them though you desire to marry them—and also the helpless among the children: that you should uphold justice for the orphans. Whatever good you do, surely God knows it well." (128) If a wife fears animosity or desertion from her husband, there is no

one's wives initiated in v. 3. When the Prophet was asked for a *ruling . . . concerning women,* this verse was revealed, instructing him to remind them that they should already know the rule, for they already have *that which has been recited to you in the Book concerning the orphan girls.* ʿĀʾishah contended that the present verse was issued as a clarification of v. 3 (Ṭ, Q; see also 4:3c) and was meant to prevent male guardians from either marrying orphan girls without giving them their full bridal gifts or refusing to marry them to themselves or others, so as later to assume the girls' inheritance, should the guardian outlive them.

The first of these seems consistent with the rebuke concerning orphan girls that follows: *you give not what is prescribed for them though you desire to marry them,* thus reiterating the insistence that orphan girls be married properly, with a bridal payment, to avoid their exploitation (see v. 3c; W). However, *though you desire to marry them* employs the verb *raghiba,* which, when used with certain prepositions, means to desire or prefer something, but when used with other prepositions, means the opposite—to dislike or be averse to something. In the present verse, the preposition has been elided, opening the verb to both meanings. Thus some commentators understand the Arabic to mean "though you desire *not* to marry them" and consider it to refer to the latter practice of refusing to either marry undesirable orphan girls or marry them off to others (cf. v:19), in hopes that the girls would predecease them, allowing them to take the girls' inheritance portions for themselves (JJ, Q, Ṭ). Open as it is to both meanings, this part of the verse thus precludes both ways of mistreating orphan girls, both marrying them off without giving them their rightful bridal payment or refusing to marry them in order to keep their inheritance for oneself.

Given that the verse also mentions *the helpless among the children* and *orphans* in general, many early commentators considered the reminder about *that which has been recited to you in the Book* to refer to the general rulings about inheritance in vv. 11–12. As noted in the commentary on those verses, some of the Prophet's Companions were unhappy with the command to give allotted shares of the inheritance to women and young children, who did not inherit according to pre-Islamic Arabian custom. According to a report from the early authority Saʿīd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714), their dissatisfaction with the inheritance provisions for women and children led them to persist in questioning the Prophet about this and seeking, through him, further Divine clarification. According to this report, the present verse represents the Divine response to their questioning, apparently rebuking them for seeking a ruling on a matter for which a ruling has already been clearly prescribed and thereby affirming the rules of inheritance in vv. 11–12 (Ṭ). All of these reported interpretations of this verse, however, collectively indicate that some of the Prophet's Companions, discontented with the new rules for inheritance, perhaps particularly as they pertained to orphan girls, complained about them, attempted to circumvent them (see commentary on 4:3, 11, 12), or hoped to have them changed by a new Divine decree. In this verse all such efforts are rebuffed and the earlier Quranic rulings are thereby implicitly reaffirmed.

128 This verse continues as part of the *ruling . . . concerning women* requested by some of the Prophet's Companions in the previous verse (R). *Animosity* translates *nushūz,* which has as its root meaning high-handedness, arrogance, or aloofness and is also used in v. 34, where it is men who fear *nushūz* (translated *discord and animosity*)

blame upon them should they come to an accord, for an accord is better. Souls are prone to avarice, but if you are virtuous and reverent, surely God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (129) You will not be able to deal fairly between women, even if it is your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, so that you leave her as if suspended. If you come to an accord and are reverent, truly God

from their wives. Both this verse and v. 34 speak of one who "fears" animosity from a spouse, but in both cases this is understood to mean that the animosity has been clearly displayed and is not merely suspected (Q; see 4:34c). A wife's *nushūz* toward her husband in v. 34 is widely understood as disobedience, or a failure to respect his marital or conjugal rights due to lack of affection, or to aversion and a desire to separate from him. In the present verse, a husband's *nushūz* is construed differently, although somewhat analogously, as neglect of his wife because of a desire or inclination toward other women or wives or as a desire to divorce her due to a loss of affection or an aversion toward her (JJ, Ṭ).

It is clear that the Quran recognizes that such unilateral feelings of aversion on the part of either husband or wife may lead to divorce and in both cases allows for extraordinary measures to prevent it. A husband may discipline his wife to counter her animosity or disrespect toward him (v. 34), while a woman facing *animosity or desertion from her husband* is, by contrast, encouraged to arrange *an accord* with him. According to most commentators, this means agreeing to give her husband part of her bridal payment or other property or forfeiting some of her rights as a wife (e.g., to conjugal relations or financial maintenance) in order to remain married to her husband and avoid desertion or divorce (JJ, R, Ṭ). Because of the possibility of polygamy in Islam, this may mean agreeing to allow her husband to spend more time or money on another (perhaps younger or more desirable) cowife; and in relation to this verse, some cite the case of Sawdah bint Zamᶜah, an older wife of the Prophet who agreed to give her allotted "night" with the Prophet to his young wife ᶜĀʾishah (Q, Ṭ). This and similar instances cited by commentators in connection with this verse indicate that arrangements in which one wife agrees to a certain inequality of companionship or conjugal rights in relation to a cowife is permissible only in the case of the consent of the cowives themselves (Q).

In Islamic Law, divorce is permitted but discouraged and considered reprehensible (*makrūh*); a well-known *ḥadīth* says that divorce is the most odious of all lawful things unto God. Thus here and elsewhere the Quran encourages various means of avoiding divorce (see 2:228–30; 4:35), indicating that a "settlement" that avoids this *is better.*

*Souls are prone to avarice* (*shuḥḥ*) addresses the greed and selfishness innate to both men and women (Q) who would put their own interests and desires above those of their spouse or the marital union. Cf. 59:9; and 64:16: *Whosoever is shielded from the avarice* (*shuḥḥ*) *of his soul, it is they who shall prosper.* Some early commentators suggest that it is the selfishness or *avarice* of the wife in particular that is intended here, since it is she who is being asked to forfeit some of her marital rights, which she may hold dearly and be reluctant to forfeit (Ṭ). But the text does not indicate that the comment is gender-specific and may well reference the husband's *avarice* or selfishness in seeking younger women (Q, R) or additional children, both of which are identified in 3:14 as earthly *passions* and *the enjoyment of the life of this world* that cannot compare to the beautiful rewards of the Hereafter. The promise to those who *are virtuous and reverent* in these matters—that is, those who overcome their avarice and agree to compromise for the sake of their spouse—is that God takes notice of their actions and, it is implied, will reward them for it.

129 This verse presents a means of reconciling the command given at the beginning of the *sūrah* that men *deal justly* among multiple wives or take only one (v. 3), and the reality, acknowledged in v. 128, that in a situation where men can take more than one wife and there are no barriers

is Forgiving, Merciful. (130) If the two separate, God will enrich both out of His Abundance, and God is All-Encompassing, Wise. (131) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. We have enjoined those who were given the Book before you, and We enjoin you, to reverence God. But if you disbelieve, [know that] unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and God is Self-Sufficient, Praised. (132) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and God suffices as a Guardian. (133) If He so wills, He can remove you, O mankind, and bring others [in your stead], and God has full power to do so.

to a man divorcing his wife, a woman is vulnerable both to the diversion or loss of her husband's affection in favor of another and to *desertion* because of her husband's right to unilateral divorce. *You will not be able to deal fairly between women* acknowledges that affection and attraction are involuntary feelings that a husband cannot always apportion "equally" between his wives. This reality was noted by many commentators in their discussion of v. 3, where they explain that the command given there is to treat wives equally in tangible measures, such as the amount of time and money spent on each wife, and that it does not require equality in more intangible things, such as love and affection. Many say that the present verse was revealed in relation to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, whom the Prophet is said to have loved above his other wives, although he maintained strict equality between them in the tangible matters of financial support and time spent with each (IK, Ṭ, Ṭb). In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet says with regard to his equal rotation among his wives, "O God, this is my division of that which I control [i.e., his time], so do not blame me for that which Thou controlest, and I do not [i.e., his affection for particular wives]" (Ṭ, Z).

Although v. 128 suggests remedies that might be used to avoid divorce, should a less favored wife find herself in danger of losing her husband, the present verse addresses the issue from the perspective of the husband. The verse can be understood as recommending that the husband cooperate in his wife's attempt to seek a peaceful settlement, since the command *do not turn away from one altogether, so that you leave her as if suspended,* implies that he accept her offer to limit her demands on him in exchange for avoiding divorce or desertion. *As if suspended* is understood as referring to a wife's being suspended or "imprisoned" between effectively having no husband, since he avoids her company, and yet not being widowed or divorced (Ṭ) and thus free to marry another. The Quran elsewhere demands that a woman be released in full after divorce or widowhood, freeing her to pursue marriage elsewhere without restriction (see 2:229–31; 4:19 and commentary). In connection with this verse, some commentators cite a *ḥadīth* that says, "Whosoever has two wives, and inclines toward one of them and away from the other, will come on the Day of Resurrection leaning to one side" (IK, Ṭ, Z). The verse ends by reiterating the importance of *an accord* made with an attitude of reverence, indicating that it will engender God's forgiveness for such human shortcomings.

130 Although the Quran recommends or requires several remedies to avoid divorce (see vv. 35, 128), if divorce is the outcome, this verse asserts that God continues to care for both spouses and will enrich them *out of His Abundance* by providing the possibility of new spouses better suited and more pleasing or beneficial to them (R, Ṭ). Cf. v. 32 where both men and women are told to *ask God for His Bounty,* rather than envying one another concerning what the other has been given.

131–33 The promise in v. 130 that God will enrich both separated spouses is followed by a threefold repetition of the frequent Quranic assertion that *unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth.* The first of

(134) Whosoever desires the reward of this world, with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter. God is Hearing, Seeing. (135) O you who believe! Be steadfast maintainers of justice, witnesses for God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kinsfolk, and whether it be someone rich or poor, for God is nearer unto both. So follow not your caprice, that you may act justly. If

these immediately follows the promise of God's enrichment of the separated spouses, thus inspiring trust in a better future for them both through a reminder of the extent of the Divine *Abundance* mentioned in v. 130. *Those who were given the Book before you* refers to Jews and Christians who, like Muslims, are similarly enjoined to be reverent toward God. According to al-Rāzī, this indicates that the command to reverence God is a Divine Law (*sharīᶜah*) common to all religious communities. But should they choose disbelief over reverence of God, they are reminded again that *unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth.*

*Self-Sufficient* translates *Ghanī,* a term that is sometimes rendered "rich," but that denotes not primarily great wealth, but rather complete independence of everything else; it could be translated "free of need." Being *Self-Sufficient,* He is neither increased by acts of obedience and worship, nor diminished by human disobedience and disbelief (R). The third repetition precedes the warning in v. 133 that God can remove human beings altogether and replace them with others, emphasizing God's Independence and Self-Sufficiency in relation to His creatures (see 6:133, where a similar warning is likewise preceded by an assertion that God is *Self-Sufficient;* 5:54; 14:19; 47:38). Nearly all commentators read this in a universal way, meaning that God can completely remove existing human beings and bring others—or another kind of creation entirely. According to one report, when this verse was revealed, indicating that God could bring *others* in their stead, the Prophet put his hand on the back of Salmān al-Fārsī (Salmān the Persian), saying, "It is this people [that is meant], that is, the Persians" (Q, Z).

134 Several passages of the Quran affirm the idea that God rewards people in both this world and the next, a concept that is often associated in the Quran with the prophets and their immediate followers (although it is not limited to them). See 12:56–57, where Joseph is given the worldly reward of being "established" *in the land,* a statement that is followed by a reminder that the reward of the Hereafter is better; 3:146–48, where the reward of this world and the next is said to have been given to those who fought patiently alongside the prophets; and 29:27, where Abraham is given by God a *reward in this world* and *in the Hereafter he shall truly be among the righteous.* Moses is also said to have been rewarded with *wisdom and knowledge* when he *reached maturity,* thus during his life (28:14).

Conversely, this verse can also be read as applying in a negative sense to the Madinan hypocrites—perhaps, again, to the advocates of Ṭuᶜmah ibn Ubayriq, which is the reported context for vv. 105–15 (see commentary on 4:105–7, 112–13)—who outwardly manifest belief in order to obtain the *reward of this world,* namely, the booty they might acquire through fighting alongside the Prophet or the general protection they receive as Muslims in Madinah (Ṭ). The *reward of . . . the Hereafter* is therefore an ironic and ominous allusion to the "reward"—that is, the punishment—they will have in the next life for their hypocrisy (Ṭ). Indeed, the "reward of this world" is sometimes counterposed to the reward of the Hereafter (see, e.g., 3:145; 33:28–29, where the wives of the Prophet are asked to choose between the good of this world and the reward of the next). A well-known *ḥadīth* says that those who made the migration from Makkah to Madinah "for the sake of worldly benefit or for a woman" shall have that for which they migrated, implying that their reward for migrating will come in this life rather than in the Hereafter.

Yet there is no reason that this verse must be read only in the negative sense, and other commentators acknowledge that those who struggle sincerely for the sake of religion may have the

reward of both this world and the next (Z). See 2:201: *But among them are those who say, "Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and shield us from the punishment of the Fire!"* This verse is a common prayer offered by Muslims, often on a daily basis.

135 Establishing and upholding justice in society is a key concern of the Quran. God establishes justice by setting *the Balance* within creation itself (15:19; 55:7; 57:25), by commanding justice among human beings through revelation (7:29; 16:90; 42:17; 57:25), and by weighing deeds in a set balance on the Day of Judgment (21:47). In 3:18, God is described as *upholding justice* (*qāʾimᵃⁿ bi'l-qisṭ*), employing an Arabic phrase similar to the one used here and in v. 127 for the human effort to maintain justice. Thus as God commands justice, the believer is expected to do so as well. God is said to *love* those who are just (5:42; 49:9; 60:8), and those who slay the upholders of justice are placed on a par with those who deny God's signs and kill His prophets (3:21). Cf. 5:8, *O you who believe! Be steadfast for God, bearing witness to justice,* which presents something of a rearranged version of the statement in the present verse *be steadfast maintainers of justice, witnesses for God.* Taken together the two verses indicate that standing for God and for justice are deeply linked. Al-Ṭabarī rephrases the meaning of this part of the present verse as follows: "Uphold justice for [the sake of] God when you bear witness." Other commentators confirm that the real meaning of this verse is that one's testimony should never be for the sake of oneself or for another, but only for the sake of God (Bḍ, Z) and in justice; that is, truthful witnessing is a claim that God has over the human being. The Sufi Rūzbihān al-Baqlī says in his commentary, "The spirit of Oneness (*tawḥīd*) will not find root in a person's heart, so long as God has a claim upon him that he has not fulfilled."

The Quran requires the presence of witnesses for commercial transactions (2:282), the transfer of wealth to orphans upon maturity (4:6), and adjudicating serious criminal charges (4:15; 24:2–9). In order to judge between people "with justice," as God commands (4:58; 5:42), society has to depend upon people honestly and fully witnessing to the truth, without regard for the ultimate consequences of their truthful testimony, which is not in their hands. According to this verse, testimony should not be swayed either by self-interest (*though it be against yourselves*) or ties of kinship (*or [against] your parents or kinsfolk*). One should note that one has a duty to testify not only against others, but even against oneself, and that truthful witnessing takes precedence even over the kindness and deference the Quran asserts one owes to parents and kinsfolk. Given the command here to testify truthfully, even against kinsfolk, this part of the verse may also be addressed to the specific case of Ṭuᶜmah ibn Ubayriq and his clan, discussed in vv. 105–15 (Ṭ; see 4:105–7c; 4:112c; 4:113c).

Testimony should also not be swayed by the wealth or poverty of the parties in question. A witness might be moved to alter testimony in favor of a wealthy individual in order to gain favor or, conversely, in favor of a poorer individual out of sympathy (JJ). One reported occasion for this revelation is an incident in which the Prophet was inclined to rule in favor of a poor man, thinking him incapable of truly harming the wealthier man (Ṭ, W). But readers are reminded that *God is nearer unto both,* meaning that He is the ultimate caretaker of both (as in v. 130, *God will enrich both out of His Abundance*), and that it is His task to establish ultimate justice between the rich and the poor (Ṭ).

It is not people's prerogative to bend the laws to achieve what they may consider ultimately just; that would be *following* their *caprice.* In a similar vein, believers are warned elsewhere not to be swayed in judgment by either *hatred for a people* (5:8) or *pity* for the accused (24:2). True justice is served by simply bearing witness to what one knows objectively and directly, not by passing along hearsay. See 24:13, where it is said that those who accuse an innocent woman of indecency without bringing *four witnesses* are simply *liars in the Eyes of God.*

*That you may act justly* uses the verb *taᶜdilū,* which can mean either "to be just" or, somewhat paradoxically, "to deviate." The former meaning is likely here, as in the translation: *follow not your caprice, that you might act justly* (R). However, it might also mean either "follow not your caprice, lest you deviate [from the truth in your testimony]" (Bḍ, Z) or "follow not your caprice, lest you deviate [from justice]." All interpretations of this phrase, however, sum up the larger meaning of the verse, which is that one must not allow one's desires or predilections to cause one to deviate

you distort or turn away, truly God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (136) O you who believe! Believe in God and His Messenger, and the Book He sent down upon His Messenger, and the Book He sent down before. Whosoever does not believe in God and His angels and His Books and His messengers and the Last Day has wandered far astray. (137) Those who believe and then disbelieve, and then believe and then disbelieve, and then increase in disbelief, God will not

from the service of justice through truthful testimony. The verse ends with a reminder that God is *Aware*, should ~~any~~ *distort* testimony or *turn away* from giving testimony altogether, thereby concealing the truth (Ṭ).

136 This is one of two verses in the Quran (the other is 2:177) that articulates a list of required Muslim beliefs that closely matches the list contained in the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, where faith, or *īmān*, comprises belief in God, His angels, His messengers, His books, the Last Day, and the Divine Decree. The present verse begins with a positive command to believe in *God, His Messenger, the Book He sent down upon His Messenger* (i.e., the Quran), and *the Book He sent down before*. Although *Book* is used in the singular here, it refers to all previous revealed books, that is, to "scripture" used as a collective noun. After the positive command, a warning is issued against disbelieving in five specific things: *God, His angels, His Books* (all revealed scriptures, including the Quran), *His messengers* (all prophets, minor and major), and the *Last Day* (the Resurrection and Final Judgment). See 2:285, where in a similar list the "Last Day" is not mentioned, but the return to God is (*unto Thee is the journey's end*). Most commentators argue that a failure to believe in any one item on this list or a failure to believe in any one prophet or message is effectively a failure to believe in all of them (see vv. 150–51; R, Ṭ, Z); and since the existence of angels, messengers, and the Last Day is affirmed in scripture, a failure to believe in these things reflects a hypocritical, selective, or insufficient belief in scripture itself.

To the extent that only Muslims believed in the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad along with the other books and messengers, Muslims were sometimes considered "believers" in the fullest sense. Thus when the Quran refers to "believers," it is often, but not always, understood to specify Muslim believers. Most commentators view this verse as a command to Muslims to believe not only in the Quran, but also in all previous revealed scripture (Z). Since the verse addresses those who are already "believers," this specific list of required beliefs may be meant to reinforce, or better inform, their existing faith; alternately, the verse may be addressed to the hypocrites who claim belief (and so are addressed, satirically, as "O you who believe"), but whose faith is not complete or sincere (R).

Another interpretation, however, understands *O you who believe* as addressed specifically to Jews and Christians, insofar as these two groups believe in the previously revealed scriptures, the Torah and Gospel, respectively (R, Ṭ, Z). Even commentators who read the verse as primarily addressed to Muslims cite an occasion for the revelation in which a group of Madinan Jews came to the Prophet and declared that, although they believed in his message and the message of the Torah, they did not believe in the other scriptures and prophets. This verse then came down, commanding belief in all of them (R, Z). It is important to note that other verses clearly mention that there are Jews and Christians who believe in the Prophet and the Quran while remaining Jews and Christians (see 3:199 and commentary), thus indicating that such Jews and Christians should be considered believers by the standards of the present verse.

137 Following upon the articulation of required beliefs in the previous verse, this verse warns those who waver in their belief. By acknowledging the possibility of returning to belief after having apostatized, the verse indicates the possibility of communal (legal) acceptance of a former believer who leaves the community of faith, but then repents and seeks to reenter it.

forgive them nor guide them unto any way. (138) Give glad tidings to the hypocrites that for them awaits a painful punishment. (139) Those who take disbelievers as protectors instead of believers—do they seek might through them?

However, the verse also suggests that each time one falls away from belief, the possibility for a full return is diminished, as it leads to an "increase" in disbelief. For those who continue to waver in this way, "increasing" *in disbelief,* the Quran issues a rare warning that *God will not forgive them* and that they will be bereft of His Guidance.

Because the act of apostasy is mentioned three times before the warning is issued, some commentators have asserted that the repentance of an apostate from the faith should be accepted only three times. Most, however, argue that repentance is always accepted (Ṭ), even if continued acts of apostasy make full and lasting repentance unlikely, either because of the negative effect of repeated apostasy upon the soul (Z) or because such wavering indicates that belief was never firmly rooted in such a heart (R). The possibility of forgiveness is thus closed only to one who continues *increasing in disbelief* until death and dies in that state (R, Ṭ)—the state in which one dies being, for some, the true indicator of faith or lack thereof (R). The latter position is supported by vv. 145–46, where it is said that the hypocrites are in *the lowest depths of the Fire .... save those who repent and make amends,* Muʿtazilites and others argued that *God will not . . . guide them* meant that they would not be guided in the Hereafter to the paradisal Garden, that is, after their disbelief had been fully confirmed by their having died in this state (R, Ṭs) or, alternately, that He removes His Guidance from them in this life as a punishment (Ṭs, Ṭū). For Ashʿarites it is simply an assertion that God does not guide disbelievers, even in this life (R). The reference to "increasing" *in disbelief* is understood by Ashʿarite theologians as supporting their doctrinal assertion that there were degrees of both faith and disbelief (R). Contrary to the Muʿtazilites, Ashʿarites held that acts of obedience or sin increased one in faith or disbelief, respectively.

Some assert that the verse applies to Jews or Christians who, having believed in their scriptures, then manifest disbelief by refusing to accept prophets and scriptures that come after their own or by compromising their belief in their own scriptures (Ṭ); see 3:72. Early Shiite *tafsīr* traditions considered this to be a reference to Muslims who manifested belief during the lifetime of the Prophet, but later refused to accept the authority of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib—an authority that, for Shiites, was alluded to in the Quran and openly affirmed by the Prophet before his death (Qm). The most likely interpretation, however, is that it refers to the hypocrites in the Prophet's community who wavered in their belief (Ṭ). It is likelier that it applies to hypocrites, rather than Jews and Christians, since other verses of the Quran assert the possibility of salvation for those who are Jews and Christians (2:62; 5:69); so the failure of individual Jews and Christians to become Muslims would not itself seem to close off the possibility of their eventual salvation. Moreover, this verse is followed immediately by a lengthy discussion of the hypocrites in vv. 138–46, thus making the hypocrites the more likely referent.

138 Following the assertion of God's lack of forgiveness for those who waver in their belief and ultimately die in disbelief, this verse instructs the Prophet to *give glad tidings* (*bashshir*) to such hypocrites of the punishment that awaits them. *Glad tidings* is usually used to mean the good news of salvation the Prophet brings to the righteous believers, for the Quran elsewhere asserts that on the Day of Judgment, *there shall be no glad tidings for the guilty* (25:22). But, as here, the Quran occasionally uses this term in an ironic or mocking tone when warning of the fate of disbelievers (see 3:21; 9:3, 34; 31:7; 45:8; 84:24) or when mentioning the fact that, in the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs often reacted to the "glad tidings" of the birth of a daughter with grief and rage; see 16:59; 43:17.

139 The concept of protectorship (*walāyah*) was an important social principle in the tribal culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, denoting a bond of complete loyalty and mutual defense. In the Quran, the concept is powerfully invoked to

Truly might belongs to God altogether. (140)He has already sent down upon you in the Book that when you hear the signs of God being rejected and mocked, do not sit with them till they engage in some other discourse, or else you will surely be like them. Truly God will gather the hypocrites and the disbelievers in Hell all together— (141)those who wait upon you, and if a victory comes to you from

express religious, rather than tribal, association and alliance as well as power and authority. The believers are repeatedly reminded that God is their ultimate Protector (*Walī*), that the Prophet and their fellow believers are their only true protectors (*awliyāʾ*) in the human realm (see, e.g., 2:107, 257; 3:68, 122; 4:45; 5:55; 6:14, 127; 7:196; 8:72; 9:71, 116), while idolaters seek protection vainly from their idols (e.g., 2:257, 13:16) and disbelievers seek protection with Satan and each other (e.g., 7:30; 8:73; 16:100). The believers are repeatedly warned not to seek the protection of those outside their religious community, including Jews and Christians (3:28; 4:89, 144; 5:51, 57), or even their own family members, if they are not believers (9:23).

In the present verse, *those who take disbelievers as protectors instead of believers* are the hypocrites mentioned in the two preceding verses. In seeking strength from those outside the community of believers—that is, with the Jewish clans (R, Z) or with the idolaters (Ṭs)—they violate bonds of loyalty to the religious community of the believers, showing their perfidy and opportunism and manifesting their lack of trust in the sufficiency of God's protection. The verse mocks the idea of seeking strength or *might* (*ʿizzah*) through such alliances of protection, when *might belongs to God altogether.* See 63:8, where *might* (*ʿizzah*) belongs to God, the Messenger, and the believers; and 29:41: *The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a house. Truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house, if they but knew.*

**140** In the same vein as v. 139, this verse suggests that the sincerity of one's religious faith or even one's true religious identity is revealed not only by one's actions and words, but also by the character of those with whom one chooses to associate. It is not enough simply to avoid "rejecting" or "mocking" the *signs of God;* one must also refuse to sit passively among those who do, thereby lending silent support and tacit approval to their impious discourse (Z). Both in "seeking protection" with the disbelievers, mentioned in v. 139, and in sitting with those who mock the signs of God—here, likely meaning the Quranic message specifically—one shows oneself to be a hypocrite.

The verse indicates that God *has already sent down* a prohibition against sitting with people engaged in such discourse. This may be a reference to the general prohibition against associating with disbelievers indicated in v. 139 (Ṭ), but may also be a reference to the Makkan verse 6:68: *And when thou seest those who engage in vain discourse about Our signs, turn away from them till they engage in other discourse. And if Satan should cause thee to forget, then once thou hast remembered, sit not in the company of wrongdoing people.* To sit among such people is to *be like them.*

That God *will gather the hypocrites and the disbelievers in Hell all together* reinforces this same point about guilt through the choice of association: in choosing protectors and friends from among the disbelievers, the hypocrites have shown themselves to be disbelievers as well and share in their ultimate fate. People's religious character is manifested in the company they keep, and so, conversely, those who seek the company of the righteous can be assumed to be "like them" and perhaps also to be with them in the Hereafter; see 4:69–70c.

For al-Ṭabarī, this verse serves as a warning not to sit with people engaged in vain or immoral discourse of any kind. An early Shiite interpretation of this verse understood the *signs of God* that are *rejected and mocked* to be a reference to the Shiite Imams (Qm); although Shiites may not have always been in a position to challenge those who denigrated the Imams and their followers, they were not to remain in the company of those engaged in such discourse.

**141** The hypocrites reveal their hypocrisy, in large part, through their reluctance to join the

God, they say, "Were we not with you?" But if the disbelievers have some success, they say, "Did we not overwhelm you, and did we not protect you from the believers?" God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection, and God will not grant the disbelievers a way over the believers. (142) Verily the hypocrites seek to deceive God, but it is God Who deceives them. When they perform the prayer, they perform it idly and to be seen of men, and they remember God but

Muslims in their battles against the disbelievers and in their desire to share in the benefits of Muslim victories while avoiding the negative consequences of possible defeat (cf. vv. 72–73); in v. 139, a similar concern with self-preservation moves them to seek alliances of protection with those outside the Muslim community. The present verse, however, suggests not only that they are reluctant to assume the risks of battle, but that they are, in fact, in communication with the Muslims' enemies. When the Muslims are victorious, the hypocrites say to the Muslims, *Were we not with you?* in order to claim a share of the spoils (Ṭ). But when the Muslims are defeated, they approach the Muslims' enemies to claim that it was their own treacherous failure to join the battle that had helped undermine the Muslim effort, thus aiding the disbelievers in their victory over the Muslims, saying, *Did we not protect you from the believers?*

God denies the disbelievers *a way over the believers,* that is, a way to triumph over them or a proof against them, *on the Day of Resurrection.* Some, however, understand this as a promise that the believers, as a community, will not suffer ultimate defeat at the hands of the disbelievers in this world (IK, Q). On the basis of this last part of the verse, legal scholars held that a disbeliever (i.e., any non-Muslim) should not possess a Muslim slave—for such enslavement would clearly grant the disbeliever a "way over" the Muslim—and thus it was illegal to sell a Muslim slave to a disbeliever (IK). Should a slave embrace Islam while under the ownership of a disbeliever, the disbeliever is required to sell or free the slave; if the non-Muslim owner fails to do so before his death, the Muslim slave becomes his heir (Q).

**142** Cf. 2:9, where the hypocrites seek to deceive others, but deceive only themselves. Here *it is God Who deceives them,* in that He allows them to be protected by their hypocritical claims of belief in this life (Ṭ, Z). This leads them to assume, incorrectly, that their hypocrisy has gone undetected and that they will not be punished. Al-Suddī and other early commentators read this verse in connection with 57:13: *On the Day when men who are hypocrites and women who are hypocrites will say to those who believe, "Wait for us that we may borrow from your light," it will be said, "Turn back and seek a light!" Thereupon a wall with a gate will be set down between them, the inner side of which contains mercy, and on the outer side of which lies punishment* (see also 2:17). They thus assert that on the Day of Resurrection, the hypocrites will be given a light with which they will walk with the Muslims, just as they did in the life of the world, but then it will be suddenly snatched away from them and extinguished, and they will be left in darkness when they reach the "wall" that separates them from the believers (Ṭ, Z).

Their prayer is done *idly,* that is, without sincerity or the proper intention of drawing near to God (Ṭ) or else reluctantly and without hope of reward or fear of punishment from God (R, Z), but only *to be seen of men* and so gain social advantage by it. See 107:4–6, where the shallowness of praying only *to be seen* is demonstrated by the fact that such prayer is not accompanied by moral action; and v. 38, which criticizes those who *spend their wealth* (i.e., give charity) *to be seen of men.*

*They remember God but little* indicates that they do not avail themselves of the various means for remembering God that are an intrinsic part of faithful Muslim life. For example, they rarely (or only hypocritically) invoke or remember God through formulas such as "Praise be to God (*al-ḥamdu li'Llāh;* Ṭ, Z). Insofar as "remembering God" is a synonym for prayer itself, it is clear that *they remember God but little* in this way, because

little— (143) wavering between this [and that], being neither for one group nor for the other. Whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him. (144) O you who believe! Do not take the disbelievers as protectors instead of the believers. Do you wish to give God a clear warrant against you? (145) Surely the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire, and thou wilt not find for them any helper, (146) save those who repent and make amends, and hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to God. Those are with the believers,

they pray only in public settings, never when out of sight of others (R, Z). Moreover, even when praying in public, they may not recite the requisite quiet or silent invocations of God that are part of the prayer, but merely perform the outward motions and utterances (R).

143 According to al-Zamakhsharī, the hypocrites "waver" between "this and that"—that is, between faith and unbelief—under the influence of Satan and their own passions. However, the next line of this verse asserts the theologically difficult idea that it is God who *leads* certain people *astray;* and when He does so, they are helpless (see 2:7c). For such persons, the Quran says, there is no *way* (here; 4:88; 42:46), no guide (7:186; 13:33; 39:23, 36; 40:33), and no protector (18:17). The Muᶜtazilites generally interpreted such "misguidance" on God's part as the withdrawal of His "Divine Favor" (*luṭf*) and Guidance as a punishment for disobedience. Although the Ashᶜarites usually accepted this possibility as well, they also held that God may simply choose to mislead certain people (R). Some also asserted that verses such as this refer to God's "leading astray" in the Hereafter those whose worldly actions had condemned them (R). The many passages in this *sūrah* and elsewhere that criticize the hypocrites led al-Rāzī to assert that hypocrisy was a more evil state even than disbelief, a sentiment that seems to be in the same vein as the Biblical statement in Revelation 3:16: "Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." The idea that hypocrisy is worse than even disbelief is also apparently borne out by v. 145.

144 This verse repeats the criticism of those who would seek protectors outside the believing community. See 4:139 and commentary.

145 This verse supports the idea that hypocrisy is among the worst of human moral conditions, perhaps even worse than disbelief, since hypocrites are said to be *in the lowest depths of the Fire.* Some commentators argue that hypocrisy is indeed worse than disbelief, since it compounds a lack of belief with belittling Islam and deceiving the believers (Bd, R, Z). Moreover, their deceit allows them to act as spies for the disbelievers, compromising the Muslim cause from within and betraying the secrets of the Muslims to their enemies (R; see v. 141).

146 Even for hypocrites, the door to Divine Forgiveness remains open for *those who repent* of their hypocrisy and come sincerely to believe in God, His Messenger, and the Quran. They must also *make amends* by performing righteous acts and following the commands and prohibitions of the religion and *hold fast to God,* that is, to the covenant with God that all human beings have undertaken, according to the Quran, to recognize His Lordship (see 7:172 and commentary). Finally they are required to *devote their religion entirely to God,* that is, to do all of these things for God and not for any other purpose, hoping for His Reward and fearing His Punishment, and through a desire to draw near to Him, seeking "His Face" (Aj, Ṭ; see 2:272; 13:22; 92:20) or "His Good Pleasure" (R; 2:207, 265; 4:114). The explicit requirement that the former hypocrites *devote their religion entirely to God* is necessary, according to al-Ṭabrisī, because hypocrisy is a sin of the heart, and so full repentance from it requires a "repentance of the heart," for which merely changing one's outward actions is not enough. For those who truly repent in this way, they will be *with the believers* and receive their *reward,* not with the disbelievers (as in v. 140) or in the *lowest depths of the Fire* (as in v. 145).

and God will grant the believers a great reward. (147) Why should God punish you if you give thanks and believe? God is Thankful, Knowing. (148) God loves not that evil should be spoken of openly, save by one who has been wronged. God is Hearing, Knowing. (149) Whether you display a good deed openly or conceal it, or pardon an evil, truly God is Pardoning, Powerful. (150) Truly those who disbelieve in God and His messengers, and seek to make a distinction between God and His messengers, and say, "We believe in some and disbelieve in others," and seek to take a way between— (151) it is they who are truly disbelievers, and

147 In Arabic there is a semantic connection between repentance and forgiveness, both of which can be signified by the verb *tāba,* which literally means "to return." Repentance and forgiveness represent a mutual "turning" between two parties toward each other. The previous verse set out the conditions for the true repentance of the hypocrite, and in this verse there is a Divine relenting or turning away from the threatened punishment of the hypocrite. Also here a similar semantic reciprocity exists between the repentant hypocrite's act of "giving thanks" (using the verb *shakara*) and the Divine Attribute *Thankful* (*Shākir*), literally "the Thankful One," both derived from the same root. The audible reciprocity in the Arabic conveys a tone of mutual relenting and reconciliation after the dire warnings to the hypocrites in vv. 137–45.

148 Given that this verse follows upon a discussion of the repentance of hypocrites, some say that the *evil* that should not be *spoken of openly* is the former hypocrisy of the repentant hypocrite. Once hypocrites have repented, they should no longer be vilified or reminded of their previous hypocrisy (R). The verse also has a general application, however, for it reflects the principle in Islamic ethics that one should conceal the faults of others or even one's own, except, of course, when one is called upon to witness to a particular act (see v. 135). Evil should not *be spoken of openly,* so that the moral dignity of the individual and the wider community may be maintained.

Al-Rāzī gives as the occasion for the revelation of this verse, an incident in which Abū Bakr was verbally abused in a gathering with the Prophet present. Abū Bakr remained quiet for a while and then began to refute the man's claims. As he did this, the Prophet rose to leave. Abū Bakr asked the Prophet why he sat through the man's abuse of him, but left when Abū Bakr responded. The Prophet responded: "Verily an angel was answering on your behalf, but when you responded to him, the angel left and Satan came in, and I do not remain in a gathering once Satan comes." This verse was then revealed.

Despite Abū Bakr's case, the verse does make an exception for *one who has been wronged,* who may make open claims about the injustice suffered in order to seek justice or aid against the one who committed the injustice (T). Similarly, those who have been wronged are given a general right to defend themselves or retaliate against those who have wronged them (42:41). The invocation of the Divine Names *Hearing* and *Knowing* at the end of the verse serve to reassure that whether evil is spoken of openly or concealed, it is known to God (see 6:3; 21:110; 87:7).

149 After allowing one to speak openly of the wrong one has suffered at the hands of another, the Quran now urges one to *pardon an evil* that one has suffered and reminds readers that *Pardoning* is a Divine Attribute that one should seek to emulate (Z). In this verse, God is described as both *Pardoning* and *Powerful.* To pardon when one has the "power" to retaliate is the nobler moral option than pardoning when one has no such power (Q), and to pardon from a position of power approximates the Divine Attributes mentioned here.

150–51 In v. 136 and 2:285, faith is defined, in part, by a belief in God and all of His prophets and revealed books. The comprehensive nature of

We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. (152) But those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them—unto them He will give their rewards. God is Forgiving, Merciful. (153) The People of the Book ask thee to bring a book down upon them from Heaven; indeed, they asked a greater thing of Moses, for they said, "Show us God openly," whereupon the thunderbolt seized them for their wrongdoing. Then they took up the calf, even after clear proofs had come to them. Yet, We pardoned

belief according to Islam means that to be selective in the prophets and books one recognizes or to believe in God, but not in all His prophets and revelations is, to enter the realm of disbelief. Here the Quran warns against making such *a distinction between God and His messengers,* for those who truly believe in God will also follow His messengers. See 3:31, where the Prophet is instructed: *Say, "If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins."* Elsewhere the Quran indicates that one should not make such distinctions between or among the messengers themselves (2:136, 285; 3:84). Those who believe in God but not in His messengers or believe in some messengers but not others seek *a way between*—that is, a way between belief and disbelief (Z); but v. 151 states that such people are *truly disbelievers,* indicating that there is no path between belief and disbelief and that those who reject any essential element of belief are in the category of disbelievers (Z). Many commentators consider this to be a reference to the Jews and Christians who rejected the prophecy of Muhammad. As such, it marks a shift from the lengthy discussion of the hypocrites in vv. 137–47 to one about the People of the Book, which is the focus of the rest of the *sūrah.*

152 The threat of punishment for disbelievers who seek to make a distinction between belief in God and His prophets is followed here by a corresponding promise of reward for those who believe without making such distinctions. The reminder that God is *Forgiving, Merciful* is understood by some to be an indication that all believers will ultimately be forgiven their misdeeds in the next life; even if they may be punished for them for a time, their punishment will not be eternal (R, Ṭ).

153 The *People of the Book* here refers specifically to the Jews and, according to some reports, to certain Madinan Jewish leaders (Th, Z). Their request that the Prophet *bring a book down upon them from Heaven* as a proof of his prophethood is understood as a request that he bring an inscribed tablet similar to the one Moses brought (R, Ṭ, Z); see 28:48, where the Madinan Jews ask why the Prophet was not *given the like of that which was given to Moses.* See also 17:93, where unspecified disbelievers, likely the Makkan idolaters, assert that they will not believe in the Prophet until he brings down a book they *can read.* Some understand the request made of the Prophet in the present verse to be a request for a book or written document addressed exclusively to the Jews or one explicitly validating the prophethood of Muhammad (Ṭ). The Israelites' request to Moses, *Show us God openly,* is also recounted in 2:55, where they make the request explicitly as a condition of their belief in Moses' prophethood. In both accounts, it is understood that the request is made by the seventy leading Israelites whom Moses took as representatives to the covenant making at Sinai (R, Th, Z; cf. 7:155; Exodus 24), and in both God responds with a thunderbolt that, in 2:55–56, is said to have struck them dead, after which they were revived. Cf. 7:143, where Moses himself asks to see God, but is told *Thou shalt not see Me* and is instructed instead to look at the mountain.

In 2:260, Abraham also requests to be "shown" God's power of resurrection, and because he affirms that he does so within the context of sincere belief, the response is not a punishing thunderbolt; moreover, the request is granted. The cases of Abraham and Moses indicate that the human desire to see the Divine is not in itself blameworthy; rather, it depends on the intention with which the request is made. The Israelites' making and worshipping the calf and God's forgiveness thereof is

this and We gave Moses a manifest authority. (154) And We raised the Mount over them, at [the making of] their covenant, and We said to them, "Enter the gate, prostrating," and We said to them, "Do not transgress the Sabbath." And We made with them a solemn covenant. (155) Then for their breaking of their covenant, and their disbelieving in the signs of God, and their slaying of the prophets without right, and their saying, "Our hearts are uncircumcised,"—Nay! Rather, God has set a seal upon them for their disbelief, so they believe not, save a

mentioned elsewhere (2:51–54, 92–93), and fuller accounts of the incident are found in 7:148–56 and 20:86–97.

That *clear proofs had come to them* refers to their having been struck down upon their request to see God "openly," which should have made it clear to them that the God they must worship, unlike the calf they crafted for themselves, cannot be seen in visible form (Ṭ). *Clear proofs* can refer to the many miraculous acts performed by Moses, such as the parting of the sea (Q), although elsewhere these are referred to as *clear signs* (see 17:101; 28:36).

The *manifest authority* given to Moses may refer either to the proof of his truthfulness and the veracity of his prophethood (Q, Ṭ) or to the authority with which he was able to command the Israelites to repent and atone for having worshipped the calf (Z; see 2:54).

154 *The Mount* (*al-Ṭūr*) refers to Mt. Sinai here and wherever it is found in the Quran (2:63, 93; 19:52; 20:80; 28:29, 46; 52:1), although the full name "Mount Sinai" is given in two places (*Ṭūr Saynāʾ*, 23:20; *Ṭūr Sīnīn*, 95:2). The raising of the Mount over the Israelites is widely understood to refer to God's lifting of the mountain from its place and causing it to hover over the Israelites at the making of the covenant, as a sign warning them to make and/or keep the covenant (R; see also 2:63, 93). However, this image may simply be meant to convey their awe at the immensity of the mountain before them (see 2:63–64c). *Enter the gate, prostrating* refers to the command to enter the land that had been promised to the Israelites; see 2:58; 5:21–23; 7:161. The importance of the Israelites' keeping of the Sabbath and the severe consequences of breaking it are also mentioned in 2:65; 4:47; 7:163. The covenant between God and the Israelites is mentioned in many places (e.g., 2:40, 83–84; 5:12, 70); see also the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

155 The Israelites' *breaking of their covenant* is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran; see 2:83–85; 5:13. Their *disbelieving in the signs of God* refers to the Quranic claim that they did not accept all of the messages and prophets sent to them (Ṭ), including Jesus. *Slaying of the prophets without right* is a claim made against the Israelites in several places; see 2:61, 91; 3:181–83; 5:70. For Biblical references to the slaying of minor prophets by the Israelites, cf. Jeremiah 2:30; 26:20–23; Luke 13:34.

*Our hearts are uncircumcised* also appears in 2:88 and is meant to express, metaphorically, their deliberate lack of receptivity to the prophetic messages sent to them (Ṭ); cf. 41:5. *Uncircumcised* translates *ghulf*, which can also mean "enwrapped" (Ṭ), and as this term appears only in the context of a claim by Israelites or Jews who are unfaithful to their covenant, it also carries an additional spiritual resonance. As Israelites or Jews, they were "circumcised" bodily and outwardly, as a mark of their membership in the covenant community. Their claim, then, that their "hearts" are uncircumcised suggests that their acceptance of the covenant, like their circumcision, was only outward and had not penetrated into their hearts. Cf. Leviticus 26:41 and Jeremiah 9:26, where disobedient Israelites are referred to as having "uncircumcised hearts." Their claim that their hearts are uncircumcised is met with the more emphatic assertion that God Himself *has set a seal upon* their hearts.

This concept of a *seal* placed upon people's eyes, ears, or hearts—that is, upon the principal human faculties of learning and understanding—is

few— (156) and for their disbelief, and their uttering against Mary a tremendous calumny, (157) and for their saying, "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God"—though they did not slay him; nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so unto them. Those who differ concerning him are in doubt thereof. They have no knowledge of it, but follow only conjecture; they slew

invoked in many other places (see, e.g., 2:7; 7:100–101; 9:93; 16:108; 30:59; 63:3). The idea that a seal has been placed as a barrier to religious understanding has been understood by some in the predestinarian sense of an inherent insensitivity or nonreceptivity toward revelation. Many Islamic theologians, however, understand this *seal* upon hearts as being a Divinely imposed punishment in response to moral transgression and disobedience (see, e.g., 10:74; 2:7c). Here the seal is expressly imposed as a punishment for their disbelief (*kufr*); their breaking of the covenant and the other transgressions mentioned in this verse and in vv. 156–57 are the reason for God's forbidding *them certain good things that had been made lawful unto them* in v. 160. The assertion that *they believe not, save a few* may also be rendered, "they believe not, save a little"—meaning that they believe only in some of the prophets and messages (R, Ṭ)—and is found elsewhere in connection with the People of the Book (e.g., 2:88; 4:46).

156 The *tremendous calumny against Mary* refers to the implied accusation of indecency against her when she, as an unmarried woman (in the Islamic tradition), brought forth her son Jesus (Z); see commentary on 19:27–28. Al-Qushayrī identifies Mary as a "friend [of God]" or "saint" (*waliyyah,* fem. of *walī*) and indicates that two kinds of people will be chastised for their attitude toward such saintly persons: those who exaggerate concerning their station, such as, in Mary's case, those who considered her to be Divine (see 5:116); and those who denounce them—for example, those who accused Mary of indecency rather than recognizing the miracle of her son's birth (Qu).

157 Although the Quran addresses and criticizes the Christian belief in the Trinity (v. 171; 5:73) and the divinity of Jesus (5:17, 72, 116; 9:31), this is the only passage that addresses the belief in Christ's crucifixion and death. It does not come in the context of a critique of Christian belief, however, but rather as part of a lengthy passage criticizing historical incidents of Jewish unfaithfulness to their covenant. It is important to note that here the critique is not aimed directly at the belief in Christ's crucifixion and death, but rather at the Jews' claim to have killed him. Their claim, seen as their way of mocking and dismissing Jesus' prophethood (Z), is understood in the context of the Quranic assertion that the Israelites or Jews rejected some of the prophets that had been sent to them (in v. 155 and elsewhere).

Although the verse only directly criticizes a Jewish claim to have killed and crucified Jesus, it is widely understood in the Islamic tradition as meaning that Jesus was not crucified or killed at all; it only *appeared so unto them,* that is, to the Jews as well as to most of Jesus' followers. Various accounts are given to explain how it *appeared so unto them.* According to some commentators, when the Jewish authorities came to arrest Jesus, he was among a group of his followers. They did not know who among them was Jesus, because a Divine ruse had made them all appear the same, and one of Jesus' followers was thus taken and killed in his place (IK, Ṭ, Z). Some accounts indicate that one of Jesus' followers in particular volunteered to sacrifice himself by assuming Jesus' likeness (IK, Ṭ, Z). According to one account, this follower was crucified (i.e., publicly exposed) after being killed (IK). This follows the order mentioned in the verse itself: *they did not slay him; nor did they crucify him,* and in general, Muslims understood crucifixion as a punishment carried out after death in most, but not all, cases.

Another account from Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. early second/eighth century), an early commentator who brought his knowledge of Judeo-Christian teachings to bear on Quranic interpretation, claims that it was one of Jesus' perfidious followers (presumably Judas) who, after attempting to betray Jesus, was made to assume Jesus' appearance and was killed in his stead. (IK, Ṭ, Z). Because most accounts indicate that it

him not for certain. (158) But God raised him up unto Himself, and God is Mighty, Wise. (159) There is not one of the People of the Book, but will surely believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a

appeared not only to the Jews, but also to all or most Christians, that Jesus had been killed, al-Ṭabarī argues that no blame or accusations of dishonesty can be leveled at Christians who believe in Jesus' death and crucifixion.

The idea that someone was killed in Jesus' stead after having assumed his likeness, voluntarily or otherwise, is found widely throughout the commentary tradition. A notable exception to this is al-Rāzī, who finds the idea that God would perpetrate such a deception in the physical realm, particularly as it relates to individual identity, unacceptable. If we cannot rely on our senses to identify individuals, then the proper application of Islamic Law, which is dependent upon physical witnessing and upon the certainty of people's identities in matters of marriage and so forth, would be called into doubt. It is worth noting, however, that there are other Quranic accounts of providential Divine "deception," such as when God is said to have altered the believers' perception of the enemy army at Badr, so that they would not be discouraged by the enemy's greater size (see 8:43 and commentary).

*Those who differ concerning him* may refer specifically to the Jews, who were unsure whether they had really killed Jesus (Ṭ, Z) and so *follow only conjecture* regarding the matter. Others, however, consider this to refer to the Christians who differ over Jesus' nature—divine or human—and thus on the issue of whether he was crucified only in his "human" aspect, but not in his "divinity" (Q). *Concerning him* can also be read as "concerning it," meaning the entire affair of the crucifixion, a reading preferred by al-Zamakhsharī. *They slew him not for certain* may refer to Jesus, indicating certainty that he was not slain, in contrast to the "doubts" and "conjectures" of those who *differ concerning him*. This last line of the verse, however, may be read idiomatically to mean "they did not kill [their doubt] about the matter"; that is, they remained in a state of doubt and conjecture (M, Q).

158 See also 3:55 and commentary. The present verse, along with 3:55, represents the source of the Islamic belief that Jesus, as in the Christian tradition, ascended directly to God. *Raised up* here translates *rafaʿa*, which literally means "to raise," rather than *baʿatha*, which is used elsewhere to mean "to resurrect" after death. The verse is thus understood as referring to Jesus' direct ascension from the earthly realm to the Presence of God without the intervening event of death. The Quran is clear elsewhere, however, that Jesus is not Divine (5:116). Logically, then, he must share in human mortality. Islamic tradition holds Jesus will return near the end times to fight the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*) and will thereafter eventually die and be resurrected with the rest of humanity. Cf. 19:33, where Jesus affirms his future death and "resurrection," saying, *Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive* (*ubʿathu ḥayyan*, from *baʿatha*).

The Gospel account indicates that Jesus' followers witnessed, or at least believed in, his death, resurrection, and ascension. However, because the Quran seems to present death and direct ascension in contradistinction to each other when it says, *They slew him not for certain. But God raised him up unto Himself* (vv. 157–58), some Islamic accounts understand these as representing two separate beliefs about Jesus' fate. Ibn Kathīr, for example, indicates that some of Jesus' followers witnessed his ascension and so were aware that he had not died, while others witnessed his "seeming" death and so believed the Jewish account that they had slain him. It should be noted, however, that the idea of resurrection even in this life, rather than between this world and the next, is not unacceptable from the Quranic perspective; see, for example, 2:259, where God caused a man *to die for a hundred years, then raised him up* (*baʿathahu*, referring to resurrection, not ascension).

159 Some commentators understand this verse to mean that all of the *People of the Book*, although here primarily Jews, will *believe in* Jesus before Jesus' own death, that is, after he returns near the end of time to fight the Antichrist or Dajjāl (see 4:158c; IK, Ṭ, Z). Another interpretation holds that the verse means that all of the

witness against them. (160) And for the wrongdoing among those who are Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been made lawful unto them, and for their turning many from the way of God, (161) and for their taking usury, though they had been forbidden it, and for their consuming men's wealth falsely. And We have prepared for the disbelievers among them a painful punishment. (162) But those among them who are firmly rooted in knowledge, and the believers, believing in that which was sent down unto thee and in that which was sent down before thee, those who perform the prayer and give the alms and believe in God and the Last Day—unto them shall We grant a great

People of the Book would believe in Jesus before their own deaths (IK, Ṭ, Z), although this seems to be a far less plausible explanation, for most Jews die without having accepted the prophethood of Jesus. Some commentators add that their "belief in him" immediately before death will be of no avail to them, just as Pharaoh's declaration of belief in "the God of the Children of Israel" as he was drowning brought him no benefit (see 10:90–91). On the Day of Resurrection, Jesus will serve as a *witness against* all of the People of the Book. That is, he will bear witness that he delivered the Divine message entrusted to him and that in doing so he affirmed his own status as a human messenger of God (Ṭ), thus refuting both the claims of his divinity made by Christians and the rejection of his prophethood by the Jews.

160 After the discussion of the fate of Jesus and his ascension to God, refuting the Jews' claim to having killed him, this verse resumes the thread of criticism toward the Jews begun in v. 155. For all of these offenses, the Quran asserts that the Jews were forbidden *certain good things* (*ṭayyibāt*) *that had been made lawful to them. Ṭayyibāt* is usually employed to mean earthly provisions granted by God and refers explicitly to food in several places; see 2:172; 5:5; 20:81; 23:51; as well as 2:57; 7:160, where it is used in reference to the manna and quails God provides the Israelites in the desert. The present verse refers to the prohibition of certain foods for the Jews; see also 3:93: *All food was lawful unto the Children of Israel, save what Israel had forbidden for himself, before the Torah was sent down;* and 6:146, where they are forbidden clawed animals and the fat of oxen and sheep.

161 Engaging in *ribā* (usually rendered *usury*) is strongly denounced and forbidden in several verses (2:275–79; 3:130; 30:39, where it is contrasted with the spiritual profit one gains through charity), and the present verse indicates that this prohibition had been ordained for the Jews as well (as it is in Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36–37), but that they did not adhere to it. For the practices that constituted their *consuming men's wealth falsely,* see 4:29–30c. See also 9:34, where certain Jewish and Christian religious authorities (*rabbis and monks*) are said to *consume the wealth of people falsely.* As a result of the forbidden financial practices of which some Jews are here accused, some Islamic legal scholars questioned whether engaging in commerce with the Jews was permissible; however, both the Quran (see 5:5) and the known practices (*sunnah*) of the Prophet indicate that such commerce is lawful (Q). At the end of the verse, it is specifically the *disbelievers among* the Jews (i.e., those who neglected or broke their covenant in the ways mentioned in vv. 155–61) who will face a *painful punishment* in the Hereafter.

162 After the discussion of "disbelieving" Jews in vv. 155–61, this verse mentions those among the Jews who are *firmly rooted in knowledge* (on this phrase, see 3:7c), which means to possess certain religious knowledge (Qu). This epithet was reserved for those who had knowledge of both legal and theological issues (R); for those who combined knowledge of the teachings and religious duties of

reward. (163) Verily We have revealed unto thee, as We revealed unto Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and unto David We gave the Psalms, (164) and messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee;

the religion with their implementation in practice (R); or for those who possessed inner knowledge. If *and the believers* is understood to be a further description of the righteous among the Jews, it indicates that it is possible for believing and pious Jews to remain Jews, even as they accept both their own scripture and *that which has been sent down unto* Muhammad, and in fact to receive *a great reward* in the Hereafter for their belief and good deeds. Many commentators mention that, historically, this verse refers to certain Madinan Jewish scholars, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, who accepted the validity of Muhammad's prophethood (R, Ṭs, Z).

The *believers* here can also be read as a specific reference to Muslim believers (R, Ṭ, Ṭs,). In the latter case, *those firmly rooted in knowledge* both among the Jews and the believing Muslims shall be granted *a great reward*. Because *those who perform the prayer* (*muqīmīna al-ṣalāh*) is in the accusative, unlike the other descriptors here, some commentators suggest the verse should be translated "the believers, believing in that which has been sent down unto thee and in that which has been sent before thee [and in] those who perform the prayer," in which "those who perform the prayer" is a reference to the angels (Ṭ) or the prophets (R, Z) and thus one of the objects of belief (Ṭ). Since performing the prayer and giving alms are joined together so frequently in the Quran, however, it seems unlikely that they were meant to be separated in this way, and some commentators note that the shift from the nominative to the accusative in a list can be used to indicate praise for the characteristic thus distinguished by the shift in case (Ṭs, Z).

163 Many similar verses present lists of God's messengers through whom He conveyed revelation, all of which Muslims are to accept (e.g., 2:136; 3:84; 6:83–89; 19:49–58). In this particular context, some see it as a response to those asking the Prophet to *bring a book down upon them from Heaven* (v. 153), refuting their claim that God had not sent a book to anyone after Moses (Ṭ, Z). The *Psalms* given to David translates *al-Zabūr*, which, when used in the singular and in the definite, and certainly when it is connected explicitly with David, is generally assumed to refer to the Psalms (17:55; 21:105), some of which Judeo-Christian tradition considers to be of Davidic authorship. When this term is used in the plural (*zubur*) and not associated with David as a prophet, it is rendered simply as "scriptures" (e.g., 3:184; 16:44; 26:196). This is the first place in the Quranic text where the Biblical figures of Job and Jonah are identified as prophets; for more on Job, see 6:84; 21:83–84; 38:41–44; and for Jonah, see 6:86; 10:98; 37:139–48; 68:48–50.

164 Although the Quran contains mention of twenty-six prophets, Islamic tradition holds that there were many more, in fact, 124,000. Here, as in 40:78, the Quran explicitly indicates that there are prophets not mentioned in the Quran, whose stories God *has not recounted* to Muhammad or his followers, thus alluding to the universal reality of revelation and keeping the door open for sacred figures of other religious traditions, such as the Buddha and Confucius, to be considered prophets to their religious communities, as they were later by some Muslim scholars familiar with these other religious traditions. This verse mentions the distinction given to Moses as a prophet in Islam: God spoke to him directly (see also 2:253, where being spoken to by God is cited as a particular distinction given to some prophets). This is the basis of Moses' prophetic title in Islamic tradition, *Kalīm Allāh* (one who speaks with God). That is also why some Muslims refer to Jews as *kalīmīs*. In Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10, this ability to speak directly with God is also said to set Moses apart from other prophets of Israel.

and unto Moses God spoke directly, (165) messengers as bearers of glad tidings and as warners, that mankind might have no argument against God after the messengers. And God is Mighty, Wise. (166) But God Himself bears witness to that which He has sent down unto thee—He sent it down with His Knowledge—and the angels bear witness. And God suffices as a Witness. (167) Verily those who disbelieve and who turn from the way of God have certainly wandered far astray. (168) Verily those who disbelieve and do wrong, God will not forgive them, nor will He guide them to any path, (169) save the path of Hell, to abide therein forever; and that is easy for God. (170) O mankind! The Messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord; so believe! It is better for you. But if you disbelieve, unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, and God is Knowing, Wise. (171) O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor utter anything concerning God save the truth. Verily the

165 The two functions of the prophets as *bearers of glad tidings* and as *warners* are mentioned together throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:213; 6:48; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 18:56; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 48:8). The Quran indicates that God sends guidance and warning to all peoples (13:7; 35:24); and although it recounts many examples of God destroying a people for their wrongdoing (e.g., 7:59–99), it also asserts that He does this only after a prophet has come to them with a warning (26:208; 28:59). In the present verse, the messengers are sent so *that mankind might have no argument against God,* that is, no claim that they were not properly guided and warned, so that they might seek to avoid punishment for their evil actions (cf. 5:19; 20:134).

166 Cf. 3:18, where God *bears witness,* along with the angels and the *possessors of knowledge,* to God's Oneness.

167–69 The Quran repeatedly chastises those who *turn from the way of God,* which may refer to placing intellectual or physical obstacles in the way of those who would seek to follow Divine Guidance, and so deliberately attempting to lead them astray, or else turning away from the way of God oneself. Although the Quran emphasizes God's infinite capacity for forgiveness and the universality of His Guidance in the form of prophetic messages (see 4:165c), it also indicates that He will not forgive certain sins. Here, in v. 168, those who *disbelieve and do wrong*—that is, by turning from the way of God (v. 167), among other things—are deprived both of God's Forgiveness and His Guidance. See vv. 48, 116, where it is said God will not forgive *that any partner be ascribed unto Him* (*shirk*). See also v. 137, which indicates that God will not forgive those who waver between belief and disbelief and gradually *increase in disbelief;* 9:79–80, where He does not forgive the disbelievers who *ridicule* the believers; and 47:34, where He does not forgive those who disbelieve and *turn from the way of God.* Even in these cases as well as the present one, God's Forgiveness remains open to sincerely repentant disbelievers or wrongdoers (R, Z).

170 Here people are urged to believe because it is *better* for them. That is, one believes for the benefit of oneself, not for God, who possesses *whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth* and so is neither enriched nor diminished by the belief or disbelief of His creatures.

171 From the Quranic perspective, if the error of the Jews is in their failure to recognize certain prophets who had been sent to them, the error of

the Christians is to *exaggerate* in their religion by ascribing divine status to their prophet, Jesus (R). In this verse, then, *O People of the Book* is addressed primarily to Christians. The verse asserts the Quranic view of Jesus as *only a messenger of God,* meaning a human messenger like Muhammad and the prophets who preceded him (see also 5:75). The understanding of Jesus as a *messenger of God* is consistent with several Gospel verses that state that Jesus was sent by the Father (see, e.g., John 5:23; 5:30; 5:36–37; 6:39; 6:44; 6:57; 8:16; 8:18; 8:29; 8:42; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:21; 17:25; 20:21.) Yet, the Quran ascribes unique distinctions to certain prophets, which then become the basis of their honorific titles in Islamic tradition. For example, God is said to have taken Abraham *for a friend* (v. 125), the basis of his honorific title *Khalīl Allāh* (the intimate friend of God), and to have spoken to Moses "directly" (v. 164), the basis of his honorific title *Kalīm Allāh* (one who speaks with God).

In the present verse, the uniqueness of Jesus among the messengers is affirmed in several ways, including his title *Rūḥ Allāh* ("Spirit of God"). He is referred to here and in certain places, however, as the *Messiah* (*al-Masīḥ*), a term that in Arabic is understood to refer to his having been purified by God of sin (Ṭ). This is not unrelated to the concept of being "anointed," the root meaning of the word in Hebrew.

He is also identified as God's *Word* (see also 3:45; 19:34), an idea that has clear resonance with the Gospel tradition, where Jesus is identified as the "Word" of God (see John 1). Christian and Islamic tradition, however, derive different theological conclusions from this appellation. In the Islamic context, the identification of Jesus as God's *Word* does not preclude or overshadow his function as the bringer of the Gospel, which, like the Torah and the Quran, represents God's Word and message to humanity. Some commentators interpret *His Word* here as the tidings Mary received of his miraculous conception in her womb or as an allusion to the Divine Creative Command *Be!* by which Christ was formed in Mary's womb (see 3:45, 59; R, Ṭ). However, while all created beings are brought into existence through God's Word, Christ alone is specifically identified as "a Word from God." Some might argue, therefore, that Jesus, by virtue of being identified as God's *Word,* somehow participates (uniquely) in the Divine Creative Command, although this is not the traditional Islamic understanding of Jesus' identification as *a Word from Him* (3:45).

The miracle of Jesus' virgin birth is also alluded to here in that he is identified as God's Word *committed to Mary* (*alqāhā ilā Maryam*), which could also be rendered "cast upon Mary." Cf. 66:12, where it is said that God *breathed* His Spirit into Mary. Consistent with the implicit representation in 66:12 of Jesus as God's "Spirit" breathed into Mary, in the present verse Jesus is also identified as *a Spirit* from God. Cf. 2:87, 253; 5:110, where Jesus is *strengthened . . . with the Holy Spirit.* It is on this basis that Jesus is given the honorific title of "Spirit of God" (*Rūḥ Allāh*) in the Islamic tradition. Some commentators, however, understand Jesus' description as *a Spirit from* God metaphorically and consider *Spirit* here to be either a reference to Jesus' purity or a metaphor for God's Mercy (*raḥmah;* R).

In addition to reaffirming the full humanity of Jesus, the present verse commands Christians to *say not "Three."* This is understood as a command to abandon the doctrine of God as Trinity. Here they are merely told to *refrain* from asserting this doctrine, as it is *better* for them. In 5:73, Christians who call God "Three" are more seriously criticized, but this verse is embedded in a larger discussion that seems to be addressing those Christians who took not only Jesus, but also his mother, Mary, to be divine (see 5:73c). In both the present verse and 5:73, however, the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as three "persons," or hypostases, "within" the One God is not explicitly referenced, and the criticism seems directed at those who assert the existence of three distinct "gods," an idea that Christians themselves reject.

Al-Rāzī is aware that Christians do not believe in three separate gods, but rather in three qualities (*ṣifāt*) in a single Divine Essence, but argues that the claim that the Divine Reality inhered in the human form of Christ belies the idea that the trinitarian concept ultimately posits a single Divine Essence. He also contrasts the Christian doctrine of aspects, or hypostases, within a single Divine Essence with the Islamic doctrine of God's Names and Qualities, which, unlike the Christian hypostases, are not understood as aspects of God that can be seen as multiple, distinct entities (R).

Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word, which He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not "Three." Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one God; Glory be to Him that He should have a child. Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and God suffices as a Guardian. (172) The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God; nor would the angels brought nigh. Whosoever disdains His service, and is arrogant, He will gather them unto Himself all together. (173) As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, He shall pay them their rewards in full, and will increase them from His Bounty. But as for those who are disdainful and arrogant, He will punish them with a painful punishment, and they will find no protector or

Despite these strong criticisms of Christian trinitarian doctrine as well as the implication through juxtaposition in 5:72–73 that Christian beliefs in the divinity of Jesus, and in God as *the third of three* can be understood as a kind of *shirk* (ascribing partners unto God), Islamic Law never considered Christians to be "idolaters" (*mushrikūn*) and accepted Christians' own assertions of monotheistic belief, maintaining the clear distinction the Quran itself makes between idolaters (*mushrikūn*) and the People of the Book.

Having addressed the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus and in the trinitarian concept of God, the present verse concludes by refuting the Christian belief in the divine sonship of Jesus: *Glory be to Him that He should have a child.* For other rejections of the notion of Jesus' divine "sonship" or of God's having offspring of any sort, see 2:116; 6:100–101; 9:30; 10:68; 16:57; 17:111; 43:16.

172–73 Here again the exclusive humanity of Jesus is asserted: *The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant* (*ʿabd*) *of God.* The Arabic term for "servant" (*ʿabd*) can also mean "slave" and describes the relationship of all human beings, ultimately, to God; it also designates those pious persons who willingly choose to submit their will to the Will of God. Jesus is God's *servant,* of course, in both senses. To reject or *disdain* servanthood in relation to God is nothing but unjustifiable arrogance, and all those *who are disdainful and arrogant* will receive a *painful punishment.* Some commentators view the assertion of Jesus' "servanthood" in relation to God as a response to a statement made by the Christian delegation from Najrān in their discussion with the Prophet. The delegates reportedly took exception to the Islamic claim that Jesus was a (mere) "servant" (or as they may well have understood, "slave") and "messenger" of God and considered it an insult to Jesus. This verse asserts in response that rejecting or disdaining "servanthood" is a form of arrogance in relation to the Divine that Jesus, and even the angels, would never display (R).

The Najrān delegation, likely under the influence of Abyssinian Monophysite doctrine, may well have held that Jesus' divinity completely overwhelmed his humanity, and so would have been particularly averse to such a description of Jesus. However, it should be noted that orthodox Christian doctrine maintains the full humanity of Christ as a theological necessity, even if it holds that this humanity is inseparable, mysteriously, from his divinity. Although the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all of the same essence and thus equally divine in orthodox Christian doctrine, the Father is the cause and the principle of the divine nature, which is in the Son and in the Spirit, and thus has some degree of superiority.

helper for themselves apart from God. (174) O mankind! Verily there has come unto you a proof from your Lord. And We have sent down unto you a clear light. (175) As for those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, He will cause them to enter into His Mercy and Bounty, and will guide them unto Himself upon a straight path. (176) They seek a ruling from thee. Say, "God gives you a ruling concerning the one without a direct heir. If a man dies having no child, but he has a sister, then unto her belongs half of what he leaves, and he will inherit from her if she has no child. If there be two sisters, then unto them belongs two-thirds of what he leaves. If there be brothers and sisters, then unto the male a share equal to that of two females." Thus does God make [this] clear unto you, lest you should go astray. And God is Knower of all things.

174–75 These verses conclude the discussion of the People of the Book and their beliefs, implying that the Quran has now brought them convincing *proof* (*burhān,* which denotes an irrefutable argument) and a *clear light* through which they may now understand the importance of being faithful to their covenant with God and the truth about their own prophets and revelations.

176 This final verse revisits the issue of inheritance addressed in vv. 11–12, and particularly the case, mentioned in v. 12, of the one who dies without direct heir (*kalālah*), that is, without a father or son (or, in some interpretations, without a parent or child). V. 12 says one-third of the estate of such a person is to be divided among the siblings of the deceased, but does not differentiate the shares according to gender or number of the siblings. The present verse increases the portion of the estate to be divided among the siblings and delineates the division among the siblings more specifically. Thus if the deceased has but a single sister, she will inherit fully half of his estate; two (or more) sisters will inherit two-thirds. In the case of there being both brothers and sisters, two-thirds of the estate is to be shared between them, with a brother receiving twice the share of a sister, following the general principle that a male relative inherits twice the share of a similarly related female relative. In all of these cases, the remainder of the estate is to be either divided up among more distant relatives (uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces) or rendered to the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) of the Islamic state (Ṭū).

The revisiting of this issue was, according to one report, occasioned by a complaint from the early Companion Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh (d. 78/697); according to the earlier ruling, his nine sisters would have had to share a mere third of his estate (Q, Ṭ, W). The early commentators differed over how the inheritance was to be divided if the deceased left a daughter as well as a sister, but no son. Some understood this to mean that if a person died leaving a daughter and a sister, each received half of the estate. Ibn ʿAbbās and the Twelver Shiite legal school, however, held that the presence of a surviving daughter, like that of a son, meant that the deceased was not technically a *kalālah* (one dying without a parent or child to inherit from him) and so precluded any inheritance for a sister (Q, Ṭ, Ṭū). According to several reports from the Prophet's Companion al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzib, this was the final verse of the Quran revealed to the Prophet, although other verses, such as 5:3 and particularly 2:281, are more widely attested as the final Quranic verse (JJ, Q, Ṭ). Other verses sometimes considered to be the final passage of the Quranic revelation include 9:128–29 and 110:1–3.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 5

# The Table Spread

## *al-Mā'idah*

A Madinan *sūrah, al-Mā'idah* contains verses that are considered to be among the last that the Prophet Muhammad received, and all of its verses were revealed after the conquest of Makkah in 8/630 (Z). The *sūrah* itself is one of the last complete *sūrah*s revealed to the Prophet (Q), along with *al-Fatḥ* (*Sūrah* 48), although *al-Naṣr* (*Sūrah* 110) is widely believed to have been the last (IK). The triumphant line in v. 3, *This day I have perfected for you your religion, and completed My Blessing upon you, and have approved for you as religion, Submission (Islam),* is one of several individual verses variously reported to be the last that the Prophet received before his death (the others are 2:281; 4:176; 9:128–29; 110:1–3). This verse and several others in the *sūrah* were reportedly revealed in the course of the Prophet's parting sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage in 10/632 (Q, Z). According to several reports, the Prophet received this *sūrah* while he was riding on a camel. The camel could not bear the weight of its descent, however, and the Prophet had to dismount (IK). The *sūrah* takes its name from the miraculous *table spread with food* (*mā'idah*) that God sends down to Jesus and his apostles at their request in vv. 112–15.

The opening section of the *sūrah,* vv. 1–11, contains various ritual and legal prescriptions concerning the pilgrimage, lawful foods, intermarriage, and ritual purity interspersed with reminders of God's blessings upon the Muslim community and of the necessity of fulfilling the covenant with Him. The tone of these opening lines is religiously triumphant and hopeful and, with its repeated mention of God's blessings and His covenant, bears some comparison with Moses' final sermon as recounted in the Biblical book of Deuteronomy.

The content of this *sūrah* is concerned primarily with two major issues: The first is the establishment of a series of ritual and legal rulings considered to be definitive by virtue of the late revelation of the *sūrah.* Some assert that no ruling in this *sūrah* was ever abrogated (Q), although some claim that parts of v. 2 and v. 106 have been abrogated (IK). The Prophet is reported to have said, "O people! *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* is among the last that came down, so whatever it makes licit, you should consider licit, and whatever it makes forbidden, you

should consider forbidden" (Q), and a similar statement is attributed to the Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah (IK, Q). Its rulings include prescriptions concerning the pilgrimage or *ḥajj* (vv. 1–2, 95–97), dietary law (vv. 3–5, 87–88), wine and gambling (vv. 90–91), and making bequests (vv. 106–8). This *sūrah* also establishes the legal punishments (*ḥudūd;* sing. *ḥadd*) for *those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and endeavor to work corruption upon the earth* (v. 33), understood to pertain to exceedingly violent crimes against the community, including armed robbery and aggression (vv. 33–34), as well as theft (vv. 38–39). The "call to prayer" is also mentioned exclusively in v. 58, although it does not refer to it by its technical term, *adhān*.

The second and larger issue with which the *sūrah* is concerned is the definitive establishment of relations between the Muslim community and the People of the Book. On the one hand, this *sūrah* contains much criticism of Jews and Christians. They are accused of breaking or forgetting their covenants with God (vv. 12–14); Christians are chastised for exaggerated claims of divinity for Jesus and his mother (vv. 17–18, 116); and the Israelites' refusal to obey Moses' command to fight is recounted (vv. 20–26). At the same time, there is a discussion of the normalizing of relations between Muslims and the People of the Book that also includes the establishment of some boundaries. Thus in v. 5, Muslims are allowed to eat their food and to marry women from among them, thereby allowing for substantial social relations between Muslims and the People of the Book. But in vv. 51–57, political boundaries are established between these communities, as Muslims are warned not to take Jews and Christians as protectors to the exclusion of members of the Muslim religious community (although Islamic Law does allow treaties of alliance between the Muslim state, or states, and Christian or Jewish political entities). Vv. 41–47 concern the ability of the Prophet, and by extension the authority of the Islamic state, to render judgment in legal disputes among the People of the Book; they also establish that these two communities have their own "law and way" (v. 48) and that they should judge themselves according to their own scriptures (vv. 43–47). Vv. 82–85 present a beautiful portrait of Christian devotion, and the very end of the *sūrah* recounts Jesus' extraordinary miracles (vv. 110–15)—including the unique story of the *table spread* (*al-mā'idah*) and its descent from Heaven—but concludes with a warning about those Christians who disbelieved thereafter. The *sūrah* ends with a final statement of God's complete Sovereignty and Power over all things.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O you who believe! Fulfill your pacts. Lawful unto you are grazing cattle, save that which is recited unto you, hunted game being unlawful when you are in the state of pilgrim sanctity. Truly God decrees whatsoever He desires. (2) O you who believe! Do not violate the sanctity of the rituals of God, nor the sacred month, nor the offerings, nor the garlands, nor those bound for the Sacred House, seeking the Bounty of their Lord, and [His] Contentment. But when you have left the state of pilgrim sanctity, then hunt for game. And let not hatred for a people who once turned you away from the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgress. Help one another toward piety and reverence; do not help one another

1 This verse is widely understood as being addressed to Muslims in general; it enjoins them to *fulfill* their *pacts,* meaning to complete in full the religious commitments they have made to God (cf. 2:40; 3:76; 13:20; 16:91; 33:23). Some early commentators, however, considered it to be addressed to the People of the Book as well, or to the People of the Book specifically, since they are all enjoined to fulfill their pacts or their covenant with God (see 2:40). The prominent early *Ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741) claims to have seen a letter that the Prophet sent to the Christians of Najrān containing the first four verses of this *sūrah* (Q), indicating that they were addressed to Christian believers as well. Some have suggested the *pacts* here may also refer to the pacts of alliance and protection made among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times (Q, Ṭ).

However, as this is the opening verse of a *sūrah* largely concerned with Muslim religious obligations as well as the covenantal obligations of all the People of the Book, it most likely refers to fulfilling religious pacts with God generally (Ṭ), which may also include the proper conclusion of marital, commercial, and treaty agreements, which are governed by religious Law (Q; see 2:177; 6:152, where this phrase is used in relation to religiously prescribed social transactions).

*Grazing cattle* (*bahīmat al-anᶜām*) designates camels, cows, and sheep (Ṭ), grazing animals commonly eaten in Arabia, and, according to some commentators, includes all forms of such animals, even their young and those in the womb when the mother is slaughtered (Ṭ). It may also include wild grazing animals, such as deer (Ṭ), although others argue these animals fall under the rules governing hunted animals (Q). The exception, *save that which is recited unto you* (see also 22:30), refers to carrion, the blood of the lawful animals (Ṭ), any animal over which the Name of God has not been mentioned, and any animal that has been slaughtered according to idolatrous rites (vv. 3–4; 6:118–19, 121, 145) or been killed in an unacceptable manner (see v. 3). The flesh of swine is also forbidden (v. 3), but is not considered to be among the exceptions to lawful grazing cattle, specifically, as swine are not "grazing" animals (Ṭ).

This *sūrah,* revealed partly in the context of the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage (in 10/632), contains several passages related to the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). Thus the verse also mentions the ban on hunting game while performing the pilgrimage, which requires a special state of purity (*iḥrām*) that prohibits hunting or slaughtering animals, with the exception of sea creatures (see 5:95–96).

2 This verse is one of several that give Islamic endorsement to various sacred elements and rituals associated with Makkah and the pilgrimage to it that were already part of the pre-Islamic practices of the Arabs (see also v. 97; 2:196–203; 22:26–36). One should not violate or breach the *sanctity of the rituals* (*shaᶜāʾir*) *of God. Shaᶜāʾir*

can mean either "rituals" or "ritual places." The verse is understood as an injunction to recognize all the sacred rites and places associated with the pilgrimage (Ṭ, Z), to avoid all things prohibited in a state of pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām;* Ṭ), and to fulfill all the elements of the pilgrimage ritual (Q, Ṭ). Although some suggest that the prohibition against violating the *rituals* (*sha'ā'ir*) *of God* relates to following all Divine commands and prohibitions in general (Ṭ), and in later Islamic usage *sha'ā'ir* can refer to other sacred rites, the Quran employs *sha'ā'ir* exclusively in connection with the Makkan pilgrimage, denoting various rites and sacred places associated with it; see 2:158 (where the term refers specifically to the sacred hills of Ṣafā and Marwah); 22:32, 36. The sanctity of the precincts of Makkah, and especially the Sacred Mosque, constituted of the Ka'bah and the *ḥaram* that surrounds it, was observed by refraining from violence or bloodshed in this area, which was recognized as a protected sanctuary (see 3:97c), although 2:191 allows fighting in the sacred precinct if the Makkans initiate hostilities there.

In addition to the spatial sanctity of these places, the verse mentions the temporal sanctity of the *sacred month.* Some say that the reference to the *sacred month* in the singular here denotes all four sacred months during which there was traditionally an abstention from violence in the pre-Islamic period: Rajab, Dhu'l-Qa'dah, Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, and Muḥarram, the seventh, eleventh, twelfth, and first months, respectively, on the lunar Arab (and also later the Islamic) calendar (Q, R). The Quran here and elsewhere (see 2:217; 9:36) upholds the sanctity of these months in the Islamic context as well. During the years of successive battles between the Madinan Muslims and the Makkan idolaters, the Quran allowed for fighting during these months under certain conditions (see 2:194, 217). Some consider the sanctity of these months to be abrogated (at least in relation to fighting idolaters) by 9:5, which enjoined Muslims, *Slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them.* But in some of the last verses revealed, including the present verse, v. 97, and 9:36, as well as in an address given by the Prophet during his Farewell Pilgrimage (IK), the sanctity of these months is upheld. Some consider the *sacred month* in the present verse to refer specifically to Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, the month in which the major pilgrimage is performed (Z); while others suggest that it may mean Rajab (R, Ṭ) or Dhu'l-Qa'dah, specifically (Ṭ).

The verse then forbids specifically harming or destroying the *offerings* (the livestock set aside to be ritually slaughtered at the conclusion of the pilgrimage; see also 2:196; 5:97; 48:25) or failing to observe their inviolate status as sacrificial offerings, symbolized by the *garlands* traditionally placed around the necks of these animals (see also v. 97). Such garlands were reportedly used during the pre-Islamic pilgrimage as well, and their use was considered to have been originally an Abrahamic practice (Q).

Finally, one must allow *those bound for the Sacred House* (i.e., pilgrims to the Ka'bah) to travel in safety and peace. According to some, this verse was revealed after the conquest of Makkah, but before the revelation of 9:1–28, which banned the idolaters from the Ka'bah pilgrimage. During this brief interim, the idolaters were not prohibited from performing the major or minor pilgrimage to the Ka'bah. One report claims that this verse was revealed in relation to a man who had once come to Madinah from Yamāmah feigning interest in embracing Islam, but who later left without making a religious commitment. On his way out of Madinah, he led away some camels belonging to the Madinan Muslims. After the conquest of Makkah, but before idolaters had been banned from the pilgrimage, some Muslims saw this same man coming to make the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, leading the stolen camels with garlands around their necks, indicating that they had been dedicated for sacrifice at the Ka'bah. When they recognized him and the stolen camels, they questioned whether to allow him to proceed or not, and this verse was revealed, indicating that they were not to interfere with the man or the sacrificial camels (Q, Ṭ, W). After the revelation of 9:1–28, however, the idolaters were no longer afforded the protections of the sacred months or pilgrim status (IK, Q); this represents a clear example of *naskh* (abrogation), where one Quranic verse abrogates the legal ruling (but not the text) of another verse. The universal nature of the protections of the sacred months and pilgrim status implied in this verse were therefore considered abrogated, insofar as they no longer pertained to idolaters (Ṭ).

*Those bound for the Sacred House* are described as seeking both *the Bounty of their Lord, and [His] Contentment,* indicating that people may make

toward sin and enmity. And reverence God. Truly God is severe in retribution. (3) Forbidden unto you are carrion and blood, the flesh of swine and that which has been offered to other than God, that which has been strangled or beaten to death, that which has been killed by falling or has been gored to death, that which has been mangled by beasts of prey—save that which you may purify—and that which is sacrificed on stone altars, and that which you allot with divining arrows; that is iniquity. This day those who disbelieve have despaired of your religion. So fear them not, but fear Me! This day I have perfected for you your religion, and completed My Blessing upon you, and have approved for you as religion, Submission (*Islām*). But whosoever is compelled by hunger, without

the *ḥajj* hoping both for worldly gain through trade or commerce conducted in the process and for the spiritual purpose of pleasing God and being rewarded accordingly (Ṭ). Those *people who once turned* the believers *away from the Sacred Mosque* are the former Makkan idolaters, who had driven the Muslims from their homes in Makkah and had thwarted the Muslims' attempt to perform the lesser pilgrimage (*ʿumrah*) to the Sacred Mosque in 6/628, during the height of the struggle between the Madinan Muslims and the Makkan idolaters (Ṭ, 48:25; see also 2:114; 8:34; 22:25 for criticism of those who bar others from the *mosques of God* or the *Sacred Mosque,* specifically). These former Makkan idolaters had gone from being the sworn enemies of the Muslim community to being its newest members in a matter of days, and the believers are warned not to allow any lingering ill will or *hatred* for them to lead them to *transgress* the rights of the new converts or (in 5:8) *to be unjust* in their dealings with them.

The Prophet made this point emphatically in his own treatment of the new Makkan converts. Shortly after Makkah had fallen to the Muslims and the Makkans embraced Islam en masse after having fought the Muslims for years, the Prophet led the Muslims, including these new converts, into battle against an aggressive tribe to the south of Makkah. When the battle was won, the Prophet made the extraordinary gesture of giving all of the considerable spoils of this battle exclusively to the new Makkan Muslims, to assure them of their full standing in the Muslim community and to alleviate any lingering resentments they might have borne toward the Muslims.

3 According to most commentators, this verse was revealed as the Prophet was delivering his Farewell Sermon on Mt. ʿArafāt, which occurred on a Friday during his final pilgrimage (Q, Ṭ; W). For this reason and because of its reference to the "perfection of the religion," it is one of several verses thought to be among the last the Prophet received (the others are 2:281; 4:176; 9:128–29; 110:1–3). A minor opinion expressed by Mujāhid, however, held that it was revealed at the time of the conquest of Makkah (Q).

The prohibition that this verse places on certain foods is similar to what is found in several other verses (2:173; 6:118–19, 145; 16:115) in that it prohibits animals already found dead (*carrion*), the blood, even of licit animals, *the flesh of swine,* and meat that has been consecrated or sacrificed in the name of some being other than God. The present verse is likely the last of the food prohibition verses to be revealed because it provides more detail than earlier verses about the modes of death that prohibit an animal from being consumed. This verse establishes explicit prohibition on meat that has been killed by strangulation, whether deliberate, as reportedly practiced by some idolaters (Ṭ), or accidental (Q, Ṭ). It is also illicit to eat animals that have been beaten to death, a practice reportedly used by Arab idolaters in pre-Islamic times (Q). Similar prohibitions apply also

to hunted game. For example, a *ḥadīth* states that if one hits an animal with a blunt arrow, which kills it without piercing it, the animal is considered "beaten to death" and may not be eaten (Q). The verse similarly prohibits eating animals that have died from a high fall, whether accidental or deliberately caused (Q), or that have been *gored to death*. Animals killed and partially eaten by other animals are also not legitimate to eat.

An exception to all these cases is made for *that which you may purify* (*dhakkaytum*, from *dhakkā*), meaning in this case an animal that one might properly slaughter before its death. Thus an animal that has been injured by any of the means mentioned above, but that one is able to properly slaughter before it has died from its injuries, is licit to eat (Q, Ṭ). The exception does not apply to the cases of *carrion* or the *flesh of swine*, which are prohibited absolutely (Ṭ). The verb *dhakkā*, which can be a synonym for the verb "to sacrifice" (*dhabaḥa*), used in the next phrase, comes from a root meaning "fragrant," "delicious," or "pure." Some have suggested that its connection to ritual slaughtering is that the meat of an animal slaughtered in this way becomes fragrant and pleasing to eat, since with the blood drained it dries quickly; it may also be related to the idea that the meat of the animal becomes purified thereby (Ṭ).

Proper ritual slaughtering in Islamic dietary law requires that the animal's throat be slit, preferably severing the jugular vein, in order to kill it quickly and cause the least suffering, and the blood must be allowed to drain out. One must mention the Name of God over the animal and face it in the direction of the canonical prayer (*qiblah*; Q). Additionally, the animal should be treated with kindness: the killing should not be preceded by a violent struggle, the animal should be well rested, and it should be killed with a sharp knife, so that it causes the least pain (Q). One should also turn one's face away from the animal when slaughtering it and remain aware that it is only by God's permission that one may kill and eat the animal (Q). All of these practices have the effect of removing the slaughterer's sense of absolute power over the animal and of maintaining the comfort and dignity of the animal to the extent possible.

For hunted game, the Name of God should be pronounced before launching the weapon or unleashing the dog intended to hunt the game, and the game must be killed in a manner that causes blood to flow. Finally, the reported idolatrous practices of sacrificing animals *on stone altars* (*ʿalā nuṣub*)—or alternately, "to idols," since *nuṣub* can also mean "idols"—or dividing the portions with *divining arrows* likewise make the meat illicit to eat. Cf. 5:90, where "divining arrows" are prohibited along with other idolatrous practices (see also 5:90c). *That is iniquity* may refer particularly to this last practice (Q), but more likely refers to any transgression of the limits established in this verse (Q, Ṭ).

*This day those who disbelieve have despaired of your religion* means that on the day this verse was revealed (according to most, on the Day of ʿArafah during the Prophet's final pilgrimage) the disbelievers have lost all hope of turning the Muslims away from their faith (Q, Ṭ). *Fear them not, but fear Me* is also found in 2:150; 3:175; 5:44 (variant). The "perfection" of the religion and the "completion" of blessing are widely understood as referring either to the fact that the Prophet's pilgrimage to Makkah established the rites and procedures for the final Muslim ritual obligation, the *ḥajj*, or to the completion of the Quranic revelation, although not all agree that this was the last verse to be revealed. Some claim that no other ritual or legal rulings were revealed to the Prophet after this day (Ṭ, Ṭū, Z), although others assert that additional verses containing legal, but not ritual, prescriptions were revealed after this verse (Q).

According to some early Shiite traditions, this verse was reportedly revealed at the site of Ghadīr Khumm in Juḥfah, where the Prophet and the rest of the pilgrims had halted on their return journey to Madinah after the final pilgrimage. At this site, the Prophet reportedly declared, "For whomever I am his master (*mawlā*), ʿAlī is [also] his master (*mawlā*)." Both Sunni and Shiite sources record this event, but it holds special significance for Shiites, who understand the Prophet's statement on this occasion to have been a direct nomination of ʿAlī as spiritual and political leader of the Muslim community after the Prophet, an interpretation not accepted by Sunnis. According to these Twelver Shiite traditions, the "perfection of religion" and "completion of blessing" in this verse are thus said to refer to the establishment of spiritual authority (*walāyah/wilāyah* or *imāmah*) in the line of ʿAlī (Qm, Ṭū). Some Shiite traditions, however, place both the Prophet's statement regarding ʿAlī and this verse at the time of

inclining toward sin, then surely God is Forgiving, Merciful. ④ They ask thee what is lawful unto them. Say, "Lawful unto you are all good things." And as for the hunting animals you have taught, teaching them from that which God has taught you, eat of what they catch for you, and mention the Name of God

the Prophet's Farewell Sermon at ʿArafah, rather than at the site of Ghadīr Khumm on the return trip to Madinah.

The "perfection of religion" and "completion of blessing" may also refer to the victory over the idolaters and idolatry and their decisive banishment from the pilgrimage (Ṭ, Z). *Approved for you as religion, Submission (Islām)* could also be rendered, "chosen for you as religion, Submission (Islam)." Here, *Islām* is widely considered to be used in the confessional sense of those who follow the religion revealed in the Quran through the Prophet Muhammad, rather than in the universal sense of submission to God that the terms *islām* and *muslim* have elsewhere in the Quran (see, e.g., 2:131; 3:19, 85; and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions"). According to a report in al-Ṭabarī, however, *islām* here indicates the full submission of one's heart to the principle of Divine Oneness (*tawḥīd*) and represents a level higher than merely the verbal affirmation of this truth.

The end of the verse returns to the issue of lawful food, reminding those who are compelled by hunger to violate the laws prescribed for the proper killing and consumption of meat, but intend no sin by it, that God is *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward them. Similar exemptions for those compelled in exceptional circumstances to consume unlawful meat can be found in all major verses dealing with dietary law (see 2:173; 6:119, 145; 16:115). For a general exemption for those facing religious compulsion, see 16:106.

4 Here and in v. 5, the Quran mentions the lawfulness of the many *good things* (*ṭayyibāt*), most specifically food, that God has provided for the believers, and elsewhere they are enjoined to partake of these things (16:114) and to be grateful for them (8:26). The freedom to enjoy *all good things,* however, is tied to notions of Divine favor and the spiritual purity of a religious community throughout the Quran. After the manna and quails were sent to Moses and the Israelites in the desert, they were instructed, *Eat of the good things We have provided you* (2:57; 20:81), and in 3:93 the Quran states, *All food was lawful unto the Children of Israel, save what Israel had forbidden for himself, before the Torah was sent down.* As a response to the "wrongdoing" of the Israelites, however, this changed, and certain things that had been lawful for them were made unlawful (4:160; 7:160).

Jesus, who is said by the Quran to have brought a message of spiritual renewal for the Israelites and to have confirmed the Torah, is thus also said to have come *to make lawful unto* them *part of that which was forbidden unto* them (3:50); and the Prophet Muhammad is similarly said to have come to make *good things lawful* for "them," which, in context, seems to refer to the Jews, although it also applies to Muslims. Although the Quran criticizes those who consume "unlawful things" (5:42, 62–63), it also criticizes those who deem "unlawful" what God has made lawful (5:87; 7:32; 10:59; 16:116), thus restricting God's favor and provision without warrant. Insofar as such arbitrary restrictions are attributed to the Arabian idolaters, they may be understood as a sign of the spiritual decadence of a religious community.

This verse allows the use of dogs or other animals and birds, such as falcons, in hunting licit game. Some Islamic traditions suggest that dogs are unclean, but this verse explicitly allows keeping dogs trained for hunting and, by extension, those that provided protection or other valuable services to human beings; it is thus understood that in such cases their unclean status does not apply (Ṭ, W). *Teaching them from that which God has taught you* refers to teaching them to obey human command and to catch prey without eating from it (JJ, Ṭ). The prey that hunting animals catch is licit to eat, so long as one has pronounced the Name of God before releasing the hunting animal or over the prey that has been caught, if it is

over it. And reverence God; truly God is swift in reckoning! (5) This day, all good things are made lawful unto you. The food of those who have been given the Book is lawful unto you, and your food is lawful unto them. And likewise the chaste women of the believers, and the chaste women of those who were given the Book before you, when you have given them their bridewealth as married women, not as fornicators, nor as paramours. And whosoever rejects belief, his deeds have come to naught, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the

still alive. However, if the prey has been caught by a wild or unknown animal or if the hunting animal has eaten part of the prey, then it is not licit to eat it, either because it indicates that the animal has not been properly trained (Ṭ), as required by this verse, or because it indicates that the animal is considered to have caught it for itself. Some say, however, that if the hunting animal has consumed some of the animal, but one reaches it before the prey has died, and can thus mention the Name of God over it and slaughter it properly, then it is licit according to the exception established in v. 3 (Ṭ).

5 The statement that the lawfulness of all good things is established on *this day* echoes the statements in v. 3, *this day those who disbelieve have despaired or your religion,* and *this day I have perfected for you your religion.* It similarly carries the triumphal tone of the full establishment of the Islamic community and its laws and rites and implicitly links the lawfulness of *all good things* for them to the Divine favor and approval for the community in v. 3. Some assert that *this day* refers not to the day the verse was revealed, but to the era of Islam itself (Q). Although various idolatrous practices related to killing and consuming meat were prohibited in v. 3, the present verse explicitly permits Muslims to eat of the food of the People of the Book—understood by most to mean the meat slaughtered by Jews and Christians specifically here—clearly distinguishing the practices of the latter from those of the idolaters. A notable exception to this interpretation is found in the early Shiite commentary tradition, which considered *the food of those who have been given the Book* to refer to vegetables, grains, or other foods that did not require ritual slaughtering (Qm, Ṭū). Yet, most reports interpret the license to eat the food of the People of the Book rather broadly; some argue that even food that has been presented as an offering to a church (Ṭ) or slaughtered in the name of the Messiah (Q) is licit. Some early Companions, however, including ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and ʿĀ'ishah, held that if one heard a Jew or Christian slaughtering an animal in the name of the something other than God, one should not eat it (Q), since 6:121 commands: *And eat not of that over which the Name of God has not been invoked* (Q).

The status of the People of the Book is further distinguished from that of the idolaters with regard to marriage. The Quran explicitly forbids marrying idolaters (2:221; 60:10–11), but this verse allows intermarriage with the People of the Book, suggesting the possibility of extensive social relations between Muslims and members of these religious communities. *Chaste women* translates *muḥṣanāt,* which may mean either "chaste women" or "free women," and the term has been interpreted differently in this context. When it is interpreted to mean "chaste," it is understood to refer to the woman's present status, not necessarily to her past actions, for women who had been unchaste but then repented regained their "chaste" status and were eligible for marriage (Ṭ). According to several reports, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb warned that once a woman had repented of such actions, those past actions were not to be brought up in future proposals for marriage (Ṭ). Some commentators understand *chaste women of those who were given the Book* to mean "free women of those who were given the Book" and argue that Muslim men may marry only free Jewish and Christian women, since the Quran only grants explicit permission to marry believing (i.e., Muslim) slave women (2:221; 4:25; Ṭ). When Muslim men marry women from the People of

losers. (6) O you who believe! When you rise to perform the prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of major ritual impurity, then purify yourselves. But if you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you has come from satisfying a call of nature, or you have touched women, and you find no water, then resort to clean earth, and wipe therewith your faces and your hands. God desires not to place a burden upon you, but He desires to purify you, and to

the Book, they must marry them properly according to Islamic Law, giving them *their bridewealth* and not taking them *as fornicators*—those with whom one commits open acts of fornication—or *as paramours*—those with whom one secretly engages in illicit sexual relations (see 4:25c, where the same conditions apply to marrying believing slave women). This prohibition does not include the case of *mutʿah,* a form of temporary marriage allowable under Shiite law and accepted by at least some Sunni jurists.

Despite the license Muslim men are given to marry Jewish and Christian (and according to some, Zoroastrian) women, some questioned the advisability of the practice when there were sufficient numbers of Muslim women to marry. Twelver Shiite tradition usually discouraged marrying Jewish or Christian women, except in cases of an absence of Muslim marriage partners or when such women were taken as temporary, not permanent, wives (Ṭū), although the practice nevertheless exists among Shiites (for a discussion of temporary marriage and the Shiite perspective on it, see 4:24c).

Some early commentators questioned whether the license to eat the food of the Jews and Christians and to marry their women was limited to those Jews and Christians who followed their own religious practices properly or applied more broadly to all those who resided within the Islamic state. Most commentators, however, interpreted this to apply to all Jews and Christians (Q, Ṭ). Although other religious communities, such as Zoroastrians, had protected status under Islamic rule, they did not always enjoy the same religious standing as Jews and Christians under Islamic Law. Although some Islamic scholars considered them to be among the People of the Book, many did not; for the latter they were simply a protected religious community. The permission granted here to eat the food and marry the women of *those who have been given the Book* is therefore widely considered to apply only to Jews and Christians, although some Muslim scholars embraced a broader definition of "People of the Book" that would also include Zoroastrians or other non-Abrahamic religions.

The verse concludes with the assertion that *whosoever rejects belief, his deeds have come to naught,* reflecting the Islamic theological principle that in the absence of proper belief good deeds have no reward in the next life (cf. 2:217; 3:21–22; 6:88; 7:147; 9:17; 18:105; 33:19; 39:65).

**6** This verse describes the three ways in which Muslims perform ablutions to purify themselves ritually before prayer. The first and most common manner of ablution described here is the *wuḍūʾ*, which is required in cases of minor ritual impurity caused by various forms of bodily discharge or by having slept or otherwise lost consciousness. All schools of law consider the *wuḍūʾ* obligatory before the five daily canonical prayers as well as prior to performing other prayers, such as the funeral prayer or supererogatory prayers. The schools of law are also unanimous in recommending that one perform the *wuḍūʾ* prior to reciting the Quran or *Ḥadīth,* entering a mosque, making the call to prayer (*adhān*), eating, and sleeping; upon rising; and after speaking angry or immoral words. The Shāfiʿī school also recommends the *wuḍūʾ* after bleeding, eating slaughtered meat, visiting tombs, or carrying the dead.

*When you rise to perform the prayer, wash* might seem to indicate that one must make the ablution anew whenever one comes to prayer, regardless of one's existing state of ritual purity,

although Islamic Law requires it only when one is in a state of ritual impurity. Many commentators explain that when this verse was revealed, it required a new ablution before every prayer, regardless of one's state of purity; after the conquest of Makkah, however, the Prophet performed a single ablution before the noon prayer and went on to pray subsequent prayers without renewing his ablution. This was thus taken as an abrogation of the previous requirement of renewing one's ablutions before each prayer (Q, Ṭ). On the basis of this Prophetic precedent, one was required to renew ablutions only after losing one's state of ritual impurity or awaking from sleep, although renewing one's ablution before each prayer remains a meritorious act (Ṭ).

The *wuḍū'*, based on this verse and interpreted according to Prophetic practice, is generally understood to entail washing the face, including rinsing the nostrils and the mouth; washing the hands and arms to just above the elbow; wiping the head, including the ears; and washing or wiping the feet up to the ankles. In addition to the specific acts mentioned in the verse, the Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, Ḥanbalī, and Twelver Shiite (Ja'farī) schools of law also required that the *wuḍū'* be preceded by a statement of intention (*niyyah*) and that washing of the various bodily parts be done in immediate succession. The Shāfi'ī, Ḥanbalī, and Ja'farī schools also require that the various parts be washed in the order that they are mentioned in the Quranic verse, and the Mālikī school requires that the areas be rubbed, rather than merely having water poured over them. Some commentators, such as al-Qurṭubī, also held that every performance of *wuḍū'* must include all of these steps, in the order they are presented in the verse.

The commentators debated whether one needed to "wash" the feet or merely "wipe" them, since *your feet up to the ankles* seems to be the direct object of the immediately preceding verb, *wipe*. Many commentators preferred this reading, including Ibn 'Abbās and other Companions as well as Twelver Shiite commentators (Ṭs). Others, however, argued that *and wipe your heads* was a self-contained phrase, while the phrase *your feet up to your ankles* was an object governed by the more distant verb *wash*. A report from the Companion Anas ibn Mālik states that "wiping" the feet is what the verse requires, but "washing" is the Prophet's *Sunnah* (Q, Ṭ). The two opinions are sometimes reconciled by arguing that, although the literal meaning of the verse is that one must wipe one's feet, it is "washing" that is really meant (Q, Ṭ). Some less common reports claim that the Prophet had merely wiped his sandals in the course of his ablutions, giving rise to the minority opinion that one needed only to "wipe the shoes" to complete this final part of the ablution. The major Sunni schools of law generally require washing the feet on the basis of the predominant Prophetic *Sunnah* and the consensus of the community (Q), but wiping the shoes is accepted in the Shiite Ja'farī school and sometimes practiced in cold winter months among Sunni Muslims as well.

The second form of ablution indicated in this verse is the *ghusl*, which is required in the case of *major ritual impurity*, such as that caused by menstruation, sexual intercourse, seminal discharge, and according to some, touching a dead body. This requires taking a full bath or shower in which all body parts are washed in a ritual manner.

Finally, the third manner of purification mentioned here, a practice known as *tayammum*, applies when illness or a lack of water makes performing ablutions with water unhealthy or impossible. In such cases, Muslims may ritually purify themselves by wiping their faces and hands with *clean earth* (for more on this practice see 4:43 and commentary). *God desires not to place a burden upon* those for whom performing a full ablution with water would present a hardship or impossibility and thus ordains this alternative form of purification (*tayammum*) under certain circumstances. The idea that God ordains some flexibility in ritual obligations for the benefit of those experiencing hardship is found elsewhere in the Quran (see, e.g., 2:185, 280).

*Complete His Blessing* echoes v. 3, suggesting that both the purification through ablution and the easing of this requirement in certain circumstances are indicative of God's favor toward the Islamic community. Although the ablutions detailed in this verse are means of ritual, rather than directly moral, purification, several *aḥādīth* link the performance of the ablution and the removal of sins (Q, Ṭ). The Prophet said, "Whosoever performs ablution, and does it in a beautiful way, his sins shall leave his body, even from under his fingernails"; and a well-known *ḥadīth* states that purity is "half of faith" (Q).

complete His Blessing upon you, that haply you may give thanks. (7) And remember God's Blessing upon you, and His covenant by which He bound you, when you said, "We hear and we obey." And reverence God. Truly God knows what lies within breasts. (8) O you who believe! Be steadfast for God, bearing witness to justice, and let not hatred for a people lead you to be unjust. Be just; that is nearer to reverence. And reverence God. Surely God is Aware of whatso-

7 *God's Blessing* on the Muslim community is invoked here, as it is in vv. 3, 6, and 11, tying these verses together as a collective and triumphal statement of special Divine favor revealed toward the end of the Prophet's life and mission. Al-Rāzī asserts that to *remember God's Blessing* is not necessarily a command meant to spur a new recollection of these blessings after a time when they were forgotten, but rather a call to remember and be thankful for these blessings always, lest the future success and prosperity of the community accustom Muslims to ease and lead them to forget the Divine source of the blessings.

The community is also called to remember *His covenant by which He bound* them. Most consider this covenant to refer collectively to the various pacts of allegiance (*bayʿah*) that the community had made with the Prophet: the pacts concluded with the future Emigrants and Helpers to obey the Prophet and defend and support the Muslim community just prior to the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah in 1/622; the renewal of that pledge of allegiance (*bayʿah*) on the outskirts of Makkah during the community's unsuccessful attempt to make pilgrimage and in the midst of tense treaty negotiations with the Makkan idolaters at Ḥudaybiyah in 6/628; and any individual pledge (*bayʿah*) made to the Prophet to obey him and follow his guidance (R, Ṭ, Z). All such pledges to obey the Prophet can be considered a covenant with God (*His covenant* in this verse) in light of the Quranic assertion that whoever obeys the Prophet obeys God (4:80) and the Quranic statement addressed to the Prophet regarding the pact at Ḥudaybiyah: *Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands* (48:10; R).

A minor tradition, primarily associated with Mujāhid, interprets *His covenant* here as a reference to the pretemporal covenant and testimony given by all human beings (or "children of Adam") that they recognize God as their Lord (7:172; R, Ṭ). Some prominent commentators cast doubt on this interpretation by noting that the verse is not addressed generally to the children of Adam, but to the Muslim community specifically (R), and that this discussion is followed in v. 12 by a contrasting account of the Israelites' failure to keep their covenant with God, indicating that here the reference is to a covenant with the Muslim community exclusively (Ṭ; see also the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions"). The idea that God knows one's inner thoughts and intentions is found throughout the Quran, and the final warning given here, that *God knows what lies within breasts,* is repeated in 3:119, 154; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13. This warning can be understood as a reminder not to break the covenant either outwardly or inwardly and secretly, for God knows and holds one accountable for what *lies within breasts* (R).

8 The believers are commanded to *be steadfast for God, bearing witness to justice,* which echoes, in inverted form, the injunction in 4:135: *Be steadfast maintainers of justice, witnesses for God.* In both verses, and especially in their juxtaposition, a fundamental connection is established between standing for God—that is, bearing witness to His Oneness and His Lordship (R)—and standing for justice. Both verses also assert that in standing for God and for justice one should not be influenced by human considerations, such as loyalty to family, questions of social status (4:135), or hatred and enmity (here). Cf. v. 2, where the believers are similarly warned not to let *hatred for a people* lead them to transgress; transgressing the limits set by God is one definition of injustice (R). To

ever you do. (9) To those who believe and perform righteous deeds, God has promised forgiveness and a great reward. (10) And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, they shall be the inhabitants of Hellfire. (11) O you who believe! Remember God's Blessing upon you, when a people were prepared to stretch forth their hands against you, but He withheld their hands from you. Reverence God, and in God let the believers trust. (12) God had made a covenant with the Children of Israel, and We raised among them twelve chieftains. And God said, "I am with you!" Surely, if you perform the prayer, and give alms, and

stand for justice, even against one's family or toward one's enemies is to stand for God, and being just is *nearer to reverence*. To *be just* toward one's enemies means to refrain from treating even the idolaters in a manner that transgresses the limits established in Divine Law, including killing their women and children or breaking treaties with them (R, Z). Some note that this constitutes a strong warning against injustice of any kind, for if one is prohibited from acting unjustly even toward disbelievers, how must God view injustice toward fellow believers (R, Z)? See also 3:18: *God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice.*

9–10 The reminder at the end of the previous verse that *God is Aware of whatsoever you do* serves simultaneously as a promise to the obedient and a warning to the sinful (R). In these two verses, the promise for the righteous believers is identified as *forgiveness and a great reward;* the warning for the sinful as *Hellfire*. Divine forgiveness is promised in several places for those who demonstrate a fundamental righteousness (see, e.g., 4:31; 25:70).

11 The believers are reminded for the final time in this opening part of the *sūrah* to remember *God's Blessing upon* them. The *people* who *were prepared to stretch forth their hands against* them may refer to the idolaters who tried to oppress and kill the Muslims. But God *withheld their hands* in that He prevented the idolaters, who initially had greater numbers and strength than the Muslims, from overwhelming them and destroying their community (R). Several other reports indicate that this verse was revealed in relation to a specific incident in which the Prophet's enemies attempted to kill him when he was in a defenseless state. In one report he was resting in the shade of a tree and had removed his weapon. A Bedouin came and seized the weapon and attempted to kill him with it, but was prevented by God from doing so despite his efforts (R, W).

Others claim that it was revealed when the Prophet and his close Companions went to the Banū Naḍīr, a Jewish clan of Madinah, seeking assistance in paying the wergild (*diyah*) for two men whom his men had killed in error. The leader of the clan invited them in and feigned hospitality while secretly plotting to kill the unarmed Prophet. The Archangel Gabriel came, however, to inform the Prophet of the danger, and he left before they could carry out their plot (R, Ṭ, W). Al-Ṭabarī favors this latter interpretation, noting that immediately after this verse the *sūrah* begins to discuss the Children of Israel and their wrongdoing.

It seems more likely, however, that this verse is meant to remind the Muslims of God's protection of them and their fledgling community against the powerful forces against them, since it is addressed to the believers as a whole, and the pronoun "you" is plural throughout the verse, indicating that it refers to God's continued protection of the Muslims as a community. Moreover, the verse can be understood as concluding the opening section of this *sūrah* that addresses the Muslim community as a whole, reminding them of God's various blessings and favors toward them.

12 Having enjoined the Muslim believers to remember God's Blessing upon them (vv. 7, 11) and to fulfill their covenant (v. 11), the Quran now turns to offer a cautionary tale about the

believe in My messengers and support them, and lend unto God a goodly loan, I shall surely absolve you of your evil deeds, and shall cause you to enter Gardens with rivers running below. But whosoever among you disbelieves thereafter, surely he has strayed from the right way. (13) Then for their breaking of their covenant, We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of the Word, and have forgotten part of that whereof they were reminded. Thou wilt not cease to discover their treachery, from all save a few of them. So

Jews and the Christians, who also had a covenant with God, which they broke, despite the blessings that God had bestowed upon them (R). The covenant with the Children of Israel is mentioned several times in the Quran and, as here, is usually followed by a discussion of their later unfaithfulness to that covenant or wrongdoing generally; see 2:40, 63, 83, 93; 4:154; 5:70; 7:169. The *twelve chieftains* is a reference to the leaders of the twelve Israelite tribes (see 7:159–60, where the community of Moses is said to have been divided into *twelve tribes* by God; also 2:60). *Chieftain* translates *naqīb,* a term that in later Islamic usage sometimes referred to the local head of a family of descendants of the Prophet (*shurafāʾ*); in Sufism, *naqīb* became a title of authority given to certain leaders within the Sufi orders and sometimes to the saintly forebears of a particular order.

In the context of the present verse, early commentators commonly connect these twelve chieftains to the story of the Israelites being called to enter the land that they had been promised in vv. 21–25. The twelve were said to be trustworthy men chosen as witnesses or guarantors for their respective tribes by Moses, who then asked them to enter the land in advance of the rest of the Israelites to scout out the territory (Ṭ, Z). They returned and, against Moses' orders, reported the terrifying might of the land's Canaanite inhabitants, which led to the Israelites' refusal to enter and fight for the land in v. 22 (Z). The Biblical Joshua (Yashūʿ ibn Nūn) is said to have been the representative of the prophet Joseph's clan among these twelve (Ṭ) and to have been one of the *two men* (in v. 23) who remained willing to enter the land despite the might of its inhabitants (R, Ṭ, Z). Some suggest that the *twelve chieftains* here may also refer to twelve righteous kings (Z) or judges (R) through whom God led the Israelites. The following promise from God, *I am with you!* and the subsequent injunction to fulfill religious obligations may be addressed to the *twelve chieftains* (R), to all Israelites and their descendants (Ṭ), or likely to both.

Although the Quran recognizes ritual and legal differences between religious communities, the performance of prayer and the giving of regular alms (*zakāh*) are frequently represented as essential practices in the religions of the People of the Book and indeed in all true religious communities (2:43, 83, 177, 277; 4:77, 162; 7:156; 19:31, 55; 21:73; 22:41; 24:37; 98:5). According to this verse and others, part of the covenant required them to recognize future prophets, and their failure to recognize certain prophets, including Muhammad, and their rejection, indeed slaying, of other unnamed prophets are consistently part of the Quranic critique of the Jews (see, e.g., 2:89–91; 4:155–57; 5:70).

The concept of lending God *a goodly loan* is a metaphor for expending one's effort and wealth for the cause of religion; cf. 2:245; 57:11, 18; 64:17; also 73:20, where, as here, it is connected with the duties of prayer and the giving of alms (*zakāh*).

13 The Israelites' *breaking of their covenant* is a common theme in the Quran (see 2:63, 83, 93; 4:155; 7:169), as it is in the Hebrew scriptures. Those Israelites who were unfaithful to their covenant are here said to be *cursed* by God, as they are elsewhere (see 2:88; 4:46–47; 5:64; also 5:78, where they are said to have been *cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus son of Mary*). Being cursed by God is understood by some to mean being exiled from His Mercy (Z).

God is also said here to have *hardened their hearts* in response to their breaking the covenant.

pardon them, and forbear. Truly God loves the virtuous. (14) And with those who say, "We are Christians," We made a covenant. Then they forgot part of that whereof they were reminded. So We stirred up enmity and hatred among

The idea that people's hearts may be "hardened" or "sealed," often as a result of their own wrongdoing, such that they are no longer receptive to Divine messages or to the "remembrance of God," is found throughout the Quran; see 2:7, 74; 6:43; 39:22; 57:16; also 10:88, where Moses asks God to seal the hearts of Pharaoh and his people (God is similarly said to harden Pharaoh's heart throughout the Biblical account in Exodus). Some understand "hardened" hearts to indicate hearts rendered "impure" through a mixture of belief and disbelief; this idea is metaphorically linked to the phenomenon of precious metals, such as gold and silver, which in their pure state are relatively soft and malleable, but become "hardened" when they are mixed with other metals to form an alloy (R, Ṭ, Z).

The charge that the Israelites or the Jews *distort the meaning of the Word* (referred to in Arabic as *taḥrīf*) is understood to mean either that they rearranged the words of scripture in a manner that altered their meaning or that they misrepresented or misinterpreted the meaning of the scriptural words. This is said to be a clear manifestation of their hardened hearts (Z); see also 2:75c; 4:46c; v. 41. Forgetfulness is a common human vice, beginning with Adam (20:115), and necessitating a long series of prophetic "reminders" and Divine "signs," which are themselves also often forgotten; see v. 14; 6:44; 7:165; 20:126.

The mention of *their treachery* likely relates to the incident alluded to in v. 11 with *a people . . . prepared to stretch forth their hands against you,* which is widely interpreted as referring to a plot by the Jewish Banū Naḍīr clan (Ṭ; see 5:11c). Despite fears or even expectations of treachery, Muslims are enjoined to *pardon them, and forbear* (cf. 2:109; 3:159; 7:199; 24:22). A widely cited report from the early commentator Qatādah (d. early second/eighth century) asserts that the injunction to *pardon them, and forbear* was abrogated by 9:29, which calls for fighting disbelieving People of the Book until they had paid the *jizyah,* or tax that non-Muslim communities were to pay to the Islamic state (IK, Ṭ, Th). In the chronology of revelation, however, this *sūrah* likely postdates the revelation of 9:29, since *Sūrah* 9 was reportedly revealed in the year 9/631, while the present *sūrah* was revealed—according to many, in its entirety—during the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage in 10/632, at the very end of his life. Some commentators do not accept, therefore, that 9:29 abrogates the injunction to pardon the Jews in the present verse, arguing that the two verses are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since once the People of the Book have agreed to pay the *jizyah,* there is no reason one cannot forgive them for past transgressions (R, Ṭ). See also the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran." The present verse, following shortly after permission is given to eat the food and marry the women of the People of the Book, may reflect a broader intention in this very late *sūrah* to reestablish normative and peaceful relations between Muslims and the People of the Book. *God loves the virtuous* is repeated in 2:195; 3:134, 148; 5:93.

14 This verse asserts that Christians, like Israelites/Jews, entered into a covenant with God and, like them, *forgot a part* of the "reminder" that had been given them. The consequences, however, are different. Whereas the Israelites' failure with regard to the covenant leads to spiritual punishment by God, the Christians' forgetting of the covenant results in *enmity and hatred among them,* alluding to the factionalism or sectarianism within the Christian community spurred by theological differences (IK, Ṭ) or to hatred between Jews and Christians—although the latter is a less likely interpretation in this context, since the verse seems to be addressed exclusively to the Christians (Ṭ). Factionalism is also presented as a mode of Divine punishment in 6:65, although not in relation to Christians specifically. That *God will inform them of what they used to do* on the Day of Resurrection is consistent with other passages of the Quran suggesting that religious differences will remain, perhaps providentially, until there is Divine clarification in the Hereafter;

them, till the Day of Resurrection. God will inform them of what they used to do. (15) O People of the Book! Our Messenger has come unto you, making clear to you much of what you once hid of the Book, and pardoning much. There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book, (16) whereby God guides whosoever seeks His Contentment unto the ways of peace, and brings them out of darkness into light, by His Leave, and guides them unto a straight path. (17) They indeed have disbelieved who say, "God is the Messiah, son of Mary." Say, "Who would have any power over God if He desired to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother, and those on earth all together?" Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them. He creates whatsoever He will, and God is

see 2:113; 3:55; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:92, 124; 22:69; 32:25; 39:3, 46.

15 For other allusions to the People of the Book or others "hiding" part of the scriptures, see 2:42, 140, 146, 159, 174; 3:71, 187; 6:91. Several commentators explain, by way of example, that the Jews and Christians *hid* those parts of their scripture that referred to the coming of Muhammad (see 7:157, which asserts that the Prophet was *inscribed* in the Torah and Gospel) as well as those passages that established the punishment of stoning for adultery (JJ, Ṭ, Z). The Prophet brought the latter to light when a Jewish adulterer and adulteress were brought to him for judgment; after learning that stoning was the punishment prescribed for this offense in the Torah, he followed it and ordered them to be stoned; see 3:23c. The concept of light (*nūr*) is frequently associated with the guidance that comes through the prophets and revelation (6:91; 7:157; 21:48; 42:52; 64:8), and in 9:32–33 and 61:8–9 the Quran mentions those who would try to *extinguish the light of God,* which, in context, could be read as an attempt to conceal Divine Revelation. In this verse, the *light* sent from God may be understood as referring to Muhammad (Ṭ), and the *clear Book,* to the Quran; see 12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 43:2; 44:2 for other references to the Quran as the *clear Book,* although the term is also used for God's Knowledge of all things (see, e.g., 10:61). Alternately, both *light* and *clear Book* may be taken as references to the revelation of the Quran (Z).

16 The most sincere and meritorious of believers are those who do righteous deeds seeking the *Contentment* (or "good pleasure") of God; see 2:207, 265; 4:114; 5:2; 59:8. *Ways of peace* translates *subul al-salām,* which could also mean the path or way to God, since Peace (*al-Salām*) is one of the Names of God (Ṭ). God's bringing the believers out of darkness into light is mentioned also in 2:257; 14:1, 5; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11. Here *darkness* translates *ẓulumāt* (lit. "darknesses"), which is always contrasted with "light," singular, suggesting a connection between darkness and the "multiplicity" of this world, on the one hand, and, on the other, a connection between light (which is always singular in the Quran) and the Oneness of God and of His Guidance through revelation, both of which are identified with light itself ("Light," or *Nūr,* is one of the Divine Names, and in 24:35 God is described as the *Light of the heavens and the earth*). The *straight path* is associated with the life lived in accord with Divine Guidance throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 1:6; 2:142; 3:101; 6:87; 43:61; 67:22).

17 This verse is one of several places (cf. 4:171; 5:72, 75, 116; 9:31) where the Quran criticizes the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus, who here is referred to simply as *the Messiah* (*al-Masīḥ*); see also 4:157, 171–72; 5:72, 75; 9:30–31. The reference to *his mother* in this verse also suggests criticism of those who would worship or divinize Mary (see also v. 116). The denial of the divinity of Christ (and Mary) is issued through

Powerful over all things. (18) And the Jews and the Christians say, "We are the children of God, and His beloved ones." Say, "Why then does He punish you for your sins?" Nay, but you are mortals of His creating. He forgives whomsoever He will, and He punishes whomsoever He will, and unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them,

an assertion of God's destructive and creative Power (*He creates whatsoever He will*), the implication being that Jesus and Mary, along with *those on earth all together,* are God's creations, and so also subject to His ability to destroy them at will. *He creates whatsoever He will* (cf. 24:25; 30:54; 42:49) also indicates that He may create in any manner that He will, including creating a human being, like Jesus, who was without a biological father (R, Z). In their being created by God, Jesus and Mary are no different from other human beings (Z). *Who would have any power over God* translates *fa-man yamliku min Allāhi shay'an,* an idiomatic expression containing the verb *yamliku,* meaning literally "to own" and, by extension, to control. This is then contrasted (in the Arabic) with the assertion *Unto God belongs sovereignty* (*li'Llāhi mulk*), since *mulk* ("sovereignty") is derived from the same root as *yamliku*. Since Christ's divinity is refuted through reference to God's all-encompassing creative power over His creatures, the verse also implicitly refutes the Christian doctrine that Christ was not created ("begotten, not made," according to the Nicene Creed).

Theologically oriented commentators, including al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, observe that, although the verse is criticizing Christians who would limit God's Being to His manifestation in a human being (Christ), this is not the actual teaching of Christian doctrine. Thus when the Quran criticizes the belief that "God is the Messiah," one could argue that it is not criticizing official Christian doctrine (which might say that the Messiah is God, but not that God is the Messiah), but rather an exaggerated and thus unorthodox understanding of Christ's nature. Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, however, argue that, in its attribution of creative power and ruling authority to Christ as well as in its assertion of the incarnation of God in Christ's human form, Christian doctrine is theologically tantamount to such an understanding, even if it is not the explicit teaching of most Christians.

18 The Quran frequently criticizes the idea that God has sons or daughters (2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 39:4; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39; 72:3). This is the only place, however, where the Quran criticizes Jews and Christians for referring to themselves as *the children of God,* an idea mentioned explicitly in the Christian Gospels (see, e.g., Matthew 5:9; Luke 20:36; John 11:52). In the Hebrew scriptures, the Israelite people are collectively referred to as the "firstborn son" of God (see Exodus 4:22–23), and as the royal representatives of Israel, both David and Solomon are referred to as the "son" of God (see Psalm 2:7; 1 Chronicles 28:6). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, this verse was intended as a response to some Madinan Jews who rejected the Prophet's calls to Islam and warnings of Divine punishment by asserting that, as the *children of God, and His beloved ones,* they had nothing to fear (Ṭ, Z). Although the Quran does not criticize their claim as an explicit assertion of divinity for individual Jews and Christians (JJ, R), the verse refutes this general claim, at least partly, in the same manner that it refutes claims of divinity for Jesus or Mary, that is, by reminding Jews and Christians that they are *mortals* and beings *of His creating* and so bounded by a birth and a death over which they have no ultimate control.

The commentators are generally aware that the Jewish and Christian claim to be *children of God* is not a literal one; rather, they assert that it is a metaphorical and/or a genealogical extension of their respective claims about Ezra and Jesus being His "sons" (IK, R, Z; cf. 9:30). Some cite the Gospel passage in which Jesus says to his followers, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father" (John 20:17), as a possible source for

and unto Him is the journey's end. (19) O People of the Book! Our Messenger has come unto you, making things clear to you, after an interval in [the series] of messengers, lest you should say, "There came unto us no bearer of glad tidings, nor any warner." But there has come unto you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. And God is Powerful over all things. (20) And when Moses said unto his people, "O my people! Remember God's Blessing upon you, when He appointed prophets among you, and appointed you kings, and gave you that which He

this misunderstanding (IK), although the metaphorical idea of God as "Father" is found in various places in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and seems to have been well established in the Judaic context prior to the Gospel accounts. Al-Rāzī links Jewish and Christian claims to be *the children of God* to implicit claims of special Divine Mercy and favor that they are said to have made for themselves according to other passages in the Quran (cf. 2:111, 135). The verse also refutes the claim of Jews and Christians that they are *the children of God, and His beloved ones* by arguing that such a status would preclude His punishing them for their sins—something that, the commentators observe, both Christians and Jews accept, even if Jews believe they will be punished for only a brief period (cf. 2:80; 3:24).

19 The Quran repeatedly asserts the clarity of the prophetic messages, signs, and books, and it indicates that one of the purposes of prophecy is precisely to clarify spiritual and ethical matters made obscure by human error or falsification; see v. 15, where Muhammad makes clear what the People of the Book *once hid of the Book;* and 16:64 and 43:63, where Muhammad and Jesus, respectively, are said to have made clear *that wherein they differed. Interval* here translates *fatrah,* used to denote a temporary cessation of revelation either between different prophets and prophetic eras or sometimes between instances of revelation sent to Muhammad (see 17:106). Here it refers to the span of time between the prophetic missions of Jesus and Muhammad. Some but not all commentators assert that there were no other prophets sent between these two major prophets (IK). Others claim that there were four minor prophets sent in the interim: three in the Judeo-Christian line, perhaps the "message bearers" alluded to without name in 36:14 (see 36:13–14 and commentary), and the fourth, an Arab prophet whose name was Khālid ibn Sinān al-ʿAbsī (Q, Z). The role of the prophets as "bearers of glad tidings" and "warners" is mentioned throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56). Many prominent early Quran commentators among the Prophet's Companions asserted that the verse was revealed as a response to some of the Jews of Madinah who claimed that no "bearer of glad tidings or warner" had been sent by God after Moses (Ṭ).

20 Both Muslims and the followers of Moses or other prophets are told to *remember God's Blessing* upon them (2:231; 5:7, 11; 14:6; 35:3). The prophets *He appointed* among them would here refer to Abraham and the other prophets among his descendants. Moses' statement that God had *appointed* them *kings* is said to refer to His having given them sovereignty over their own affairs and having freed them from the tyranny of Pharaoh (Q). That God gave the Israelites *that which He gave unto no other in all the worlds* is similar to other statements of the unique Divine favor the Israelites enjoyed (cf. 2:47, 122; 7:140; 45:16) and may refer to the miraculous manna and quails through which they were sustained in the desert (see 2:57, 7:160, 20:80), to the many prophets and signs that He sent to them (Q), or to the fact that He granted them many good things of both this world and the next (IK). The commentators point out that this unique favor was enjoyed by the Israelites "in their time" (IK, Q) and thus was not absolute.

gave unto no other in all the worlds. (21) O my people! Enter the Holy Land, which God has prescribed for you, and do not turn back, or you shall become losers." (22) They said, "O Moses! In this land are a domineering people. We shall not enter it till they leave it. But if they leave it, we shall enter." (23) Two men whom God had blessed among those who feared [Him] said, "Enter upon them by the gate, for once you have entered it, you will be victors. And trust in

21–26 Cf. Numbers 13–14 for the Biblical counterpart to this account.

21 Some commentators explicitly connect the *Holy Land* (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasah*) ordained for the Israelites (cf. 7:137) with Abraham, indicating that he was shown this land and given it as an inheritance for his progeny (R, Z)—which from an Islamic point of view would also include his Arab Muslim descendants through Ishmael. It is interesting that the Quran describes this land as blessed in a universal way, and as the "Holy Land"—a term used widely today in Judeo-Christian contexts for this land, but one that is used only very rarely in the Bible itself. The exact location of this *Holy Land* mentioned in the Quran is unclear. Various reports locate it in Sinai, Syria, Jericho, or an area encompassing parts of Syria, Palestine, and Jordan (R, Ṭ, Z); others identify it simply as the land of the Jerusalem sanctuary (*al-bayt al-muqaddas;* Z). Al-Ṭabarī claims that the exact location is unknowable, but that it lies somewhere between the Euphrates and Nile rivers (although not encompassing all of this area).

Some commentators assert that God *prescribed* (*kataba,* which could also mean "inscribed") the Israelites' right to reside in this land in the Preserved Tablet, which is understood by many as referring to the repository of eternal Divine Knowledge and Revelation (R, Ṭ, Z; cf. 85:22). The universal sacredness of this land is alluded to elsewhere, as in 17:1, which mentions *the Farthest Mosque* (referring to the site of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem), saying that its *precincts We have blessed;* and 21:71, *And We delivered him* (Abraham) *and Lot to the land that We blessed for all peoples,* although some believe the latter verse refers to Makkah. *Do not turn back* may be a command not to retreat from the land without fighting for it, but it may also be rendered "do not turn your backs," that is, on the Divine command and obedience to the prophet Moses.

22 After the Divine to enter the land, Moses reportedly chose twelve men, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (see 5:12c), to enter the land in advance and report to him on its inhabitants. While there, the advance party witnessed the great size and might of the inhabitants. According to some reports, they were discovered and seized by one of the land's inhabitants, but released thereafter so that they could warn their own people not to enter the land (Ṭ). When they returned, they reported to Moses, *O Moses! In this land are a domineering people* (*jabbārīn*). *Jabbār* may also be rendered "tyrant," in that it denotes a person of overwhelming force or power, able to compel others to do his will. *Al-Jabbār* is also one of the Divine Names (mentioned in 59:23), conveying God's ultimate power over all others. When the term is applied to a human being, it has the negative sense of tyrant and oppressor, because the exercise or assumption of such power over others belongs rightly to God alone (Ṭs). Despite Moses' assurance that God would lead them to victory if they were righteous and obedient to their prophet (cf. v. 12), the Israelites refused to enter.

23 *Two men* among the twelve sent to assess the land, however, remained confident in God's ability to grant them victory over its inhabitants. These *two men* are identified in the commentary as the Biblical Joshua (Yashūʿ ibn Nūn) and Caleb (Kalāb ibn Yūfannā), who tried to calm the fears of the Israelites and instill confidence in their ability to overcome the land's inhabitants with the help of God (R, Ṭ, Th, Z). This description accords with the Biblical account, although a minor report indicates that the *two men* represent two of the lands' inhabitants who had been converted to

God, if you are believers." (24) They said, "O Moses! We shall never enter it, so long as they remain therein. So go forth, thou and thy Lord, and fight! We shall sit here." (25) He said, "My Lord! I have no power over anyone save myself and my brother; so separate us from the iniquitous people!" (26) He said, "Then verily it shall be forbidden them for forty years, while they shall wander on the

belief in Moses' prophethood and had returned with the advance Israelite party (R, Ṭ).

24 *So go forth, thou and thy Lord* is understood to mean "go forth, Moses, with the help of thy Lord," since God cannot be said to "go forth" in a physical sense (Ṭ). There are reports that the Prophet's Companions understood this account in vv. 21–26 as a warning to them to follow the Prophet's command, even to go into battle against a powerful enemy, rather than exhibiting the cowardice and lack of faith demonstrated by the Israelites in this story. According to one report, at Ḥudaybiyah, when the Prophet and his Companions were barred from entering Makkah to perform the pilgrimage and were engaged in a potentially dangerous confrontation with the more powerful Makkans in 6/628, the Companion Miqdād ibn al-Aswad cited the present Quranic verse and said, "By God, we will not be like the Israelite party, when they said to their prophet, *So go forth, thou and thy Lord, and fight! We shall sit here;* but rather [we shall say]: 'Go forth, thou and thy Lord, and fight! Verily we shall be fighting along with you'" (Ṭ). A variation of this account connects it to the Battle of Badr in 2/624 (IK).

25–26 In his frustration with the Israelites' refusal to follow his command, Moses complained to God that he had no control over, and by extension no moral accountability for, any save himself and his *brother*, Aaron. Although Joshua and Caleb were faithful to his command (see 5:23 and commentary), al-Zamakhsharī suggests that Moses does not include them among those over whom he has "power" because, in his despair with the Israelites, he cannot be sure of the loyalty of any of them, save his brother, a fellow prophet. Alternately, al-Zamakhsharī suggests that Moses may here be using *brother* in a religious sense to mean all those who faithfully follow him in his religion, rather than just his biological brother, Aaron. Moses' supplication to God, *separate us from the iniquitous,* is understood to be a plea to God to judge or decide between Moses and his brother, on the one hand, and his "iniquitous" followers on the other (Ṭ, Z).

The Divine response to Moses' plea for judgment comes in v. 26: *Then verily it* (meaning the land) *shall be forbidden them for forty years, while they shall wander on the earth.* That the land was *forbidden them* may be understood to mean that they were physically prevented from entering it or that they were to observe the prohibition as a matter of devotion and submission to God (R). The subsequent command to *grieve not for the iniquitous* clearly connects this Divine statement to Moses' supplication against the "iniquitous" in v. 25. The command to *grieve not* is said to have been addressed to Moses, who was dismayed by the severity of the punishment meted out to his people as a result of his supplication and regretted having made it (R). Although the Israelites were forbidden from the land for forty years, God's "ordainment" of the land for them remained, being inscribed in the Preserved Tablet according to some commentators (see 5:21c), but in suspension (Z).

The beginning of v. 26 may also be read, "Then verily it shall be forbidden them. For forty years they shall wander on the earth," indicating that the exile was "permanent" for the disobedient among the Israelites, since they would most likely die before they were able to enter it (Ṭ). Later Jericho was conquered under the leadership of Joshua, whom the commentators consider to be a prophet sent to guide the Israelites after Moses' death (Q, Ṭ, Z), although some reports claim that Moses entered Jericho along with Joshua (R, Ṭ, Z) and personally killed one of the giants—or *a domineering people* (*jabbārīn*) mentioned in v. 22—among its inhabitants (Ṭ). The commentators,

earth. So grieve not for the iniquitous people." (27) And recite unto them, with truth, the account of Adam's two sons, when they each offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them, though not accepted from the

like the Biblical account, state that none of the other Israelites who were adults at that time, save the obedient Joshua and Caleb, survived to enter the land that God had ordained for them (Ṭ, Z, Numbers 14).

Because the Divinely imposed exile and wandering are presented as a punishment for the "iniquitous" and disobedient Israelites, and because Moses had asked that he and his brother be "separated from them," some questioned whether Moses and Aaron remained with the Israelites during their period of wandering. Most claim that they did, and some assert that the exile was not difficult for them and caused them no hardship, just as the fire into which Abraham was thrown remained cool for him (21:69; R, Z). God is also said to have continued to grant comfort and sustenance even to the Israelites themselves during their exile (Ṭ, Z), including providing them water from the twelve springs that miraculously flowed from a rock when Moses struck it with his staff (see 2:60; 7:160; Ṭ).

27–32 Cf. Genesis 4. These verses recount the story of the Biblical Cain and Abel, and like its Biblical version the Quranic story of Cain and Abel serves as a prototype of the inclination of fallen human beings toward violence and the killing of their own "brothers." Within its specifically Quranic context, the story is read by some commentators as offering a subtle commentary on issues related particularly to the People of the Book raised elsewhere in the *sūrah*.

*Recite unto them, with truth* may mean that Muhammad should relate this account to the Jews and/or the idolaters who, according to the interpretation of v. 11, had plotted to kill Muhammad and some of his Companions (Z): *Remember God's Blessing upon you, when a people were prepared to stretch forth their hands against you, but He withheld their hands from you* (see 5:11c). The idiomatic phrase *stretch forth their hands against* is also used to describe the intent to kill in the present account (v. 28), suggesting a thematic link between the two passages. Insofar as the story is about the moral danger of spiritual envy, it may be directed at those Jews and Christians who were hostile to Muhammad's message out of spiritual envy (R; spiritual envy in general, on the part of earlier religious communities, is suggested in v. 59 and stated directly in 2:90, 109, 213; 3:19; 4:54; 45:17).

The conclusion of this account with a reminder about the gravity of the sin of murder as it is found in God's message to the Israelites (v. 32) further suggests that this account may have been directed, in part, toward the People of the Book. Al-Ṭabarī, however, suggests that the reason for telling this story was to encourage the Muslims to deal leniently and forgivingly with those Jews who had been plotting to kill Muhammad and some of his followers, and hence to follow the example of Abel, who did not raise his hand against his brother despite his brother's threat to kill him. He cites a *ḥadīth*, "Verily God gives you the example of the two sons of Adam; so take [the path of] the better of the two, and leave [the path of] the worse" (Ṭ).

27 *Adam's two sons* refers to the Biblical Cain (Qābīl) and Abel (Hābīl). The two were either commanded by God to offer a sacrifice (Ṭ) or, according to some commentators, engaged in rival sacrifices in order to compete for the right to marry Cain's twin sister, whom both Cain and Abel desired (R, Ṭ, Z). Abel, being a herdsman, offered a fattened sheep for the sacrifice, while Cain, who grew crops, offered some of his produce. The Quranic account indicates that God accepted the sacrifice of the one (understood to be Abel) and not the other (understood to be Cain), but, like the Biblical account, does not indicate the reason for this choice. Some commentators explain that while Abel sacrificed his most prized sheep, Cain offered the poorest produce from his crop (Ṭ). *Sacrifice* here renders *qurbān*, a word whose root, *q-r-b*, is related primarily to nearness, indicating that "sacrifice" is understood primarily as a

other. One said, "I will surely slay you!" [The other] said, "God accepts only from the reverent. (28) Even if you stretch forth your hand against me to slay me, I shall not stretch forth my hand against you to slay you. Truly I fear God, Lord of the worlds. (29) I desire that you should be burdened with my sin and your sin

means of drawing closer to God. Al-Ṭabarī notes that closeness to God was the essential motivation of both Cain and Abel in their sacrifice, thus casting doubt on the accounts that indicate that their sacrifices were part of a competition over a woman, although al-Rāzī attributes pious intent in the sacrifice only to Abel. *God accepts only from the reverent,* Abel's statement in response to his brother's threat, is meant to indicate that the latter's sacrifice was not accepted because it had not been done with proper "reverence" or fear of God (Ṭ, Z), as he had offered only a lowly and unfitting sacrifice (Ṭ).

Al-Ṭabarī notes that the practice of sacrificial offering for earlier religious communities was like the practices of charity and alms for Muslims and, more broadly, that righteous acts, including prayer and fasting as well as mandatory charity, take the place of sacrifice in Islam. *Offered a sacrifice* translates *qarraba,* a verb that can also be used in connection with giving charity (R, Z). Insofar as prayer, fasting, and charity are analogous to ritual sacrifice in the Islamic perspective, *God accepts only from the reverent* serves as a general reminder that only ritual or moral acts done with "reverence" are accepted by God (R, Z). However, in Islam, the rites of the *ḥajj* culminate with the sacrificial slaughter of animals and the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice (*ʿĪd al-aḍḥā,* sometimes also called *ʿĪd al-qurbān*), both of which commemorate God's halting Abraham's test, during which he was to sacrifice his son, and His provision of a ram for the sacrifice instead. The meat from the sacrificial slaughtering at the end of the pilgrimage rite is given to charity, which would seem to confirm partially al-Ṭabarī's assertion that, in Islam, charity toward the poor partly takes the place of ritual sacrifice found in earlier religions. See 22:36–37, where it says of the *sacrificial camels* to be slaughtered during the pilgrimage: *Neither their flesh nor their blood will reach God, but the reverence from you reaches Him.*

28 Commentators question why Abel refused to oppose his brother's attack or defend himself, even though Cain had clearly stated his intention to kill him. Some argue that this was a way of clarifying and emphasizing the enormity of his brother's murderous intention and action (R, Ṭ), while others claim that attacking another in self-defense had not been made legitimate at this early stage of human history (Ṭ, Z). Others point out that Abel's statement, *I shall not stretch forth my hand against you to slay you,* is not necessarily an abandonment of self-defense, but an abandonment of the intention to kill his brother preemptively or in the process of self-defense (Q, R). Some accounts indicate that Cain killed Abel while he was sleeping, and Abel was thus unable to defend himself, which does not preclude the possibility that Abel would have defended himself, had he been awake (Q, R). It may also be the case that Abel considered it better to be killed than to kill, even in self-defense (R). Al-Qurṭubī notes that the pious and prominent early Muslims who, like ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, abstained from fighting fellow Muslims and taking sides in the First Civil War (36–40/656–61) cited, by way of justification, the example of Abel, who demonstrated greater strength in abstaining from violence that could have resulted in the death of his brother—a fellow monotheist, even if, at that moment, a disobedient and iniquitous one.

29 *I desire that you should be burdened with my sin and your sin* is understood to mean that, rather than attacking his brother in return, Abel preferred to allow his brother to assume the full burden of the sin. *My sin* (*ithmī*) here is not intended to mean that Cain would bear the burden of Abel's sins—for the Quran and Islamic tradition are clear that none bears the moral burden of another—but rather that Cain would bear the burden of the sin of killing Abel. Thus *my sin* really means "the sin of killing me" (*ithm qatlī*)—the intervening *qatl* ("killing") is elided (R, Ṭ, Z)—whereas *your sin*—that is, Cain's sin—refers to the other acts of disobedience he had committed up to that time.

and so become one of the inhabitants of the Fire. Such is the recompense of the wrongdoers." (30) Then his soul prompted him to slay his brother, and he slew him, and thus came to be among the losers. (31) Then God sent a crow, scratching the earth, to show him how he might conceal his brother's nakedness. He said, "Oh, woe unto me! Am I not able to be even as this crow and conceal my brother's nakedness?" And he came to be among the remorseful. (32) For this reason, We prescribed for the Children of Israel that whosoever slays a soul—unless it be for another soul or working corruption upon the earth—it is as though he slew mankind altogether, and whosoever saves the life of one, it is as though he saved the life of mankind altogether. Our messengers have certainly

30 Cain's carnal soul *prompted him to slay his brother,* meaning that it led or encouraged him to kill him, that it made it easy for him, or that it made it seem good to him and emboldened him to undertake the crime (Aj, R, Ṭ, Z). Although *soul* may simply refer to the individual as an independent moral entity, in certain verses in the Quran and in pious and Sufi literature the "soul" can represent the seat of the passions that drive human beings to behave in immoral ways; see 12:53, where the prophet Joseph says, *But I absolve not my own soul. Surely the soul commands to evil.* In connection with this verse, al-Qushayrī remarks that once the soul—influenced as it is by its vain desires—has formulated an intention to do evil (as Cain had in v. 27), subsequent calls to right or just action become muted, perhaps explaining why Abel's response to his brother's threat had no apparent effect. According to most reports, Cain killed his brother in his sleep by crushing his head between two rocks, an idea some say he received from Satan (R, Ṭ, Z). Although Adam lived many years after Abel's murder, it is said that he never laughed again (R, Z).

31 Some commentators indicate that Abel was the first person to have been killed, or even to have died, among human beings; hence Cain's ignorance of how to dispose of his body (Ṭ, Z). Cain does not know how to conceal Abel's *nakedness* and protect it from wild beasts, since the practice of burying the dead had not yet been established (Ṭ). God then sent a living crow who "scratched the earth" with its beak and feet to bury another crow, thereby demonstrating to Cain how to properly bury his brother's corpse (Ṭ), indicating that the rite of burial was taught to human beings by God. Seeing the crow able to dispose of the other crow's body causes Cain to realize his terrible moral state as well as his ignorance, as he had not had the decency or knowledge to do this for his own brother and so became *remorseful.* Other accounts say that the crow was digging in the earth in order to bury some other thing and this gave Cain the idea of burying his brother; or that the crow came and began covering the dead Abel with earth, and when Cain saw how much dignity was afforded his victim, he became *remorseful* (R). *Nakedness* translates *saw'ah,* which can also be used to allude to one's private parts. Al-Zamakhsharī asserts that *saw'ah* here denotes the shame of Abel's exposed body, whereas al-Ṭabarī simply glosses *saw'ah* as "corpse." *Oh, woe unto me* translates *waylatī,* which is an exclamation of spiritual regret found elsewhere in the Quran (see 2:79c), often when the certainty of Divine punishment is realized; see 18:49; 21:14, 47, 97; 25:28; 36:52; 37:20; 68:31.

32 The account of Adam's two sons here and in the Bible is focused on the gravity and horror of the act of murder. Cain's initial inability to hide Abel's corpse in the Quranic account and the statement that Abel's blood was "crying . . . out from the ground" in the Biblical account (Genesis 4:10) both suggest the particular difficulty of concealing a crime of murder, and thus the likelihood of punishment in this world as well as the next. In

come unto them with clear proofs. Yet even after that, many of them are prodigal on the earth. (33) Verily the recompense of those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and endeavor to work corruption upon the earth is that they be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off from opposite sides, or be banished from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and in

this verse concluding the account, the Quran further emphasizes the enormity of the sin of murder by stating that God *prescribed for the Children of Israel* that the killing of one soul was like the killing of *mankind altogether* and, analogously, that saving a life was like saving *mankind altogether.* The Jewish commentary tradition as contained in both the Mishnah and the Talmud similarly connects this specific idea, which became an important part of Jewish ethics, to the story of Cain and Abel.

In explaining the symbolic equivalence the verse suggests between killing a single soul and killing all humanity, some commentators claim that the intended meaning is that killing a soul of particular spiritual importance—such as a prophet or a "just imam"—is like killing all humanity; others say that killing a single soul is like killing all humanity from the point of view of the murdered individual (Q, Ṭ). Some, however, consider the gravity of murder from the perspective of its offense to the Creator, for whether one kills a single person or many, one has violated what God has made most sacred (Q).

Mujāhid asserts that the punishment in the Hereafter is equally grave for all murderers, regardless of the number of their victims, since the terrible punishment threatened for killing a believer is not increased even in the case of multiple victims (Q, Ṭ); although others take this statement to mean that the worldly punishment for murder is the same for one or multiple victims (Q, Ṭ), since the perpetrator has only one life that can be taken. The exception *unless it be for another soul* exempts killing in the course of carrying out lawful capital punishment against one who has killed another soul—or for any other crime that carries the penalty of capital punishment, such as adultery committed by married persons (R)—as well as killing those who are *working corruption,* understood to mean idolatry, warring against the Muslims, or terrorizing roads (Q, Ṭ, Z). For *working corruption,* and its penal consequences, see v. 33.

*Whosoever saves the life of one* is understood variously as referring to those who, as the kin of the murder victim, forgo retaliation and agree to accept compensation or simply forgive the perpetrator (see 2:178 and commentary) or to those who save people from fatal peril, such as fire or drowning (Ṭ, Z). Some broaden the idea of saving a life to include more indirect or spiritual modes of saving, such as by lifting a person out of poverty or providing guidance if one is spiritually or morally astray (Qm).

The verse indicates that the moral principle equating the value of a single life to that of all humanity in matters of killing and saving was ordained explicitly for the Children of Israel. Some commentators explain that the latter are mentioned specifically, as they were the first religious community threatened with eternal punishment for the sin of murder (Q); al-Rāzī argues that the Children of Israel are singled out here because of the alleged plot of certain Jews of Madinah against the Prophet, as mentioned in 5:11c. Other commentators indicate that the moral principle applies equally to the Muslim community (IK, Q, Ṭ).

33 This verse contains one of the five Quranic *ḥadd* punishments—that is, Divinely ordained capital or corporal punishments—to be carried out by the Islamic state against those convicted of crimes considered to undermine the moral fabric of the Islamic community as a whole, including murderers, thieves, adulterers, slanderers, and, here, *those who wage war against God and His Messenger* (*muḥāribūn*). This phrase is understood to mean those who attack and terrorize members of the Islamic community directly, since one cannot

"wage war" against God (Q). The crimes covered under this *ḥadd* punishment are referred to collectively as *ḥirābah* and consist of armed robbery, assault (including rape), and murder, particularly of innocent travelers along the road, although this is widely considered to include attacks in cities and settled areas as well. The use of weapons, threats of extreme violence, or other tactics to instill fear are the hallmark of these crimes and distinguish them from other forms of robbery or assault.

Although the phrase *work corruption upon the earth* may seem to be open to wide interpretation, its meaning in this verse has been limited by most major commentators to the armed crimes mentioned above and their detrimental effect on the safety and security of the community. Nonetheless, the idea of "working corruption upon the earth" is mentioned in several other places, where it is often connected with "behaving wickedly upon the earth" and opposed to "setting things aright upon it." It is sometimes used to indicate spiritual corruption and its otherworldly consequences; see 2:11–12, 27, 220; 3:63; 7:56, 142; 10:40, 81; 16:88. In 2:30, however, the angels foresee that establishing human beings as "vicegerents" on earth will mean their "working corruption" and "shedding blood," thus linking "working corruption" to physical violence and suggesting that it is a fundamental tendency within the human character (cf. 30:41), an idea borne out by the story of Cain and Abel in vv. 27–31. "Working corruption" is implicitly or explicitly connected to physical violence elsewhere (see, e.g., 2:205; 5:64; 26:183; 27:48–49; 28:4) and often implies a combination of spiritual and worldly corruption; see 7:74, 85–86, 103; 11:85; 13:25.

The most widely attested occasion for the revelation of this verse is an incident in which a group of men from the ʿUraynah and ʿUkl tribes came to the Prophet feigning a desire to embrace Islam. The Prophet accepted them into the community, but they soon complained to him that, as Bedouin, they found the settled life of Madinah unbearable. The Prophet thus allowed them to leave the city and sent with them a camelherd and some camels to milk for sustenance. Once outside the city, however, they brutally maimed and killed the camelherd and made off with the camels the Prophet had given them to use. The Prophet had the men apprehended and reportedly ordered that their hands and feet be cut off, their eyes gouged out, and their bodies exposed until death (Q, Ṭ, W). This verse then came down, establishing the punishment for such crimes as being the four penalties listed here: the cutting off of a hand and foot on opposite sides, execution, crucifixion, and banishment (cf. 20:71, where Pharaoh threatens his sorcerers with similar punishments when they repent and become followers of Moses).

Given that the perpetrators were also, among other things, apostates (*murtaddūn*), since they embraced Islam in the presence of the Prophet, then renounced it through their actions, a small minority have considered the verse to apply to apostates in general (Ṭ). It seems clear, however, that the severe punishments in this verse pertain specifically to those who commit various crimes brazenly and with exceptional brutality, violence, and terrorization of innocent people.

Some say that this verse, with its list of punishments for such criminals, was sent as a clarification in light of the Prophet's actions or even an endorsement of them (Ṭ). Others understand it as a partial criticism and abrogation of the severity of the Prophet's response, since the verse contains no endorsement of the practice of gouging out eyes or exposure until death (Q, Ṭ). According to some, the verse can be read as implicitly banning torture (Q); and in fact the Prophet had refrained from any kind of torture both before and after this incident (Q). Others reject the assertion that the verse abrogated or criticized the Prophet's behavior, claiming either that the Prophet had wanted to gouge out the eyes of the perpetrators, but when the verse was revealed he refrained from doing so, or that the Prophet's additional order to gouge out their eyes was done as retribution (*qiṣāṣ*, see 2:178 and commentary) for the similar maiming the perpetrators had inflicted on the camelherd (Q, Ṭ).

Some commentators and a minority of legal authorities argued that the Islamic authority (or *imām*) could use his discretion to apply one or a combination of the four punishments listed here for one convicted of *ḥirābah* (Q, Ṭ). Al-Shāfiʿī and others legal scholars, however, considered the punishments to correlate in specific ways to the severity of the crime: those who committed murder in the course of *ḥirābah*, but not theft, were subject to simple execution; those who committed theft, but not murder, had their hand and foot amputated; those who committed both theft and

the Hereafter theirs shall be a great punishment, (34) save those who repent before you overpower them. And know that God is Forgiving, Merciful. (35) O you who believe! Reverence God, and seek the means to approach Him, and strive

murder were killed and crucified; and those who terrorized others, but did not kill or steal in the process, were banished (JJ, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

There has been some debate among jurists about the specific procedures for carrying out these punishments. Crucifixion, understood to mean the exposure of the criminal in public, was usually carried out, historically, after the execution of a criminal in Islamic society—as a means of public deterrence—not as a means of execution itself. Some legal scholars recommended crucifixion prior to execution, but not as the means to it, so that perpetrators would be exposed, but then almost immediately killed, lest they endure suffering that would constitute torture, which is forbidden (Q, Ṭs). Banishment is interpreted by some early commentators as meaning that perpetrators should be pursued relentlessly until driven from Islamic lands. Most, however, understood it to mean that they should be exiled from their native territory to another or that they should be imprisoned, which effectively "banished" them from human society (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Imprisonment was reportedly first implemented as a punishment by the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who would imprison such offenders until they had fully repented (Q). The idea that the worldly *disgrace* and punishment of sin will be compounded by punishment *in the Hereafter* is articulated in other forms elsewhere; see v. 41; 2:114; 9:74; 13:33–34.

34 Here, as in the case of all sins, even grave ones, the door of repentance is left open. Repentance for these crimes may spare the perpetrators punishment in the Hereafter, but is considered to spare the perpetrators earthly punishment only if they repent before they are "overpowered," that is, before they are caught and brought to the authorities. This parallels the idea that repentance spares a person punishment in the next life only if it is made before death, after which the Divine sentence and punishment become certain (see 4:17–18c). In most schools of law, once the perpetrator of a major crime has been brought before the authorities and convicted, applying the prescribed *ḥadd* punishment is mandatory; but if a perpetrator is forgiven by the victim and not denounced to the authorities, then the punishment need not be applied (Q, Ṭ). Although repentance averts the *ḥadd* punishments listed in v. 33, the rights of the victims are maintained insofar as the perpetrator is still required to pay restitution for damaged or stolen property and is liable to retribution, or *qiṣāṣ* (see 2:178 and commentary). As in the case of the law of retribution itself, a victim has the right to have justice exacted from the perpetrator, but to forgive the perpetrator and avoid a public denunciation is considered to be of higher spiritual merit and a way of participating in the Divine Attributes *Forgiving* and *Merciful,* invoked at the end of this verse.

35 Seeking *the means to approach* God, or elsewhere "nearness" to Him, is presented in the Quran as both a lofty spiritual goal (and its reward; 17:57; 38:25, 40) and the result of obedient and virtuous acts (9:99; 34:37). In several verses, those who hold the highest spiritual rank are described as *those brought nigh* (56:11, 88; 83:21, 28). Following upon the previous verse allowing for the repentance of criminal wrongdoers, the *means of approach* to God might here allude to either the sinner's act of repentance or the forgiveness and acceptance of sincere repentance on the part of the victim. Those who seek to achieve nearness by other means, however, such as through the intercession of false deities, are rebuked (39:3; 46:28). A well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*) describes the best means of approach to God as being the fulfillment of the mandatory religious acts, such as prayer, charity, and fasting. The *ḥadīth* then indicates that the pious servant of God may draw yet nearer to Him through supererogatory good works. In Sufi thought, seeking to approach God and attaining nearness to Him are the loftiest of spiritual goals and stations.

For Sufi commentators, as for others, right action and fulfilling religious duties was the primary *means of approach* to God, although Sufi commentators also stress cultivating spiritual

in His way, that haply you may prosper. (36) Truly those who disbelieve, were they to possess all that is on the earth and the like of it besides with which to ransom themselves from the punishment of the Day of Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them. And theirs shall be a painful punishment. (37) They will wish to come forth from the Fire, but they shall not come forth from it. And theirs shall be a lasting punishment. (38) As for the male thief and the female thief, cut off their hands as a recompense for what they have earned, as an exemplary punishment from God. Truly God is Mighty, Wise. (39) But whosoever repents after his wrongdoing, and makes amends, God will relent unto

virtues, such as patience, contentment, and sincerity as "means of approach" to God (Su, Qu). Ibn ʿAjībah sees the means to approach as necessarily including a spiritually accomplished *shaykh,* who can guide the aspirant toward removing the soul's impurities, thereby increasing nearness to God. To *strive in His way* is also a common injunction throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:218; 4:95; 8:72, 74; 9:20; 49:15).

36–37 The certainty of the reckoning after death is a central theme of the Quran, and the Quran repeatedly asserts the futility of seeking to *ransom* oneself with worldly goods in order to escape punishment in the Hereafter. See 2:48, 123; 3:91; 10:54; 13:18; 39:47; 57:15; 70:11.

38–39 V. 38 contains another of the five *ḥadd* punishments specifically mentioned in the Quran (see 5:33c), establishing the amputation of a hand as the punishment for theft. According to al-Qurṭubī, amputation was the punishment for theft in the pre-Islamic (*jāhiliyyah*) period in Arabia as well. Although some commentators argued that this penalty applied to all manner of theft, regardless of the amount or degree, most legal authorities asserted, on the basis of a Prophetic *ḥadīth* and the precedent of the early Caliphs, that the punishment applied only to those who stole a significant sum or a very precious object. The minimum amount for which the penalty can be applied is variously given as 3 *dirhams* (3 grams of silver) or, most commonly, one quarter of a *dīnār* (1 gram of gold) or their equivalent in goods (Q, Ṭ). Others put the minimum amount at the worth of a shield (Q). For less than this, the penalty is restitution or compensation for the stolen goods, which al-Shāfiʿī considers to be mandatory even for those to whom the *ḥadd* punishment is also applied (Q).

The verse is explicit that the penalty applies equally to both male and female thieves, as is the case explicitly for adultery (see 24:2–3) and as is understood to be the case with all *ḥadd* penalties. To emphasize the point and the universality of the penalty, the Prophet famously asserted that even if his beloved daughter Fāṭimah were to be caught stealing, he would not hesitate to apply the penalty to her as well (IK).

Although the penalty is meant to be disabling, it is not intended to result in death, and Islamic Law requires that medical procedures be used to stop the bleeding and prevent death. The *ḥadd* punishments are understood to be a right God has against the perpetrator of crimes that, like theft, have a destabilizing effect on the society at large. Each thus serves not only as a *recompense* for the crime, but also as an *exemplary punishment* meant to deter others from such crimes and keep their overall incidence very low. To *make amends* here, according to al-Qurṭubī, means repenting of all disobedient actions.

As in v. 34, the door of repentance remains open, even for the worst of criminals. The commentators debated whether or not repentance spared a thief from the punishment of amputation. Some asserted that it did; others argued that it did not and that God's "relenting" toward the repentant thief, promised in these verses, pertains only to his judgment and punishment in the

him. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (40) Dost thou not know that unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth? He punishes whomsoever He will, and He forgives whomsoever He will. And God is Powerful over all things. (41) O Messenger! Let them not grieve thee, those who hasten unto disbelief, those who say, "We believe" with their mouths, while their hearts believe not, and those who are Jews, who listen to lies and to others who have not come to thee. They distort the meaning of the word, saying, "If you are given this, then take it, but if you are not given this, then beware!" For whomsoever God desires that he be tried, thou hast no power to avail him aught against God. They are

Hereafter (Q, Ṭ). Several *aḥādīth* indicate that the Prophet assured repentant thieves who had undergone the *ḥadd* punishment that they were forgiven by God and had been purified of their sin as a result of the punishment (IK). Similar to the case of armed offenses (*ḥirābah*), discussed in vv. 33–34, foundational legal scholars, including Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfiʿī, held that the *ḥadd* punishment could be averted only if the perpetrator were forgiven by the victim and not brought before the authorities (JJ, Z).

**40** This verse closes the section on punishment with a reminder that God is the ultimate judge, and the true dispenser of both punishment and forgiveness. Al-Rāzī understands this verse as supporting the Ashʿarite thesis that God's inherent right to punish some while forgiving others—even if it might seem arbitrary to the human mind—is justified on the basis of His *Sovereignty* and "ownership" (*mulk*, which means both) of all things as their Creator.

**41** This verse is one of many that seek to comfort the Prophet in the face of those who reject or assail his message, here referring to both the hypocrites—*those who say, "We believe" with their mouths, while their hearts believe not*—and those Jews of Madinah who sought to undermine or discredit the Prophet's mission. Some commentators indicate that hypocrites and the Jews are not necessarily grouped together here, and that *while their hearts believe not, and those who are Jews, who listen to lies* may be read, "while their hearts believe not. Those who are Jews listen to lies" (R, Z). *Who listen to lies,* which was widely understood to mean listening to and accepting as truth the lies that were told, may also be read, "who listen [to the Prophet] in order to lie or deny [what he says]" (R).

The most widely reported context given for the specific issues mentioned with regard to the Jews in vv. 41–44 is the incident mentioned in 5:15c, in which the case of two Jewish adulterers from a nearby town, either Khaybar or, in some accounts, Fadak, were brought for judgment to the Prophet by the Madinan Jews on behalf of their coreligionists outside Madinah (Ṭ, Z). When the Prophet asked about the Torah ruling on the matter, he was reportedly given distorted information, as the Jews sought to conceal the Torah's prescribed penalty of stoning and avert this punishment from the two adulterers (W). That these Jews *listen to lies* is understood to mean that they listen to their own rabbis' misrepresentation of the Torah teachings. That they listen to *others who have not come to thee* refers to their consulting with the Jews outside Madinah, in Khaybar (or Fadak), who instructed the Madinan Jews: *if you are given this*—that is, if the Prophet ordains flogging for the adulterers—*then take it,* but if *you are not given this,* and they are given the penalty of stoning, *then beware!* (Ṭ, W, Z). A minority report says that this verse and vv. 41–47 in general refer to a dispute brought to the Prophet by two Madinan Jewish clans, the Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayẓah, about whether compensation (*dīyah*) can be accepted rather than execution for

those whose hearts God desired not to purify. Theirs is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter they shall have a great punishment. (42) Those who listen to lies, and consume what is unlawful—if they come to thee, then judge between them, or turn away from them. If thou turnest away from them, they will not

the slaying of one who is of a lower tribal standing than the murderer (Q, Ṭ).

*Distort the meaning of the word* (*yuḥarrifūna'l-kalima min baʿdi mawāḍiʿihi*) can mean, literally, to move words from their proper place in the text, and some suggest that the Madinan Jewish leaders removed the stoning passage from its context in the Torah's discussion of adultery (JJ). This "distortion" (*taḥrīf*) of the scriptural text on the part of the Jews is similarly described in 2:75; 4:46; 5:13. Multiple accounts say that when the Jews requested a ruling from the Prophet on the two Jewish adulterers, and he demanded to know the ruling in the Torah, they took him to a young rabbi named Ibn Ṣūriyā, who confirmed the Torah penalty of stoning. He or another Jewish authority apprised the Prophet that the Jewish leaders had decided to change the prescribed penalty of stoning when they became reluctant to carry it out against those of high social standing and so substituted the alternate penalty of flogging and public humiliation, which they were more comfortable imposing upon all adulterers (Ṭ, Z). The Prophet thereafter decided to impose the penalty of stoning on the adulterers, asserting that this practice was a revival of the original teaching of the Torah (Ṭ).

*That he be tried* (*fitnatahu*) can refer to either trial or temptation. In the negative context in which it is found, however, some major commentators understand this verse to mean that when God desires that some be in error, no one, not even the Prophet, has the power to change their spiritual situation against God's Will (R, Ṭ). Thus there is no reason for the Prophet to be saddened by their rejection of him. For similar reassurances to the Prophet about those who rejected the Quranic message, see v. 68; 3:176; 6:33; 10:65; 16:127; 31:23; 36:76. Such people are *those whose hearts God desired not to purify*. For al-Rāzī, this means that God refuses to aid them spiritually as a consequence of their evil actions or that He refuses to *purify* them of the negative passions and emotions that lead them to disbelief. For the pairing of *disgrace in this world* and *punishment* in the Hereafter, see 5:33 and commentary.

42 This verse continues the discussion of the Madinah Jews who attempted to deceive the Prophet when they came to him for judgment. That they *consume what is unlawful* refers not to food, but to illegal financial gain (JJ), most specifically bribery (Ṭ), and is mentioned in connection with the Jews of the Prophet's time in vv. 62–63 as well. *If they come to thee, then judge between them, or turn away from them* gives the Prophet the option of adjudicating a matter among the People of the Book that is brought to him or refusing to do so. Islamic legal scholars considered this incident and this verse as bearing upon the Islamic authorities' right to adjudicate at least some crimes and disputes among the non-Muslims within the Islamic state when no Muslim is involved in the matter. Both al-Shāfiʿī and Mālik held that if a serious matter between two non-Muslims is brought to the Islamic ruler (*imām*), he may choose to adjudicate their case or abstain from it (Q); if the Islamic ruler declined to rule on the case, it would be adjudicated within the non-Muslims' own religious community. Some say that this choice to adjudicate such cases or abstain from doing so was abrogated by v. 48, which instructs the Prophet to *judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down,* although others disagree (Q, Ṭ). Al-Shāfiʿī, Mālik, and other legal scholars considered it the duty of the Islamic ruler to adjudicate all serious disputes among non-Muslims that also involve a Muslim. Once the matter is brought to the Islamic ruler, however, the matter is to be adjudicated according to Islamic Law (Q, Ṭ; cf. 5:48–49 and commentary). For the importance of judging with justice, see 4:58, 135 and commentary. See also 4:65, where the unwillingness of certain Madinan hypocrites to accept the Prophet's judgments in their disputes is a sign of their lack of belief. *God loves the just* is repeated in 60:8.

harm thee in the least. But if thou judgest, judge between them with justice. Truly God loves the just. (43) And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah, wherein is God's Judgment? Yet even after that, they turn their backs, and they are not believers. (44) Truly We sent down the Torah, wherein is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who submitted [unto God] judged those who are Jews, as did the sages and the rabbis, in accordance with such of God's Book as they were bidden to preserve and to which they were witnesses. So fear not mankind, but fear Me! And sell not My signs for a paltry price. Whosoever judges not by that which God has sent down—it is

43–44 The opening question in v. 43 suggests the disingenuousness of the Madinan Jews in seeking the Prophet's judgment on a matter already clearly decreed in their own scriptures, and that they were merely seeking a more lenient ruling than the one they had been given (Ṭ). This verse, then, along with vv. 44–47, indicates that the Torah and the Gospel remain valid sources of moral and legal judgment and guidance for Jews and Christians, respectively, even after the coming of the Prophet—indeed, even in his presence. See also v. 68, where the People of the Book are likewise enjoined to observe their scriptures. The Torah is described here as containing *a guidance and a light,* as it is in 6:91. The *prophets who submitted [unto God]* is thought, by some, to refer to the Prophet Muhammad, because of the connection to the notion of "submission" (*islām;* Ṭ), but it more likely refers to those Israelite prophets who lived between Moses and Jesus (Z). *Sages* translates *rabbāniyyūn,* which is defined in several different ways by early Islamic commentators: as the legal (or political) authorities among the Jews (Ṭ); as the ascetic devotees (*zuhhād*) among the descendants of Aaron, and so perhaps "priests" (Z); or as the most authoritative scholars among the Jews, those comparable to Islamic jurisprudents (*mujtahidūn*) insofar as they were qualified to issue decisive rulings on religious Law (R). *Rabbis* translates *aḥbār,* which was usually glossed simply as the religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) among the Jews. The warning *fear not mankind, but fear Me* is also found in v. 3; 2:150; 3:175.

The warning against "selling" weighty religious matters—such as Divine revelations and covenants—*for a paltry price* is a common metaphorical warning and chastisement in the Quran, meant to suggest the absurdity of such an exchange and the inevitable loss one incurs in trading something of eternal value—Divine guidance and salvation—for the ephemeral things of this world (cf. 2:41, 79, 174; 3:77, 187, 199; 9:9; 16:95). Together these two commands enjoin the Jewish authorities and scholars to preserve the Torah as it had been revealed and to avoid altering it, either out of fear of others or to gain wealth and social standing by changing the laws to suit influential people (cf. the warning against unlawful consumption, meaning "bribery" in v. 42).

Those who do not judge according to *that which God has sent down*—here invoking the case of the Jews neglecting the judgment on adulterers found in the Torah—are *disbelievers, kāfirūn. Kāfirūn* also has the meaning of those who "cover" or "hide" something and may thus refer to those who, like the Jews in this incident, try to conceal the words or rulings found in scripture (Ṭ), rather than to those in an absolute state of disbelief. The warning to those who do not judge *by that which God has sent down* is repeated in vv. 45 and 47, where such people are described as *wrongdoers* and *iniquitous,* respectively. An interpretation attributed to the early commentator Ibn ʿAbbās asserts that those who actively oppose or reject the Judgment of God are disbelievers, while those who simply fail to judge according to Divine Law are *wrongdoers* (v. 45) and *iniquitous* (v. 47; Z). The Quran states elsewhere that judgment is ultimately the prerogative of God alone (6:57, 62; 12:40, 67).

they who are disbelievers. (45) And therein We prescribed for them: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds, retribution. But whosoever forgoes it out of charity, it shall be an expiation for him. Whosoever judges not by that which God has sent down—it is they who are wrongdoers. (46) And in their footsteps, We sent Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him, and We gave him the Gospel, wherein is a guidance and a light, confirming the Torah that had come before him, as a guidance and an exhortation to the reverent. (47) Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has sent down therein. Whosoever

45 This verse provides a general description of the law of retribution found in the Torah (see Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21), although forgoing the retribution *out of charity* is not mentioned in these Biblical passages. Al-Rāzī indicates that this verse was meant to remind the Jews of the law of the Torah regarding retribution for murder and injury. Indeed, some commentators suggest that vv. 41–44 refer not only to the Jews altering the penalty for adultery, but also to their neglect of the proper retribution and penalty for killing. The Madinan Jewish clans, the Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayẓah, would reportedly alter the required retribution in accordance with the relative social standing of the killer and the victim. As the Banū Naḍīr were of a higher social standing than the Banū Qurayẓah, if a member of the Banū Naḍīr killed one of the Banū Qurayẓah, he would not face retribution, but merely be required to pay compensation; in the reverse situation, however, the perpetrator would be killed or required to pay a much higher amount of compensation (R, Ṭ). The present verse is meant to indicate that the true Torah ruling regarding retribution, *a life for a life,* makes no accommodation based on the social status of killer or killed and makes no provision for the payment of compensation *(diyah)*—an alternative allowed in Islamic Law. According to this verse, the laws of the Torah allow only equivalent retribution or outright forgiveness (Q, R).

Although the commentators understand this to be a description of the law of retribution as given specifically to Moses, similar principles exist for Muslims (cf. 2:178; 2:178c; 4:92; 42:40). Forgoing lawful retribution as an act of charity is said in the present verse to be an *expiation* for sin, but the commentators have differed over whether this act expiated the sins of the forgiving party as a reward for his charity or whether it served to expiate the sin of the offender (Ṭ, Ż). Al-Ṭabarī argues that the expiation is for the forgiving party, since another *ḥadīth* clearly indicates that expiation for the offender comes through the carrying out of the *ḥadd* penalty for the crime; and he cites a *ḥadīth* that states that forgoing one's right to retribution as an act of charity serves as an expiation of one's own sins. A reward from God for the forgiving party seems indicated in 42:40, suggesting either that the expiation is for the forgiver or, alternately, that the expiation is for the offender and a separate "reward" from God lies in store for the forgiver (R).

46 *In their footsteps* means in the footsteps of the *prophets who submitted,* mentioned in v. 44 (R, Ż). In the present verse both Jesus and the Gospel he brings are separately described as *confirming the Torah.* Jesus is also described as confirming the Torah in 3:50 and 61:6, as is John the Baptist in 3:39. That Jesus "confirms the Torah" means that he upholds the validity of all Torah rulings not specifically abrogated by the Gospel (Ṭ); see also 3:50, where Jesus comes *to make lawful* unto the Israelites *part of that which was forbidden* to them. The Gospel here, like the Torah in v. 44, is described as containing *a guidance and a light.* The Quran is also described as a *light* in v. 15; 7:157; 64:8.

47 Several commentators note that enjoining the *people of the Gospel* to *judge by what God has sent down therein* means that they should follow

judges not by that which God has sent down—it is they who are iniquitous. (48) And We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth, confirming the Book that came before it, and as a protector over it. So judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down, and follow not their caprices away from the truth that has come unto thee. For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ. (49) And judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down, and follow not their caprices. And beware of them, lest they tempt thee away

the rulings of the Torah in most cases, since Jesus himself lived largely according to Torah rulings, with the exception of those that the Gospel abrogates (IK), and since the Gospel itself contains teachings and exhortations, but relatively few legal rulings (Z). This verse indicates that the Gospel remains a valid source of guidance for *the people of the Gospel,* just as vv. 43–44 suggest that the Jews can continue to find guidance in the Torah. The continuing validity of these two scriptures is also suggested in v. 68: *O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord.* Several commentators, however, argue that the exhortation here to follow the Gospel indicates only that they should have followed the Gospel prior to the coming of the Quran, which thereafter abrogated the scripture that came before it (IK, R). This reading seems implausible in light of other Quranic verses, however, since v. 43 questions why the Jews have come to the Prophet for judgment (regarding two Jewish adulterers) *when they have the Torah,* indicating that Prophetic adjudication is not necessary (even during his lifetime) as long as they follow their own scripture. And indeed, in issuing his ruling in that case—namely, the implementation of the penalty of stoning, the Prophet stated that his actions were intended to revive (and thus legitimate) the Torah ruling for the Jews (see commentary on 5:41–44).

48 This verse addresses the Prophet directly and describes *the Book* sent down to him—that is, the Quran—as *confirming the Book that came before it,* just as the Gospel confirms the Torah. The Quran is also described as "confirming" earlier scriptures in 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 6:92; 35:31; 46:30. The Quran is further described as a *protector* (*muhaymin*) over the previous scriptures, meaning that the Quran testifies to the validity of the earlier scriptures and serves as their trustee, keeper, and guardian (Ṭ, Z). "Protector" (*al-Muhaymin*) is also one of the Names of God in the Quran (59:23). The idea of the Quran as guardian and keeper of previous revelations is consistent with 5:41c and 5:45c, which report that the Prophet ordered the sentence of stoning for the two idolaters as well as retribution for killing and injury in order to reestablish the original Torah rulings on these matters. When the Prophet "judges between them"—that is, the People of the Book—this verse enjoins him to do so in accordance with *what God has sent down,* which most major commentators understand to mean that he should judge according to what God has revealed to him, namely, the Quran (Bḍ, Ṭ, Z). Alternately, it could mean that he should judge the People of the Book according to *what God has sent down* to them, namely, their own scriptures (which is what the Prophet explicitly does in the incident discussed in vv. 41–43). That he should *follow not their caprices* means that he should not rule in

accordance with their unwarranted digressions from or alterations to their own law, as discussed in vv. 41–47 (Ṭ), or that he should not comply with their desire to alter or neglect what has come to the Prophet himself in the Quran (Bḍ). The Prophet is similarly warned against following the *caprices* of the People of the Book in the following verse, as well as in 2:120, 145; 42:15.

Although vv. 41–47, taken together, suggest the validity of Jews and Christians judging by their own scriptures, and thus the continuing spiritual guidance to be found in those scriptures, this verse goes farther by asserting the providential nature of different religious communities and their distinct laws and practices. Indeed, the verse does not pertain only to Jews and Christians, but rather makes a universal statement about all religions. *For each among you We have appointed a law and a way* indicates that different religious communities may have different ritual and legal formulations specifically "appointed" for them by God, and that each religious community is independent of the laws of other such communities, even if the essential truths and principles of the religions are the same (IK, Q, R, Ṭ).

*Law* here translates *shirʿah,* from the same root as *sharīʿah,* the technical term for religious law, and Islamic Law in particular; *way* (*minhāj*) denotes a path that is smooth and clear (Ṭ, Z). For some commentators, these different "laws" and "ways" are not valid simultaneously; rather, God ordains a particular "law" and "way" for each era (Bḍ, Z). A minority opinion attributed to the early commentator Mujāhid understands *a law and a way* as a reference to one law and one way, namely, Islam (Ṭ). Ibn Kathīr argues that in *for each among you We have appointed a law and a way,* the word "Quran" was elided, but meant to be understood, so that the phrase would read, "for each among you We have appointed [the Quran] as a law and a way," indicating the universality of Quranic rulings. These more exclusivist readings, however, seem inconsistent with the verse's clear implication that it is the Divine Will that there be multiple religious communities, as expressed in the next line of this verse, *had God willed, He would have made you one community* (Ṭ). Grammatically, this is a counterfactual conditional statement indicating that human beings do not exist as *one* (religious) *community,* because God has not willed it as such. See also 2:213; 10:19; 11:118; 16:93; 42:8, where the reality of multiple human religious communities is also mentioned.

Moreover, the present verse goes on to state a Divine purpose for this plurality of religious forms, namely, *that He might try you in that which He has given you,* by testing your obedience (Ṭ). Thus like other modes of human differentiation mentioned in the Quran—including gender, race, and social status (cf. 49:13)—the existence of different religious communities can be understood as a matter of Divine Wisdom whose intention is advancing the spiritual good of human beings. A good example of religious differentiation as a test of obedience can be seen in 2:143–45, where God is said to appoint different directions of prayer (*qiblahs*) for different communities; He appointed for the Muslims a *qiblah* different from that of the People of Book, so that He would *know those who follow the Messenger from those who turn back.* Commentators who interpret the different revealed religious forms as having validity only in particular historical situations, however, suggest that the existence of different religions is a "trial" to distinguish the faithful from those who disbelieve (Q) with regard to the religious form that was ordained by God for their own time, abrogating those that came before it (IK).

The subsequent command, *vie with one another in good deeds* (cf. 2:148; 3:114), however, seems most plausibly addressed to human beings as a whole (Ṭ) and thus supposes not a process of supersession among religious forms, but rather a contemporaneous existence of different religious communities competing in virtue. The competition is in *good deeds* and thus on the practical rather than theological level. Resolving the intractable theological differences between the religions may not be a vocation for religious adherents in this world; rather, these may be matters only resolved by God in the Hereafter, when *He will inform you of that wherein you differ.* This verse carries enormous importance for the question of religious pluralism from an Islamic perspective. Since it is one of the key verses confirming the essential truth of different religious forms and indicating that the formal differences between religions have been Divinely ordained, it has played a central role in contemporary Islamic discussions of religious pluralism.

49 This verse repeats the injunction to judge between the People of the Book according to

from some part of that which God has sent down unto thee. And if they turn away, know that God desires to smite them for some sin of theirs, and surely many among mankind are iniquitous. (50) Is it the judgment of the Age of Ignorance that they seek? And who is fairer in judgment than God, for a people who are certain. (51) O you who believe! Take not Jews and Christians as protectors. They are the protectors of one another. And whosoever takes them as protectors,

scripture, and many of the major commentators note that it is the Islamic scripture alone by which the Prophet should judge (Q, Ṭ). The verse also repeats the warning not to follow the *caprices* of the People of the Book. Ibn ʿAbbās links the warning to the Prophet about being "tempted away from" the revelations he has been given to a reported incident in which a group of Madinan Jewish authorities, including Ibn Ṣūriyā (see 5:41c), tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Prophet to side with them in a dispute they had with some of their fellow coreligionists in Madinah; they "tempted" him with the suggestion that, if he were to rule in their favor, they would become believers in his message and confirm the truth of his prophethood and that, given their influence, the wider Jewish population would follow them in this matter (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z).

For some, the fact that the Quran here warns the Prophet about the possibility of his being "tempted" by them indicates that, although prophets never sin intentionally, they may have lapses of judgment or make errors (Q, R). The warning, however, seems to relate generally and plausibly to the Prophet and to the Quran's concern, discussed in vv. 41–47, that the Jews follow the Torah rulings as they had been revealed to them, without alteration. And some say that the warning to the Prophet is that the Jews might mislead him into issuing an incorrect ruling by lying to him about the true content of the Torah and the penalties it prescribes (Ṭs). If the Jews should *turn away* from the Prophet's ruling, the Quran seems to console the Prophet by telling him that their refusal merely reflects God's desire to *smite them for some sin of theirs*. For al-Rāzī, this proves that all good and evil comes about through the Will of God for some ultimate purpose.

50 The *Age of Ignorance* (*jāhiliyyah;* cf. 3:154; 33:33) refers to the era in Arabia prior to the coming of Islam, an era marked by idolatry and a culpable "ignorance" of true religion. The *judgment of the Age of Ignorance,* unguided as it was by any religious law, was governed solely by human opinion and caprice (IK). The reference to the *judgment of the Age of Ignorance* may pertain particularly to the issue of the differential penalties for killing reportedly meted out among the Jewish clans according to the social status of killer and killed (R, Z; see 2:178c; 5:45c). Such judgment, which takes social status into consideration, was characteristic of the tribal system in Arabia, but unacceptable in Divine Law (cf. 4:135; 5:45c). The verse thus serves as a chastisement to those who would reject the Prophet's judgment because it did not accord with their own wishes, reminding them that such approaches to judgment are the hallmark of an idolatrous age ignorant of Divine Law and its ultimate justice, benefit, and mercy (IK, Ṭ).

51 This verse addressed to Muslims (*O you who believe*) forbids them to take Jews and Christians *as protectors* (*awliyāʾ*). *Awliyāʾ* (sing. *walī*) can also mean "friends" or "allies" (see also 3:28c; 4:139c), but here more likely denotes those whom one would turn to as a protector or dominant authority. This term and the verbal noun from the same root, *walāyah,* are used in the Quran to denote the bonds of loyalty, mutual protection, and friendship that ideally mark the relationship between members of the same religious community (see, e.g., 8:72; 9:71). Although this is the only verse in the Quran in which believers are urged not to take Jews and Christians, specifically, as protectors, believers are elsewhere urged to avoid taking as protectors those who disbelieve (3:28; 4:89, 139, 144), those who mock their religion (v. 57), God's enemies (60:1), and even close relatives who *prefer disbelief to belief* (9:23). That Jews and Christians *are protectors of one another*

surely he is of them. Truly God guides not wrongdoing people. (52) Yet thou seest those in whose hearts is a disease hastening to them, saying, "We fear lest a change of fortune should befall us." It may be that God will grant victory, or

indicates that they realize those bonds of loyalty among themselves, as separate religious communities; and in vv. 80–81, they are criticized for having themselves taken "disbelievers" as protectors.

This verse reportedly concerned certain Madinan Muslims who had political allies and protectors among the Jews. One report tells of the Companion ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, one of the natives of Madinah who had become Muslim (Anṣār) but had maintained alliances of mutual protection with the Jewish clans. He came to the Prophet to renounce his attachment to them and to declare that his only "protectors" were God, the Prophet, and the believers (see v. 55). Another Madinan Muslim, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, subsequently came to the Prophet declaring his need to maintain a similar relationship of protection with his Jewish allies, and this verse then came down, instructing him and believers generally not to do so (Q, R, Ṭ). Another account reports that after the Muslims suffered the military loss at Uḥud, some Muslims, feeling vulnerable, established allies among the Jewish clans. This verse was meant to forbid this practice (Ṭ).

The verse warns that whoever takes the Jews and Christians as protectors is *of them,* meaning one of them. Thus to seek an alliance of mutual protection with Jews or Christians is to identify oneself as one of them, since the relationship of mutual protection (*walāyah*) with one's coreligionists is what defines one, in part, as a member of the religious community. See also 3:28 and 4:139, where taking such allies *apart from the believers*—that is, apart from fellow Muslims—is explicitly criticized. For some this means that the status of one who allies with members of another religious community, such as with Jews or Christians, has the same status, legally and theologically, as the other members of that religious community (Q, Ṭū). The verse's prohibition against alliances of protection with those outside the Muslim community likely had much to do with the fluid and somewhat precarious social and political situation of the fledgling Islamic community during the time of the Prophet; and it is important to note that Islamic Law, developed after the Islamic state had become fully established, allowed agreements of mutual protection with non-Muslim states and political entities. According to some commentators, this verse also means, in part, that the relationships of inheritance between those who ally themselves with another group and the members of the Muslim community are nullified, since the root for *awliyā'/walī* can relate to inheritance as well as to mutual protection (Q, Ṭs).

The word for *protector* (*awliyā'/walī*) can also mean "friend," and thus the verse may cast doubt on the acceptability of Muslims maintaining amiable relations with Jews and Christians, leading some but not all to conclude that one should not have close relationships with them or confide in them (Z). Some commentators include a report that the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, adduced this verse in an (unsuccessful) attempt to persuade his provincial governor, Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, to stop employing the services of his Christian scribe (IK, R, Z). Nonetheless, most commentators as well as the reported occasion of revelation for this verse make clear that here the word connotes something closer to "protector" or "ally" and situates it in a context of the Islamic community struggling to define and establish itself against those who were enemies of the religion. The verse should not be interpreted as forbidding friendly relations with Jews and Christians on a purely personal level, since such a reading would contradict v. 5, which allowed for the most intimate of personal relationships—marriage—to exist between Muslim men and Jewish and Christian women, and 60:7–8, which states that Muslims may behave justly and kindly to any who do not fight them *on account of religion* or otherwise oppress them.

52 *Those in whose hearts is a disease* describes those of impure intentions (33:32) or those who *secretly* harbor *in their souls* a deep religious hypocrisy or doubt (see 2:8–11; 24:47–50; 33:12, 60; 47:20, 29; 74:31). This verse may be addressing the specific case of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, mentioned

a command from Him. And then they shall be remorseful for that which they secretly harbored in their souls. (53) And those who believe will say, "Are these the ones who swore by God with their most solemn oaths that they were with you?" Their deeds have come to naught, and they have become losers. (54) O you who believe! Whosoever among you should renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward the believers, stern toward the disbelievers, striving in the way of God, and fearing not the blame of any blamer. That is the Bounty of God, which He gives to

in connection with the previous verse, or more likely hypocrites in general, who, fearing a *change of fortune,* attempted to "hedge their bets" by establishing supportive alliances with those outside the Muslim community who would protect them if the community suffered adversity (R, Ṭ). Such people are warned that God may *grant a victory* (*fatḥ*)—widely understood as a reference to the future Muslim victory over religious opponents (R, Z) or over the Makkans in 8/630 (Ṭ)—which will cause them to regret their hypocrisy (*that which they secretly harbored in their souls*). The word *fatḥ* can also mean "judgment," so another reading is that God may "grant a judgment," but many reconcile the two readings by considering the conquest of Makkah to manifest God's ultimate judgment in favor of the Muslim believers over the Makkan idolaters (Ṭ). He may also send *a command* that will cause similar regret, and many early commentators interpret this as the implementation of the tax (*jizyah*) on the non-Muslim residents of the Islamic state (Q, Ṭ; see 9:29) or the later expulsion of the Jews and Christians from the central regions of Arabia (R, Z). Alternately, some suggest that this *command* might be a sudden revealing of the insincere intentions of the hypocrites (Ṭ, Z). According to al-Rāzī, *it may be that God will grant victory* indicates a promised certainty, not a mere possibility, as the wording may literally suggest.

53 If the *command* that God may bring in v. 52 represents a sudden revealing of the hidden insincerity of the hypocrites, as some have posited, then the believers' question here is an expression of surprise at the hypocrisy of those who had sworn *their most solemn oaths that they were with* them as well as of gratitude for God's granting success to those who were sincere in their faith (R, Ṭ, Z). Alternately, the believers' question may be addressed to the Jews with whom some Muslims had sought alliance, meaning, *Are these* (hypocrites) *the ones who swore by God . . . that they were with you* (the Jews); see also 59:11, where the hypocrites are reported to have vowed their protection for their Jewish allies (Z). The Quran and Islamic teachings in general explicitly require both belief and "good deeds" for salvation (see, e.g., 2:25; 3:57; 4:57). Although some schools of theology have accepted the possibility of eventual salvation through faith alone, most have considered works to be indicative of or related to faith, and all have agreed, on the basis of this and similar verses, that works in the absence of proper faith will be meaningless on the Day of Judgment (Z) and effectively *come to naught* (cf. 2:217; 5:5; 6:88; 7:147; 9:17; 18:105; 33:19; 39:65; 47:32), since they merit no reward and have no salvific value (R, Ṭ, Z). Those who do good deeds without faith are the *losers* in the Hereafter, meaning that they will perish for their lack of faith, despite their deeds (Ṭ). In a deeper sense, what one might consider "good deeds" are not really "good" unless they are combined with faith.

54 Cf. 4:133; 6:133; 14:19; 35:16; 47:38. This verse makes it clear that those who *renounce* (*yartadda*) the religion of Islam do no harm to God or ultimately to His religion, since God will replace them with those who are sincerely bound to God by mutual love. As this verse immediately follows the discussion of improper alliances with members of the Jewish and Christian communities in vv. 51–53, it may suggest that such alliances are tantamount, in some cases, to apostasy

(*irtidād,* from the same root as *yartadda;* R, Ṭ). However, this should not be understood in absolute terms, since both the Prophet and the early Muslim authorities engaged in treaty relations with non-Muslim powers or groups, and the Christian king of Abyssinia famously sheltered and protected a group of Muslims from persecution in Makkah prior to the migration to Madinah. The problem emerges in situations in which such alliances entail the risk of division among the Muslims or betrayal of the Muslim community by or in favor of its enemies. Many major commentators consider the verse as referring to and foretelling the apostasy of some Arab tribes during the later life of the Prophet as well as several other tribes who renounced their allegiance to the Madinan caliphate after the Prophet's death (JJ, Q, R, Z).

Commentators have differed over the identity of those whom *God will bring* in place of the renouncers (cf. 4:133; 6:133; 14:19; 35:16; 47:38). Many consider it a reference to the first caliph, Abū Bakr, who successfully fought the apostate Arab tribes (IK, Ṭ, R, Z). Many also note that it may refer, on the basis of a *ḥadīth,* to Abū Mūsā al-Ashᶜarī and his tribe or Yemeni tribes in general, who played a major role in the Islamic conquests under the second caliph, ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Z). Less widely reported interpretations consider it a reference to the Madinan Helpers (Anṣār; Ṭ, Ṭū) or to the people of Salmān al-Fārsī—that is, the Persians—also on the basis of a *ḥadīth,* although one less widely reported than the one involving Abū Mūsā al-Ashᶜarī (R, Ṭs, Z). Additionally, some raise the possibility that the reference may be to ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law, and close Companion as well as the fourth caliph. ᶜAlī carried the standard at the Battle of Khaybar (7/629), and on the eve of the battle the Prophet reportedly said, "Tomorrow I shall give the standard to one who loves God and His Messenger, and whom God and His Messenger love" (R, Ṭs, Ṭū). Despite these differing views, the reference is likely general as well as historical and is meant to indicate that God will never lack for sincere servants, despite the perfidy and hypocrisy of others.

Interpretations of this verse were sometimes connected to Sunni-Shiite debates about the relative merits of Abū Bakr, whom Sunnis agree is the legitimate first caliph, and ᶜAlī, whom Shiites believe should have been caliph immediately after the death of the Prophet. The fact that the verse could be considered a reference to Abū Bakr or to ᶜAlī inspired some commentators to issue long defenses of its proper attribution to either Abū Bakr (R) or ᶜAlī (Ṭs, Ṭū), primarily on the basis of which one best exemplified the other characteristics mentioned in the verse: *humble toward the believers, stern toward the disbelievers, striving in the way of God.*

Additionally, some Shiite commentators interpret the verse's mention of those who renounce their religion as a reference to those who rebelled against the authority of ᶜAlī's caliphate, particularly the people of Baṣrah, who initiated the First Civil War (36–40/656–61) during his tenure as Caliph; and some Shiite reports indicate that ᶜAlī cited this verse during the opening battle of the First Civil War in Baṣrah (Ṭb, Ṭū). One Shiite commentator even connects this verse to what some early Shiites considered to be the "apostasy" of the Prophet's Companions who endorsed the caliphate of Abū Bakr and rejected what they believed to be the rightful and Divinely granted authority of ᶜAlī (Qm). This rather extreme view concerning non-Shiite Muslims was, however, later rejected by most Imāmī Shiite authorities. Nevertheless, some Shiite traditions consider those whom *God will bring* in the place of the renouncers to refer to the future Mahdī, understood by Shiites to be a descendant of ᶜAlī who will restore the Muslim community to its rightful (ᶜAlid) leadership and avenge the injustices perpetrated against the descendants of the Prophet (Qm, Ṭs). The Sunni commentator al-Rāzī, however, argues that this verse is among the strongest proofs against the extreme Imāmī Shiite contention that after the death of the Prophet, all those who confirmed the caliphate of Abū Bakr and neglected the authority of ᶜAlī had "apostatized," or renounced their religion. Al-Rāzī argues that since this verse promises that those who renounce their religion will be "replaced," and these early Companions clearly were not, it belies this early Shiite claim.

This verse has also been extensively discussed among theological and mystical commentators because of the mutual and reciprocal nature of love between God and His sincere servants it suggests in the phrase *a people whom He loves and who love Him.* The Quran makes numerous

statements about those whom God loves (the virtuous, the patient, the just) and those whom He does not (the sinners and transgressors), and love of God as a characteristic of the believers is also mentioned in 2:165 and commentary. The present verse is distinct, however, in that God's love of certain people is directly linked to their love of Him.

Some commentators were theologically uncomfortable with the idea that a relationship of love could exist between a human being and God. For example, some gloss those *who love Him* as those who obey God and seek to please Him and those *whom He loves* as those whom He rewards for their obedience (Ṭū, Z). However, this interpretation of human beings' love of God as "obedience" and God's love of human beings as "reward" seems to reverse the implied causality in the verse, since obedience (the servants' love for God) should precede God's reward thereof (His Love of them), whereas the verse suggests, conversely, that God's love of people precedes their love for Him. Because the verse seems to indicate that God's love for a person must precede that person's love for God (R), some mystical commentators connect this verse to the idea that the human inclination toward God is the result of God's having turned toward humanity first (Aj) or that God's love for human beings necessarily engenders human love of God (Qu). For al-Ghazzālī, this means that human love of God in this verse cannot simply be glossed as obedience to God, which must logically come before God's reward thereof (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, v. 4, p. 393).

Yet some commentators criticized in the strongest terms those interpreters—particularly the Sufis—who posit a relationship of essential love between human beings and God (Z), given the incommensurability between the two. Mystical writers responded in several ways. Al-Ghazzālī, for example, argues that God's love of anything, including humanity, is merely God's love of Himself, since He is infinite and nothing exists outside of His Being; whereas human love for God is nothing but God's intentional unveiling of Himself in the heart of the one seeking nearness to God, whose seeking itself is made possible only through God's determination (*Iḥyāʾ*, v. 4, p. 437). The mystical poet Rūmī cites this verse in his major work, *Masnawī-i maʿnawī*, asserting that love is an attribute that belongs to God alone and thus that human beings participate in it in only a derivative fashion (bk. 5, 2184–90).

Mystical writers also discuss this verse as pointing to the distinct reality of love in the relationship between God and men and women. Al-Qushayrī, for example, asserts that God's love for certain of His creatures is more particular than the Mercy that He shows toward all of His creatures. Although God's "Mercy" includes all the blessings that God might bestow, His "Love" is a more exclusive and ennobling relationship that He has with certain of His servants. Al-Qushayrī further distinguishes the love of the servant for God from other forms of piety or obedience, stating that such love is a "subtle state" that allows the servant to find delight in the Presence of God, His Beloved, and leads to the complete "disappearance" of the lover's separate existence in the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God. He describes it as an "intoxication" from which one never recovers and an "illness" for which there is no cure and for which no cure is sought.

The people *whom He loves* are also described as *humble* (*adhillah*) toward fellow believers; *adhillah* indicates not only humility, but also sympathy, mercy, and tenderness (R, Ṭb, Ṭū, Z). Toward the disbelievers, however, they are *stern* (*aʿizzah*), that is, harsh, showing their might. A parallel sentiment is expressed in 48:29, where the true followers of the Prophet are described as *harsh against the disbelievers, merciful to one another.* In acting so, in their *striving in the way of God* for the success of the religion, and in their *fearing not the blame of any blamer,* they present a sharp contrast to the hypocrites addressed in vv. 51–53, who make improper and even treasonous alliances out of fear (Z). Many commentators connect *striving in the way of God* here with the early Muslim community's struggle against the apostate tribes, mentioned above. However, in the discourse on love that al-Qushayrī offers on this verse, which is typical of the Sufi understanding of this phrase, *striving in the way of God* is purely spiritual, consisting of the struggle to maintain perfect obedience to God's commands, to detach oneself from worldly attachments, and to stand witness to God at every moment. *That is the Bounty of God* refers to the existence of the meritorious spiritual qualities of the believers mentioned in this verse. For al-Rāzī, this is proof that all good things, including the righteous acts

whomsoever He will. And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. (55) Your protector is only God, and His Messenger, and those who believe, who perform the prayer and give alms while bowing down. (56) And whosoever takes as his

of human beings, come ultimately from God (R). For others, however, this simply refers to God's Favor (*lutf;* Ṭū, Z), by which He leads people toward belief and good actions.

55 This verse continues the discussion of *protectors* begun in v. 51, reiterating that the believers should take only *God, and His Messenger, and those who believe* as protectors (*awliyā';* Ṭ). In this verse one's primary *protector* (*walī*) is God, one of whose Names is *Walī,* and one then takes His Prophet and the other believers as *awliyā'* as a natural extension of or corollary to one's *walāyah* in relation to God (Bḍ, R). Some consider this verse to be an endorsement of ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit (see 5:51c), who renounced his alliance with the Jewish clans and vowed his alliance solely to the Prophet and his community (IK, R). Others consider it to be a response to some Companions of the Prophet who complained about being socially ostracized by the Jewish clans Banū Qurayẓah and Banū Naḍīr (JJ, W).

Those *who perform the prayer and give alms while bowing down* can be understood as a description of the believers in general (Ṭ) or of the sincere believers who are untainted by hypocrisy (R, Z; cf. 9:71). To pray and give *alms while bowing down* may also indicate that one performs these religious deeds in a state of humility (R, Z; cf. 2:43, which also connects prayer and alms with "bowing down"). However, it is widely reported in both Shiite and Sunni commentaries that many early authorities, including the influential early commentators Ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid, considered this to be a specific reference to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's son-in-law, cousin, and the fourth Islamic caliph. According to these reports, the verse refers to an incident in which ʿAlī, while in the act of bowing during the prayer, gave his ring to a man requesting charity (Bḍ, IK, Ṭ, Z, W). The verse is thus seen as encouraging the practice of giving charity whenever it is requested and recommending that believers seek to emulate ʿAlī's high degree of virtue in refusing to delay giving the needed charity, even until the end of the prayer (Z). A minority tradition considers this verse to be a reference to Abū Bakr (R).

Shiites sometimes refer to this verse as the "verse of *wilāyah/walāyah*." Although *walī* is generally translated "protector" or "friend," the position of *walī* and the corresponding state of *wilāyah/walāyah* are also spiritual concepts that hold particular importance for Shiites, who have used these terms traditionally to refer to the unique spiritual authority of ʿAlī and his consequent right to succeed the Prophet as spiritual and political leader of the Muslim community. They consider this verse to be a reference to ʿAlī as the *walī* of the believers, after God and the Prophet, and thus interpret it as one of the clear indications of ʿAlī's rightful authority over the Muslim community (Ṭb, Ṭū).

A number of Sunni authors who acknowledge the widespread connection of this verse to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib nonetheless argue that traditions defending this thesis are not entirely sound (IK) or that they do not bear out the legitimist interpretations for ʿAlī that the Shiites attribute to them. Al-Rāzī, for example, denies that *wilāyah/walāyah* means anything other than friendship or mutual support here, rejecting the idea that it refers to a kind of spiritual authority and noting that ʿAlī did not reportedly adduce this verse in favor of his own right to the caliphate during a council (*shūrā*) that was convened to resolve the issue of the caliphate after the death of the second caliph, ʿUmar, in 22/644. Yet, the prevalence of the association of this verse with ʿAlī, even in Sunni commentaries and among some of the earliest authorities, argues strongly for its authenticity in the early Islamic *tafsīr* tradition.

56 Those who follow the injunction in vv. 51 and 55 to avoid taking protectors other than God, the Messengers, and the believers, are here described as the *party of God* (*ḥizb Allāh*)—a term that has been adopted by many groups in Islamic history up to today, including the Shiite movement and political party Hezbollah (an anglicized rendering of *ḥizb Allāh*) in contemporary

protector God, and His Messenger, and those who believe—the party of God, they are the victorious! (57) O you who believe! Take not as protectors those who take your religion in mockery and as play, from among those who were given the Book before you, or the disbelievers, and reverence God, if you are believers. (58) And when you call to prayer, they take it in mockery and as play. That is

Lebanon. *Party of God* is also used in 58:22, where it is described as consisting of those *who shall prosper,* those with whom God is content, and those who are content with God; they are contrasted with the *party of Satan* in 58:19.

57 This verse continues the discussion about those whom the believers should take as protectors. *Those who take your religion in mockery and as play* is understood to refer to those who feign belief outwardly, but harbor disbelief inwardly. The enemies of the believers are not only those who fight the religion, but also those who ridicule it. The Quran frequently mentions those who "mock" religion itself as well as the prophets (e.g., 15:11), the signs (e.g., 30:10), and the warnings of destruction sent by God (e.g., 11:8) and warns that they will eventually be destroyed by *that which they used to mock* (see, e.g., 6:10; 16:34; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26). To take *religion . . . as play* is to engage in it vainly and without commitment or serious purpose (cf. 6:70; 7:51). This passage reportedly refers to hypocrites whom some of the Muslim believers had befriended, warning the Muslims to discontinue their close relations with them (R, Ṭ, W, Z). Alternately, it is said to refer to some Jews and idolaters who would mock Muslims when they made the prostration in prayer (Q).

The verse mentions both *those who were given the Book before you,* that is, Jews and Christians feigning belief in Islam, and *the disbelievers.* The latter is taken as a separate category referring to the idolaters (Ṭ). For the foundational legal scholar al-Shāfiʿī, this verse meant that Muslims should not take People of the Book as allies, even against the idolaters (Q). As discussed in 5:51c, the command seems to pertain specifically to the circumstances of the new Islamic community in Madinah. Some say that it was connected with an incident in which the Prophet refused the help of some Madinan Jews who offered to fight alongside him in the Battle of Uḥud (3/625; Q); see 3:128c, where a similar incident is reported during the Battle of the Trench in 5/627.

58 *When you call to prayer* is considered a scriptural basis for the Islamic ritual practice of the call to prayer, technically referred to as the *adhān* (R, Z). This is the only verse that mentions the call to prayer directly, although it does not use the technical term, *adhān.* The call to prayer is ideally made publicly before each of the five daily prayers, and the text of the call in Sunni Islam is as follows:

*Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar* (God is great! God is great!).
*Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar* (God is great! God is great!).
*Ashhadu an lā ilāha illa'Llāh* (I bear witness that there is no god but God).
*Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūlu'Llāh* (I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God).
*Hayya ʿalā'l-ṣalāh* (Come to the prayer).
*Hayya ʿalā'l-falāḥ* (Come to prosperity or salvation).
*Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar* (God is great! God is great!).
*Lā ilāha illa'Llāh* (There is no god but God).

The Shiite call to prayer adds *Ashhadu anna ʿAlīyyan walī Allāh* ("I bear witness that ʿAlī is the *walī* of God") after *Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūlu'Llāh.* It also adds the line *Hayya ʿalā khayr al-ʿamal* ("Come to the best of acts," that is, prayer) after *Hayya ʿalā'l-falāḥ.*

Although the Prophet is said by some to have heard the call to prayer during his Night Journey (Q), this practice was instituted only after the Muslims began praying in the direction of the Kaʿbah, about two years after the migration from Makkah to Madinah, when some Companions of

because they are a people who do not understand. (59) Say, "O People of the Book! Are you vengeful toward us for no other reason than that we believe in God and in that which has been sent down unto us and in that which was sent down before, and because most of you are iniquitous?" (60) Say, "Shall I inform you of something worse than that by way of recompense from God? Whomsoever God has cursed and upon whom is His Wrath, and among whom He has made some to be apes and swine, and who worship false deities, such are in a worse situation, and further astray from the right way." (61) When they come to you, they say, "We believe." But they certainly entered with disbelief and they

the Prophet are said to have had dreams about such a call to prayer, and several prominent Companions indicated the need for a public announcement of the times of prayer (Q). It is reported in connection with this verse that some Christians or Jews in Madinah would mock and cast ill omens upon the Prophet or the believers when they heard the call to prayer (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z); or that the disbelievers mocked the call to prayer as a religious innovation or as having an ugly sound (Q, R, W). They mock in this way only *because they are a people who do not understand.* According to al-Rāzī, those of real understanding know that prayer is the best of all human acts, and he quotes the saying, "The noblest movement is prayer, and the most beneficial stillness is fasting."

59 This verse is similar to 7:126, where, after Pharaoh's sorcerers repent and come to believe in Moses, Pharaoh threatens to kill them, and they respond, *You take vengeance upon us only because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came unto us.* See also 85:8. One report considers this verse to have come down in relation to some Jews of Madinah who broke with the Prophet because of his affirmation of the prophethood of Jesus (referenced in the phrase *that which was sent down before*), which the Jews did not accept (R, Ṭ). The verse also indicates that their rejection of the Prophet had its roots in the "iniquity" of many among them, that is, their own deviation from the religion and laws of God, which compelled them to harbor ill will toward the Prophet, the Quranic message, and the Muslim community.

60 *By way of recompense* translates *mathūbat*$^{an}$, which usually denotes a positive "recompense," a reward rather than a punishment. Its use here to introduce Divine punishment is therefore ironic, and this verse is similar in tone to those in which the Prophet is told to give *glad tidings* of punishment to come (Z; see, e.g., 4:138 and commentary). *Whomsoever God has cursed* means those He has exiled from His Mercy (Ṭ). *Among whom He made some to be apes* is likely a reference to God's having said to those Jews who violated the Sabbath, *Be you apes* (see 2:65; 7:163–66). That God *made some to be apes and swine* can therefore be understood as a metaphor for the state—in either this world or the next—of those who deliberately violate religious Law (see 2:65c). These can also be seen as a reference to God's changing their hearts, hardening them (see 2:74; 5:13; 6:43) and making them prone to heedlessness (*ghaflah;* Aj). Some say that *apes* refers to those who broke the Sabbath, and *swine* refers to those among Jesus' followers who betrayed him during his last supper (Q, R). That they *worship false deities* (*ṭāghūt*) is also mentioned in 4:51 (on *ṭāghūt,* see 4:51–52c) and may refer to the Israelites' worship of the golden calf (Z; for Quranic accounts of this incident, see 7:148–56; 20:86–97).

61 This verse reportedly refers to a group of Madinan Jews who came to the Prophet claiming to believe in him and in the message he brought. Their claims were disingenuous, however, and God is said to have made their hypocrisy known to the Prophet (Ṭ, Z).

have certainly left with it, and God knows best what they were concealing. (62) Thou seest many of them hastening to sin and enmity, and consuming what is forbidden. Evil indeed is that which they were doing. (63) Why do the sages and the rabbis not forbid them from their sinful speech and their consuming what is forbidden? Evil indeed is that which they were working. (64) The Jews say, "God's Hand is shackled." Shackled are their hands, and they are cursed for what they say. Nay, but His two Hands are outstretched, He bestows as He wills. Surely that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord will increase many of them in rebellion and disbelief. And We have cast enmity and hatred among them till the Day of Resurrection. As often as they ignite a flame for war, God extinguishes it. They endeavor to work corruption upon the earth.

62 For the claim that the Jews of Madinah were *consuming what is forbidden,* see 5:42; 5:42c, where this is widely reported to refer to illicit gain and bribery. The *sin* to which they hasten is glossed, by some, as "lying" (R, Z) or as "disbelief," although it may relate to all manner of sin (Ṭ). Their *enmity* may refer to several things mentioned elsewhere in the Quran, including their hostility toward the Prophet, their general wrongdoing, and their transgression of the limits set by God (Ṭ, Z).

63 *Sages* translates *rabbāniyyūn* (see 5:44; 5:43–44c). If the previous verse criticizes those Jews who were *hastening to sin and enmity,* the present one criticizes the religious leaders among the Jews who, while knowing better, did nothing to *forbid* their followers from engaging in *sinful speech* and illicit consumption. They were not "judging according to the Judgment of God" (Ṭ); see also vv. 44, 47. This sin of omission on the part of the knowledgeable *sages* can be considered more serious and deeply rooted than the sin of ordinary people who lack extensive religious knowledge. This difference is manifest in the parallel closing lines of vv. 62 and 63. Of the common sinners among the Jews, v. 62 says, *Evil indeed is that which they were doing,* referring to their general sinfulness and lack of belief. But in v. 63, in reference to the sages, the Quran states, *Evil indeed is that which they were working,* meaning what they brought about through their refusal to forbid wrongful behavior, despite their ability to have changed it by acting and ruling correctly on the basis of their knowledge (R). Some early authorities, such as Ibn ʿAbbās and Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 105/723), reportedly considered this to be among the severest and most frightening verses of the Quran (R, Ṭ, Z), perhaps because of the warning it implies for those who possess religious knowledge, like themselves, but who fail to live up to the moral responsibilities incumbent upon such persons.

64 The image of "shackled hands" is sometimes used in discussions of the torments of Hell and the helplessness of those faced with Divine punishment in the Hereafter (e.g., 13:5; 34:33; 40:71), but it is also associated with miserliness (see 17:29). Miserliness is clearly the intended meaning here, and those who make this statement are suggesting that God withholds His Provision and His Bounty, at least from them (Ṭ). The Divine response to this charge is to turn the accusation back on the accusers: *shackled are their hands.* This response indicates, as do many other verses, the reflexive nature of sin and falsehood in the Quran, as the very wrong one intends for others is unwittingly brought upon oneself (e.g., 2:9; *They would deceive God and the believers; yet they deceive none but themselves*). *Shackled are their hands* may also be read, "May their hands be shackled!," that is, from all good things (Ṭ). They are *cursed* for

*what they say.* To be *cursed* is widely understood to mean "exiled from God's Mercy" (Ṭ).

Al-Rāzī acknowledges that the Jews, as such, certainly do not make such claims about God's Hand being *shackled* as part of their doctrinal beliefs. In fact, they are quite aware of God's Might and Power and of the impossibility that such a claim about God could be true. He thus suggests that the Jews who said this did not do so in earnest, but rather as a way of ridiculing the Muslims. He suggests, for example, that they would take a Quranic question like, *Who shall lend God a goodly loan?* (2:245; 5:12; 57:11), pretend to understand it literally—that God is in actual need of a "loan" from His servants—and then argue facetiously that *God's Hand is shackled* by need in order to make the Quranic question seem absurd. Alternately, he suggests that when the Jews saw the dire financial situation in which the early Muslim community at Madinah found itself, they may have said mockingly that the hand of the "God of Muhammad" was shackled, as it may have appeared to them that He did not materially help His community (R). Some commentators suggest that when the fortunes of the Jews of Madinah changed for the worse with the rise of Islam in Madinah and Arabia generally, they said, *God's Hand is shackled,* meaning that He now withholds His blessings from the Jews as a community (R, Z). Their claim that *God's Hand is shackled* may also refer or relate to their claim elsewhere that God would not punish them in the Fire save for a *number of days* (2:80; 3:24), since this latter claim suggests a certain limitation on the part of God.

The claim that God's Hand is *shackled* is then contrasted with the image of *His two Hands . . . outstretched* (*mabsūṭatān*), that is, open and giving as *He bestows as He wills.* This description of God's Hands as *outstretched* (*mabsūṭatān*) forms part of the Quranic basis for the Divine Name *al-Bāsiṭ,* "the Open-Handed"; and in several verses, it is said that God *outspreads* (*yabsuṭu*) *and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12).

The apparently anthropomorphic image of God's *two Hands* also occurs in 38:75, where God indicates that He created Adam *with His two Hands.* Some interpreters consider all references to God's "Hand" (in the singular or the dual) as metaphors for the Blessings He bestows on His creatures (as in this verse) or for His Strength and Power. See, for example, 38:45, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are described as *possessed of strength* (*uli'l-aydī*), literally, "possessed of hands." (Ṭ). Some Islamic scholars argued that references to God's Hand or Hands in the Quran have to be understood literally, even if God's Hand cannot be considered to be of the same nature as a human hand, thereby rejecting an explicitly anthropomorphic interpretation (Ṭ). Some suggest that the claim *God's Hand is shackled,* using the singular "hand," is refuted by the statement *His two Hands are outstretched,* using the dual "two Hands" in order to indicate the great abundance of God's provision bestowed upon His creatures (R, Z), although al-Ṭabarī rejects this interpretation, arguing that the dual form always represents two specific things and cannot be made to signify simple abundance (Ṭ). If God's Hand can be seen as a metaphor and symbol for the blessings He bestows, then His "two Hands" might be a metaphor for two different kinds of blessings God might bestow, for example, the blessings of this world and of the Hereafter, or outward and inward blessings, or the blessings of granting benefit and preventing harm (R).

This verse further mentions the paradoxical idea, found elsewhere in the Quran, that prophecy or revelation, although intended to bring guidance, may actually lead some people farther astray (cf. 3:19; 5:68; 8:2; 9:124; 17:41, 60, 82; 35:42; 71:6; 74:31). Here the revelation the Prophet receives from God serves to *increase many of them in rebellion and disbelief.* Revelation and prophecy are thus referred to in several places as the *Criterion* (*Furqān;* 2:53, 185; 3:4; 21:48; 25:1), meaning that part of their function is to distinguish and separate believers from disbelievers, the latter being frequently described as repelled by the Divine message, as in 74:49–51: *So what ails them that they turn away from the Reminder, as if they were frightened asses fleeing from a lion?*

As a punishment for their *rebellion and disbelief,* God casts *enmity and hatred among them*—that is, among the Jews or the People of the Book in general—*till the Day of Resurrection* (see also v. 14, where this internal *enmity and hatred* is also attributed to the Christians). Some commentators suggest that this means that God casts *enmity and hatred* between the Jews and the Christians (Ṭ). The Jews repeatedly *ignite a flame for war,* but

And God loves not the workers of corruption. (65) Had the People of the Book believed and been reverent, We would surely have absolved them of their evil deeds, and caused them to enter Gardens of bliss. (66) Had they observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down unto them from their Lord, they would surely have received nourishment from above them and from

*God extinguishes it.* Some interpret this as a reference to their unsuccessful animosity to the Prophet's mission (Ṭ), while other commentators see it as a reference to a series of military losses for the Jews from the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions (which many consider the Quran to allude to in 17:5). For the idea of "working corruption upon the earth," see 5:33c; 30:41c.

65 *Had the People of the Book believed*—that is, in the Quran and the prophethood of Muhammad—according to most commentators, they would have been forgiven their sins. Although "believe" is sometimes used to refer to the general act of believing in God and the Last Day among Jews and Christians as well as Muslims (see, e.g., 2:62; 5:69), the term "believer" is most commonly used in the Quran to refer to those who believe in all prophets and books, necessarily including the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran, and thus specifically to a believing member of the Islamic community; see 4:136c. For verses with a similar message concerning the People of the Book or earlier peoples, see 2:103; 7:96.

66 This is one of several verses in this *sūrah* indicating the importance of Jews and Christians following their own scriptures (see also vv. 44, 47, 68) and suggesting that these scriptures remain a source of spiritual *nourishment.* "Observing" the Torah and Gospel is understood by some commentators in a limited sense to mean merely upholding the covenant with God established in those scriptures in a general way, which would not preclude Jews and Christians from following the Prophet—indeed, according to some, it would require them to follow the Prophet Muhammad, whom the Quran indicates was *inscribed* in the Torah and Gospel (R; see 7:157; 61:6). It can also be understood as enjoining them to continue to uphold the rituals and laws prescribed in these scriptures (R) in keeping with the statement in v. 48 that God had prescribed *a law and a way* for every religious community. Yet, the verse also requires them to observe *that which was sent down to them from their Lord.* This is understood by many early commentators as referring to the Quran (Q, Ṭ), although some have thought it might be a reference to certain prophetic books, such as the book of Daniel, found in the Hebrew scriptures, but outside of the Torah narrowly defined (Q, R).

For the People of the Book to observe both their own Scriptures and the Quran means, according to some commentators, that Jews and Christians should follow those teachings in the Torah and the Gospel that were either endorsed by the Quran or at least not declared false in it (Ṭ). Had they done this, *they would surely have received nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet.* Most commentators read this statement as an image of worldly prosperity, meaning that God would have sent them rain from the heavens and brought forth nourishing vegetation for them from the earth (R, Ṭ, Z). As such, it may be read either as a counterpart to the spiritual prosperity that it is said would be theirs if they *had . . . believed and been reverent* in v. 65 (R) or as a response to the claim in v. 64 that *God's Hand is shackled,* since this claim suggests God's withholding of worldly provision (Ṭ). Alternately, this metaphor for prosperity can be read as a spiritual allegory relating to what the verse itself says about the People of the Book following both their own scriptures and *that which was sent down to them from their Lord* (i.e., the Quran, according to most commentators). For the People of the Book, the nourishment *from beneath their feet* would be the teachings of their own scriptures—that is, the metaphorical spiritual seeds they have already "planted" in their hearts—and the nourishment *from above them*—that is, the life-giving rain—would be the Quran, both of which are *sent down unto them from their Lord.* Rain provides direct nourishment to human beings alongside the

beneath their feet. There is a moderate community among them; but as for many of them, evil is that which they do! (67) O Messenger! Convey that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord, and if thou dost not, thou wilt not

crops that come from the ground, but the rain also nourishes those very crops. Continuing the spiritual allegory, the Quranic message, like the rain, provides both direct spiritual nourishment to the People of the Book and indirect spiritual nourishment by bringing new life to their own scriptures, to their "nourishment from below."

This verse indicates that among the Jews and Christians there remains a *moderate community* (*ummah muqtaṣidah*), that is, a community that takes a middle course between extremes. The Arabic here is different from that used to describe the Muslim community as *a middle community* (*ummatan wasaṭan*; 2:143), but descriptions of moderation and balance are associated in a variety of ways with what is good and proper in the Quran (cf. 15:19; 17:29; 68:28). Consistent with the interpretation of the People of the Book following their own scriptures and accepting the Quranic message, some commentators understand *moderate* as describing those Jews and Christians who "moderate" their beliefs in a way consistent with *that which was sent down unto them from their Lord,* that is, the Quran. Specifically, they see it as a reference to those People of the Book who neither exaggerate the station of Jesus by considering him to be the son of God (as do the Christians) nor underestimate his spiritual rank by refusing to consider him a prophet of God (as do the Jews; Ṭ); rather, they see him as a Divinely sent prophet, as he is presented in the Quran. This statement may also be read in conjunction with other passages in the Quran that describe those People of the Book who are just in their dealings with the Muslims (3:75; R), or those who *take a middle course* (*muqtaṣid*) between wrongdoing and being those who are *foremost in good deeds* (35:32). Some commentators suggest that this "moderate community" may refer to People of the Book who have become believers by embracing Islam (Q, R), although this does not seem to fit with the description of them as "taking a middle course," and if this is so, it is not clear why they should be differentiated from other Muslims who converted from paganism.

67 This verse is situated in the middle of a long and often critical discussion of the People of the Book, leading some to suggest that the message the Prophet may have been hesitant to convey is the criticism of these other religious communities (Ṭ). Some read the threat *if thou dost not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message* to mean that if the Prophet were to conceal even the smallest part of what had been revealed to him, it would be as if he had not conveyed the message at all or as if he had concealed all of it (Z). According to one report, the Prophet stated the God had revealed to him that if he did not convey all of the revelation that came to him, God would punish him (Z). The Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah argued that this verse should serve as a sufficient refutation of those who claim the Prophet had concealed parts of the revelation that he received (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

The verse's assurance to the Prophet that *God will protect thee from mankind* does suggest, however, that he at times feared people's reaction to the message. According to one report, when the Prophet was in Makkah and he and his followers were in constant danger from the Quraysh, the Prophet used to conceal some of the revelations that he received, but once the Prophet's community strengthened, he was ordered in this verse to *convey* all that had been revealed to him. Alternately, some reports indicate that when the Prophet was in Makkah, he (or, variously, his uncle Abū Ṭālib) always arranged to have him guarded by others. After this verse was revealed, along with its promise of Divine protection, the Prophet indicated that fear left him completely (R, Ṭ), and he discontinued the practice of having guards (IK, Q). Others suggest that this assurance relates to an incident in which a Bedouin wanted to kill the Prophet and came upon him with a sword while the Prophet was alone and unarmed. The Bedouin asked, "Who can protect you from me?" The Prophet answered, "God," at which point the Bedouin's hand began to tremble with fear, and the sword fell from his hand (Q, Ṭ). A similar story is told in relation to the revelation of v. 11 (see 5:11c).

have conveyed His message. And God will protect thee from mankind. Surely God guides not disbelieving people. (68) Say, "O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord." Surely that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord will increase many of them in rebellion and disbelief. So grieve not for disbelieving people. (69) Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabeans, and the Christians—whosoever believes in God

Twelver Shiite commentaries explicitly connect this verse to the Prophet's reported announcement at Ghadīr Khumm, just after the completion of his Farewell Pilgrimage in 10/632, regarding his cousin and son-in-law, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, "For whomever I am his master (*mawlā*), ʿAlī is [also] his master (*mawlā*); O God, befriend the friend of ʿAlī and be the enemy of his enemy." The Shiite commentaries suggest that the Prophet was hesitant to make this announcement, which Imāmī Shiites consider to be a matter of Divine inspiration, although it is not in the Quran, because he feared the reaction among some of his Companions. This verse was then revealed to him, indicating his duty to convey the Divine message and promising Divine protection for him, after which he stood with ʿAlī in front of his gathered Companions and made the announcement (al-ʿAyyāshī, Qm, Ṭb, Th, Ṭū).

A small number of Sunni commentators also link this verse to Prophetic statements relating to the spiritual merits of ʿAlī, including the statement, "For whomever I am his master, ʿAlī is [also] his master," or to Ghadīr Khumm, specifically (Āl, Th). Other Sunni commentators connect this verse to the announcements the Prophet made during his sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage, which preceded the Ghadīr Khumm event by a matter of days (IK), thus indicating, like the Shiite views above, that the verse pertains to directives the Prophet gave to his community at the very end of his life. Those reports that situate the revelation of this verse in the context of the Farewell Pilgrimage and related events, such as the Prophet's announcement at Ghadīr Khumm, seem to be most plausible, since this *sūrah* is generally thought to be late Madinan in its entirety; many scholars maintain that vv. 1–11 of this *sūrah* were revealed in the context of the Prophet's sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage.

68 As in v. 66, this verse reiterates the importance of Jews and Christians observing both their own scriptures, the Torah and the Gospel, and *that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord,* which most commentators understand to mean the Quranic message brought by the Prophet (see 5:66; 5:66c). The idea that many of the People of the Book *will be increased in rebellion and disbelief* echoes v. 64, which indicates that *that which has been sent down unto* the Prophet will increase some of the People of the Book in "rebellion and disbelief" (see 5:64; 5:64c). Here, as elsewhere, the Prophet is told to *grieve not* for those who are unresponsive to the Divine message (cf. 5:26; 27:70). Some connect this verse to the injunction to the Prophet in the previous verse to *convey that which has been sent down* to him, indicating that this message to the People of the Book to follow their own scriptures as well as the Quran was what the Prophet had hesitated or feared to convey (R, Ṭ).

69 This verse is nearly identical to 2:62; see 2:62c. Compare this verse also to 22:17, where it is said that *God will judge* between *those who believe,* the *Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians,* and *the Magians* (or Zoroastrians, *majūs*), on the Day of Resurrection. This present verse, however, situated as it is within a *sūrah* largely devoted to the People of the Book, and within a long section that discusses the People of the Book critically, represents one of the most important Quranic affirmations of the potential of those outside the Muslim community to achieve salvation. Although Jews, Christians, and Sabeans are mentioned specifically, the verse also refers more broadly to *whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works*

and the Last Day and works righteousness, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (70) We indeed made a covenant with the Children of Israel, and sent messengers unto them. Whensoever a messenger brought them what their souls did not desire, some they would deny and some they would slay. (71) And they supposed that there would be no trial, and so became blind and deaf. Then God relented unto them; then [again] many of them became blind and deaf. And God sees whatsoever they do. (72) They certainly disbelieve, those who say, "Truly God is the Messiah, son of Mary." But the Messiah said, "O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." Surely whosoever ascribes partners unto God, God has forbidden him the Garden, and his refuge

*righteousness,* thereby opening the possibility of salvation even beyond the Abrahamic faiths. This verse, along with v. 5, which allows intermarriage between Muslim men and People of the Book, and v. 48, which indicates that God has ordained more than one religious "law" and "way," argues for the continued validity of Judaism, Christianity, and by extension other Divinely revealed religions, despite the strong criticism of certain Jewish and Christian doctrines and practices found here and elsewhere in the Quran.

The present verse affirms that for those who both believe and act properly, *no fear shall come upon them*—that is, they have no dread for their future after resurrection—*nor shall they grieve;* that is, they have no sorrow about the past or about having left the earthly realm, for what they are certain to receive in the Hereafter is better (R). In other words, such people have no concern for either the future or the past, indicating that those who have achieved salvation are understood to live in the "eternal now" of the paradisal state.

70 This verse is one of several that mention the Divine covenant with the Children of Israel; see also 2:63, 83–84, 93; 4:154; 5:12; 7:134. For the Divine covenant with the People of the Book in general or Christians, see 3:187; 5:14; 7:169. See also the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." The rejection of previous messengers and prophets by their people is a common theme running throughout the Quran; for other references specifically to the Israelites' rejection and slaying of certain prophets, see 2:87, 91; 3:183–84; 4:155 and commentary.

71 In the Quran, spiritual insensitivity to the prophetic messages is frequently referred to as a kind of blindness or deafness (see, e.g., 2:171, 6:104; 7:64; 10:43; 11:28; 13:19; 27:4, 66, 81; 30:53; 41:17, 44; 43:36–37, 40), and it is said in 22:46: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.* Moreover, this spiritual blindness is said to continue in the Hereafter (see, e.g., 17:72, 97; 20:102, 124–25). The Quran seems to assert both that there can be a preexisting moral "blindness" and "deafness" that impedes an individual's ability to be spiritually convinced and moved by the messages of the prophets and that it is the willful mocking, rejection, or transgression of those messages that leads to a state of blindness (see, e.g., 2:14–18). Because the Quran indicates that all human beings were born in a state of *fiṭrah*—that is, with the pure and *primordial nature from God* (30:30)—and have an innate awareness of spiritual truth or at least of the Lordship of God (7:172), many have understood "blindness" to the truth brought by the prophets to be the result of a certain moral deformity brought about by sin and repeated moral transgression itself or the result of a Divine "curse," as punishment for sin (see, e.g., 47:23).

72 See v. 17, where the specific belief that *God is the Messiah* is also criticized as "disbelief," and the commentary on this verse as well as other verses where the divinity of Jesus is directly or indirectly refuted (3:59; 4:171–72; 5:75, 116–17; 9:31).

shall be the Fire. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. (73) They certainly disbelieve, those who say, "Truly God is the third of three," while there is no god save the one God. If they refrain not from what they say, a painful punishment

In the present verse, the words of *the Messiah*—that is, Jesus son of Mary—are adduced to refute any belief in his divinity. From the Islamic perspective, Jesus' statement that God is *my Lord and your Lord* (also found in 3:51; 5:117; 19:36; 43:64) asserts his full humanity and "servanthood" in relation to God. The only parallel in the Gospel to the words attributed to Jesus in this verse is found in John 20:17, where Jesus refers to God as "my father and your father," although this is not in the context of a command to worship God, as it is in the Quran, and the conception of God as "father," as noted elsewhere, is problematic from a Quranic perspective (see, e.g., 5:18, where Jews and Christians are criticized for their claim to be the "children of God"). In the present verse and in 9:31, the criticism of the belief in the divinity of Jesus is followed by strong warning against "ascribing partners unto God" (*shirk*), leading some to consider any explicit claim that Jesus (or *the Messiah*) is God Himself to be a form of *shirk* and to see the warning and its consequences (being forbidden the Garden) as directed at those who make this claim (Z). Some major commentators, however, indicate that the explicit claim criticized in this verse is made only by certain sects among the Christians, mentioning, in particular, the Jacobites (R, Ṭ), who rejected the notion of Christ's "dual nature" as human and Divine and instead asserted a more essential unity between God and Christ.

73 Whereas the previous verse criticizes belief in the divinity of Jesus, this verse criticizes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, or at least an exaggerated form of that doctrine in which God is one of three separate entities to be worshipped. Some commentators understood the Christian Trinity criticized here to comprise God, Jesus, and his mother, Mary, as three distinct deities (R, Ṭ), based on v. 75, where the human characteristics of Mary and Jesus are emphasized, presumably in response to those who considered them divine, and v. 116, where the divinization of Mary among some followers of Jesus is directly criticized. Commentators were generally aware, however, that the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity considered God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and not Mary, as three persons in a single Divinity (IK, Q, R), and some argued that it was only certain sects, such as the Jacobites and Nestorians, who held to a belief in three distinct deities (IK, Q). Al-Rāzī understood the three persons in the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity to represent for Christians three aspects of God, respectively: His Essence, His Word, and His Life. Al-Rāzī's explanation puts trinitarian doctrine in terms that make some sense in relation to the Islamic view of God's Essence and Attributes, but it does not persuade him to view this doctrine as acceptable, and he describes it, nonetheless, as clear error.

In 4:171, the People of the Book are told merely to *refrain* from saying *Three,* which is commonly understood to refer to the trinitarian doctrine; in the present verse, saying that *God is the third of three* is clearly identified as a form of disbelief, and a *painful punishment* is threatened for those who do not "refrain" from asserting this, as they were commanded to do in 4:171. Some commentators argue that the threat of punishment is not only for certain sects among the Christians, but for Christians in general, since the Quran suggests here and elsewhere that certain common Christian doctrines are forms of "disbelief," and the punishment in this verse is threatened for all who disbelieve (Ṭ, Z), or at least those who persist in this disbelief and do not *turn to God in repentance* (v. 74), as they are urged to do in the next verse (R, Z). However, the verse clearly threatens punishment only for *those among them who disbelieved,* suggesting that it is not for all Christians. Moreover, an interpretation that considers all Christians to be barred from the Garden in the next life would openly contradict both v. 69 and 2:62 (as well as 3:113), where Christians and anyone who *believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve,* and is not consistent with the description

will befall those among them who disbelieved. (74) Will they not turn to God in repentance and seek His forgiveness? And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (75) The Messiah, son of Mary, was naught but a messenger—messengers have passed away before him. And his mother was truthful. Both of them ate food. Behold how We make the signs clear unto them; yet behold how they are perverted! (76) Say, "Do you worship, apart from God, that which has no power to benefit or harm you, when it is God Who is the Hearing, the Knowing?" (77) Say, "O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion beyond the truth, and follow not the caprices of a people who went astray

of Christian virtue in vv. 82–85. For a longer discussion of the Quranic criticism of trinitarian doctrine, see 4:171c.

74 In this verse, those who hold to doctrines of Jesus' nature and the Trinity that contradict the principle of the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) are urged to repent.

75 Jesus is described as a messenger of God throughout the Quran, and in 4:171, as here, he is described as *only a messenger* in order to refute claims about his divinity, although in 4:171 he is identified as *His Word* and as *a Spirit from Him*. Muhammad is also described as being a "messenger," and a statement identical to the one in this verse is made concerning Muhammad in 3:144: *Muhammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him*. Jesus' mother, Mary, is described as *truthful* (*ṣiddīqah*), a feminine construction of *ṣiddīq*, a term sometimes used in the Quran to describe prophets (see, e.g., 19:41, in relation to Abraham; 19:56, regarding Idrīs) or particularly saintly people; see, for example, 4:69, where the truthful are said to be in the company of the prophets, the witnesses, and the righteous, as those *whom God has blessed*. Some connect her description as *truthful* (*ṣiddīqah*) to her role as one of those who affirmed the truth of Jesus' prophethood and message, just as the Prophet Muhammad's close Companion Abū Bakr was given the title al-Ṣiddīq, because he affirmed the truth of Muhammad's miraculous Night Journey (Z). Others connect it to the Quranic statement that Mary *confirmed* (*ṣaddaqat*) *the Words of her Lord and His Books* (66:12; R).

The assertion in this verse that both Mary and Jesus *ate food* is meant to affirm their full humanity and refute those who see them as divine. Of course, Christian theology also sees Christ as "fully human" as well as "fully divine," and the Quranic view of Jesus as fully human is consistent with certain verses of the New Testament, such as Luke 18:19 and Philippians 2:6–8, which stress Jesus' humanity in relation to God.

76 The Quran frequently poses the rhetorical question contained in this verse, either directly or through the words of the prophets, as an argument against those who would worship something other than God; see 10:18, 106; 13:16; 20:88–89; 21:62–66; 22:12; 25:55; 26:71–73.

77 See 4:171, where the same command is given to the People of the Book in general not to *exaggerate in . . . religion*. In both verses, however, the command is addressed primarily to the Christians in relation to their claims of divinity for Jesus. The *people who went astray before* is understood by some to be a reference to the Jews, who rejected and disbelieved in Christ's prophethood and message entirely (Ṭ). Others consider the *people who went astray before* to refer to the early leaders and authorities of the Christian community who established the Christological and trinitarian doctrines criticized here and who, through these doctrines and later through their rejection of the Prophet Muhammad, *led many astray* (IK, Z). Still others consider the verse to be addressed to both Jews and Christians, urging them to accept *the truth* that Jesus was a major prophet of God and to believe in the message and signs that

before, and led many astray, and strayed from the right way." (78) Those who disbelieved among the Children of Israel were cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and used to transgress. (79) They would not forbid one another from the wrong they committed. Evil indeed is that which they used to do. (80) Thou seest many of them allying with those who have disbelieved. Evil indeed is that which they have sent forth for their souls: the anger of God is upon them, and in punishment shall they abide. (81) And had they believed in God and the Prophet, and that which was sent

he brought, but not to *exaggerate* beyond this to make claims of his divinity or his sonship in relation to God (Q); or it urges them to avoid various errors they or their religious leaders had made in the past, as discussed in this long section beginning in v. 41 (R, Ṭs).

78 Here and elsewhere in the Quran, the majority of commentators read *cursed* as meaning "exiled from Divine Mercy." In the present verse, the disbelievers among the Israelites are cursed not by God, but by the prophets David and Jesus. According to some early commentators, this refers to statements concerning disbelieving Israelites found in the Psalms of David and the Gospel of Jesus; some mention that they were also cursed in the Torah of Moses and in the Quran brought by Muhammad (Ṭ, Z). Some commentators connect the cursing by David and Jesus with God's curse, mentioned in v. 60, by which some were made into apes and swine (Ṭ). Many also connect the cursing by David with the curse upon the Sabbath violators mentioned in 7:163–66, who are reported to be the people of Eilat (JJ, R, Z), and link the cursing by Jesus to those who disbelieved after the miraculous table spread with food had been sent down to Jesus (see vv. 114–18; JJ, R, Z).

79 The importance of "forbidding wrong" is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran (3:114; 9:112; 22:41; 31:17). Enjoining right and forbidding wrong among those in one's own community is an obligatory religious duty in Islamic Law, and as such it is both a central moral responsibility for individual Muslims and an important basis of the moral society (see 3:104c). The disbelieving Israelites are criticized in the present verse for not forbidding *the wrong they committed*, that is, wrongs committed among themselves or by their own people. In relation to the importance of forbidding wrong, one commentator cites the *ḥadīth*, "The best striving (*jihād*) is a word of truth" (Th). See v. 63, where the rabbis and sages among the Jews are blamed for not forbidding their followers from sinful speech and unlawful consumption.

80–81 The People of the Book are sometimes considered "disbelievers" not in an absolute sense, but only insofar as they do not meet the Quranic requirement of believing in all prophets and scriptures, including Muhammad and the Quran. These verses, however, establish a clear distinction between the People of the Book and the disbelievers, since the former are criticized for *allying with*, or "taking protectors among," *those who have disbelieved*. The Quran also forbids Muslim believers from seeking protectors among the "disbelievers" and "wrongdoers," who are *protectors of one another* (8:73; 45:19), and even among Jews and Christians (5:51). Vv. 80–81 are understood as referring to certain Jews of Madinah, or certain hypocrites among them, who allied with the idolaters (*mushrikūn*) against the Muslim believers (Q, Ṭ, Z); for a discussion of reported cooperation between certain Madinan Jews and the Makkan idolaters, see 4:51–52c.

In v. 81, their taking protectors among the disbelievers is presented as a result of their refusal to believe in *God and the Prophet, and that which was sent down unto him*, understood by some to mean their refusal to believe in Muhammad and the Quran (Ṭ). An alternate reading of v. 81 understands it to mean that *had they believed in God and* their own prophet, Moses, and *that which was sent down unto him*—that is, the Torah—they

down unto him, they would not have taken them as protectors, but many of them are iniquitous. (82) Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men toward those who believe to be the Jews and those who ascribe partners unto God. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection toward those who believe to be those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant. (83) And when they hear that which was sent down unto the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears

would not have sought out alliances among the disbelievers (R). Both readings, however, indicate that the rise of Muhammad as a prophet presented his Jewish contemporaries in Arabia with the choice of either allying with him, whose message both affirmed and challenged the Jews' own religious understanding and practice, or allying with the disbelievers, that is, the idolaters, whose religious views were anathema to their own. *That which they have sent forth for their souls* refers to their deeds in this life for which they will be recompensed in the Hereafter; see 75:13c.

82–83 Although both Jews and Christians are privileged in the Quran as "People of the Book," with whom the Muslims have a particularly close affinity (see v. 5, where Muslims can intermarry with and eat the food of *those who have been given the Book*), in v. 82 Jews and Christians are differentiated with regard to their attitude toward Muslim believers. Here the Jews are described as the most *hostile* to the believers, along with the idolaters (cf. 2:96, where both Jews and idolaters are said to be among *the most covetous people for life*), while the Christians are said to be the *nearest . . . in affection* to Muslim believers. Some indicate that the Jews' hostility toward the believers made it particularly difficult for them to accept the truth of the Quran and the Prophet's mission, while the Christians' "nearness in affection" to the believers made it comparatively easier for them to accept the Quranic message (Z).

Although some commentators consider these statements to be absolute in nature and not limited to a particular historical situation (Th), such an interpretation is belied by the fact that at various points in Islamic history Muslims had better relations with the Jews than with Christians and Christian dynasties—the Crusades and the Spanish Reconquista would be two clear examples of this fact. It thus seems more plausible to contextualize this verse within the life of the Prophet and the early Muslim community. The Jews of Madinah and of the surrounding region presented a continual challenge to the Prophet's authority as a prophet, and some of them reportedly colluded with the Makkan idolaters to harm the Prophet and his community. By contrast, certain Christian figures played positive and pivotal roles in the Prophet's early life and mission. The Christian monk Baḥīrah first recognized Muhammad as a prophet; Waraqah, the Christian cousin of the Prophet's wife Khadījah, identified the early revelations the Prophet received as being Divine in origin and consistent with the Christian scriptures he knew (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 96); and the Negus, the Christian king of Abyssinia, sheltered some of the Makkan Muslims from persecution by keeping them as guests in Abyssinia for years until they could later journey to Madinah. The Negus reportedly recognized the affinity between the Islamic teachings and his own religious beliefs as a Christian and thus refused to hand over the Muslim refugees to the idolatrous Quraysh, who demanded their return.

One early commentator claimed that this verse came in response to the Muslims' first encounter with the Negus, when they were seeking shelter from the Makkan idolaters, although this does not make chronological sense, since this *sūrah* is widely considered to have been revealed in full in Madinah, and the original encounter with the Negus was during the Makkan period (IK). According to most commentators, however, the occasion for the revelation of these verses was the later visit of a delegation sent by the Negus to the Prophet in Madinah. When the Quran was

recited to the Christian delegation, they began to weep and became believers (IK, Ṭ, Th, Z). Some accounts state that the delegation returned to the Negus and recited the Quran to him, whereupon he became a believer as well (Ṭ, Th). However, there is no historical evidence that the Negus later became Muslim, and the verse attributes positive attributes to Christians in general, not only to those who later embraced Islam (Th), since the Christians are described as *nearest . . . in affection toward those who believe,* rather than as Muslim believers themselves (see also 57:27, where the virtues of Christians are similarly praised). Some say that this refers to those Christians who heard the message brought by Muhammad and believed in his prophethood, although they continued to live according to the "*sharīʿah* (religious law) of Jesus" or the "way of the Gospel," thus remaining "Christian" in a confessional sense (IK). Nonetheless, the report about the Negus does illustrate the good relations between the Prophet's community and an important Christian dynasty in the region and suggests that a certain spiritual affinity between the Christians and the Muslims was a basis for their good relations.

In v. 82, the Christians' nearness to the Muslim believers is attributed partly to the presence of *priests and monks* among them, suggesting that these men serve as exemplars of Christian virtue. *Priests* translates *qissīsīn,* which some commentators understand to mean the religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) among the Christians (IK, Z), while a single report from the Prophetic Companion Salmān al-Fārsī—who was formerly Zoroastrian and then briefly Christian before embracing Islam—claims that the Prophet glossed *qassīsīn* as the "truthful (or saintly) ones" (*ṣiddīqīn;* IK). Despite the implied praise of Christian monks in this verse, the Quranic and Islamic attitude toward Christian monasticism is somewhat mixed. The Christian institution of monasticism has no parallel in the Islamic context and is in some ways inconsistent with the Islamic ideal of balancing worldly obligations with spiritual devotions, as exemplified by the Prophet himself, who explicitly discouraged his Companions from practicing the celibacy and excessive asceticism often associated with Christian monasticism. The Quran also blames certain monks for *consuming the wealth of people falsely* and *turning from the way of God* (9:34) and criticizes their followers for having taken them as *lords apart from God* (9:31). In 57:27, the Quran describes monasticism as something Christians *invented,* not something ordained for them (see 57:27c). See also 3:113, where it says in reference to the People of the Book, *They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate.*

Christians are also said to be "near" to Muslim believers, because *they are not arrogant.* Arrogance is a vice derided in all religious traditions, and the Quran repeatedly connects arrogance to the spiritual blindness that leads people to reject the signs of God, which include the prophets and their messages; see 2:87; 6:93; 7:75–76, 146; 10:75; 23:67; 31:7; 35:42–43; 39:59, 72; 41:15; 45:8, 31; 46:10; 63:5; 71:7. Arrogance is contrasted with the attitude of humility and gratitude that compels one to prostrate before God and to worship Him (cf. 4:172–73; 16:49; 21:19; 32:15; 40:60; 41:37–38). The assertion that Christians are not *arrogant* thus suggests both their inclination to worship and devote themselves to God and their receptivity to God's signs and prophetic messages.

The latter is borne out in v. 83, where they are said to be particularly sensitive to the spiritual truth of the Quran, which *they recognize* and which causes their eyes to *overflow with tears.* For similar responses to the Quran among some of the People of the Book, see 17:107–9, where the Prophet is told to say of the Quran, *Surely those who were given knowledge before it, when it is recited unto them, fall down prostrate on their faces. And they say, "Glory be to our Lord! The promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled." And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility;* and 28:52–53. Some commentators on this verse also mention the *ḥadīth,* "Recite the Quran and weep, and if you do not weep [naturally], then cause yourself to weep" (Th). In v. 83, the Christian response to hearing the Quran is also to say *we believe,* that is, in Muhammad as a Divinely sent prophet (even if they remained Christians, confessionally, as discussed above) and in the Quran as the truth from God (Ṭ). Their plea *inscribe us among the witnesses* may mean that they wish to be counted either among those who recognize the truth and the Oneness of God or among the religious community of Muhammad specifically (R, Ṭ, Z).

because of the truth they recognize. They say, "Our Lord, we believe, so inscribe us among the witnesses. (84) And how should we not believe in God and the truth that has come unto us, when we desire that our Lord should cause us to enter among the righteous people?" (85) So God rewarded them for what they said with Gardens that have rivers running below, to abide therein, and that is the recompense of the virtuous. (86) As for those who disbelieved and denied Our signs—such shall be the inhabitants of Hellfire! (87) O you who believe! Do not forbid the good things that God has made lawful unto you, and do not transgress. Surely God loves not transgressors. (88) Eat of that which God has provided you that is lawful and good, and reverence God, in Whom you are believers. (89) God will not take you to task for that which is frivolous in your oaths, but He will take you to task for the oaths you have pledged in earnest. The expiation thereof is the feeding of ten indigent people with the equivalent of that which you feed your own family, or clothing them, or freeing a slave. And whosoever finds not [the means], let him fast for three days. That is the expiation for your oaths when you have sworn [them]. But keep your oaths.

**84** The response of these Christians is to ask rhetorically, *And how should we not believe in God*—that is, in His Oneness—*and the truth that has come unto us* through His revelations (Ṭ), given that they desire to be in the company of the righteous in order to obtain the blessings of God (Z). The *righteous people* here may mean the Prophet and his Companions or simply those who affirm God's Oneness (Ṭ); and some commentators suggest that the Christians' overall response here indicates a new awareness of the need to abandon their trinitarian beliefs (R). Their desire to be *among the righteous people* is also, for some, a sign of their belief, since disbelievers desire no such thing (Z).

**85–86** The image of Gardens with *rivers running below* as a reward for believers and the virtuous is found throughout the Quran (see 2:25c), as is the idea that disbelievers and those who deny God's signs will be punished in Hellfire in the next life (see, e.g., 2:39; 5:10; 7:36; 22:51; 57:19; 64:10).

**87–88** Earlier in this *sūrah* and elsewhere, the Quran clearly delineates lawful and unlawful foods; see 2:173; 5:3–5; 6:118–19, 145; 16:115. These stipulations are presented in a way that suggests that the limits on what can be consumed are rather few, and that in fact Muslims have a wide range of lawful foods available to them that they can eat and enjoy freely, as enjoined in v. 88 (cf. 2:168, 172; 16:114). In this vein, the Quran is critical of those who would forbid lawful things arbitrarily and without Divine warrant; see 6:138–45, 150–51; 7:32 (with regard to adornment in dress, rather than food); 16:116. *God loves not the transgressors* is repeated in 2:190 and 7:55; and in 10:74 it is said that God sets *a seal upon the hearts of the transgressors*.

**89** The Quran often speaks about the serious nature of oaths—that is, swearing on God's Name or, according to some, on the Quran, since swearing on other things is not legitimate (Q)—and their misuse. Here *that which is frivolous in your oaths* relates most specifically to oaths taken arbitrarily to avoid certain lawful foods, following the injunctions in vv. 87–88 to not restrict the consumption of lawful things (Ṭ), but it has a more general application. This verse makes it clear that swearing to abstain from certain lawful things

Thus does God make clear unto you His signs, that haply you may give thanks. (90) O you who believe! Wine, and gambling, and idols, and divining arrows are but a means of defilement, of Satan's doing. So avoid it, that haply you may prosper. (91) Satan desires only to sow enmity and hatred among you through

does not make them actually forbidden according to God (Q). Other verses mention the importance of being true to one's oaths (3:77; 38:44) and warn against using them disingenuously or for harmful purposes (2:224; 16:91–92, 94). The Quran also criticizes disbelievers and hypocrites for either breaking their oaths or using them deceptively (5:53; 6:109; 16:38; 24:53; 35:42).

Here also, as discussed in 2:225c, God does not hold one accountable for oaths that are *frivolous* or made carelessly, but only for those that are *pledged in earnest*. Some commentators, however, maintain that it is these frivolous oaths that require the *expiation* mentioned in the latter part of the verse, and the meaning is that God will not hold one accountable for *frivolous* oaths for which one has made expiation (Ṭ). Others say that it is the oaths *pledged in earnest* that require expiation, particularly those made with sinful intent (Ṭ) or those made and not fulfilled (Ṭ). For oaths taken with the intent of deception or lying (*kadhb*), there is no expiation (Q, Ṭ).

Expiation by *the feeding of ten indigent people* is understood to mean providing for them in various ways. Some consider a combination of bread, dates, and oil to be what is required, but the best provision would be meat (Ṭ). Others consider a certain amount of wheat or other grain to be sufficient, while still others say it means feeding them lunch and supper (Ṭ). The expiation of *clothing them* may include giving them one or two articles of clothing, sometimes specifically including a head covering (Q, Ṭ). For both of these cases, some stipulate that the recipient must be truly poor and cannot be a dependent or close family member, for whom one is responsible in any case (Q). Some indicate that the recipient must be a free person, since a slave should be taken care of by his or her master; and there is some disagreement about whether the recipient must be a Muslim or not. The Ḥanafī school of law allows the food or clothing to be given to the poor among other religious communities (Q). Regarding giving charity to non-Muslims, see 2:272c; 60:8c. If one frees a slave for purposes of expiation, it must be a slave in good health, without physical deficiency (Ṭ). Some say the expiation of fasting must be for three consecutive days, although others maintain that this is not required, since it is not stipulated specifically in the verse, as it is, for example, in 58:4, which mandates that one *fast two months consecutively* for a certain kind of oath against one's wife (Q, Ṭ). In either case, fasting is sufficient only as a means of expiation for those without the means of providing for the poor (Ṭ). For other passages where similar forms of expiation are mandated, see 2:184; 4:92; 5:95; 58:2–4.

90–91 This is the fourth and final passage in the chronological order of revelation relating to intoxicating drinks, and it enjoins their ultimate and complete prohibition. In 16:67, the image of *fruits . . . from which you derive strong drink* is presented as a sign of God's generous provision for human beings. However, in 2:219 both wine and gambling are said to have some *benefit*, but also *great sin*. Then in 4:43 people are told to avoid prayer when in a state of drunkenness. In the present verses wine and gambling are included, along with *idols* and the pre-Islamic, pagan practice of using *divining arrows* to allot food and other goods, as among those things that bring spiritual impurity and should be completely avoided. *Gambling* translates *maysir*, a specific form of gambling popular in pre-Islamic Arabia (see 2:219c), although the verse is understood as applying to all forms of gambling, just as the prohibition on wine in these verses is understood as a prohibition on all intoxicants.

That the prohibition of wine (*khamr*), which technically refers to wine made from grapes, nonetheless extends to all intoxicating beverages was reportedly explained by ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in a sermon in which he said, "Wine (*khamr*) is that which clouds (*khāmara*) the intellect," indicating that the prohibition applies to

wine and gambling, and to turn you away from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. Will you, then, refrain? (92) Obey God and obey the Messenger, and be wary. But if you turn away, then know that only the clear proclamation is incumbent upon Our Messenger. (93) There is no blame upon those who believe and perform righteous deeds for that which they have eaten, so long as they are reverent, and believe, and perform righteous deeds, then are reverent

any substance that, when consumed, clouds the mind (IK). Moreover, the ban on intoxicating beverages includes not only their consumption, but also their sale and any profit attained by it (IK).

Some considered the ban on gambling to extend to all games that squander people's time fruitlessly, such as chess and backgammon (IK), although these latter were never banned in Islamic Law, and both have remained popular games among Muslims to the present day. In this verse, *idols* (*anṣāb*) is likely a reference to the idolatrous practice of sacrificing animals on stone altars (*nuṣub*), which is mentioned in v. 3 as a practice that made the meat unlawful to consume.

Some accounts report that the present verse was revealed after some of the Prophet's Companions became drunk and began to fight with one another until one man was seriously injured (Ṭ). V. 91 thus indicates that wine and gambling should be avoided, because they are a means through which Satan may cause *enmity and hatred* among the believers and lead them to neglect *remembrance of God* and *prayer*. Intracommunal *enmity and hatred* are said elsewhere to be the fate of Christians (v. 14) and of Jews (v. 64) as a result of their forgetfulness or disobedience.

92 The combined injunction to *obey God and obey the Messenger* is found throughout the Quran (see 3:32, 132; 4:59; 8:1, 20, 46; 24:54; 33:33; 47:33; 58:13; 64:12; see also 7:156–57; 59:7), although in this context it is likely meant to encourage obedience specifically to the prohibitions listed in vv. 90–91 (R, Ṭ). This is one of several places where the Prophet is reminded that his only duty is to deliver *the clear proclamation* (cf. 3:20; 5:99; 13:40; 16:82; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12). In the same vein, the Prophet is repeatedly reminded that he has no control over others' reactions to the message that he delivers and thus is not responsible for those who remain unmoved by it (see, e.g., 4:80; 6:107; 42:6, 48).

93 This verse was revealed in response to concerns among the Prophet's Companions about those Muslims who had died before the revelation of the prohibition against drinking wine in vv. 90–91. As these verses banning wine were revealed late in the Madinan period, well after the battles of Badr and Uḥud, many good Muslims who had drunk wine throughout their lives had already died. This verse assures the Companions that their fellow Muslims who had lived in obedience and virtue would not be blamed *for that which they* had *eaten* or consumed previous to the prohibition of these substances (Q, R, Ṭ, W).

A similar exemption for acts committed before their prohibition is found in 2:275, allowing those who practiced usury prior to its prohibition to keep what they had gained by it in the past. In the same vein, in 2:143 mention of the change of the *qiblah* direction is followed by the statement *but God would not let your belief be in vain*. This was reportedly a response to concern among the Companions about those believers who had died before the change (Q, R).

Given that the reason for the prohibition of wine and gambling in v. 91 is that it causes *enmity and hatred* among people and causes them to neglect *prayer* and the *remembrance of God*, some reportedly adduced the present verse to argue that the consumption of wine was permissible as long as one could do it without these negative results, or that what one consumed would not negatively affect those who were reverent, believed, performed *righteous deeds*, and were *virtuous*. This conclusion, however, is strongly contradicted by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the consensus of the community (*ijmā'*) regarding the absolute nature of the prohibition of wine in vv. 90–91 and by the widely accepted interpretation of the present

and believe, and then are reverent and virtuous. And God loves the virtuous. (94) O you who believe! God will surely try you with something of the game you obtain with your hands and your spears, so that God may know the one who fears Him unseen. So whosoever transgresses after that, his shall be a painful punishment. (95) O you who believe! Slaughter not any game while you are in a state of pilgrim sanctity. And [for] the one among you who slaughters it intentionally, a recompense of cattle, the like of that which he slaughtered, as judged by two just men among you, as an offering brought to the Kaʿbah, or the expiation of feeding the indigent, or the equivalent of this in fasting, that he may taste the evil consequences of his affair. God has forgiven that which is past, but whosoever

verse as relating specifically to those who drank wine but died prior to its prohibition (R).

The three things with which being *reverent* is combined in this verse—believing, performing *righteous deeds,* and being *virtuous*—are essentially identical to the three major components of the Islamic religion as identified in the well-known *ḥadīth* of Gabriel: proper belief (*īmān*); submission (*islām*) to the obligatory acts of worship, which is what most understand by *righteous deeds* in this verse; and *virtue* (*iḥsān*), which is "worshipping God as if you did see Him." Some describe *righteous deeds* in this verse as the observance of all obligatory religious acts and prohibitions, and *virtue* as the performance of supererogatory acts of worship by which one seeks to draw nearer to God (Q, Ṭ), echoing another *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*), which states, "My servant brings nothing that I like more than the duties I have made incumbent upon him. Then My servant continues to draw nigh unto Me through supererogatory works until I love him . . ." Indeed, here and in several other places, God is said to "love" *the virtuous* (2:195; 3:134, 148; 5:13), who, according to the *ḥadīth* above, are those who seek to draw near to God through supererogatory works. Some commentators state that to have earned God's Love in this way is the highest spiritual degree and the noblest station (R; also see the essay "The Quran and Sufism"). Other interpretations of the threefold mention of reverence (*taqwā*) in this verse are that it is meant for emphasis; that it refers to being mindful of what was prohibited in the past, what is prohibited at present, and what will be prohibited in the future (Q, R); or that it means having reverential fear of disbelief, of major sins, and of minor sins (Q, R).

94 Since those in the state of pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām*) are prohibited from hunting or slaughtering animals, the trial here is that pilgrims observe this prohibition fully, even avoiding small or helpless game that can be captured easily and have no way to escape (e.g., small birds and their eggs), and observing the prohibition even when out of sight of others (Q, Ṭ), thus demonstrating that they fear God even while *unseen*. The game obtained with *hands* refers to small game, such as birds, and game obtained with *spears* refers to larger animals (Q, Ṭ).

95 Here the ban on killing game while in a state of pilgrim sanctity is clearly stated and is understood as applying to those making either the major or the minor pilgrimage (*ḥajj* or *ʿumrah*). It is the actual taking of the life of a living animal that is prohibited, and thus if other pilgrims were to eat from the killed game, no repentance or expiation would be incumbent upon them (Q). One is permitted, however, to kill an animal, not for food, but because it is immediately threatening to human life, such as a lion, a wolf, or even a scorpion. This verse was reportedly revealed after one of the Madinan Helpers made the lesser pilgrimage (*ʿumrah*) in 628, during which he killed a wild donkey (Q). The verse establishes that expiation is required from one who violates this ban intentionally—that is, not accidentally—or because he

relapses, God will take vengeance upon him, and God is Mighty, Possessor of Vengeance. (96) The game of the sea and the food thereof is made lawful unto you—an enjoyment for you and for the travelers—but the game of the land is

has simply forgotten that he is in a state of pilgrim sanctity.

Several means of expiation are listed, including *feeding the indigent* and *fasting,* which, as already mentioned, are also means of expiation for broken oaths, among other things (see 5:89 and commentary); but since this violation would take place in the context of the pilgrimage, the primary means of expiation is giving the equivalent, some say the monetary equivalent (Q, Ṭ), of the animal slaughtered as an *offering brought to the Kaʿbah,* that is, brought to the Makkan sanctuary (*ḥaram*) to be distributed among the needy there (JJ, Q). The *two just men* determine the worth or equivalent of the slaughtered animal, so that an equivalent offering can be made to the Kaʿbah. Their estimation of the worth of the slaughtered animal is also the basis of the extent of the other modes of expiation, should they be chosen, in that one must spend the equivalent amount in feeding the poor or fast one day for every standard measure (approximately half a liter) of food the slaughtered animal is determined to have contained (Q). Because of the sacred character of Makkah, hunting of any kind is not permitted within its precincts, even for nonpilgrims, and its trees may also not be cut. Some reports and *aḥādīth* apply these prohibitions to the city of Madinah as well. No expiation is required for violating these principles, however, since the issue of expiation in the present verse relates only to those in pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām;* Q). *God has forgiven that which is past,* that is, illicit killing of game done in the pre-Islamic period (*jāhiliyyah;* Ṭ). The description of God as *Mighty, Possessor of Vengeance* is also found in 3:4; 14:47; 39:37.

96 *The game of the sea* that is licit for Muslims to eat under all circumstances refers to the meat of both freshwater and saltwater fish (Ṭ, Ṭū), but generally excluded predatory fish, such as sharks, and certain amphibious creatures, such as frogs, which the Mālikī school permitted, but others did not (Q). The Jaʿfarī Shiite school of law explicitly required the fish to have scales in order for it to be licit to eat, but also permitted shrimp; whereas some legal interpretations in the Ḥanafī school prohibited all shellfish. To be licit for pilgrims, however, most maintain that the meat must come from sea creatures that live only in the water, thus excluding amphibious creatures and certain shellfish that can also live on land (JJ, Q, Ṭ).

*The game of the sea* refers to seafood that is caught through human effort, but *the food thereof* is understood by many to mean dead fish that have washed up on the shore, which can then be collected and eaten (Ṭ). The permissibility of eating fish that washes up dead on the shore is accepted by most as an exception to the prohibition against eating "carrion" (otherwise forbidden in 2:173; 5:3; 6:145; 16:115), because it comes from the sea, which, according to a *ḥadīth,* is a pure substance that can be used for ablutions (Q). Shiite commentators, however, generally argue that it is illicit under all circumstances to eat fish that have washed up dead on the shore (Ṭs, Ṭū); they maintain instead that *the game of the sea* refers to fish caught fresh while in a state of pilgrim sanctity, and that *the food thereof* refers separately to fish caught earlier, salted, and preserved to carry as provisions on a journey (Ṭs). Others derive a similar meaning from the description of seafood as *an enjoyment for you and for the travelers,* indicating that *for you* and *for the travelers* refer, respectively, to the continuous abundance of fresh fish for those living or traveling near the sea or rivers and to the practice of salting and preserving fish to use as provisions for travelers on lengthy journeys on land (Ṭ, Ṭū).

There is some disagreement about the extent of the repeated prohibition *but the game of the land is forbidden unto you.* V. 95 indicates only that one may not kill game while in a state of pilgrim sanctity, but the present verse seems to prohibit eating from *the game of the land* in a general or absolute sense while one is making the pilgrimage, whether one has killed it oneself or not. On the basis of different interpretations of these two verses, early authorities disagreed as to whether it was only killing game that was prohibited for pilgrims, or whether pilgrims should

forbidden unto you so long as you remain in a state of pilgrim sanctity. And reverence God, unto Whom you shall be gathered. (97) God has made the Kaʿbah, the Sacred House, a support for mankind, and the sacred month, and the offerings, and the garlands, this that you might know that God knows whatsoever is in

avoid eating all meat from hunted game, both that killed by their own hand and that killed by another.

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib considered eating the meat of hunted game of any kind to be discouraged (*makrūh*) for pilgrims, while ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān considered it lawful to eat the meat of game killed by others (Ṭ). Several reports say that the Prophet was given some meat from hunted game as a gift while he was in pilgrim sanctity and that he returned it. This may, however, be because he believed that the meat had been intentionally hunted and killed on his behalf—that is, to give to him as a gift—and a *ḥadīth* states that the meat of hunted game is licit for pilgrims to consume, so long as they neither hunted it themselves nor had it hunted or killed on their behalf (Ṭ).

The Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī schools thus accept that pilgrims may eat the meat of hunted game, so long as it was not killed by the pilgrims themselves or killed on their behalf. The Ḥanafī school, however, reads v. 95 more literally to mean that the prohibition applies only to game hunted and killed by the pilgrims themselves, while the meat of game hunted even on his behalf is licit for them to eat (Q). A contrasting opinion attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ibn ʿAbbās, and several other prominent early authorities, however, holds that the general prohibition on hunted game found in the present verse means that the meat of any hunted game is illicit for pilgrims (Q, Ṭs); this is also the view of the Twelver Shiite Jaʿfarī school of law (Ṭs). Some early authorities indicate that one can eat the meat of game one has hunted and killed prior to entering the state of pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām*), although others, including Ibn ʿAbbās, do not accept this distinction (Q); Shiite commentators also reject this distinction (Ṭū).

97 Although the pilgrimage rites and access to the Makkan sanctuary (*ḥaram*) and the Kaʿbah were made exclusive to Muslims in the last year of the Prophet's life (see 5:2c) and non-Muslims can no longer go there, the present verse is one of several that suggest that the Makkan sanctuary has universal significance for all people, describing it as *a support for mankind*. For similar statements regarding the benefit of the sanctuary and its rites for *mankind*, see 2:125; 3:96; 22:25. *Mankind* translates *al-nās*, which is not necessarily universal in connotation and can mean simply "people." Some commentators thus explain that the Kaʿbah is described as a *support for mankind*, because it served to order the affairs of the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period (Ṭ), for just as Makkah is a place of sanctuary for wild birds and animals, in that they cannot be hunted within its borders, so too did it serve as a sanctuary for human beings (R). Since even the idolatrous Arabs observed its sacred status and maintained a ban on violence in the Kaʿbah sanctuary, it served to hold back "the strong from the weak, the evil from the virtuous, and the oppressor from the oppressed" (Ṭ). Some interpret the description of the Kaʿbah as *a support for mankind* to mean a support for the Arabs, specifically, during the *jāhiliyyah* period, when there was no authority to maintain order in Arabia, and that it now serves as a support for Muslims by orienting their religious rites of pilgrimage and prayer (R, Ṭ). Al-Rāzī also understands the description of the Kaʿbah as a *support for mankind* to indicate that God has *made the Kaʿbah* in such a way that human beings have a natural awareness of its majesty and an inherent desire to go toward it (R).

In this verse, the *sacred month, the offerings,* and *the garlands* are mentioned, along with the Kaʿbah itself, as a *support for mankind*. The *sacred month* may refer specifically to the month of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah (Z), when the pilgrimage was and is still performed, or to the four sacred months collectively (see 5:2c), in which travelers were safe from harm in pre-Islamic Arabia (R, Z); the *offerings* refer to sacrificial animals destined for the sanctuary who could not be harmed; and *the garlands* refer to ornamental wreaths the pre-Islamic Arabs would put around the necks of the

the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and that God is Knower of all things. (98) Know that God is severe in retribution, and that God is Forgiving, Merciful. (99) Only the proclamation is incumbent upon the Messenger. And God knows what you disclose and what you conceal. (100) Say, "The good and the wicked are not equal, though the abundance of the wicked may impress you."

sacrificial animals, so others would know their status and not harm or impede them as they were being led to the Kaʿbah; see 5:2 and commentary.

98 The description of God in this verse as being *severe in retribution* (*shadīd al-ʿiqāb*) comes at the end of a series of prohibitions related to the pilgrimage, and the same phrase is found at the end of v. 2, which similarly contains commands and prohibitions related to the pilgrimage. It is also found in 3:11; 40:22; 59:4, 7. The description of God as both *severe in retribution* and *Forgiving* and *Merciful* (a pairing similar to that found in 13:6 and 40:3) reflects the widely held principle that a true believer is always suspended between fear of God's Wrath and hope in His Mercy. In this vein, some quote a saying, "Were the fear of a believer weighed against his hope, they would be equal" (R). The fact that the verse concludes with the mention of God's merciful and forgiving qualities is understood by some to mean that these qualities predominate in the Divine Nature (R), as in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*), "My Mercy takes precedence over My Wrath."

99 See 5:92c, which also discusses the reminder to the Prophet that his only responsibility is to deliver *the clear proclamation*. God's Knowledge of the unseen is repeatedly mentioned in different ways throughout the Quran. His Knowledge of what human beings disclose and hide of their own thoughts and nature is also mentioned specifically in 2:33; 11:5; 14:38; 16:19, 23; 24:29; 27:25, 74; 28:69; 33:54; 36:76; 60:1; 64:4.

100 This is one of many places where the Quran asserts the spiritual and qualitative inequality of human beings in a variety of ways. See, for example, 9:19; 11:23–24; 16:76; 35:19; 39:29; 57:10; 59:20; and especially 39:9: *What of one who is devoutly obedient during the watches of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], wary of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord [. . .]? Say, "Are those who know and those who do not know equal? Only possessors of intellect reflect."* In the present verse, *the wicked* are compared to *the good,* and although the wicked may exist in great quantity, it is understood that the good surpass the wicked in spiritual quality. With regard to the abundance of the wicked, a *ḥadīth* says, "Mankind is like a hundred camels, among whom you can scarcely find one to ride" (Aj). According to some, the comparison between *the wicked* and *the good* may refer to wicked or good things—that is, those that are licit and illicit—rather than to people (Ṭs, Ṭū).

The phrase *possessors of intellect* (*uli'l-albāb* or *ulu'l-albāb* in other contexts) is found throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:269; 3:7, 190; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29, 43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54) and, as in the present verse, they are directly addressed by the Quran in several places; see 2:179, 197; 65:10. *Intellect* translates *albāb,* which has the primary meaning of "pith" or "kernel," denoting the pure inner essence of something, and the secondary meaning of pure intellect or heart, insofar as these represent the purest spiritual essence of the human soul (Iṣ). Such people may also be said, more literally, to possess knowledge of the inner essence of things, which must be discerned with the intellect rather than reason or the senses. Ibn ʿAjībah glosses *uli'l-albāb* here as "possessors of pure hearts," who "avoid the wicked, even if they are many, and who betake themselves to the good, even if they are few." In this sense, "intellect" is very different from "reason" or "rationality," in that intellect represents a faculty for the attainment of unitive knowledge directly connected to God through which one acquires knowledge of essential realities, whereas reason is the human faculty of discernment that arrives at knowledge through a logical, analytical, and dialectical process that is dualistic in its approach.

So reverence God, O possessors of intellect, that you may prosper. (101) O you who believe! Ask not about things which, if they were disclosed to you, would trouble you. And if you ask about them while the Quran is being sent down, they will be disclosed to you. God has pardoned this, and God is Forgiving,

101–2 The most widely attested account about the revelation of these verses reports that they came in response to a man who, when the Prophet announced that the *ḥajj* was incumbent upon believers, asked if this meant they were required to make the *ḥajj* every year. The Prophet ignored his question three times before responding, "No. But if I had said yes, it would have been obligatory for you!" (Q, Ṭ, W, Z). In another version of the Prophet's response, the Prophet added, "Keep silent regarding those things about which I am silent, for those who came before you were only destroyed by their questions and by disputing with their prophets" (Ṭ), echoing the warning in v. 102. The Prophet's answer suggests that there may be an intentional leniency or mercy in the ambiguities of certain religious commands. If one pushes to have them clarified, it might make the obligation more difficult or too difficult. Thus people should refrain from asking questions of this nature, for *if* the matter *were disclosed* to them, it *would trouble* them (Ṭ).

Other reports indicate that these verses were revealed in response to those who would ask the Prophet disingenuous questions in order to test or belittle him. Such people would ask him about things that would naturally be unknown to him, such as who their father was or where their lost camel had wandered (Q, Ṭ, W), the answers to which, especially in the first case, might reveal troubling information best left unknown (R). Another report indicates that these verses were revealed after some people asked the Prophet about the idolatrous practices of *baḥīrah, sā'ibah, waṣīlah,* and *ḥām,* which are mentioned and refuted in v. 103 (Q, Ṭ). The general warning in v. 101 about asking questions whose answers might *trouble you* would be applicable to all three types of questions mentioned above and can be read in connection to the statement in v. 92 that *only the clear proclamation is incumbent upon Our Messenger* (R). Thus one should not question the Prophet about religious obligations beyond what has been revealed to him or about matters, like lost camels, that do not pertain to religious guidance and about which the Prophet has not been given any special knowledge. The Quran repeatedly states that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor the earlier prophets had access to knowledge of the unseen beyond what had been revealed to them (see, e.g., 3:44; 6:50; 7:188; 11:31).

In a more general way, some indicate that these verses are meant to discourage excessive questioning of any type and connect them to a *ḥadīth* in which it is said that one of the three things God dislikes among people is "too much questioning" (*kathrat al-su'āl;* Q). Nonetheless, the present verses clearly address inappropriate questioning, which is likely to lead to troubling answers, and some commentators are careful to note that appropriate questions, asked in a genuine search for religious guidance, are not discouraged (Q, R).

*And if you ask about them while the Quran is being sent down*—that is, while the Prophet was still alive and able to receive revelation (JJ, Z)—*they will be disclosed to you.* This may indicate, by way of warning, that those who asked about such matters while the Quran was still in the process of being revealed were in particular danger of receiving a more difficult command as a result of their questions, since their questions would certainly be answered (JJ, Z). However, this statement can also be read as a license to ask legitimate questions regarding what has already been revealed, for example, about what a particular verse of the Quran means. If such questions are asked while the Prophet is still alive to receive revelation, the answers *will be disclosed* (R). What *God has pardoned* may be excessive or inappropriate questioning in the past (Q, R, Ṭ, Z) or perhaps the past sins that might be revealed by the answers the Prophet gives to certain inappropriate questions (R).

V. 102 mentions *a people before you* who asked similar questions, leading them to become disbelievers. There are several examples in the Quran of earlier prophets being questioned disingenuously or inappropriately by their followers. See, for example, 4:153, where the Israelites tell Moses, *Show*

Clement. (102) A people before you asked about these things, then came to be disbelievers therein. (103) God has not established *baḥīrah,* or *sā'ibah,* or *waṣīlah,* or *ḥām.* But those who disbelieve fabricate lies against God, and most of them do not understand. (104) And when it is said unto them, "Come unto that which

*us God openly,* and are then seized by a thunderbolt; 2:246–47, where the Israelites ask for a king, and when God appoints Saul for them, they proceed to question his qualifications; and 2:67–71, where Moses relates to the Israelites God's command to slaughter a cow, and they respond by asking a series of questions about the exact nature of the cow to be slaughtered in a manner that suggests an inappropriate distrust of Moses. Like the question about the *ḥajj* mentioned above, their questioning makes a given command even more difficult to fulfill. Some commentators connect the reference to earlier communities who had asked inappropriate questions of their prophets to the people who asked the Prophet Ṣāliḥ for a sign to prove that he was truly a prophet. When he brought them a sacred she-camel as a sign, his people hamstrung her and so brought destructive punishment down upon themselves (see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; Q, Ṭ, Z). Some commentators also suggest that one example of previous peoples asking inappropriate questions of their prophets is the followers of Jesus who asked for a table spread with food (*mā'idah*) to be sent down in vv. 112–15 (Q, Ṭ, Z). The Quran does not relate this account in as critical a tone as it does the story of the Israelites and the cow, but in v. 115 God does warn that any who disbelieve after He had fulfilled their request would receive an unprecedented punishment.

103 The four Arabic terms in this verse refer to particular kinds of camels that, for various reasons, the Arabian idolaters used to consider sacred and dedicate to the gods. Such camels could not be ridden or milked for human consumption, but had to be allowed to wander and graze freely. The commentators differ on the precise nature of each of these kinds of camels, and the distinctions they mention for these different consecrated camels tend to overlap. Some report that *baḥīrah* referred to a female camel who had borne five offspring (Q), the fifth of which, according to some, had to be a male (R). *Sā'ibah* generally referred to a female camel that was consecrated to the gods voluntarily by its owner as a supplicatory offering for overcoming illness, for protection on a journey, or as a means of giving thanks for some good fortune (R). Others report that *sā'ibah* may have referred to a slave that was freed completely, one for whom all ties to the former master had been severed (R). The *waṣīlah* was either a female camel who had given birth to many female offspring (JJ)—particularly valuable for their milk—or a female camel who had given birth to a male and a female offspring (R). *Ḥām* (the only reference to a male camel among the four) refers to the male camel who had sired many offspring (JJ) or whose offspring had sired another generation of offspring (R) and so was allowed to graze freely and could not be ridden or made to carry any burden (R).

These sacred camels would often be marked by slit ears, so that people who came upon them would be aware of their sacred status and not disturb them. See 4:119, where Satan vows to lead people astray by, among other things, commanding them to slit the ears of their livestock. See also 6:136–39, 143–45, and 10:59, which criticize the idolatrous Arabs for arbitrarily making certain kinds of livestock sacred or consecrating them to their gods. These practices are reported to be some of the first ways in which the pre-Islamic Arabs deviated from the monotheistic religion of Abraham (Ṭ). Besides being idolatrous in orientation, these practices also violate the Quran's repeated objection to arbitrarily restricting the enjoyment or consumption of the good things that God has provided for human beings (see 5:87–88 and commentary). Moreover, when they falsely represent practices they have devised themselves as either requirements of Divine Law or means of approaching the Divine (IK), they *fabricate lies against God,* an enormous sin often connected in the Quran with the religious innovations of previous religious communities; see 3:24, 93–94; 6:21, 93, 137–40, 144; 7:37, 152; 10:17–18, 59–60, 69; 16:56, 116.

104 See 2:170, for a nearly identical verse. Following upon v. 103, which repudiated the traditional idolatrous practices of making certain camels arbitrarily "sacred," the present verse

God has sent down, and unto the Messenger," they say, "Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing." What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided? (105) O you who believe! You have charge of your own souls. He who is astray cannot harm you if you are rightly guided.

suggests that such practices cannot continue to be justified by the idolaters' claims to be following the traditions of their fathers. Throughout the Quran many peoples are said to have rejected the messages of the prophets sent to them, because they were reluctant to abandon their existing idolatrous and immoral practices. Such people often invoke their fathers and their fathers' corrupt religious guidance as a basis for their rejection of the prophet. Some manifest outrage at the prophet's demand that they abandon the traditions of their fathers; see, for example, 34:43: *And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, they say, "This is naught but a man who desires to turn you from that which your fathers used to worship";* as well as 2:170; 7:70; 10:78; 11:62, 87; 14:10; 23:24; 28:36; 31:21; 43:22–23. Elsewhere, disbelievers invoke their fathers' teachings as an excuse for their own idolatrous or immoral practices, in an ineffective attempt at deflecting blame from themselves; see 7:28: *When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus." Say, "Truly God commands not indecency. Do you say of God that which you know not?"* See also 21:51–54 and 26:69–76, where Abraham upbraids his people for uncritically following the idolatrous teachings of their fathers.

This general theme, which is articulated in many of the prophetic narratives in the Quran, serves as a strong basis for the resistance to the practice of "blind obedience" (*taqlīd*), without inquiry, to other people purported to be authorities in matters of religious doctrine (R). At the very least, this verse suggests that one is responsible for finding worthy sources of instruction and guidance in religion (R, Z), for when the disbelievers in this verse plead their loyalty to their fathers' traditions, they are chastised for following those who *knew naught and were not rightly guided.* Regardless of inherited customs, the Quran makes it clear that individuals are personally morally responsible for their own religious choices on the basis of what Islamic tradition considers an inherent awareness of the Being and Oneness of God, to which the Quran says they testified in a pretemporal covenant, as related in 7:172.

105 If the previous verse rejected the claim of the disbelievers who refused prophetic guidance on the basis that they were following the practices of their fathers, the present verse can be read, in one sense, as asserting that all human beings have responsibility for the fate of their own souls. *You have charge of your own souls* could also be read in the imperative: "Take charge of your own souls!" which some commentators see as an admonition to take care to preserve one's own soul from religious disobedience (Q, R). *He who is astray* may be a reference to the "fathers" from whom the disbelievers in the previous verse claim to take their religious guidance. It may also be a reference to other disbelievers, or perhaps even to Satan, who is said in several verses to possess no independent authority over people's souls or moral choices (see 14:22; 15:42; 16:99; 17:65; 34:21).

Most commentators, however, interpret this verse to mean that ultimately one is morally responsible for only oneself. The commentators' primary concern with this verse was the extent to which the idea that one was morally responsible for only oneself would compromise the importance of *enjoining right and forbidding wrong,* established as a principle for believers and the believing community in other verses of the Quran (3:104, 110, 114; 7:157, 199; 9:67) and considered one of the religious obligations of all Muslims, individually and collectively (R, Ṭ). Most commentators maintain, therefore, that this verse does not in any way nullify the obligation to enjoin right and forbid wrong, but simply indicates that if one's calls nevertheless go unheeded, one bears no moral responsibility for those who refused to accept the admonition (R, Ṭ, Z). Others interpret *you have charge of your own souls* to mean "you have charge over your own," meaning that you have a moral responsibility to guide the mem-

Unto God shall be your return all together, and He shall inform you of what you used to do. (106) O you who believe! The witness between you, when death approaches one of you, at the time of the bequest, shall be two just men among you, or two from among other than yourselves if you are traveling upon the earth when death befalls you. Detain the two of them after the prayer, and let them both swear by God, if you doubt [them], "We will not sell it for any price, though he were a kinsman, nor will we conceal the witness of God, for then we

bers of your own religious community, but not those outside it (R). Some say that the intended meaning is that one should not be grieved by the recalcitrance of others (R) in the face of moral admonition, since even the Prophet is told that he has no control over whether the Divine message he brings will be accepted or not (see 5:92c; 5:99c).

A number of statements attributed to the Prophet's Companions asserted that the time for the message of this verse to take effect had not yet been realized. They suggested that it was only in the distant, perhaps apocalyptic, future, when people will be widely impervious to religious guidance and the world will be filled with moral enormities, that people would become responsible for simply protecting their own souls from moral destruction (Ṭ, Th). This represents a rather weak view, however, since it would restrict the relevance of the verse to circumstances in the distant future.

The idea that God will *inform* people in the Hereafter about what they *used to do,* their own past actions and things over which there were religious differences, is mentioned in several other places in the Quran (5:48; 6:60; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 29:8; 31:15; 39:7; 62:8).

106 In Islamic Law, one may bequeath up to one-third of one's wealth prior to one's death to anyone who is not already entitled to an ordained share of inheritance as stipulated in 4:11–12. The Quran initially enjoined leaving bequests in a general way for parents and other relatives (2:180) and for widows (2:240). After the revelation of 4:11–12, which assigned specific shares of the inheritance to parents, widows, and other close relatives, most Islamic legal schools considered the stipulated heirs to be ineligible to receive such bequests (see 2:180c for a fuller discussion). One of the stipulations of 4:11–12, however, is that any known bequests made by the deceased to others must be rendered before the remainder of the property is divided among the legal heirs.

Such bequests must be made in the presence of two witnesses, which is also true of other transactions of property; see 2:282, regarding the contracting of debt, and 4:6, which concerns giving orphans their property when they reach maturity. In the present verse, *the witness between you,* or according to another reading, "the witness to what is with you," *when death approaches* must be *two just men among you,* which is widely interpreted to mean two men from among the community of Muslims (Ṭ). *Two from among other than yourselves* could thus refer to non-Muslims who might be called upon to witness the bequest when one is *traveling upon the earth,* presumably among non-Muslims (Q, Ṭ). Some say that the non-Muslim witnesses may be from any religious community, since the verse is not specific on this issue, but others say that they should be from the Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian communities, and testimony from those belonging to these three communities has been legally accepted in Islamic courts (Ṭ). In Islamic courts in India, Hindu testimony was also accepted in some cases. A minority interpret *two just men among you* to mean two men from among one's neighbors, in which case, *two from among other than yourselves* would refer to those outside one's immediate community (Q, Ṭ). Based upon the gender of the adjective *just* (*dhawā ʿadl*), the verse is understood as requiring two male witnesses (Q).

The present verse was reportedly revealed after an incident involving a Muslim man who became ill and died while traveling with two Christian companions. The young man entrusted his possessions to his companions to give to his family. Upon their return, the companions gave the man's possessions to his family, and the Prophet

would surely be among the sinners." (107) But if it is discovered that the two of them are guilty of sin, then two others shall stand in their place, from those most entitled as claimants, and swear by God, "Indeed, our witness is truer than their witness, and we have not transgressed, for then we would surely be among the wrongdoers." (108) Thus it is more likely that they will bear true witness, or fear that their oaths will be countered by oaths thereafter. And reverence God and listen. God guides not iniquitous people. (109) The day when God will gather the messengers and say, "What response did you receive?" they

made them swear that they had held nothing back. Later, however, it was discovered that they had kept for themselves a valuable silver drinking vessel. When one of the deceased's heirs saw the cup, he recognized it as one of the deceased man's possessions and testified that it should have been part of the bequest (Ṭ, Z).

Commentators generally indicate that it is necessary for the witnesses to be "detained" or made to swear an oath before God only in cases where their faithfulness is suspect (Q, Ṭ). Detaining *them after the prayer* (*ṣalāh*) is widely understood to mean after the Islamic late afternoon (*ʿaṣr*) prayer, as it was reported that the Prophet's practice was to exact oaths from people at this time specifically (Ṭ). Some maintain, however, that *the prayer* does not necessarily refer to the Islamic canonical prayer, since the witnesses might be non-Muslims, in which case they should be detained after their own prayer (Ṭ), presumably because they are more likely to be faithful witnesses and to fear making a false oath before God after having completed their prayers. The oath to *not sell it for any price* is a promise that they will not profit from their witnessing in any way (Ṭ). This verse is also evidence that solemn oaths should be sworn *by God,* an idea supported by a *ḥadīth,* "Whosoever would swear an oath, let him swear by God or be silent" (Q). The foundational legal scholar al-Shāfiʿī, however, also permitted swearing upon a written copy of the Quran (Q). Regarding the significance of oath taking, see v. 89.

107 *But if it is discovered that the two of them are guilty of sin*—that is, of betraying the trust they specifically undertook as witnesses to the bequest of the deceased (Q, Ṭ)—then *two others* will stand in their place. These *two others* will be among *those most entitled as claimants* to the bequest of the deceased (Ṭ), whose rights have therefore been violated by the unfaithful witnesses (Ṭ). This phrase may also be rendered "those nearest to it," meaning both those most entitled to receive the bequest and those nearest to the affairs of the deceased and thus having greater knowledge of his situation (Z). These *two others* must take an oath to their own truthfulness because, as claimants to the bequest, they are not disinterested witnesses (Ṭ). As part of this oath they swear that they have not *transgressed,* that is, exceeded the limits in the testimony they have given regarding the bequest (Ṭ).

108 The various procedures for assuring the truthful witness of those present at a bequest in vv. 106–7 are intended to make it likely that the witnesses will execute the bequest faithfully and to increase public trust in such matters. Some suggest that the verses are intended to impress upon all people the solemnity and seriousness of taking oaths or serving as witnesses to such bequests (Q). As such, vv. 106–8 are among a number of passages that insist upon the religious duty of truthful witness (4:135; 5:8) and of faithfully fulfilling matters with which one has been entrusted (2:283; 4:58; 8:27; 23:8–11; 70:32–35).

109 This verse is meant as a warning about *the day when God will gather the messengers* and can be understood to mean "Beware of the day when . . ." Although no explicit warning is issued, some indicate that the verse follows upon the admonition in v. 108, *reverence God and listen* (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), or upon the last sentence of v. 108, so that it reads, *God guides not the iniquitous people* [on]

will say, "We have no knowledge. Truly it is Thou Who knowest best the things unseen." (110) Then God will say, "O Jesus son of Mary! Remember My Blessing upon thee, and upon thy mother, when I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, that thou mightest speak to people in the cradle and in maturity; and when I taught thee the Book, Wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel; and how thou wouldst create out of clay the shape of a bird, by My Leave, and thou wouldst breathe into it, and it would become a bird, by My Leave; and thou wouldst heal the blind and the leper, by My Leave; and thou wouldst bring forth the dead, by My Leave; and how I restrained the Children of Israel from thee, when thou didst bring them clear proofs, and those who disbelieved

*the day when God will gather the messengers* (R, Z). God's question to the prophets, *What response did you receive?* is meant as a rebuke to their people (Bd, Ṭ). The question is addressed to the prophets, because they are the leaders of their communities (Th). The commentators seek to explain why the prophets, when questioned by God about this matter, claim that they *have no knowledge* of it, when, as witnesses for and against their own communities, they surely know the answer. Some commentators suggest that even the prophets will be too overwhelmed with awe at the terrors of that Day to respond immediately, but will later regain their composure and proceed to testify to the actions of their respective communities (Ṭ, Z). This explanation is hard to reconcile, however, with other verses that state that the believers—and the prophets are surely among them—will have no fear on that Day (2:62; 21:103; R, Ṭs).

Considering the prophets' further response, *Thou . . . knowest best the things unseen* (cf. v. 116), they may simply be indicating that they are not aware of what their communities have done after they themselves have passed away or of the secret intentions of their followers (R, Ṭ, Z). Yet, this explanation also seems inconsistent with the Quranic idea that the prophets will testify against their communities on the Day of Judgment (2:143; 4:69; 22:78; 57:19). The prophets' statement that they *have no knowledge* is probably best understood as the prophets' expression of humility before God's Knowledge (Z), meaning either "we have no knowledge save what Thou hast taught us," which is identical to the response the angels give to God in 2:32, or "we have no knowledge save that Thy Knowledge thereof is the same or greater" (Bd, R, Ṭ). In the same vein, it may also be the prophets' acknowledgment that, although they know the outward aspects of people's actions, God alone knows their secrets (R). Thus the prophets, although aware of the deeds of their communities, prefer to entrust the matter of their judgment to God (Z).

110 This verse continues in the context of God speaking to the prophets on the Day of Judgment, but here and for nearly the remainder of the *sūrah* God addresses Jesus specifically regarding his mission and the actions of his followers. The present verse rehearses many of the extraordinary qualities attributed to Jesus throughout the Quran. He is *strengthened . . . with the Holy Spirit* (see 2:87, 253; for the role the Spirit plays in his creation, see also 4:171; 19:17; 21:91; 66:12). The *Holy Spirit* (*rūḥ al-qudus*) is widely understood in its Quranic context and in the commentary tradition to be a reference to the Archangel Gabriel, the angel of revelation (Ṭ; see also 16:102; 17:85; 26:193; 42:52; 97:4). It is also identified with the Spirit (*al-Rūḥ*) as such, which the Quran describes as being *from the Command of my Lord* (17:85). Given the grammatical form of *rūḥ al-qudus*, it could also be rendered "Spirit of the holy" or even "Spirit of God," since it is related to the Divine Name *al-Quddūs* (*the Holy;* see 59:23; R); see also 2:87c. Given the connection between Jesus and the Spirit, his prophetic title is *Rūḥ Allāh*, or "Spirit of God,"

among them said, 'This is naught but manifest sorcery.' (111) And when I inspired the apostles to believe in Me and in My messenger, they said, 'We believe. Bear witness that we are submitters.'" (112) When the apostles said, "O Jesus son of Mary! Is thy Lord able to send down to us from Heaven a table spread with food?" He said, "Reverence God, if you are believers." (113) They said, "We desire to eat from it, so that our hearts may be at peace, and we may know that thou hast spoken truthfully unto us, and we may be among the witnesses thereto." (114) Jesus son of Mary said, "O God, our Lord! Send down unto us a table from Heaven spread with food, to be a feast for us—for the first of us and the last of us—and a sign from Thee, and provide for us, for Thou art the best of providers." (115) God said, "I

which can therefore also be used as a proper name in Islam.

In this verse Jesus is also described as a bearer of revelation in a manner similar to that used to describe other prophets: he has been taught *the Book and Wisdom* (3:81; 4:54, 113), a phrase used to refer to the scriptures of the prophets and to the prophets' knowledge of their meaning, respectively (Ṭ; see also 2:129, 151, 231; 3:164; 62:2); and he has been given *clear proofs,* also said of Jesus in 2:87, 253, and used as a general term for Divine Revelation in all its forms throughout the Quran. Jesus' ability to *speak to people in the cradle,* meaning his ability to speak to people while he himself was an infant, also found in 3:46 and 19:29–30, is an exclusively Quranic attribute not found in the Bible. His creating live birds out of clay birds, healing the *blind* and the *leper,* and raising the dead are likewise recounted in 3:49 (for *blind* and *leper,* see 3:49c). These last three miraculous powers attributed to Jesus are extraordinary in that they suggest powers usually reserved for God: God is the one who heals in 26:8; He is the raiser of the dead throughout the Quran; and the creation of birds from clay and bringing them to life by breathing upon them is exactly parallel to God's creation of the human being (15:26–29; 32:7–9; 38:71–72). The verse repeatedly makes clear, however, that all these powers are done by God's leave (*by My Leave*) and so are ultimately His. Jesus' ability to heal and power to raise the dead are also found in the canonical Gospels, and a similar account of Jesus' creating birds from clay is given in the noncanonical *Infancy Gospel of Thomas.*

That God *restrained the Children of Israel from* him is understood by most commentators to mean that He thwarted their attempt to slay him, since the Quran asserts that they did not *slay him; nor did they crucify him* (see 4:157 and commentary). Jesus' miracles are dismissed by some as *manifest sorcery* (see also 61:6). Similar accusations of sorcery were made against Muhammad (6:7; 10:2; 21:3; 43:30; 46:7; 74:24; also 54:2, regarding the splitting of the moon), Moses (10:76; 20:57; 27:13; 28:36), and the messengers of God in general (11:7; 34:43; 37:15).

111–15 These verses recount the incident in which Jesus' apostles request, and God sends down *from Heaven,* a table *spread with food* (*māʾidah*—from which this *sūrah* takes its name).

111 Cf. 3:52–53, where Jesus' apostles also testify that they are *muslims*—that is, submitters unto God—although their assertion there is followed by the statement in 3:54 that they *plotted.* In this verse, God speaks in the first person to state that He *inspired the apostles to believe,* using a verb for "inspired" that is related to *wahy,* which usually denotes prophetic revelation. In this context, it is glossed as a "casting into the heart," indicating a less direct or verbatim form of inspiration than what the prophets received (IK, Ṭ). From a theological perspective, the fact that the apostles' "belief" precedes their submitting unto God as *muslims* indicates that inward belief should pre-

cede the outward conforming of one's actions to the Divine Will (R), an idea reflected in the Islamic theological formulation that faith consists of "knowledge in the heart, affirmation with the tongue, and proper action with the limbs."

112–13 The apostles' question seems to suggest a certain doubt in God's Omnipotence, since they ask whether God is *able* to send down the table spread with food. They may have desired such food for either simple nourishment or the spiritual blessing of consuming heavenly food (Āl), or both. Yet it is the apparent disrespect or lack of appreciation of God's Power that their question suggests that leads Jesus to respond, with a tone of rebuke according to some, *Reverence God, if you are believers. Reverence God* (*ittaqū'Llāh*) also carries the meaning "Have fear of God" (Ṭ). Because their request comes shortly after the recounting of Jesus' many miraculous abilities in v. 110, it may suggest a certain ingratitude for the signs they have already been given (R). Some early commentators read the verse to indicate that the apostles were asking Jesus if he was able to beseech God on their behalf to send down the table, rather than questioning God's ability to do so (Ṭ). In the latter case, Jesus' response was meant as a rebuke, since their asking for a sign might indicate their lack of faith or certainty in Jesus' status as a prophet (Ṭ, Z), despite their claim of faith in v. 111. The Quran contains several other accounts of people requesting a sign from their prophets due to lack of faith (see 4:153; 6:37, 109; 7:203c).

The apostles' response to Jesus' rebuke is to express their desire that their *hearts may be at peace* and that they might have direct confirmation of Jesus' prophetic message. This response suggests that the apostles' motivations are similar to those of Abraham in 2:260: *And when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how Thou givest life to the dead," He said, "Dost thou not believe?" He said, "Yea, indeed, but so that my heart may be at peace"* (R). In fact, Jesus' words *Reverence God, if you are believers* may not be meant as a rebuke at all, but rather as a reminder that an attitude of reverence would lead God to fulfill their request (R). The apostles' promise to be *witnesses thereto* means either that they will be witnesses to this miracle for those not present or that they will be witnesses to the truth of God's Oneness and Power and to Jesus' prophethood (Ṭ, Z).

According to one commentator, the apostles' request followed a thirty-day fast, after which Jesus had advised them that God would grant them any need they might have (Th), thus creating a parallel between this account and the Islamic *ʿĪd al-fiṭr* (the Feast of Breaking Fast), which follows the month-long fast of Ramadan (note that when Jesus makes the request of God in v. 114, he indicates that it should be a "feast," *ʿīd*, for them). Although this story has no direct parallel in the Gospel accounts, and some consider it something known only to Muslims through the Quran (IK), it may be linked with the Gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44) or more indirectly with the story of the Last Supper, and by extension to the "heavenly food" of the Christian Eucharist, which is based on it. Insofar as it is a story of faith and miracles, it may also be compared to Gospel accounts of Jesus rebuking his apostles for lacking faith in God's ability to provide food for them (see Matthew 6:31; 16:5–10; Luke 12:28–29) or asserting that the lack of faith prevents God's miraculous intervention (Matthew 17:15–21).

114–15 Jesus' prayer that the *table from Heaven spread with food* be *a feast* (*ʿīd*) *for us—for the first of us and the last of us* may simply be a request that God send down sufficient food for all Jesus' followers (Ṭ, Z). As such, it has some resonance with the Gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (mentioned in 5:112–13c). However, Jesus' wish that the Heaven-sent table be a *feast*, using *ʿīd*, which connotes both "returning" and "joy" and is used to denote Muslim religious holidays, may also indicate that he and his followers, present and future, would observe the day of this event as a sacred feast (R, Ṭ, Z). Some say that this perpetually observed feast day is Sunday (Z), which would support the suggestion that this Quranic account is a reference to the Eucharist.

Varying reports indicate that the Heaven-sent food consisted of fish (Ṭ, Z), of meat and bread, of paradisal fruits, or of all kinds of food except meat (Ṭ). According to one report, it came down as a red cloth spread with food, between two clouds, whereupon Jesus prayed, "O God, make me one of the thankful. O God, make this [table] a mercy, and make it not a punishment" (R, Z). Some commentators, however, maintain that no *table . . . spread with food* was sent down at all, and

shall indeed send it down unto you. But whosoever among you disbelieves thereafter, I shall surely punish him with a punishment wherewith I have not punished any other in all the worlds." (116) And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?'" He said, "Glory be to Thee! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right. Had I said it, Thou wouldst surely have known it. Thou knowest what is in my self and I know not what is in Thy Self. Truly it is Thou Who

the story is simply a parable told to discourage people from asking for such things in the future (R, Ṭ); some report that the apostles withdrew their request and repented after hearing God's warning in v. 115 that whoever disbelieves after He sent down the table will be punished *with a punishment* such as none have seen before (IK, Ṭ, Z). However, given God's affirmation, in v. 115, *I shall indeed send it down unto you* and the principle that whatever God promises shall come to pass, most commentators maintain that the table was actually sent down (IK, R). And despite the varying accounts of its contents, this table may represent, above all, the descent of spiritual blessings and nourishment (R).

116 Some assert that God's questioning of Jesus in this verse took place immediately after his ascension (3:55; 4:158). Yet the verse seems, rather, to bring the discussion back to God's questioning the prophets, apparently on the Day of Judgment, about how people responded to their messages, as initiated in v. 109. Although many prophets and their messages were forgotten over time, the issue here is the extent to which Jesus' spiritual station was exaggerated by his followers after his death to the point that they attributed divinity to him and his mother. Following immediately upon the warning in v. 115 that whoever disbelieved after the miracle of the table would be punished, this verse suggests that this is the disbelief of which they had been warned.

Although traditional Christian doctrine does not view Mary as a member of the Trinity, the Quran may here be referring to certain Orthodox and Roman Catholic doctrines regarding Mary, for example, her identification as Theotokos, or "Mother of God," which is a doctrinal extension of the Christian belief in Christ's divinity. The implicit criticism of the divinization of Mary here may also suggest that she is understood to be the third person in the Trinity as it is criticized by the Quran (cf. 4:171; 5:73), rather than the "Holy Spirit," since the latter term is used in the Quran, as already mentioned, primarily as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel, and it is never suggested that he was improperly divinized. In this verse, however, the Quran may be criticizing not Christian doctrinal formulations concerning Mary, but rather popular Christian exaggerations of Mary's status that approach divinization, similar to the Quranic criticism in 9:31: *They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God.*

Connecting the belief in Jesus' divinity to his miraculous actions recounted in v. 110, al-Rāzī says that if Christians consider Jesus' miracles to have been "created" by him at will—that is, that he, rather than God, had full control over them—then they effectively consider him Divine (R). Jesus indicates that he bears no responsibility for such exaggerations of his or his mother's status, but rather than directly denying that he commanded his followers to take him and his mother *as gods apart from God,* he demonstrates an attitude of proper comportment before God by offering a response of perfect humility, saying he had *no right* to utter such a thing (Bḍ, R). His further response is similar to that given by the prophets in v. 109, indicating that his testimony is ultimately unnecessary, since God knows all things, including *the things unseen* (see v. 109 and commentary), thus properly deferring the matter to Him (R). Jesus' statement that God knows what is in his *self,* but that he does not know what is in God's *Self,* may simply mean that God knows whatever

knowest best the things unseen. (117) I said naught to them save that which Thou didst command me: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them, so long as I remained among them. But when Thou didst take me [to Thyself], it was Thou Who wast the Watcher over them. And Thou art Witness over all things. (118) If Thou punishest them, they are indeed Thy servants, but if Thou forgivest them, then indeed Thou art the Mighty, the Wise." (119) God said, "This is the Day wherein the truthful shall benefit from their truthfulness. For them shall be Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein forever.

Jesus knows, while God's Knowledge remains unknown to Jesus (Z), or that God knows what Jesus might hide within himself, but that Jesus does not know what is hidden in God (R). *Self,* used in connection with both Jesus and God, translates *nafs;* in the case of Jesus, it refers to his human soul, whereas in the case of God, it can be said to refer to His Essence (R).

117–18 *Worship God, my Lord and your Lord* is a common formulation of the prophetic message found throughout the Quran. Jesus gives this same command in 3:51; 5:72; 19:36; 43:64; it is attributed to Hūd in 11:56, Moses in 40:27 and 44:20, and Muhammad in 2:139 and 42:15. Continuing in the same tone of humility seen in vv. 109 and 116, Jesus claims no ability to be witness for his people after his time on earth; his witness lasted only for the duration of his earthly life, but God, he says, is *Witness over all things.* In fact, some maintain that the purpose of God's question to Jesus in v. 116 was to inform Jesus of his followers' actions after he was no longer among them rather than to obtain knowledge of things that God, being omniscient, would have already known (Ṭ).

Jesus further manifests his humility before God by refusing to suggest either the punishment or the forgiveness of his errant followers; instead, he entrusts the matter entirely to God. Although the error of taking Jesus and his mother *as gods apart from God* (v. 116) might be considered by some as a form of *shirk* (ascribing partners to God, "idolatry") and thus as "unforgiveable," according to 4:48 and 4:116, many commentators suggest that these Christian beliefs do not actually rise to the level of *shirk,* but are rather considered mere "sins," which God may certainly forgive (R). The Ashʿarites, who refuse to limit God's freedom to assign reward or punishment by making it contingent upon human actions, consider His possible forgiveness of Christian errors of belief as fully within the scope of His just action and Wisdom (R). Jesus' suggestion that God may forgive his followers, while also leaving the matter of their punishment or forgiveness completely in God's Hands, indicates the proper manner in which prophets intercede for their people, and some consider this verse a proof that God may accept the intercession of prophets on behalf of their sinful followers (R). According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet was once heard praying from night until morning, reciting only v. 118 in each cycle of prayer. When a Companion, Abū Dharr, asked him about this matter, the Prophet responded that he had been asking His Lord for the ability to intercede for his community and that it had been granted for all those who were innocent of the sin of *shirk* (IK).

119 Commentators consider God's statement here to be the final part of His address to Jesus, either immediately after his ascension or more likely on the Day of Judgment (R, Ṭ). This verse concludes the account of God's reckoning with the prophets and their followers in vv. 109–18 with a promise of bliss in the Hereafter for those who are *truthful.* Cf. 33:7–8, where a connection is made between the covenant God establishes with the prophets and His questioning the *truthful . . . concerning their truthfulness;* and 33:24, where God rewards *the truthful for their truthfulness.* The reward for truthfulness is said to apply only to those who were truthful in their earthly lives, when it was a matter of choice. None can avoid

God is content with them, and they are content with Him. That is the great triumph." (120) Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is therein, and He is Powerful over all things.

being truthful on the Day of Judgment (not even Satan), but they are not rewarded for it (R, Z).

The present verse brings together several common descriptions of inward and outward paradisal bliss that are repeated throughout the Quran. The blessed will abide forever in *Gardens with rivers running below,* an image presented dozens of times throughout the Quran (see 2:25 and commentary). They experience a state of mutual contentment with God, also mentioned in 9:100; 58:22; 89:28; 98:8. Al-Rāzī describes this state of mutual contentment as one of the wondrous secrets of Paradise whose reality cannot be described in words (R). The bliss of the Hereafter is always described in the Quran as a state of joy that is calm and peaceful, and "contentment" is mentioned as the characteristic of paradisal existence in 3:15; 9:21, 72; 22:59; 69:21; 88:9; 92:21; 93:5; 101:7. Moreover, deeds are considered righteous insofar as they are undertaken with the intention of seeking God's Contentment with them; see 3:174; 5:2, 16; 9:109; 19:6; 57:27; 59:8. Finally, attaining the reward of Paradise is described as *the great triumph,* a phrase connected with the blessings of Paradise throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 3:185; 4:13; 6:16; 9:72, 89, 100; 10:64; 45:30; 48:5). Some commentators, however, indicate that in the present verse, *the great triumph* describes the state of mutual contentment with God to the exclusion of the other paradisal blessings (Qu, R). This is supported by reading this verse in conjunction with 9:72: *God has promised the believing men and the believing women Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein, and goodly dwellings in the Gardens of Eden. But Contentment from God is greater; that is the great triumph!* Contentment from God (*riḍwān*) is thus understood to allude to the highest Paradise.

120 Some view this statement as a final rebuke to those who would attribute divinity to Jesus and Mary (mentioned in v. 116), indicating that they, along with all beings, fall under God's Sovereignty and Power (Aj, Ṭ). Al-Rāzī says that this verse is meant as a final warning to people that they, like all created beings, animate and inanimate, are completely under God's Power and submitted to His Will, and that whatever knowledge or power they may ascribe to themselves is nothing before His Knowledge and Power. Al-Rāzī notes that this *sūrah* opens with a reminder to the believers to "fulfill their pacts" with God and proceeds to outline various ritual and legal requirements that they must meet. But the *sūrah* ends with the final absorption of the individual soul in the totality of God's Reality. If the *sūrah* opens by establishing the laws governing the servant and thus the relationship of servanthood to Lordship, it ends with the reminder that all that is other than God is contingent in essence and remains completely within God's Sovereignty and Power (R).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 6

# The Cattle

## *al-Anᶜām*

Revealed in the Makkan period, *al-Anᶜām* clearly addresses the challenges faced by the Prophet and the Muslims engaged in a religious struggle with the idolatrous Makkans. The *sūrah* takes its name from the discussion of idolatrous ritual prohibitions on the consumption of certain kinds of cattle and the Quranic assertion, in response, that God puts no such restrictions on the cattle He has created and allowed for human consumption (vv. 136–45). The primary concern of the *sūrah* is to refute through powerful arguments various kinds of idolatry in general—including the worship of idols, celestial bodies, and jinn—and to discredit the idolatrous and humanly invented ritual practices of the Makkans in particular. Many consider this *sūrah* to be a late Makkan one and thus to reflect the culmination of the Prophet's struggle and effort to persuade the Makkans to abandon idolatry and follow the Quranic message prior to his migration from Makkah to Madinah in 622. The Prophet is directly addressed throughout the *sūrah* and given specific arguments and challenges to pose to the disbelievers in Makkah. Its verses collectively sum up the Quranic argument against all forms of idolatry.

According to a *ḥadīth*, "*Sūrat al-Anᶜām* was sent down all at once, accompanied by seventy thousand angels, hymning glorifications and praises" (IK, Q, Z). A longer version of this *ḥadīth* cited by al-Zamakhsharī adds, "So whoever recites *al-Anᶜām,* praise and blessings be upon him; these seventy thousand angels seek forgiveness for him with each verse of *Sūrat al-Anᶜām,* day and night." Another report mentions that one particular verse (v. 59, which begins, *And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He*) was sent down with twelve thousand angels of its own (Q). Some early authorities, however, considered certain verses, perhaps vv. 20, 23, 91, 93, 114, 141, and 151–53, to have

been revealed in Madinah (Z). Some consider v. 145, which designates four kinds of meat forbidden to Muslims, to have been revealed during the Farewell Pilgrimage on the Day of ʿArafah (Q).

The *sūrah* begins with a powerful statement of God as the universal and omniscient Creator (vv. 1–3). After rejecting the Makkans' excuses for not heeding the warning of the Prophet Muhammad, the *sūrah* continues with a reminder of the fate that befell previous generations who had ignored the warnings of the messengers God had sent them and a preview of the fate that awaits them in the Hereafter (vv. 4–31). Vv. 32–36 seek to console the Prophet in the face of the Makkans' rejection, and vv. 37–73 include a series of arguments and statements that the Prophet is instructed to present in the face of the idolaters' continued rejection of the Quranic message. In vv. 74–83, there is the account of Abraham's argument against worshipping anything other than God, in which he points out to his people that even the celestial bodies, which they considered to have great power over the earth and its inhabitants, were ephemeral and changing. This pericope about Abraham is followed by a mention of the prophets and revelations that came after him, concluding with a mention of the Quran as part of, and a confirmer of, this prophetic and scriptural legacy (vv. 84–92).

Vv. 95–99 discuss God as the giver of both life and death, in this world and the next. Several verses in the latter half of the *sūrah* address the arbitrary restrictions on the consumption of certain kinds of meat as observed by the Makkan idolaters—along with the pre-Islamic Makkan practice of "slaying their children" (vv. 137, 140)—and counters with a simpler set of dietary restrictions as revealed to the Prophet (vv. 116–21, 136, 138–50) and a concise list of Divinely imposed commands and prohibitions (vv. 151–53). After further warnings to the Makkans about the consequences of rejecting the Quranic message, the *sūrah* concludes with a powerful statement of monotheistic belief and utter devotion to the One God that the Prophet is instructed to issue in the face of continuing Makkan resistance (vv. 161–64). Perhaps by way of warning, the final verse (v. 165) invokes the idea that God causes generations to succeed one another in the life of the world, whose vagaries are merely a test of individual human character.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Praise be to God, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made darkness and light. Yet those who do not believe ascribe equals to their Lord! (2) He it is Who created you from clay, then decreed a term. A term is appointed with Him—yet still you doubt! (3) He is God in the heavens and on the earth: He knows your secret and that which you make public, and He knows that which

1 This *sūrah* opens with a reference to God as Creator of *the heavens and the earth* and of *darkness and light*. Invoking *the heavens and the earth* and *darkness and light* highlights both the duality of the created world in relation to God's Oneness and the totality of His creative Power. That the Makkans *ascribe equals to their Lord* is thus made to seem absurd in the face of their own recognition of His all-encompassing creative Power. Some early commentators noted the similarity of this opening verse to the opening section of the Torah (Genesis 1:1–5), with its reference to God's creation of the heavens and the earth and separation of light from darkness (Ṭ). As throughout the Quran, the word for *light* (*nūr*) is singular, but darkness is rendered in the plural (*ẓulumāt*), implying that although there are multiple kinds of darkness, light is one, just as there are multiple kinds of falsehood, but Truth is ultimately one (R, Z; see also 5:16c), even if there are degrees of light, and on the level of the created order there can be said to be multiple truths.

2 Adam is described as being made of *clay* over a dozen times in the Quran. The clay from which Adam and here, by extension, all human beings are created is variously described in the Quran as being like potter's clay (55:14); as *dried clay, made of molded mud* (15:26); as *a draught of clay* (23:12); and as *viscous clay* (37:11). As for all created things, God has *decreed a term* for human beings, that is, an earthly life span (cf. 11:3; 30:8; 39:42; 46:3). The second reference to a term, *a term is appointed with Him*, may be a further description of the "decreed term" that precedes it, although most commentators distinguish between these two "terms": the first refers to one's earthly life span set by God, and the second, to the final moment of reckoning (IK, Q, Ṭ); for other references to an "appointed term," see 6:60; 7:34; 10:49; 14:10; 16:61; 35:45; 71:4. When the two "terms" are understood as referring to death and the moment of reckoning, respectively, the verse can be read as parallel to 2:28: *How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned?* (Ṭ). It is also consistent with verses that mention God bringing forth *the living from the dead* (as when He brings living human beings forth from dead clay or resurrected beings forth from the dead on the Day of Judgment) and bringing forth *the dead from the living* (as when He causes human beings to die, ending their earthly life); see 6:95; 10:31; 30:19.

3 Although the Quran mentions repeatedly that all that is in the heavens and on earth belongs to God and that He *knows whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth* (3:29; 5:97; 29:52; 58:7; 64:4), this is the only place where He is described as being *God in the heavens and on the earth*. Some commentators, perhaps concerned that the reference to God being *on the earth* might compromise His Transcendence, explained this part of the verse as meaning that He is "called God" or "worshipped as God" *in the heavens and on the earth* (IK). *That which you earn* refers to the deeds one chooses to perform in life and the corresponding reward or punishment that they entail.

you earn. (4) Never did a sign from among the signs of their Lord come unto them, but that they turned away from it. (5) They indeed denied the truth when it came unto them, but tidings will soon come to them of that which they used to mock. (6) Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them? We had established them on the earth more firmly than We have established you, and We sent the sky upon them with abundant rains, and made rivers flow beneath them. Then We destroyed them for their sins, and brought into being after them another generation. (7) Had We sent down unto thee a Book inscribed on parchment, such that they could touch it with their hands,

4–5 *Never did a sign . . . come unto them, but that they turned away from it* (cf. 26:5–6; 36:46) refers to an idea reiterated in the various Quranic accounts regarding people of previous ages who rejected the messengers and signs that were sent to them and so were destroyed *by that which they used to mock;* see 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 26:5–6; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:25. The present verse served as a direct warning to the Quraysh, who rejected the message of warning brought by the Prophet and "mocked" the idea of resurrection, that they might likewise be besieged by a Divine reckoning. Taken more specifically and in the historical context in which it was revealed in the Makkan period, those who *denied the truth when it came unto them* may refer to the Quraysh, who denied the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. The *tidings* that would come to them would thus refer to their defeat at the hands of the Muslims at the Battle of Badr (2/624; Q, Ṭ). Commentators generally read v. 5 as warning of an earthly, rather than an otherworldly, punishment to come (IK), although others say it may refer to punishment in either this world or the next (Z).

6 The Quran frequently mentions previous peoples destroyed for their iniquity and refusal to accept the teachings of their prophets, mentioning both towns (7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13; 50:36) and whole generations (17:17; 19:74, 98; 20:128; 32:26; 36:31; 38:3) that had been destroyed. This is a theme more common in the Makkan *sūrah*s than in the Madinan ones, and in the present context the warning is likely addressed to the Quraysh, who may have thought themselves too powerful to suffer destruction. Thus the Quran, here and elsewhere, warns that some of the destroyed peoples were stronger and better established than the Quraysh, but were nonetheless utterly destroyed (cf. 19:74; 47:13; 50:36). God may choose to allow disbelievers or wrongdoers to dwell in comfort or even in prosperity for a while, leading them to think that they have been blessed with good fortune, in this case in the form of *abundant rains* and *rivers,* before unexpectedly destroying them for their sins; see also 2:266; 15:3–4; 16:54–55; 22:48; 23:54–56; 44:25–28; 68:17–20; especially 43:51, where Pharaoh invokes the streams watering his domain as proof of his sovereignty and, mistakenly, of his imperviousness to the destruction of which Moses had warned him. *Generation* translates *qarn,* which can also mean "century" (Q). The idea that God replaces an iniquitous people or generation with another is found elsewhere in the Quran (5:54; 7:169; 23:28–31, 41–42), for it is God who *brought into being the generations* (28:45).

7 Although all the prophets are said to have brought evidentiary miracles to support their missions, the Quran often suggests that such miraculous signs have little effect on entrenched disbelievers and that their requests for "signs" of various types are made disingenuously, serving only as excuses for not accepting God's message. For examples of such requests, see 2:118; 10:20; 13:7; 20:133; 25:21; 29:50. The present verse may

those who do not believe would have said, "This is naught but manifest sorcery." (8) And they would say, "Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?" Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite. (9) Had We made him an angel, We would have sent him as a man, thus obscuring for them that which they themselves obscure. (10) Messengers have surely been mocked before thee. Then those who scoffed at them were beset by that which they used to mock. (11) Say, "Journey upon the earth

be a response to those who expected the Prophet to bring a complete scripture, in writing, as did Moses. See 25:32, where the disbelievers ask why the Quran has not been sent down *as a single whole,* and 28:48, where they ask why the Prophet was not given *the like of that which was given to Moses.* Given the Makkan context, this verse may be a response to those disbelievers in Makkah who said to the Prophet, *And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read* (17:93; Q). In the Quran such displays of the prophets' evidentiary miracles often result in accusations of "sorcery" by those who deny their prophethood (see, e.g., 10:2; 21:3; 26:57; 28:36; 37:15; 5:110c).

8–9 Here, as in several other verses, the disbelievers question why God has not sent an angel either with the Prophet or instead of the (human) Prophet (cf. 11:12; 15:7; 17:92–95; 25:7, 21; 43:53). The response in v. 8 is that were an angel to be sent down *the matter would be decreed,* meaning that either their own punishment or the Final Hour would be at hand *and they would be granted no respite* such that they might repent and come to believe (Ṭ). Some commentators say that this is because the descent of an angel would be such a clear and incontrovertible sign of the truth of the message that, were they to disbelieve after this, they would surely be destroyed without the opportunity to repent (Ṭ, Z); others suggest that the very sight of the angel might be powerful enough to cause their immediate death (Q, Z). For this reason, v. 9 indicates that, even were God to send down an angel as a messenger, He would send him in the outward form of a human being, lest the sight of the angel overwhelm and destroy people (Ṭ). When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet and occasionally to his Companions at the same time, he is said to have done so in human form, and when the angelic messenger, understood to be Gabriel, visits Mary, he *assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man* (19:17). Being sent in the form of a man, however, the angelic messenger would be no more convincing to the disbelievers than a human messenger, leaving them further confused about the true nature of the message and the messenger. Moreover, the human form of the angelic messenger would give the leaders of the disbelievers another means of discrediting the message in the eyes of their followers, since they could argue that even this additional confirming messenger was merely human, like themselves (Q).

10 The warning that those who mock the prophetic warners and their messages will be *beset by that which they used to mock* is also found in 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26.

11 The Quran repeatedly reminds its listeners that the guilty, the corrupt, the schemers, and those who denied the warnings they had been sent by God did not fare well in the end (3:137; 7:84–86, 103; 10:39, 73; 12:109; 16:36; 27:14, 51, 69; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 37:73; 40:21, 82; 43:25; 47:10). This verse follows upon the warning in v. 6 about previous generations destroyed in this world for their rejection of the prophets. The command to *behold how the deniers fared in the end* was directed at the Arabs who would have passed the ruined remains of bygone towns and settlements on their frequent travels. Such sites have been invoked widely in Islamic literature as sources of admonition and warning, insofar as they were occasions to learn about the destruction that befell people of earlier ages.

and behold how the deniers fared in the end." (12) Say, "Unto whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth?" Say, "Unto God. He has prescribed Mercy for Himself. He will surely gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe. (13) Unto Him belongs all that dwells in the night and in the day, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing." (14) Say, "Shall I take as a protector anyone other than God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds and is not fed?" Say, "I was commanded to be the first of those who submit." And be

12–13 The Prophet is here instructed to remind the disbelievers of God's Sovereignty and His ability to destroy them at will by posing and answering the question, *Unto whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth?* (Q). The question may have been rhetorical for the idolatrous Makkans, since despite their mocking of the Prophet and the warning he brought, some did acknowledge *Allāh* as the Creator of the heavens and the earth (see also 31:25; 39:38; 43:9, 87), although not in the sense understood in the Abrahamic traditions. That all things belong to God is then reiterated in v. 13.

That God *has prescribed Mercy for Himself* (see also v. 54) indicates that although God remains absolutely free, He has nonetheless obligated Himself to act with mercy toward His creatures. A well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*) conveys the same message, "When God decreed the created realm, He prescribed for Himself in a Book that is with Him, 'Truly My Mercy prevails over My Wrath,'" (Q); and in another *ḥadīth qudsī,* God says, "My Mercy has precedence over My Wrath." The Prophet reportedly would pray during his daily devotions, "O God, I seek refuge in Thy Contentment from Thine Anger, and in Thy Forgiveness from Thy Punishment, and in Thy Mercy from Thy Wrath." See also 7:156, where God speaks, saying, *I cause My Punishment to smite whomsoever I will, though My Mercy encompasses all things.* Mercy is therefore the dominant aspect of God's relationship with His creatures, as established by His own self-obligation.

In the context of implicit warning about the destruction that awaits those who reject the warnings of the messengers, this statement that God has *prescribed Mercy for Himself* explains why He does not bring the punishment down upon the disbelievers immediately, but rather gives them a period of respite, that they might repent and come to believe (Q, Ṭ). More generally, the Mercy God obligates for Himself may refer to His having undertaken to guide His creatures to an understanding of His Oneness (Z). Although God is described by many Attributes in the Quran, "Mercy" is the only one that He is said to have "prescribed" for Himself, indicating that Mercy has a unique and supreme status among all His Attributes. That God "prescribes" Mercy for Himself also indicates that Mercy is an intrinsic or essential quality of God, not merely a way of relating to His creatures, since it could only be an essential "mercifulness" that prescribes Mercy as a principle of God's acts in the first place. Although God's Mercy continues into the Hereafter, the period of respite and guidance for human beings on earth will eventually come to an end when God gathers all *on the Day of Resurrection.* Here and elsewhere, this day is described as one *in which there is no doubt* (2:2; 3:9, 25; 4:87; 22:7; 40:59; 45:26).

*Those who have lost their souls* by ascribing equals to God (v. 1), turning away from His signs (v. 4), and mocking the message of the Prophet (vv. 5–10) *do not believe;* that is, their lack of faith can be seen as a result of these ruinous actions and beliefs (Z). This statement is repeated in v. 20, but in the present context, some commentators read *those who have lost their souls* as a description of those whom God will *gather . . . on the Day of Resurrection* (Ṭ).

14 The Prophet is told to respond to the demand of the Makkan idolaters that he recognize

not among the idolaters. (15) Say, "Truly I fear the punishment of a tremendous Day should I disobey my Lord." (16) Whosoever is spared on that Day, He has certainly been merciful unto him, and that is the manifest triumph. (17) If God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He, and should He touch thee with goodness, then He is Powerful over all things. (18) He is

the deities they worship besides God by pointing out the inanity of worshipping anything that is not totally independent of all need and by identifying himself as *the first of those who submit* (on this statement, see 6:162–63c). The Prophet is then warned personally by God to *be not among the idolaters.*

*Originator* translates *Fāṭir,* a Divine Name, which is derived from a verb meaning to "split" or "cleave." In the Quran, the term always occurs as part of the larger phrase *Originator of the heavens and the earth* (see 12:101; 14:10; 35:1; 39:46; 42:11). The verbal form of this word, however, is also used in the context of God's creation of human beings (11:51; 17:51; 20:72; 32:22; 43:27), whence its etymological relation to the *fiṭrah,* or primordial nature, which God creates in all human beings (see 30:30 and commentary).

That God *feeds and is not fed* refers simultaneously to God's provision of sustenance for all things and to His utter independence of all need (3:97; 4:131; 10:68; 29:6; 31:26). According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet rose to wash his hands after finishing a meal and said, "Praise be to God *who feeds and is not fed*" (IK). Cf. 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me. I desire no provision from them, nor do I desire that they should feed Me.* See also 5:75, where it is said of Jesus and his mother that *both of them ate food,* indicating that their dependence upon earthly sustenance serves as an argument against their divinity.

That the Prophet was *commanded to be the first of those who submit* (cf. v. 163; 39:12) may indicate that he was the first among the people of his time to submit to God, setting an example that his contemporaries would follow (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), or that he was the "first" in rank among those who submitted (Ṭb), or that he alone received Divine Revelation (Ṭs). See also 7:153 and 26:51, where Moses makes a similar claim.

15 In this verse, the Prophet is told to affirm his own fear of God's punishment, and hence his susceptibility, along with all human beings, to God's Judgment. In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet says, "I have the best knowledge of God among [the people], and I fear Him most among them."

16 *Whosoever is spared* from punishment on the Day of Resurrection has attained *the manifest triumph.* Salvation in the Hereafter is described as a *manifest triumph* or a *great triumph* in over a dozen verses and is often associated, as it is here, with God forgiving people's sins or otherwise sparing or shielding them from the Fire, suggesting Divine Mercy toward those whose deeds may have made them liable to punishment (Z); see 3:185; 40:9; 44:56–57; 48:5; 61:12; 64:9.

17 Although this verse is addressed specifically to the Prophet, it has a more general application and affirms that God alone has power over all benefit or harm that may come to a human being and that none can alter the benefit or harm He may decree for a person. Nonetheless, Divine Mercy is always operative, for God *has prescribed Mercy for Himself* (v. 12) and His *Mercy encompasses all things* (7:156). See also 3:160 and commentary; 10:107; 28:71; 35:2; 39:38; 48:11. Elsewhere in the Quran, idols and false deities are dismissed as those who do not possess the power to either aid or harm their human devotees (5:76; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 20:89; 21:66; 22:12; 25:55; 26:73); the Prophet proclaims that he has no power to bring benefit or prevent harm to himself (7:188; 10:49); and even sorcery is said to have no power to harm *save by God's Leave* (2:102).

18 *He is Dominant over His servants,* a statement that recurs in v. 63, means that all things are humbled and abased before God, that He alone is truly worshipped (Ṭ), and that all things are subservient to Him (Z) and under His ultimate Authority and Power. This verse thus represents

Dominant over His servants; and He is the Wise, the Aware. (19) Say, "What thing is greatest as testimony?" Say, "God is Witness between you and me. And this Quran has been revealed unto me, that thereby I may warn you and whomsoever it may reach. Do you truly bear witness that there are other gods beside God?" Say, "I bear no such witness." Say, "He is only One God, and truly I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him." (20) Those unto whom We gave the Book recognize it as they recognize their own children. Those who have lost their souls, they do not believe. (21) Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies His signs? Surely the wrongdoers will

a culmination of the discussion of God's absolute Sovereignty and Power begun in v. 12.

19 God is described as *Witness* in several places (3:98; 4:33, 79, 166; 10:46; 22:17; 33:55; 34:47; 41:53; 58:6; 85:9), and "Witness" (*Shahīd*) is considered one of the Names of God. The prophets sometimes invoke God as "Witness" between themselves and their wrongdoing people; see 5:117, where Jesus, when questioned by God about the claims of divinity his later followers made for him and his mother, says, *I was a witness over them, so long as I remained among them. But when Thou didst take me [to Thyself], it was Thou who wast the Watcher over them. And Thou art Witness over all things;* and 17:96, where the Prophet is told to say that God is a sufficient witness between himself and the disbelievers among his people. The Prophet is instructed to tell his people that the Quran was revealed to him so that he might thereby warn them *and whomsoever it may reach,* indicating that the Quran has a universal message that is operative beyond the Prophet's own community and that it serves as a Divine warning to all whose ears or eyes it may reach (Ṭ).

According to a report, the Prophet is here told to ask, *Do you truly bear witness that there are other gods beside God* in response to some disbelievers among his people who asked him if he really believed that there were no other gods beside God (Ṭ). Like Abraham, also raised among idolaters, the Prophet directly dissociates himself from the beliefs of his people, saying, *I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him.* See v. 78 for Abraham's identical claim, and also 11:54–55, where the pre-Islamic Arabian prophet Hūd similarly dissociates himself from the idolatry of his people.

20 The assertion that the People of the Book *recognize it*—that is, the Quranic message—*as they recognize their own children* is also made in 2:146 (see commentary on this verse). The statement *those who have lost their souls*—that is, through willful rejection of the Prophet's clear message—*do not believe* is also found in v. 13 (see commentary).

21 The rhetorical interrogative *who does greater wrong than* is found in several places, frequently in reference to those who fabricate lies against God (6:93, 144; 11:18; 18:15; 61:7); to those who deny God's signs or the truth (6:157; 18:57; 32:22); or, as in this case, to both (7:37; 10:17; 29:68; 39:32). Elsewhere it applies to those who *bar [entrance to] the mosques* (2:114) or conceal testimony (2:140). To *fabricate a lie against God* is to commit some form of religious error, specifically to hold a false belief or engage in a false religious practice, while claiming that one is following Divine guidance in doing so, as in 7:28: *When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus." Say, "Truly God commands not indecency. Do you say of God that which you know not?"* Their "fabricating a lie against God" may also refer to any of the idolatrous practices attributed to the pre-Islamic Arabs, from their worship of false deities to their imposition of arbitrary religious restrictions upon themselves (see 5:103; 6:139), and perhaps also to certain Islamically unacceptable Jewish and Christian religious claims mentioned in the Quran (R), although the latter seems less

not prosper. (22) And on the Day when We shall gather them all together, We shall say unto those who ascribed partners unto God, "Where are those partners whom you claimed?" (23) Then their contention will be but to say, "By God, our Lord, we were not idolaters." (24) Behold how they lie against themselves, but that which they used to fabricate has forsaken them. (25) Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. Were they to see every sign, they would not believe in it, so that when they come to thee, they dispute with thee. Those who disbelieve say, "This is naught but fables of

likely, given the Makkan context of this *sūrah*. The verb *prosper* is often used in relation to those who prosper morally by believing and following right guidance in this life and who will thus be rewarded for their faith and good deeds in the Hereafter (see, e.g., 2:5; 7:8; 23:1–11). By contrast, *wrongdoers,* and elsewhere disbelievers (28:82), *prosper not,* meaning that they will not find what they seek in this world or the next (R).

22–24 Several Quranic passages depict those who *ascribed partners unto God* being asked on the Day of Judgment about the false idols they worshipped (16:27; 28:62–65; 28:74–75; 40:73–74; 41:47–48). In some cases, they continue to call upon those false deities to no avail, while in others they admit their religious error. Here, however, their response is to deny that they were idolaters and so to *lie against themselves,* just as they had lied against God and His signs in v. 21. Here as elsewhere, the Quran warns that all false authorities and deities worshipped in this life will "forsake" their worshippers in the next (cf. 6:94; 7:37; 10:30; 14:22; 16:86–87; 40:73–74).

25 The concept of individuals or their hearts being "veiled" or "covered" in such a way as to prevent comprehension of God's signs and the Quranic verses (both referred to as *āyāt*) is found in several other places; see 2:7; 17:46; 18:57, 101; 36:9; 41:5; 45:23; 50:22; 83:14–15. *Deafness* is similarly used to signify spiritual deafness in 2:18, 171; 5:71; 6:39; 8:22; 17:97; 18:57; 41:5, 44; 47:23. God's signs have no effect upon those who are spiritually "veiled" and "deaf" and do not bring them to belief (cf. 2:145; 7:146; 10:96–97). For example, when the moon was split by the Prophet in response to the disbelievers' request for a "sign," they dismissed it as mere *sorcery* (see 54:1–2; 54:1c). The present verse was reportedly revealed about the leaders of the Quraysh, including Abū Sufyān and Abū Jahl, who listened to the Prophet and the Quran, but could not comprehend or accept its meaning (Z).

Since it is God who is said to *have placed coverings over their hearts,* and thus their understanding, as well as *in their ears a deafness,* some commentators who subscribe to a more predestinarian view of God's relationship to human beings understand the verse to mean that God prevents some people from believing. For them, the verse serves as proof that the belief or disbelief of individuals comes from God; the "veil" over their hearts serves as a metaphor for an innate predisposition toward disbelief (R). Others, however, note that calling people to a message of belief that they have been predisposed not to understand would seem inconsistent with the Quranic assertion that God *tasks no soul beyond its capacity* (2:286); it would also grant the disbelievers an argument against God and the Prophet since they could claim that they are not responsible for following something they have been prevented from understanding (R).

The verse can also be understood, however, to mean that the stubbornness of such people in rejecting the message served to create within them a negative moral state that further prevented their acceptance of the message; or similarly, that God deprived them of His necessary guidance and left them to their own intellectual devices as a consequence of their evil actions and false beliefs (R; see 2:26; 14:27; 40:34, 74; 45:32, where this is clearly

those of old." (26) And they forbid it, and keep away from it, and they destroy none but themselves, though they are unaware. (27) If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before the Fire, whereupon they will say, "Would that we were sent back! Then we would not deny the signs of our Lord, but we would be among the believers!" (28) Nay, but it has now become clear to them what they used to hide. And even if they were sent back, they would return to the very

indicated). It may also simply indicate that their refusal to benefit or be guided by the Quranic message put them in the same position as one who was indeed blinded by a veil or is "deaf" to it (Q). The "veil" can also be said to be a reference to a "darkness of soul" that obscures the light of the message for the individual (Aj). The disbelievers' attempt to dismiss the Quranic message, particularly its warnings about Resurrection and Judgment, as *fables of those of old* is also mentioned in 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13.

26 This verse likely continues the discussion of those Makkans and leaders of the Quraysh who refused to heed the Quranic message brought by the Prophet. They both *forbid it*—that is, they forbid others from following it—and *keep away from it,* or "flee from it" themselves (Ṭ, Ṭs). An alternate interpretation attributed to some early exegetes understands *they forbid it* to mean they forbid that any harm come to the Prophet, while nonetheless "keeping away from" or refusing to accept the content of his prophetic message. As such, they consider it a reference to the Prophet's uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who was the guardian of the Prophet when the latter was a young boy and served as a crucial protector of the Prophet in the early years of his prophetic mission, but who, many believe, refused to become a follower of his message (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). Interpreting the verse as referring to Abū Ṭālib's "forbidding" harm to the Prophet, however, does not seem consistent with the situation of this verse within a lengthy passage chastising the Makkan idolaters generally or with the verse's condemnation of this action as spiritually destructive (*they destroy none but themselves*), since protecting the Prophet would be a meritorious act. Shiite exegetes also reject this interpretation, since they believe that Abū Ṭālib did embrace Islam (Ṭs).

27–28 The claim made in the words of those *arraigned before the Fire* can be read in two ways. The first, as reflected in the translation, indicates that if they *were sent back,* they *would not deny the signs* and *would be among the believers* (cf. 26:102). With different voweling, however, it could yield the meaning "Would that we were sent back and that we did not deny the signs of our Lord and that we were among the believers" (Ṭ). Although both readings are possible, the first rendering seems more consistent with the statement in v. 28 that *even if they were sent back,* they would return to their former ways, which would then be understood as a response to their claim in v. 27. In v. 28, *what they used to hide* refers to their evil deeds in the life of the world, which in the Hereafter *become clear to them* or are manifested clearly before them (Ṭ). The consequences of their evil deeds are also now likewise apparent as they stand in or before the Fire.

Some say that these two verses refer to the hypocrites, who hid their disbelief in earthly life, but whose disbelief was made clear in the Hereafter; or to the People of the Book whose error in rejecting the prophecy of Muhammad would be made clear to them in the next life (Z). This latter does not seem consistent with the context of this *sūrah* and passage, which is clearly aimed at the pagan idolaters of Makkah.

*What they used to hide* may also refer to their attempt to hide their polytheism, or *shirk,* from God on the Day of Judgment (see vv. 23–24) or to the Makkan leaders' attempt to hide the reality of Resurrection and Judgment from their followers (R). The verse may well be alluding to all that was hidden on earth, but will be made manifest in the Hereafter, since the Quran elsewhere describes the Day of Resurrection as *the Day when the secrets are tested* (86:9). The disbelievers' assertion in

thing they had been forbidden. Truly they are liars. (29) They say, "There is naught but our life in this world, and we shall not be resurrected." (30) If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before their Lord, He will say, "Is this not the truth?" They will say, "Yea, indeed, by our Lord!" He will say, "Then taste the punishment for having disbelieved." (31) Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with God till, when the Hour comes upon them suddenly, they say, "Alas for us, that we neglected it!" They will bear their burdens upon their

v. 27 that, if sent back, they would not *deny the signs* of God and would be believers is presented as nothing but a ruse, for their promise is made because of fear of the Fire, not because of true desire for belief, and thus brings no spiritual benefit (R). Moreover, v. 28 asserts that if they were sent back, *they would return* to their former deeds, and as such it declares them *liars*. For those who held that human moral destiny and belief were matters of Divine Decree (*qaḍāʾ*), this verse could serve as proof that a second chance at belief would not avail disbelievers, even after seeing the consequences of their disbelief, since their disbelief was a matter already decreed before their initial temporal existence (R).

29 This is one of several places in the Quran where the disbelievers explicitly deny the Resurrection (see 23:36; 44:35; 64:7); and their skepticism about resurrection is a key element of their disbelief in the Quranic message as a whole (see, e.g., 17:49, 98; 23:82; 37:16; 56:48).

30 This verse returns to the image in v. 27 of the disbelievers *arraigned* for judgment in the Hereafter. After a life of disbelief in God's signs, and particularly in the reality of resurrection and judgment, they are now asked, *Is this not the truth?* Experiencing the Resurrection and Judgment, they now affirm their reality, but to no avail, and they are told to *taste the punishment for having disbelieved* (see 46:34 for a nearly identical passage). See also 7:44, where those of the Garden call out to those in the Fire, saying, *We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?* They respond in the affirmative, but are immediately cursed. That the punishment in the next world is "tasted" is mentioned in over two dozen verses and alludes to the idea that the Reality of God, His Judgment, and the consequences of human actions will be known by the disbelievers experientially, and thus undeniably, after having scoffed at the prophetic warnings about them during their earthly lives (see, e.g., 3:181; 4:56; 7:39; 8:14; 32:21 and commentary). Even in this world, certain forms of atonement for sin are said to have the intended effect of making transgressors *taste the evil consequences* of their transgression (5:95; 59:15; 64:5; 65:9).

31 The Quran commonly refers to those who disbelieved in this life as being *lost* or "losers" in the Hereafter. *Those who deny the meeting with God,* thinking *there is naught but our life in this world* (v. 29), will have the realization of their error "come upon them suddenly" with the coming of *the Hour* (see also 7:188; 12:107; 21:40), meaning the Day of Resurrection and universal judgment. Their cry, *Alas for us,* expresses their regret over failing to prepare for this day. Al-Rāzī explains this as a deep, existential regret, as disbelievers realize that they have squandered the intellect and other faculties bestowed upon them by God, through which they were meant to realize the truth and develop virtuous character. Using a commercial metaphor, al-Rāzī describes it as the regret of those whose poor choices have caused them to lose not only the anticipated return on an investment, but the borrowed principal as well. The *burdens* they bear *upon their backs* may be their sins and transgressions themselves (Ṭ); or the *burden of wrath from God* that is earned as a result of those sins (see 2:61, 90; 3:112, 162); or the burden of the warning and reminders they refused to heed in their earthly lives (cf. 20:100–101, where the reminder becomes a burden in the Hereafter for those who ignored it during their lives).

backs. Behold! Evil is that which they bear! (32) The life of this world is naught but play and diversion. Better indeed is the Abode of the Hereafter for those who are reverent. Do you not understand? (33) We know well that what they say grieves thee. Yet, it is not thee that they deny. Rather, it is the signs of God that the wrongdoers reject. (34) Surely messengers were denied before thee, and they bore patiently their being denied and persecuted till Our help came to them. None alters the Words of God, and there has already come unto thee some tidings

32 This world is described as mere *play and diversion* (see also 29:64; 47:36; 57:20) insofar as play and diversion involve a certain delusion in which the inner reality of things is obscured by outward appearances (R). The pejorative description of the world as *play* is meant not to disparage play of any sort, which is certainly permissible in Islam, but rather to make the point that many of those things accorded great weight and significance in this world are as mere child's play in relation to the reality of the Hereafter. Cf. 3:185, where the life of this world is said to be *naught but the enjoyment of delusion,* and 57:20, where it is more expansively described as *play, diversion, glitter, mutual boasting, and vying for increase in property and children.*

At the same time, however, the Quran affirms that this world was created with Divine purpose and that God did not create *Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in play* (21:16; 44:38). Thus it is not the purposeful "life in the world" that is dismissed here, but rather an attachment to its fleeting rewards and satisfactions (R). The Quran frequently warns against seeking the *ephemeralities of the life of this world* at the expense of morality, virtue, or the pursuit of spiritual concerns (e.g., 4:94; 7:169; 8:67; 24:33; 75:20–21), and against taking religion itself as mere *play and diversion* (6:70; 7:51). That *the Abode of the Hereafter* is better for the *reverent,* since its enjoyments are both more noble and more lasting, is repeated in several places (4:77; 7:169; 9:38; 12:109; 13:26; 16:30; 17:21; 29:64; 40:39), emphasizing the foolishness of those who would *purchase the world at the price of the Hereafter* (2:86; 14:3) or prefer the goods of this world to those of the next (3:145; 16:107; 86:16–17). A well-known *ḥadīth* makes a similar point: "The world is the prison of the believer and the paradise of the disbeliever" (R).

33 The Prophet was reportedly saddened by those who rejected his message, in both Makkah and Madinah, and the Quran frequently consoles him, telling him not to grieve for those who reject the message (3:176; 5:41, 68; 10:65; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 31:23; 35:8; 36:76). This is the only instance, however, when the Prophet is comforted by being told that he should not consider their denial a personal rejection of him as a messenger or as a truthful person, since his truthfulness was widely acknowledged by the people of Makkah and Madinah, as reflected in his having been given the name al-Amīn ("the trustworthy") by his fellow Makkans even prior to his prophetic mission (Ṭ, Z). Rather, their denial should be understood as a rejection of the message itself, of the very *signs of God,* because of their own moral stubbornness (Ṭ). The implication that one's reaction to or attitude toward the Prophet is indicative of one's attitude toward God is also found, for example, in 48:10: *Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee* (Muhammad) *pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands;* and in 3:31, where the Prophet is instructed to say, *If you love God, follow me, and God will love you.* That the disbelievers' rejection is ultimately directed at God and His signs, not at the Prophet himself, and that many of them rejected the Quranic message while acknowledging the personal truthfulness of Muhammad indicate the seriousness of their spiritual recalcitrance (Z).

34 In this verse, the Prophet is reminded that the messengers who preceded him were similarly *denied and persecuted,* a consolation and encouragement also offered to the Prophet in 3:184; 6:10; 13:32; 21:41; 35:4; 38:12; 40:5. These earlier

of the messengers. (35) And if their turning away is distressing to thee, then seek, if thou canst, a tunnel into the earth, or a ladder unto the sky, that thou mightest bring them a sign. Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance—so be not among the ignorant. (36) Only those who hear will respond. As for the dead, God will resurrect them, and unto Him they shall be

prophets *bore patiently* their rejection, and thus the Prophet is implicitly instructed to show similar patience and confidence that God's help will come, as it had unfailingly come in the past. The idea that all prophets eventually receive Divine help is connected with the Islamic belief that all prophetic missions are ultimately victorious (37:171–73; 58:21). For *none alters the Words of God,* see also 6:115; 10:64; 18:27. Here *the Words of God* may refer to the Quran (Th), in which case the assertion that *none alters* it would indicate the Divine protection God gives to both His Word and to the Prophet who delivers it. *The Words of God* might also refer to God's promise of deliverance and eventual victory to the Prophet, indicating that it has been Divinely decreed and so will inevitably come to pass (IK, R). Some have understood *the Words of God* here as referring to God's Decree for all things, suggesting that the disbelief of the disbelievers has also been decreed by God and that nothing the Prophet or anyone else can do will ultimately change their rejection of the message (R). *Some tidings of the messengers* refers to the Quranic accounts of previous prophets, some of which had already come as revelation to the Prophet by this point in his mission, that is, while he was still in Makkah.

35 As a further response to the Prophet's sadness over the disbelievers, this verse presents him with the challenge *seek, if thou canst, a tunnel into the earth, or a ladder unto the sky, that thou mightest bring them a sign.* It is understood that the Prophet cannot do such things (Z), and thus the rhetorical challenge serves to reinforce the idea that the Prophet has no personal control over the acceptance or denial of the Divine message he brings, as the ultimate effect of religious guidance lies with God alone. *Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance* is similar to other verses suggesting that human religious diversity—including both those guided by other religious paths and those who refuse all such guidance—is providential. See 5:48; 16:93; and 42:8, which indicate that *had God willed,* He could have made mankind a single religious community; and 6:107, where *had God willed,* the idolaters would not have *ascribed partners* to God. The present verse and those that make similar statements about God's Will regarding the religious orientation of human beings were seen by some theologians and commentators as proof that God "creates" human acts, or at least the irresistible drive to do those acts, good or bad, and thereby decrees the ultimate moral destiny of His creatures (R); others read them in the precisely opposite way to mean that *had God willed,* He could have "compelled" all human beings to guidance or to a single religious community, but did not do so (R, Z), so that they might choose their religious destiny freely.

36 *Only those who hear will respond* is understood to mean that only those to whom God has given the ability to hear the call of the Prophet and the Quranic message and to understand it will respond. As such, it expresses the idea found in other verses that there are some people whom God has made spiritually "deaf" and lacking in understanding, and that such people will remain impervious to revelation (see 6:25 and commentary). *The dead* whom God *will resurrect* may refer specifically to the disbelievers, meaning that when they are dead, they will be resurrected along with all other human beings and judged for their disbelief (Ṭ). It may also mean that the disbelievers are "dead" in a spiritual sense, through disbelief, ignorance, and heedlessness (Aj, R). The connection between being spiritually "deaf" and spiritually "dead" is also made clearly in 27:80: *Surely thou dost not make the dead hear, nor dost thou make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs.*

returned. (37) They say, "Why has no sign been sent down unto him from his Lord?" Say, "Surely God has the power to send down a sign." But most of them know not. (38) There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, nor bird that flies upon its wings, but that they are communities like yourselves—We have neglected nothing in the Book—and they shall be gathered unto their Lord in the end. (39) Those who deny Our signs are deaf and dumb, in darkness. Whomsoever God

Like the present verse, 27:80 is situated within a larger passage explaining the Prophet's inability to guide those whom God has made impervious to His Guidance.

37 The Quran makes repeated reference to the disbelievers' skepticism about why *no sign* has come to prove the reality of Muhammad's prophethood and the truthfulness of the message with which he had been sent (2:118; 7:203; 10:20; 13:7, 27; 20:133). But it also indicates in various ways throughout this *sūrah* (vv. 4, 25, 35, 46, 109, 124) and elsewhere (e.g., 7:132, 146; 10:97, 101; 12:105) that such signs are of no avail for those who stubbornly refuse to believe. According to Muslim tradition, all prophets are sent with "signs," often understood to mean "evidentiary miracles" (*muʿjizāt*), that serve as proof of their prophethood. The Prophet Muhammad's true "sign" and "miracle" is believed to be the Quran itself, whose verses are referred to as "signs" (*āyāt*) and whose beauty and power, of both language and meaning, are considered "inimitable" (cf. 2:23; 10:38). This "sign," however, was not sufficient for the disbelievers, perhaps because their requests for "signs" were disingenuous and driven by an attitude of spiritual stubbornness that the "signs" alone could not overcome (R). Moreover, the Quran affirms that the "signs" of God's Power and Benevolence can be found all around, in nature and in human beings themselves, for those who genuinely wish to see them (see, e.g., 12:105; 16:10–13, 65–69; 26:7–8; 30:21; 34:9; 36:33–35; 41:53; 45:12–13).

*Surely God has the power to send down a sign* implies that God sends such signs according to His own Will and for His own purposes, rather than in response to human requests (cf. 26:3). God's refusal to honor their request for a sign might also be a demonstration of His Mercy (R), for as indicated in v. 8, once a clear sign, such as a visible angel, is sent, people no longer have any excuse for disbelief, and so become liable to immediate punishment if they do not believe thereafter (cf. 5:114–15). Thus withholding such a sign can be understood as an act of Divine respite (IK, R), particularly if such a sign would be unlikely to have a positive effect on belief or if it might render its recipient more liable to immediate punishment; see 17:59; 26:4.

38 This is one of several verses indicating that nonhuman creatures have a relationship with God that is in some ways analogous to that of human beings. See 16:68–69, where God reveals knowledge to the bees; 17:44 and 24:41, where it is said that all things in Heaven and on earth glorify God; and 38:18–19, where the mountains and the birds hymn God's praises along with David. The present verse seems to go farther, however, indicating that all animals constitute *communities like yourselves;* in Quranic usage "community" (*ummah*) usually denotes a specifically religious community (see, e.g., 3:110; 10:47). Insofar as the Quran asserts that at least some animals receive revelation and glorify God, they can be described as religious communities, that is, as groups of beings defined by a certain mode of relating to God as their Creator. Some commentators assert that animals are aware of God and His Oneness (R, Th), suggesting that they praise and glorify Him consciously. Some suggest that the description of animals as *communities* is merely a way of saying that animals are creatures (*khalq*) of God (IK) or that they, like human beings, are the recipients of God's Mercy, Succor, and Bounty (R); see 11:6; 29:60. Such a basic and straightforward notion, however, seems rather pointless (R) and does not fully explain the use of the important term *ummah* in relation to animals or account for all its implications. For example, in 10:47 the Quran states that *for every community* (*ummah*) *there is a*

*messenger.* Reading 10:47 in conjunction with the present verse suggests that every animal "community" received a Divinely sent message, just as did all human communities (R).

The indication in the present verse that these various animal groups constitute "communities," specifically "religious communities (*umam*)" like those of people, and the clear mention in other verses that all creatures "praise God" (17:44; 24:41) and thus exist in some sort of conscious relationship with their Creator together make a strong argument for the necessity of giving ethical consideration to the rights and needs of all creatures, not only to those of human beings. If all creatures enjoy such a relationship with their Creator and were created to praise Him, then it cannot be assumed that human beings alone enjoy the right to ethical treatment and consideration in His religion. Even if the Quran asserts that God has made natural phenomena *subservient* to human beings (14:32; 16:14; 22:36–37, 65; 31:20)—that is, He has provided them to human beings for their benefit and use—human beings must consider what right they have to treat God's creatures cruelly or without regard for their innate spiritual value or to utterly destroy them by using or consuming them rapaciously, irresponsibly, or wastefully.

Moreover, *shall be gathered* (*yuḥsharūn*) *unto their Lord* employs a verb used over twenty times in the Quran to denote the universal Resurrection of human beings on the Last Day for Final Judgment. Commentators do not agree on whether this means that animals will, like human beings, be resurrected and face judgment or whether it simply means that they will be gathered to their deaths (IK, Ṭ, Th). One *ḥadīth* quoted by some in connection with this verse indicates that the final gathering will entail some moral resolution or meting out of justice even for animals (IK, Ṭ, Th); another suggests that human beings will be held accountable for those animals they have killed in vain (R). Yet another *ḥadīth* states that after rendering judgment upon and for the animals, God will simply command them to return to dust, at which point the disbelievers will wish that they too could be returned to dust rather than face punishment (an allusion to 78:40; IK, R, Ṭ, Th).

The idea that God's "gathering" and perhaps His reckoning encompass all the beasts of land and air suggests His limitless ability to keep account of His creatures and should thus increase human beings' certainty of their own resurrection, accounting, and judgment (Ṭ, Z). The second-/eighth-century scholar Sufyān ibn ᶜUyaynah considered the beasts and birds of this verse to refer to different moral categories of human beings, who in their earthly lives and habits have come to resemble certain animals (R), an idea also found in more sophisticated form in the philosophical writings of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), for whom the resurrection or otherworldly return of various animals represents the return of certain lower aspects of individual human beings (*al-Ḥikmat al-ᶜarshiyyah*). Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī also presents a philosophical argument for the resurrection of animals, and indeed of all animate and inanimate creatures in their own right (see *Risālat al-ḥashr*, Tehran: Intasharat-i Mawla, 1984, pp. 92–117). The idea that animals will be "gathered" to resurrection may seem to be supported by 81:5, where one of the events of the Last Day is said to be that *the wild beasts* will be *gathered* (using the same verb).

The reference to *the Book* here may be a reference to either the Preserved Tablet (85:22), in which the destiny of all created things has been written (Th), or the Quran (R). Although the Quran cannot be said to contain detailed knowledge of all things, many would argue that it contains the essential and principal knowledge from which all the Islamic sciences, and indeed all spiritually beneficial knowledge, may be derived (R). For example, the Quran does not stipulate all of the commands and prohibitions that became part of Islamic Law (*Sharīᶜah*), many of which were derived from Prophetic precedent, from the consensus of the believing community, or forms of human reasoning, such as reasoning through analogy (*qiyās*) or on the basis of the principle of equity (*istiḥsān*); yet the authority of these other sources of law can be derived from the Quran (R). For example, the Quran indicates the necessity of following the commands and the practices (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet (e.g., 33:21; 47:33; 59:7) as well as the reliability of the believing community (3:110).

39 For other references to the spiritual "deafness" that leads some to deny God's signs, see 6:25c; for other references to the combination of spiritual "deafness" and "dumbness," see 2:18, 171; 8:22; 17:97. *In darkness* refers to the state of being misguided or astray, as the Quran frequently

will, He leads astray, and whomsoever He will, He places him upon a straight path. (40) Say, "Think to yourselves: were the Punishment of God to come upon you, or were the Hour to come upon you, would you call upon anyone other than God, if you are truthful?" (41) Nay, but it is upon Him that you would call, and He would remove that which had caused you to call upon Him, if it be His Will, and you would forget whatever partners you had ascribed unto Him. (42) We have indeed sent messengers unto communities before thee, and We seized them with misfortune and hardship, that they might humble themselves. (43) If only, when Our Might came upon them, they had humbled themselves. But rather their hearts hardened, and Satan made all they used to do seem fair unto them. (44) So when they forgot that whereof they had been reminded, We opened unto them the gates of all things, till, as they exulted in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereupon they came to despair. (45) Thus was

juxtaposes *darkness* to light to refer to the state of being astray in contrast to being guided by God (e.g., 5:16; 14:1; 33:43; 57:9). That God *leads astray* certain people and guides others is mentioned in several verses. In some cases, He leads astray those already in a state of disbelief or wrongdoing (2:26; 14:27; 40:34, 74; 45:23), although elsewhere the "leading astray" is considered to be either explicitly or implicitly a matter of His Will (7:155; 14:4, 27; 16:93; 35:8; 74:31); and His "leading astray" is represented as decisive, for those without His Guidance have no *way,* no *guide,* and no *protector* (4:88, 143; 7:186; 13:33; 17:97; 18:17; 30:29; 39:23; 40:33; 42:44–46). These Quranic verses led to serious theological questions about God's role in human moral choice and destiny as well as the meaning of God's "Will." The Muʿtazilites argued that God's "leading astray" is not an act of direct misguidance, but rather a withholding of Divine Favor, or *lutf* (Z), by which God gives human beings guidance and makes them receptive to it; or this "misguidance" or "leading astray" refers to the Hereafter, when, as a result of their disbelief or misdeeds, He will lead them away from Paradise and toward Hellfire (R). Ashʿarites, however, held that God created human acts and that guidance or misguidance, faith or disbelief, were ultimately determined by His Will (R).

**40–41** Many of the pagan and idolatrous Makkans, to whom this *sūrah* is primarily addressed, referred to the Creator as *Allāh,* although they worshipped other deities in addition to Him. As a means of demonstrating to them that *Allāh* is not one among many gods, but indeed the one and only God, these verses ask the idolaters to think about whom they would *call upon* for deliverance *were the Punishment of God* to come upon them suddenly. This *Punishment* might refer to the coming of a catastrophic worldly destruction of their communities such as befell peoples in the past (cf. 7:65–79; 11:50–68; 54:18–29) or to *the Hour,* the universal apocalypse (Ṭ). The question is a rhetorical one, and the answer given in v. 41 is that in such an existential crisis, they would undoubtedly call upon God (*Allāh*), their Creator. These verses are similar to others in which people in situations of grave peril are moved to call upon God to save them (see 6:63–64; 7:189–90; 10:22–23; 17:67; 29:65; 30:33; 31:32).

In v. 41, God's saving them offers hope that they will *forget whatever partners* they *had ascribed unto Him* and abandon the false deities

they had worshipped alongside God, realizing that they bring no benefit (R). In other verses, however, such supplicants often forget God once they have been saved or go on to worship other gods after that; and even in the present verses, the implication may be that they merely forget their false deities temporarily during their moment of peril (Z). These verses contribute to the Quran's pervasive argument that false deities have no power to help those who worship them, in either this life or the next (see, e.g., 6:71; 7:37, 194–95; 28:64; 46:4) and thus that such deities are worshipped purely in vain. In v. 41, God may remove the peril that had moved them to supplicate Him *if it be His Will,* suggesting that He may or may not respond to such a prayer for deliverance. Elsewhere, however, the Quran affirms that God responds to those who call upon Him (cf. 2:186; 40:60). For Ashᶜarites, God's response to a supplicant is dependent purely upon His Will, and v. 41 supports their argument; for Muᶜtazilites, God responds or does not respond depending upon which ultimately serves the greater good (R).

42–44 Cf. 23:75–76; 44:12–16. The Quran mentions *misfortune* (*baʾsāʾ*) and *hardship* (*ḍarrāʾ*) together elsewhere as means by which human beings are tested (2:177). Many commentators suggest that the first refers to loss of wealth and straitened circumstances, and the second to illness and physical suffering (R, Ṭ, Z). Encounters with both good and evil serve as tests of faith (7:168; 21:35), since ease may make people overly exultant or forgetful (see v. 44), while adversity can make them despairing or ungrateful (see 11:9–10; 28:58; 41:49–51). Tests of adversity or ease are sometimes mentioned, as here, in connection with the sending of prophets and messengers; the circumstances of either hardship (2:214) or an alternation between hardship and ease serve to deepen the spiritual test brought by the prophet (see, e.g., 7:94–95, 130–35). In v. 43, when people fail to respond to such tests of adversity with humility, their *hearts* are *hardened* (cf. 2:74; 5:13; 10:88; 57:16), while Satan causes their actions to *seem fair unto them,* so that they see their evil actions as good. Although this is a Satanic tactic (see 15:39; 27:24), the Quran also suggests that this delusion is a general human tendency (see 2:212; 3:14; 6:108, 122, 137; 8:48; 9:37; 10:12; 13:33; 16:63; 27:4; 29:38; 40:37; 41:25; 47:14).

*They forgot that whereof they had been reminded*—that is, they forgot the lesson they should have learned from their *misfortune and hardship* (R, Z) regarding their utter dependency on God, or they forgot the message brought by the messenger (Ṭ). In response, God did not send immediate punishment, but rather *opened unto them the gates of all things,* removing their suffering and granting them ease and prosperity. This Divine interweaving of hardship and ease is likened by some to the actions of a caring father, who is by turns harsh and gentle with his child, seeking to cultivate moral character (R, Z). Alternately, God's temporarily granting ease to those who reject His messengers and allow their hearts to be *hardened* rather than humbled by adversity can be understood as a means by which they are lured further toward the world (Ṭ). A *ḥadīth* states, "When you see that God has given much to one of His servants in this world, despite his disobedience, it is only as a temptation" (IK, R, Ṭ).

Like those before them, they *exulted,* thinking they had been blessed and that their actions were therefore *fair,* in the sense of beautiful and good. *Came to despair* renders *mublisūn,* which also connotes those in a state of regret or those who are dumbfounded, unable to speak in defense of themselves. It is said to be related to the name Iblīs (Ṭ), a name of Satan in the Quran (2:34; 7:11; 15:31; 17:61; 18:50; 26:95; 34:20). Their sense of *despair,* when God *seized them suddenly,* was heightened because of the contrast with the ease and prosperity they had enjoyed previously (R), just as Iblīs's banishment is more dramatic in contrast to the nearness to God he had previously enjoyed. The overall effect of these verses, and others like them, is to encourage detachment in relation to adversity and prosperity in this world, avoiding both bitterness and self-satisfaction, and to engender an awareness that the vicissitudes of earthly life are merely a Divine test and do not necessarily reflect either Divine pleasure or dissatisfaction.

45 To *cut off the last remnant* of a people (cf. 7:72; 8:7; 15:66; 69:6–8) means to "uproot" and eliminate them entirely as a people, in this case through a sudden punishment, such as that mentioned in v. 44 (R). This terrible warning is followed by a formula of praise to God in recognition of God's many merciful efforts to bring these people to guidance before their destruction (R, Ṭs).

cut off the last remnant of the people who did wrong. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds! (46) Say, "Think to yourselves: were God to take away your hearing and your sight and seal your hearts, what god other than God would restore them unto you?" Behold how We vary the signs; yet still they turn away. (47) Say, "Think to yourselves: were the Punishment of God to come upon you suddenly or openly, would any be destroyed save the wrongdoing people?" (48) We do not send the messengers save as bearers of glad tidings and as warners. Thus whosoever believes and makes amends, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (49) But

46 In several places, the Quran mentions that God may thwart people's appreciation of spiritual truth by blocking their hearing, sight, or hearts—the latter understood to be the seat of spiritual understanding—or otherwise rendering them ineffective (cf. 2:7, 17; 7:100–101; 16:108; 45:23; for the "sealing of hearts" specifically, see 4:155; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 30:59; 40:35; 42:24; 47:16; 63:3). God's power over human affliction and deliverance and the inability of any but God to remove an affliction He Himself has ordained are also mentioned in 6:17 and 10:107; and in 28:71–72 and 39:38 they are presented, as here, in the form of a rhetorical question addressed to the disbelievers. To *vary the signs* means to present them in different forms or to bring out all their aspects; see also 6:65, 105; 7:58; 17:41; 46:27. *Signs* (*āyāt*) may refer to Quranic verses, but can also refer to all means of Divine revelation and theophany, including the marvels of the created order and the interior dimensions of the human soul (cf. 41:53). That God "varies the signs" may refer to the manner in which the Quran invokes various images and created phenomena or explains them in different ways as repeated proofs of God's Oneness. Similarly, the Quran's parables and warnings are said to be presented in various ways; see 17:89; 18:54; 20:113.

47 That the punishment may come upon the wrongdoers *suddenly or openly* means that it may befall them either when they are unaware, for example, at night while they are sleeping, or in broad daylight, coming unexpectedly before their very eyes (Z); that is, it may come upon them either with or without warning (R). The rhetorical question *would any be destroyed save the wrongdoing people* seems to indicate that only wrongdoers would suffer destruction in the face of such a Divine punishment; though in the Quran worldly destruction usually comes upon whole peoples (save for their prophets and the few righteous people who followed them), as we see in the case of the people of Noah and Lot as well as that of the Arabian tribes the ʿĀd and the Thamūd (see, e.g., 7:59–93; 11:25–95). See also 8:25: *And be mindful of a trial that will not befall only those among you who do wrong.* Al-Rāzī argues that even in cases where worldly punishment comes upon a people as a whole, the righteous will ultimately receive their reward with God in the Hereafter, as suggested in v. 48, while the wrongdoers will have lost "both this world and the next" (R).

48–49 Messengers and prophets are referred to repeatedly as *bearers of glad tidings and as warners* (see 2:119, 213; 4:165; 5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 18:56; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 35:24; 48:8). That those who believe and are righteous are spared fear and grief is similarly repeated in over a dozen verses (2:38, 62, 112, 262, 274, 277; 3:170; 5:69; 7:35, 49; 10:62; 43:68; 46:13). In v. 48 it is those who both believe inwardly and demonstrate righteousness outwardly through acts of obedience who are spared fear and grief, whereas in v. 49 the punishment befalls those who both reject faith by "denying God's signs" and commit *iniquity*. These verses, and others like them, demonstrate the deeply interconnected reality of faith and acts, indicating that both the inward and outward aspects of one's spiritual state determine one's ultimate spiritual punishment or reward.

as for those who deny Our signs, the punishment shall befall them for the iniquity they committed. (50) Say, "I do not say unto you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me." Say, "Are the blind and the seer equal? Will you not, then, reflect?" (51) Warn hereby those who fear that they will be gathered unto their Lord—they have, apart from Him, no protector and no intercessor—that they might be reverent. (52) And drive not away

50 As an argument for their rejection of Muhammad's prophethood, the disbelievers repeatedly cited the Prophet's human rather than angelic nature (6:91; 11:12; 15:7; 17:94–95; 21:3; 25:7, 21; 43:53), his inability to foretell the precise coming of the Hour or the Day of Judgment (7:187; 10:48–49; 67:25–26), and his failure to produce miraculous worldly goods (17:90–91). Elsewhere they claimed that his message was not accompanied by a miraculous sign (2:118; 10:20; 13:7; 17:92–93; 20:133; 29:50)—although for Muslims the Quran itself is the greatest miracle, inimitable through mere human effort (2:23–24; 10:38; 11:13–14), and also the Prophet reportedly split the moon as a miraculous sign to the disbelievers (as mentioned obliquely in 54:1–2).

In the present verse, the Prophet is instructed to respond to similar criticisms issued by the disbelievers in vv. 8–9 and 37 by asserting that he does not claim to be an angel (cf. 17:93; 18:110; 41:6) and that he follows *only that which is revealed* to him (cf. 46:9), not his personal whim. In words identical to those of Noah in 11:31, he rejects any notion that he possesses the *treasuries of God*—that is, the power to bring worldly provision and benefit to himself or others (R, Ṭ)—or that he knows the *unseen,* such as the timing of future events through which he or others could profit (R). The Quran elsewhere indicates that the *unseen* is known only to God (6:59; 10:20; 27:65), save for what He chooses to reveal to His messengers (3:44; 11:49; 12:102; 72:26–27).

The rhetorical question *are the blind one and the seer equal* (also found in 11:24; 13:16; 35:19; 40:58) pertains to spiritual, not physical blindness. It asks whether the believers who are guided to and understand the truth of the Quranic message are like the disbelievers who are blind to it. See 22:46: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.* As "seeing" here is a metonym for possessing spiritual knowledge and understanding, the rhetorical question in this verse is also similar to that in 39:9: *Are those who know and those who do not know equal?* Here as elsewhere, the Quran invites its audience to *reflect* upon its verses, parables, and proofs or upon God's creation in order to facilitate spiritual understanding (see, e.g., 3:191c; 11:24, 30; 16:17; 30:8; 37:155; 45:23; 56:62).

51 *Warn hereby*—that is, with the Quran (IK)—*those who fear that they will be gathered unto their Lord* on the Day of Judgment. *Those* may refer to either Muslims who believe in their own resurrection and fear God's Judgment, but are deficient in their works; or the People of the Book, who believe in the Day of Judgment, but have not accepted the prophethood of Muhammad; or those idolaters who harbor a hidden fear of the reality of the Day of Judgment and may thus be amenable to the Prophet's warning (Z). That there is *no protector and no intercessor* in the Hereafter other than God (see also 6:70; 32:4) is consistent with other verses that limit intercession to God or those to whom He has given the power to intercede, such as the Prophet, according to the majority Muslim opinion. For a fuller discussion of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shiite Imam, understood the *intercessor* in this verse to be the Quran itself, saying, "Warn by means of the Quran those who anticipate the meeting with their Lord [cf. 50:45 for similar wording] and make them long for what shall be at that time, for truly the Quran is an intercessor which will intercede on their behalf" (Ṭs, Ṭū).

52 This verse was reportedly revealed when a group of prominent Makkans indicated that they

those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face. Naught of their reckoning falls upon thee and naught of thy reckoning falls upon them, such that thou shouldst drive them away and thus become one of the wrongdoers. (53) Thus did We try some of them by means of others, that they might

wished to join the Prophet's teaching circle, but were loathe to sit among and be associated with some of Muhammad's other followers who were of low social standing (including Bilāl and other freed slaves) and so asked the Prophet to send them away. Some reports indicate the Prophet was not asked to send away these followers altogether, but rather to send them to the back rows of prayer, so that the prominent Makkans would not be seen standing or praying behind those of lower social status (Ṭ). The Prophet refused to "drive away" his poorer followers (in 11:27–29 and 26:111–14 Noah refuses to do the same), but was prepared to agree to have these followers temporarily depart when the prominent Makkans came to sit with him. This verse was then revealed forbidding him from "driving away" his pious followers *who call upon their Lord morning and evening* (IK, R, Ṭ, W). See also 18:28: *Make thy soul patient with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face,* reportedly revealed in a similar circumstance (Ṭ, W); and 80:1–10c, about the incident in which the Prophet is admonished for registering displeasure when his teaching attracted a poor blind man rather than the wealthier Makkans.

These passages raise the question of how the Prophet could seem to favor these prominent Makkans, who were still preoccupied with worldly status, over his sincere followers and how his actions should be evaluated, considering that the verse here indicates that, were he to *drive away* his followers, as he may have been prepared to do temporarily, he would *become one of the wrongdoers*. Al-Rāzī argues that even if the Prophet were initially prepared to accede to the Makkans' demand, his intention was only to facilitate their acceptance of Islam, and since the Prophet could continue to instruct his poorer followers at another time, there would be no spiritual harm to them either. Moreover, the Prophet, according to al-Rāzī, cannot be said to have sinned in his apparent initial willingness to accommodate the Makkans' demand (R), since his intention was good.

That God should be "called upon," "glorified," or "invoked" *morning and evening* (see also 19:11; 33:42; 48:9; 76:25) can be said to refer to praying the five canonical prayers at their prescribed times, to performing supererogatory acts of invoking God (*dhikr Allāh*) or reciting the Quran, or to all of them (R, Ṭ). To do so *desiring His Face* (cf. 2:272; 30:38–39; 76:9) may mean, literally, with the hope of seeing God's Face, for any sincere lover longs to see the face of the beloved (R), but also it refers metaphorically to sincerity of intention among the Prophet's followers (IK, R). *Naught of their reckoning falls upon thee* echoes the Quranic idea that *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). In the syntactical context of the verse, *their reckoning* seems most likely to refer to the reckoning of *those who call upon their Lord morning and evening,* meaning that the Prophet need only judge his followers' piety on the basis of their outward actions (Z).

Some commentators explain this as a response to an accusation made by some of the Quraysh that the poor followed the Prophet not out of religious sincerity, but only because they hoped to be fed and clothed by him. According to this interpretation, the verse was meant to indicate that the Prophet had no responsibility to assess the possible ulterior motives behind his followers' apparent piety (R). Others suggest, more plausibly, that it refers to the reckoning of the prominent Makkans who made the request regarding the Prophet's followers. The verse indicates that the Prophet need not be so concerned with their embracing Islam that he should accede to their demand and "drive away" his pious followers at their behest (Z).

53 That God tries *some of them by means of others* (cf. 47:4) refers generally to the idea that the discrepancies in wealth and power among

say, "Are these the ones whom God has graced among us?" Does God not know best those who are thankful? (54) When those who believe in Our signs come to thee, say, "Peace be upon you! Your Lord has prescribed Mercy for Himself, that whosoever among you does evil in ignorance and thereafter repents and makes amends, He is truly Forgiving, Merciful." (55) Thus do We expound the

human beings serves as a trial for all (Ṭ); the strong are tested with regard to their responsibility toward the needy, and the needy with regard to their trust in God and their humble acceptance of others' charity. In this context, it refers specifically to the way in which the humble social status of the Prophet's early followers constituted a "test" for the prominent Makkans, who had to overcome their false association of spiritual worth with social standing, an association indicated in the contemptuous question, *Are these the ones whom God has graced among us?* It was also a test of their attachment to their own social status, since as new followers of the Prophet, they would have to accept being instructed to some extent by the Prophet's poorer followers, who had preceded them in adopting the religion (R) and were thus more firmly rooted in it. At the same time, this was also a test for the needier followers of the Prophet, who watched the disbelieving Makkans continue to prosper, while they themselves remained poor and vulnerable to persecution at the hands of the powerful who disparaged their faith (R). These needier followers could also ask, in reference to the wealthy, disbelieving Makkans, *Are these the ones whom God has graced among us?* wondering why God continued to grant worldly prosperity to those who rejected His religion (R). It is unclear whether the question is posed by the poorer believers or the wealthier disbelievers and may well be understood as a question each group asked regarding the other.

54 The saying *Peace be upon you!* or simply *Peace!* is mentioned several times in the Quran as the greeting for or between the people of Paradise (7:46; 14:23; 16:32; 19:62; 39:73; 56:26) and is thus the preferred greeting in Islamic society, even for those whose mother tongue is not Arabic. It is also a formula of blessing upon the prophets in the Quran (15:52; 51:25; 37:79, 109, 120, 130, 181) and Islamic tradition generally. This verse may refer to the same incident addressed in v. 53, instructing the Prophet to offer greetings of peace to those who believe, rather than "driving them away" (see v. 53); or it may mean that the Prophet should offer greetings of peace and hope for God's forgiveness to those believers, reportedly including ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who initially counseled the Prophet to accede to the prominent Makkans' demand (IK, Ṭ). Alternately, it may be related to a separate incident in which a group of believers confessed to the Prophet that they had committed terrible sins. The Prophet initially said nothing, but this verse was then revealed, instructing him to greet them as believers and offer them hope of forgiveness (Ṭ). For the statement that God *has prescribed Mercy for Himself,* see 6:12–13c. In a *ḥadīth* mentioned in connection with this verse the Prophet asks, "Do you know the right of God over the servants? [It is] that they worship Him and not ascribe partners unto Him." Then he said, "Do you know the right of the servants over God if they do this? [It is] that He not punish them" (IK). For the reference to God's forgiveness of one who *does evil in ignorance* and then *repents and makes amends,* see 4:17–18 and commentary as well as 16:119.

55 That God "expounds the signs" is mentioned four times in the present *sūrah* and several times elsewhere; see 6:97–98, 126; 7:32, 52, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 11:1; 13:2; 30:28; also 41:3, where it is the basis for the title of *Sūrah* 41, "Expounded." In the present context, it refers to the variety of arguments and indications for the Oneness of God and the truth of Muhammad's prophethood given throughout this *sūrah* in response to the disbelief, rejection, and false arguments of the Makkan idolaters (R, Ṭ).

signs, that the way of the guilty may be made clear. (56) Say, "I am forbidden to worship those whom you call upon apart from God." Say, "I will not follow your caprices, for then I would have gone astray, and I would not be among the rightly guided." (57) Say, "Truly I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, and you have denied Him. That which you seek to hasten is not within my power. Judgment belongs to God alone, He relates the Truth, and He is the best of deciders." (58) Say, "If that which you seek to hasten were within my power, then the matter would be decreed between you and me, and God knows best the wrongdoers." (59) And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He; and He knows what is on land and sea; no leaf falls but that He knows

56 Having put forward a series of arguments against Makkan idolaters, the Prophet is told to make known his uncompromising rejection of the idolatry of his people (cf. 10:41, 104; 26:216; 40:66; *Sūrah* 109), stating that he is *forbidden to worship* their idols and false deities and that he refuses to follow their *caprices,* that is, their whims or desires, with regard to religion and worship. Elsewhere, the Quran warns the Prophet against acquiescing to the whims of the disbelievers; see 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 6:150; 13:37; 42:15; 45:18.

57–58 The claim to *stand upon a clear proof* from God is made by several prophets in the face of their people's rejection (11:17, 28, 63, 88; 35:40; 47:14) and is an assertion of the prophet's own clarity regarding the truth of the message he brings (Ṭ). The prospect of Divine punishment and the resurrection of human beings was consistently denied by the Makkan idolaters; yet the Quran suggests that the idolaters seem to want to *hasten,* or that they unwittingly *hasten,* the punishment precisely through their obstinate rejection of its reality and their insincere questions and assertions concerning both punishment and resurrection. For example, see 8:32: *And [remember] when they said, "O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment"* (cf. 26:203; 27:46; 27:71–72; 37:176; 51:59). The Prophet is instructed here to make it clear that he possesses no power over the timing of such punishment, for *judgment belongs to God alone* (cf. 6:62; 12:40, 67; 28:88), a statement that serves as a Quranic basis for the sovereignty of Divine rather than human law in Islamic thought. In the present context, the *judgment* that belongs to God includes the determination of when His Punishment will descend (Z).

*He relates* (*yaquṣṣu*) *the Truth* can be read with a slight orthographic change to mean, "He decrees (*yaqḍī*) the Truth," a reading preferred by some commentators (R, Ṭ, Z), given the context of this verse concerning God's Judgment. That God is *the best of deciders* (*fāṣilīn*) indicates that He will decide between truth and falsehood and between the Prophet and those who reject his message (Ṭ). Cf. 7:87; 10:109; 11:45; 12:80; 95:8, where God is the *best* or *most just of judges* (*ḥākimīn*). In v. 58, the folly of the idolaters' attempts to elicit the timing of Divine punishment is demonstrated by the warning that, were the timing in the hands of the Prophet, *the matter would be decreed*—that is, the punishment would have been called down upon them already (Ṭ, Z); but it is God who decrees the timing of His Punishment, and its postponement should be seen as an act of Divine Wisdom and Mercy.

59 The *Unseen* (*ghayb*) refers to all realities beyond the reach of ordinary human perception: God Himself, the inner thoughts and intentions of others, the inner reality of things, future events, metaphysical realities, and the spiritual and psychic realms. That God alone knows the *unseen* is found in 6:50; 10:20; and 27:65, but this is the only verse that states that God possesses *the keys of the Unseen* (*mafātiḥ al-ghayb*). A *ḥadīth* states, "The keys of the Unseen are five, which none knows but God: None knows what will happen tomorrow but God; none knows what is in the womb but God; none knows

it, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is in a clear Book. (60) He it is Who takes your souls by night, and He knows what you commit by day. Then by day He resurrects you, that a term

when it will rain but God; none knows in what place one will die but God; none knows when the Hour will be established but God" (cf. 31:34). The *keys of the Unseen* is commonly glossed as the keys to the storehouses or treasuries (*khazāʾin*) from which creation is originated (R, Ṭ, Z), perhaps in connection with a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says, "I have been given the keys of eloquent speech, and victory with awe, and while I was sleeping last night, the keys of the treasuries of the earth were brought toward me till they were put in my hand." Al-Zamakhsharī suggests that *the keys of the Unseen* are metaphorical images that grant access to otherwise inaccessible truths. Insofar as the *keys of the Unseen* (*mafātiḥ al-ghayb*) refers to something that makes difficult or hidden truths accessible, it serves as the title of several important works in Islamic intellectual history, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Quranic commentary and a work on the Quran by Mullā Ṣadrā.

God also knows all aspects of "seen" reality as well, that is, *what is on land and sea*. He knows them not only in a general sense, but in their particulars: the falling of every leaf, and every *seed in the dark recesses of the earth*. His Knowledge of even the smallest things may serve as a warning to human beings that God is aware of all that they do, no matter how small or hidden (Ṭ). This verse also served as a scriptural basis for the criticism made by Islamic theologians against certain Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā, who claimed that God knows only universals, but not particulars. The connection between God's Knowledge and the statement that all realities are *in a clear Book* is also made elsewhere in the Quran (cf. 10:61; 11:6; 27:74–75; 34:3). *Clear Book* may be a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c; Ṭ) or to the very Knowledge of God (Z), although it is used elsewhere to refer to revealed scripture in general (5:15; 12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 43:2; 44:2).

60 *Takes your souls* renders *yatawaffākum*, a verb commonly used to refer to the death of a person; here, however, it refers to sleep, for in sleep, as in death, one's physical senses and limbs are rendered ineffective (R), and only the inner senses and movement of the soul continue. That God "takes souls" *by night* and then "resurrects" them during the day indicates an analogous relationship between sleep and death, and waking and resurrection. See also 25:47: *And He it is Who made the night a garment for you, and made sleep repose, and made day a resurrection.* This analogy is also present in the story of the People of the Cave (18:13–26). Likening sleep and waking to death and resurrection makes an implicit argument for the reality of resurrection on the basis of ordinary human experience in this world: if God can withhold the ordinary waking consciousness in sleep and then return that consciousness and cause awakening on a daily basis, He can also withhold it permanently through death and cause people to "wake" through resurrection in the Hereafter (R, Ṭ).

Like Quranic arguments that invoke God's ability to "resurrect" a withered land by sending Rain (7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:24; 41:39), this verse argues for God's power to resurrect by adducing His power over analogous phenomena experienced in worldly existence. God *resurrects* people *by day*, so *that a term appointed may be fulfilled*, that is, so that the duration of their earthly lives may be completed (Ṭ); see also 39:42: *God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not during their sleep. He withholds those for whom He has decreed death, and sends forth the others till a term appointed.* In the Quran, individuals as well as communities (7:34; 10:49), and indeed all created phenomena (see, e.g., 13:2; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 46:3), have an "appointed term," in keeping with the idea of Divine *qadar*, or God's "measuring out" all things, including their temporal span of existence. The cycle of sleeping and waking also points to the vicissitudes of earthly life, characterized by alternation between God's giving or expansion (*bast*) and withholding or contraction (*qabḍ*) of spiritual and physical provision. Both are ultimately transcended in the "return unto Him" either in the next world or, for the mystical seeker, in this life in the state of "union" with God that transcends the various spiritual stations (Aj).

appointed may be fulfilled. Then unto Him shall be your return, and He shall inform you of that which you used to do. (61) And He is Dominant over His servants. He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, Our messengers take him, and they neglect not their duty. (62) Then they are returned unto God, their true Master. Surely judgment belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners. (63) Say, "Who saves you from the darkness of land and sea, when you call upon Him humbly and in secret [saying], 'If only He saves us from this, we shall surely be among the thankful'?" (64) Say, "God

In the Hereafter, God will *inform you of that which you used to do* (5:105; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 29:8; 31:15; 39:7; 62:8); that is, every soul's deeds will be presented to it, sometimes metaphorically in the form of a "book" (17:71; 69:19, 25; 84:7, 10).

61–62 That God is *Dominant over His servants* (see also 6:18) means that He transcends them in both His Knowledge, for He alone possesses the *keys of the Unseen* (v. 59), and His Power, for He is able to *take . . . souls* and return them again (v. 60). He is also *Dominant* in that He transcends all opposites and dualities, being an "ocean without a shore" (R). *Dominant* translates *qāhir,* which is derived from the same root as the Divine Name the *Paramount* (*al-Qahhār*) in 12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 38:65; 39:4; 40:16; and al-Qāhir is also considered by some to be one of the Divine Names.

*Guardians* refers to angels said to accompany each individual soul through earthly life, recording his or her deeds faithfully (Ṭ); see also 10:21; 13:11; 50:18; 82:10–12. Some say that each individual is accompanied by two angels, one to record sins and the other to record righteous acts (R). Given that God possesses knowledge of all things and thus has no need of such written records, it is understood that the benefit of the recording angels is for human beings themselves who, knowing that their deeds are being meticulously recorded, may be moved to avoid evil or dishonorable deeds (R, Z).

In the Quran, *messengers* (*rusul*) usually refers to prophets, but here and in several other verses it refers to angels; see 22:75: *God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among mankind.* In the present verse, it refers to angels sent by God to collect spirits of the deceased (Ṭ; cf. 7:37); see also 32:11, which mentions a single *Angel of death,* identified in Islamic angelology with ʿIzrāʾīl (Azrael). The angelic *messengers* in the present verse may be understood as assisting the angel of death; some say the *messengers* "take" the souls, and the angel of death carries them off (R, Ṭ). It is unclear whether the recording angels and the angels that take souls at death are the same angels performing different functions, although the predominant tendency has been to see them as separate angels (R); see 32:11c. *Then they are returned unto God* for judgment and recompense. That *judgment belongs to* God is repeated again (see vv. 57–58 and commentary). God's "swiftness" in reckoning is also mentioned elsewhere (2:202; 3:19, 199; 5:4; 13:41; 14:51; 24:39; 40:17), as is His swiftness in retribution (6:165; 7:167).

63–64 The Quran gives several examples of people calling upon God for help in moments of great distress, only to forget and return to idolatry when the moment of need has passed (see, e.g., 7:189–90; 30:33). As in the present verse, some of these examples are connected with perils at sea (17:67; 29:65; 31:32). The *darkness of land and sea* may simply refer to the anxiety-producing vicissitudes of earthly life, or it may be a metaphorical reference to the different types of "darkness" human beings experience, including both inward and outward sources of fear and sadness. Some Sufi interpretations consider the *darkness of land* to represent the various forms of earthly adversity encountered by those following the Islamic exoteric Law (*Sharīʿah*) and the darkness *of sea* to represent the spiritual difficulties and challenges faced by those pursuing the mystical path (*ṭarīqah;* Aj). Calling upon God *humbly and in secret* suggests supplication done in a private and sincere fashion (R), not merely for show (see also 7:55). This, together with the supplicants' promise

saves you from this and from every distress; yet you ascribe partners unto Him!" (65) Say, "He is the One Who has power to send a punishment upon you from above you or from beneath your feet, or to confound you as discordant factions and make you taste the might of one another." Behold how We vary the signs, that they may understand. (66) Thy people have denied it, though it is the truth.

that, if God delivers them, they will be *among the thankful,* points to the spiritual benefits one may derive from the experience of danger or distress, including the motivation to *call upon* God as well as the humility, sincerity, and thankfulness such supplication engenders (R).

65 To send a punishment *from above you or from beneath your feet* (cf. 5:66; 29:55; 33:10) means, idiomatically, to cause it to come from all sides. It may also be a reference to the various ways in which punishment comes or threatens to come upon people in the Quran (IK, R): *from above,* as in the flooding rains upon Noah's people, the rain of stones upon the people of Lot and others (15:74; 17:68; 26:173; 27:58; 29:33, 40; 54:34; 67:17), and the destructive cry or thunderbolt that destroys or accompanies the destruction of various peoples (2:55; 4:153; 11:67, 94; 15:73, 83; 18:40; 23:41; 29:40; 36:29, 49, 53; 38:15; 41:13, 17; 50:42; 51:44; 54:31; 80:33); and *from beneath* their feet, as in earthquakes (7:78, 91; 29:37) or being "swallowed up" by earth or sea (16:45; 17:68; 28:81; 29:40; 34:9; 67:16).

Dividing into *discordant factions* is mentioned elsewhere as an error committed by previous religious communities and something Muslims should strive to avoid (cf. 3:103–5; 30:32; 42:13–14; 98:4). The present verse warns that God might *confound you as discordant factions* as a punishment; cf. 5:14, where the consequence of Christians forgetting their covenant with God is that He *stirred up enmity and hatred among them.* When the present verse was revealed, the Prophet was disturbed and requested through the Archangel Gabriel that God spare his community such punishments. Gabriel returned with the response that, although God would spare them the punishment *from above . . . and from beneath* their feet, He would not spare them the division into discordant factions and the consequent conflicts that would ensue; that is, they would *taste the might of one another* (IK, R, Ṭ). The Prophet thus said, "My community will divide into seventy-two sects, only one of which will be saved" (R; see also IK and Abū Dāwūd, *K. Al-sunnah,* where the Prophet predicts seventy-three sects). The Prophet's mention of seventy-two sects into which his community would later divide was influential in the writings of later Islamic heresiographers, who attempted to classify different theological perspectives in Islam into seventy-two distinct "sects" (*firaq*). The Prophet also warned about the consequences of violence among his community, saying, "If the sword [of mutual fighting] comes down upon my community, it will not be removed until the Day of Resurrection" (IK, Ṭ).

Since this verse identifies factionalism in religion as a possible Divine punishment, some might argue that this verse should be read as prohibiting disagreements or debates concerning religious teachings entirely (Ṭ). It might therefore be interpreted as a scriptural basis for discouraging the establishment of different theological and legal schools in Islam, although the coexistence of different legal and theological schools has had a long and largely (although by no means entirely) peaceful history in Islam, and a well-known Prophetic *ḥadīth* describes differences among his community as a mercy (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*). However, the consensus of the Muslim community has long been that different theological and legal schools are acceptable within the large umbrella of Islam, so long as the basic principles of Islamic belief are upheld. The warning in this verse, moreover, seems to pertain primarily to factions engaged in mutual violence, since through them *you taste the might of one another. We vary the signs* renders *nuṣarrifu'l-āyāt,* which means literally to turn the signs about or move them in different directions and thus, figuratively, to show them in all their aspects; see 6:46c; 6:105; 7:58; 17:41; 46:27.

66–67 That the Prophet Muhammad was not made a *guardian over* his people or, elsewhere, a *keeper* or *watcher* over them (cf. 4:80; 6:104, 107; 10:108; 17:54; 25:43; 39:41; 42:6, 48) indicates that

Say, "I am not a guardian over you. (67) For every tiding there is a fixed setting, and soon you shall know." (68) And when thou seest those who engage in vain discussion about Our signs, turn away from them till they engage in other discourse. And if Satan should cause thee to forget, then once thou hast remembered, sit not in the company of wrongdoing people. (69) Their reckoning falls not upon those who are reverent, but [upon them is] a reminder, that they might be reverent. (70) Leave those who take their religion to be play and diversion, and who are deluded by the life of this world, but remind them with it, lest any soul be delivered to ruin because of what it has earned—it has no protector apart from God, nor any intercessor, and though it should offer every kind of ransom, it shall not be accepted from it. Those are the ones delivered to ruin for that which they have earned. Theirs shall be a drink of boiling liquid and a painful punishment for having disbelieved. (71) Say, "Apart from God, shall we call upon that which neither benefits nor harms us, and be turned back on our heels after God has guided us, like one bewildered, seduced by satans on the earth, though he has companions who call him to guidance, 'Come to us!'?" Say, "Indeed, the Guidance of God is the true guidance, and we are commanded to submit to the

the Prophet's duty was only to convey the Divine message (cf. 3:20; 13:40; 29:18). He was not responsible for the acceptance or rejection of the message by people; that is their own moral responsibility as well as a matter that is ultimately in God's Hands, for as it says in 10:100: *It is not for a soul to believe, save by God's Leave.* Cf. 5:25 and 11:86 for this assertion in relation to other prophets.

*For every tiding*—that is, for every message of warning sent by God through the prophets—here referencing the Quranic warnings in particular, *there is a fixed setting,* meaning a period of time during which the warning is operative; after that, what has been warned about will come to pass. *Soon you shall know* warns that the punishment for rejecting the Prophet's message is imminent, and when it comes, those who rejected it will know the truth of the warnings he brought (Ṭ). The imminent punishment refers, according to some, to the Battle of Badr (2/624), in which the Muslims inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Quraysh of Makkah, or to the Muslims' eventual triumph over the idolaters with the conquest of Makkah (8/630); but it can also be a warning that death and Judgment are ever nigh, and when they occur, those who rejected the Quranic message *shall know* the truth of it and of its warnings (R, Ṭ).

68–69 The disbelievers *engage in vain discussion* about the signs of God, seeking to deny and deride them (Ṭ; cf. 4:140; 6:112). The Quran links such vain discussion elsewhere with "playing" in a pejorative sense (see 6:32c; 6:91; 9:65; 43:83; 52:12; 70:42), since one should not take religion as mere *play* and *diversion* (cf. 5:57; 6:70; 7:51). According to the Quran, *vain discussion* of any sort should be avoided (23:3), and 24:14–16 indicates that *vain discussion* in matters of religion and law can have serious consequences for the community, in that it can lead, for example, to false accusations of adultery, which may then give rise to serious miscarriages of justice and to mutual division and mistrust among believers. This verse thus counsels the Prophet, and by extension all believers, to avoid or remove themselves from groups engaged

in *vain discussion* about religious matters, an idea supported by other Quranic verses (cf. 4:140; 6:91, 112; 7:180; 43:83; 70:42). Here, one need only turn away from them until they move on to another topic (Z). The Quran similarly counsels those who encounter such discussions: *Say,* "Allāh," *then leave them to play at their vain discourse* (v. 91).

Some reports connect the warning in this verse regarding those who engage in *vain discussion about Our signs* to the *discordant factions* mentioned in v. 65, indicating that the warning pertains not only to the disbelievers, but even to those believers who would engage in fruitless and divisive debate about religion (Ṭ). Some literalists have taken this verse to mean a prohibition against all discussion and debate regarding religious issues, and thus as an indication that one should rely only on a literal reading of the scripture. But al-Rāzī rejects such an interpretation, indicating that the verb for "engaging in vain discussion" (*yakhūḍūn*) means precisely to engage in discussion that is disrespectful and disparaging, and the warning thus does not pertain to sincere religious deliberation, which is encouraged in the Quran.

Addressing the Prophet specifically, but all believers as well, the verse indicates that Satan may *cause* people *to forget* the prohibition against sitting among those engaged in vain discussion of religion or perhaps make them unaware initially that the conversation has changed to a disparaging one, but as soon as they become aware of it, they should remove themselves from the discussion. Elsewhere in the Quran (cf. 12:42; 58:19), it is said that Satan causes people to forget but that he is capable of causing the Prophet to forget raises some difficult issues (Āl), although other verses in the Quran suggest that even the prophets can be the object of Satan's whisperings; see 22:52: *And no messenger or prophet did We send before thee, but that when he had a longing, Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast.*

The *reckoning* of the disbelievers and those who *engage in vain discussion* about the signs of God will not fall upon *those who are reverent,* that is, those who fear God and are observant of His commands and prohibitions. Even if they temporarily find themselves among those engaged in such activity, they need not fear being judged by association, for none bears the burden of another (see 6:52c). But it is incumbent upon the believers to deliver *a reminder* to those engaged in such discourse; that is, believers should not only leave them, but also show their displeasure with and opposition to the discussion and exhort them against it (Z).

70 One should leave not only those engaged in *vain discussion* of religion (v. 68), but all those *who take religion to be play and diversion* (see also 7:51). The latter phrase can refer to several types of people, among them those who do not take religious matters seriously; those who follow religions that are themselves nothing but folly, such as religions that entail idolatry; those who make judgments in religious matters based merely on their own whims and desires; those who take the religious festivals ordained by God as mere opportunities for *play and diversion;* or those who support religion only to attain worldly ends, such as power, authority, or wealth (R, Z). All such people can be considered *deluded by the life of the world* (cf. 6:130; 31:33; 35:5; 45:35). As in vv. 68–69, leaving those who treat religion disdainfully or without due seriousness should be accompanied by an admonitory reminder (*remind them with it,* i.e., with the Quran or religion itself; R), in the hope that they may become reverent (v. 69) or that they may become rightly guided and avoid being *delivered to ruin* for their sins.

Reminding people in this life is important, for there is no repentance or atonement for sins accepted in the next life; there they will have *no protector* and no *intercessor* (see also 6:51; 32:4) and cannot ransom themselves (cf. 2:48; 2:123; 3:91; 5:36; 10:54; 13:18; 39:47; 57:15; 70:11). Certain pious Sunni interpreters say that this verse was revealed in relation to the Prophet's close Companion and first Caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, whose son tried to lure him back to idolatry (Z). Since the believers are told merely to avoid or warn the idolaters, some interpreters attribute this message to the weak position of the Muslim community when this verse was revealed, prior to the migration from Makkah to Madinah in 622, and consider the nonconfrontational approach to the idolaters enjoined here to have been abrogated by a later Madinan verse that commands the believers to *slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them* (9:5; Q, Ṭ). The image of a *drink of boiling liquid* is used in connection with Hell in several verses (10:4; 18:29; 37:67; 38:57; 40:72; 44:44–46; 56:54, 93; 78:25; 88:54) and contrasts sharply with the cool and pleasing drinks of the Garden (cf. 37:45–47; 76:5–6; 17–18, 21; 83:25–28).

71–72 The folly of worshipping *that which neither benefits nor harms* is repeatedly mentioned

Lord of the worlds, (72) and to perform the prayer and to reverence Him; it is unto Him that you shall be gathered." (73) He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in truth; and on the day He says "Be!" and it is, His Word is the Truth. And sovereignty is His on the Day when the trumpet is blown, Knower

in relation to idols and false deities; see 5:76; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 20:89; 21:66; 22:12; 25:55; 26:71–73. The futility of "calling upon" any other than God for help is evoked in 2:171: *The parable of those who disbelieve is that of one who cries to that which hears only a call and a shout;* and 13:14: *Those to whom they supplicate apart from Him answer them not in the least, save as one who stretches forth his palms toward water that it may reach his mouth, though it never reaches him.* To "turn back on one's heels" means to return to a state of ignorance after having received God's guidance. *Satans,* in the plural and general form, refers to the agents of Satan, who may be jinn in the service of Satan proper, or human beings who wittingly or unwittingly do his bidding (cf. 2:14, 102; 6:112, 121; 7:27, 30; 19:68; 23:97; 26:221). *Satans,* both human and jinn, are said to "seduce" human beings through "whispering," evoking the subtlety with which they entice people away from the path of guidance (cf. 7:20; 20:120; 114:4). The Quran also mentions, however, satans in the service of the prophet Solomon (21:82; 38:37), suggesting that in some places they simply refer to jinn. Here the *satans* seduce them *on the earth* or, as read figuratively by al-Rāzī, "lure them into a deep hole."

The *companions who call him to guidance* can be understood as referring to sincere and rightly guided companions who try to persuade him to follow guidance, but their call goes unheeded. If v. 70 was revealed in relation to the attempt of Abū Bakr's son to lure his father to idolatry, the present verse may refer to Abū Bakr calling his son *to guidance* (R). A minority, however, interpret the *guidance* to which the companions call to be false guidance (R, Ṭ). That God's guidance *is the true guidance* (see also 2:120; 3:73) means that there is no guidance outside of His; all paths to which one may be "guided," other than His, are paths that lead astray (Bḍ, R). The Prophet is instructed to respond to his people's calls to idolatry by saying that he has been *commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds* (see also 40:66), to *perform the prayer*—that is, the canonical prayer, performed five times a day (see 2:3c)—and to *reverence* God—that is, to be ever mindful of His unseen Presence and of His commands and prohibitions; for a longer discussion of the important Quranic concept of *reverence* (*taqwā*), see 2:2 and commentary. According to al-Rāzī, the three commands to *submit* (*aslama*) to God, to *perform the prayer,* and to *reverence* God represent the best of the various modes of human action: submission (*islām*) is, along with faith, the best of the "acts of the heart"; prayer is the best of the acts of the limbs; and reverence is the best of the "acts of omission," insofar as reverence refers to the pious fear or mindfulness that helps one avoid sin.

73 God *created the heavens and the earth in truth* (10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 16:3; 29:44; 30:8; 39:5; 44:39; 45:22; 46:3; 64:3), that is, in accordance with the nature of reality and with purpose (JJ) rather than in play (21:16; 44:38) or in vain (3:191; 38:27); this can also indicate that the world He has created is in itself good (R), not evil, and created in goodness. This sentence can also be read, "He it is Who created the heavens and the earth with the Truth," that is, with His Word, for *His Word is the Truth,* as when *He says* [to something], *"Be!" and it is* (cf. 2:117c; 3:47, 59; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68) or when He creates the heavens and the earth by calling them to Himself (41:11; Ṭ). Muslim theologians debated whether the Speech (*kalām*) of God was created in time or was eternal and uncreated. Some have argued that this verse supports the latter theological position (although in this verse *Word* translates *qawl,* rather than *kalām*), since if it is by God's Word that all things are created, then His Word must preexist creation and be therefore "uncreated" (Ṭ). According to some, *the day* on which *He says "Be!"* is ultimately the same as *the Day when the trumpet is blown* (Ṭ). The blowing of the trumpet is invoked in several verses as the herald of the apocalypse and the onset of the Day of Judgment (18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68; 50:20; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18), and thus

of the Unseen and the seen; and He is the Wise, the Aware. (74) And when Abraham said unto his father, Āzar, "Do you take idols for gods? Truly I see you and your people in manifest error." (75) Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among those possessing certainty. (76) When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star. He said, "This is my Lord!" But when it set, he said, "I love not things that set." (77) Then when he saw the moon rising he said, "This is my Lord!" But when it set, he said, "If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be among the people who are astray." (78) Then when he saw the sun rising he said, "This is my Lord! This is greater!" But when it set, he said, "O my people! Truly I am quit of the partners you ascribe. (79) Truly, as a *ḥanīf,* I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the idolaters." (80) His people disputed with him. He said, "Do you dispute with me concerning God, when He has guided me? I fear not the partners you ascribe unto Him, save as my Lord wills. My Lord encompasses all things in Knowledge. Will you not, then, remember? (81) How should I fear the partners you ascribe, when you do not fear ascribing partners unto God for which He has sent down to you no authority? So which of the two parties has greater right to security, if you know? (82) Those who believe and who do not obscure their belief through wrongdoing, it is they who have security, and they are rightly guided." (83) That was Our argument, which

the Divine Creative Command here likely refers to the manner in which God will resurrect the dead on this day; He will create them anew using the command through which they were created the first time, "Be!"; see 17:51: *Then they will say, "Who will bring us back?" Say, "He who originated you the first time"* (Ṭ).

The word for trumpet, *ṣūr,* can be read with different voweling as *ṣuwar,* meaning "forms," which would give the meaning: "And Sovereignty is His on the Day when the forms are blown upon," that is, when God breathes His Spirit upon the forms of created things and brings them into being (R, Ṭ), although this is a minority reading. For breathing as a means of Divine creation, see 15:29; 21:91; 32:9; 38:72. Either interpretation makes the point that the world is brought into being and brought to a conclusion in an analogous manner, and that creation in this world and resurrection in the next are simply two modes of Divine generation. God is also referred to as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* in 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18.

74–83 This pericope about Abraham and his people demonstrates in narrative form the Quranic argument for God's Oneness and Transcendence in relation to created reality and is often cited as an indication that *tawḥīd,* or God's Oneness, is evident to any who objectively and sincerely contemplate the nature of the universe. At the same time, the story has raised some theological difficulties, since Abraham appears to identify, at least temporarily, a star, the moon, and the sun, as "his Lord." Some hold that Abraham did

not make such claims sincerely, but only feigned them to make the point to his idolatrous people that all things are temporal and subject to change save for the One God (IK, R). Others suggest that this pericope recounts a genuine process of intellectual deduction through which Abraham came to know the Oneness of God by observing the ephemerality of all created things (Sy, Ṭ, Ṭū).

Several commentators connect this passage with a legendary account of Abraham's birth and early life. According to this account, when Abraham was born, the king in the region—whom some identify as Nimrod (also see 2:258c)—dreamed that a boy would be born who would usurp his power and so ordered all young boys in the kingdom to be killed. Abraham's mother gave birth to Abraham in secret and hid him in a cave, where she occasionally visited him, but where he was fed and nurtured by the Archangel Gabriel. As a result, he grew up knowing that he had a Lord to whom he owed obedience and worship, and when he first emerged from the cave, he mistakenly identified a star as "his Lord," then the moon, and finally the sun, before realizing that his Lord transcended all of these celestial bodies (R, Ṭ).

This story, which has no basis in the Quranic or Biblical accounts of Abraham's early life, seems to amalgamate several thematic elements from other Quranic and Biblical prophetic narratives and has its own theological difficulties. Some objected to the idea that a prophet could mistakenly identify, even temporarily, a created reality, such as a star, with God, since this is a form of *shirk,* or idolatry. One response to this view has been to claim that Abraham made this erroneous identification when he was still a young child, before the age of religious responsibility and before he became a prophet (IK, R, Ṭū). Even if this is read as an account of Abraham's own rational deduction of the Oneness of God, this reasoning process nonetheless has a revelatory aspect to it, since in v. 75 it is God who shows Abraham *the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among those possessing certainty;* and v. 83 identifies Abraham's discourse with his people as *Our argument, which We gave unto Abraham against his people.* The two interpretations of this narrative may be reconciled, however: although Abraham may have been merely feigning worship of the celestial bodies to make a rhetorical argument about monotheism for the benefit of his people, his demonstration may reflect an earlier process of intellectual deduction that was inspired by his wonder at the celestial bodies, but ultimately ended in his certainty regarding *tawḥīd.*

Sufi commentators have tended to see this passage as a symbol for progressive spiritual illumination or increasing levels of spiritual certitude (*yaqīn*). Each of these celestial bodies represents a state of spiritual understanding attained by the seeker. The "setting" of each of these bodies represents the seeker's realization of the limitations of his or her current spiritual station, engendering a period of darkness or trial from which he or she may emerge into a state of greater spiritual certainty and illumination. For al-Qushayrī, the *star* represents the intellect that first witnesses the truth through demonstrative proof (*burhān*); *the moon* represents the knowledge that is attained with increasing clarity and elucidation of thought; and *the sun* represents the brilliant light of gnosis (spiritual knowledge). Similarly, he interprets Abraham's marveling at these three celestial bodies as his first seeing created things through God, then seeing them for God, and finally the complete effacement of all things in God (Qu).

74 *Āzar* is given as the name of Abraham's father in the Quran, although only in this verse. In the Biblical account, his father is Terah (Genesis 11:25–32), and some commentators suggest that Terah may have been a second or alternate name for him (IK, JJ, R, Ṭ). Some suggest that *Āzar* was the name of an idol, and Abraham calls his father by this name as a way of disparaging his idol worship (IK, R, Ṭ). Others have suggested that Āzar was Abraham's uncle (R, Ṭū), who is referred to as his *father* in the general sense of an older paternal relative (cf. 2:133, where Jacob identifies Ishmael as among his *fathers,* although Ishmael was his uncle). This suggestion was driven, in part, by the fact that, although Terah is a spiritually neutral figure in the Bible, Āzar is identified not only as an idol worshipper, but as a maker of idols (Ṭ). Some Muslims, particularly Shiites, hold that the father of a prophet cannot be a disbeliever or an idolater (Ṭū, R), citing a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says, "God transferred me from pure loins to pure wombs; I was not sullied by the filth of the *jāhiliyyah* [the Age of Ignorance, or idolatrous pre-Islamic Arabia]" (R, Ṭū). Moreover, if references to Āzar and to Abraham's father were really references to his uncle, it would explain why Abraham

can dissociate himself from him (9:114) without contradicting the Quranic injunction to maintain good relations even with disbelieving parents (31:14–15; R). Nonetheless, the most literal reading of this and other verses is that Āzar was Abraham's father and that he was an idolater (R).

75 That God showed Abraham *the dominion of the heavens and the earth* may mean simply that Abraham witnessed the wondrous phenomena of the celestial and terrestrial realms that are also visible to human beings in general. The Quran indicates elsewhere that anyone who observes and reflects upon these phenomena with sincerity and a sound mind should come to the conclusion that there is an all-powerful God who is One (cf. 10:101; 34:9). Since Abraham was given *sound judgment* by God (21:51), he was able to apply reason to his observations of the world around him in order to arrive at the reality of monotheism (IK). Al-Rāzī argues that the manifestation of God's Being and Power in natural phenomena is always objectively observable, but is veiled for many by human error and the preoccupation with worldly things. When Abraham rejected his father's idolatry (v. 74), he attained a new intellectual clarity that allowed him to see this Divine Self-Manifestation with the inner eye of his intellect (R). God's showing Abraham *the dominion of the heavens and the earth* is, however, more widely associated with a miraculous and revelatory journey in which God split open the heavens, allowing Abraham to see all its levels up to the Divine Throne itself, and cleaved the earth so that he could see to its lowest level (IK, R, Ṭū, Z). Al-Rāzī suggests that though any thoughtful monotheist might see proofs of God's Being in the created order, Abraham experienced this Divine Self-Manifestation to an extent that is made accessible to only the greatest prophets, such as Muhammad, citing the Prophet's reported supplication, "O God, show me things as they truly (and really) are!" (R).

God shows Abraham *the dominion* in order to grant him *certainty* in his spiritual beliefs; *certainty* here refers to a kind of knowledge arrived at usually after a period of doubt or confusion has been overcome through reflection and contemplation (R) or as the result of a vision. Abraham's initial aversion to idolatry and inclination toward monotheism are thus strengthened through this experience of Divine Self-Manifestation. This clause might also be read to mean that God showed Abraham the *dominion,* "because he was among those possessing certainty" (R), that is, as a reward for the spiritual insight he had already attained.

76–78 As noted above, commentators differed over whether the demonstration of God's Transcendence relative to temporal phenomena in these three verses represents Abraham's own gradual realization of pure monotheism through a process of intellectual deduction or is simply Abraham's rhetorical argument against his people's idolatry. The latter interpretation seems to fit best the surrounding context, since Abraham's discourse in these verses is preceded by his explicit criticism of idolatry (v. 74) and his being shown *the dominions of the heavens and the earth* (v. 75). According to this latter interpretation, Abraham's statement *This is my Lord!* upon seeing the star, and then upon seeing the moon and the sun, was not made in earnest, but rather sarcastically or in jest—perhaps with a tone of incredulity, as if to say, "Is this my Lord?!" (Ṭ). Or it was said as a means of setting up his opponents in an argument by beginning with a repetition of his opponents' own view, which would then be gradually disproved (R); see 21:51–67, where Abraham takes a similar approach. See also 37:88–89, where Abraham, while engaged in an argument with his people, glances at the stars and declares, *I am sick,* perhaps indicating his actual view concerning his people's worship of the stars.

Abraham's declaration in v. 77, *If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be among the people who are astray,* indicates, as in v. 71, that the only guidance is God's guidance and it was perhaps meant to indicate to his people their own religious status (R). After the setting of the sun, Abraham declares himself *quit of the partners* his people ascribe to God; similar statements are made by Abraham in 43:26 and 60:4 as well as by Muhammad in v. 19 and the Arabian prophet Hūd in 11:54.

Abraham's discourse regarding the celestial bodies was relevant to his people's worship of stone idols either because the idols served as representations of celestial deities worshipped by his people (IK, R) or because he was making the point that, if even the celestial bodies, which travel through the sky and seem so sublime, can be shown to be ephemeral, it was all the more nonsensical to worship stone idols, which could not even move

(Ṭū). Some commentators report that among Abraham's people were astrologers (JJ, R), who considered a celestial body to be influential when it was waxing and weak and ineffectual when it was waning; thus according to al-Rāzī, Abraham's argument about the waning of the celestial bodies should have been persuasive. The *star,* which some identify as Venus (IK, JJ), *the moon,* and *the sun* were the brightest and therefore considered the most powerful of the seven celestial bodies reportedly worshipped by Abraham's people (IK).

For some, this passage serves as an argument that although religious truth is not entirely self-evident (R, Ṭū), neither can it be based simply upon blind imitation (R), such as was practiced by Abraham's people in continuing to worship the idols of their fathers. Rather, religious certainty must be based upon sincere and objective reflection and upon clear proofs and arguments derived from observations of the created order; otherwise there would be no point in Abraham issuing a proof of this kind (R).

79 Cf. 10:105; 30:30. To "turn" or, variously, "submit" or "set" one's face toward God means to orient one's whole being toward the worship and obedience of God (R); see also 2:112; 3:20; 7:29; 31:22; 30:43. *Ḥanīf* is used predominantly in connection with Abraham in the Quran (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:120, 123), but also elsewhere to denote a pure monotheism that avoids all manner of idolatry (22:31; 30:30; 98:5); it is also associated with the Prophet Muhammad both before and after the onset of his prophetic mission. For a fuller discussion of *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c; 30:30c.

80 Abraham's people *disputed with him,* by professing that they were merely following the traditions of their forefathers (cf. 21:53; 43:23); by expressing surprise that Abraham would limit worship to a single God (cf. 38:5); or by threatening that their false deities and idols would bring harm upon him for his rejection of them (R, Ṭ). Abraham wonders how his people think their vain disputations will have an effect upon one, such as himself, who has been guided by God, and how they can hope to frighten him by invoking the *partners* they *ascribe* unto Him, that is, idols who can bring "neither harm nor benefit" (R; cf. vv. 17, 71–72). His qualification *save as my Lord wills* indicates that he fears only what comes from God, and if he were to fear the *partners* his people ascribe to Him, it would only be as a result of God's Will to test him in some way (R). That God *encompasses all things in Knowledge* (20:98; 40:7; 65:12) means that everything occurs according to His Wisdom (R) and Knowledge. See 2:255: *He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His Knowledge, save what He wills. His Pedestal embraces the heavens and the earth.*

81–82 Abraham continues his argument with his people, expressing amazement that they could expect him to fear helpless idols, although they had no fear of ascribing partners unto God *for which He has sent down . . . no authority,* that is, no proof of their reality (R, Ṭ; see also 7:33, 71; 12:40; 22:71; 53:23). He challenges them as to *which of the two parties,* he or they, *has greater right to security,* meaning from Divine punishment. The answer is, *those who believe and who do not obscure their belief through wrongdoing,* that is, those who do not obscure their belief in God through *shirk,* or idolatry (IK, Ṭ). For some, this refers to those who combine their faith with good works of all kinds (R). When this verse came down, the Prophet's Companions were reportedly fearful, asking the Prophet, "Who is it who believes and never does wrong [lit. never wrongs oneself]?" The Prophet responded by indicating that what is meant by *wrongdoing* here is precisely idolatry (IK, Ṭ). The Prophet is also reported to have said, "Those *who have security* and *are rightly guided* are those who are thankful when they receive, who are patient when they are denied, who seek forgiveness when they have done wrong, and forgive when they have been wronged" (IK).

83 *That was Our argument* refers to either the argument about who should fear God's punishment and who should feel secure from it, put forth by Abraham in vv. 80–82, or the argument regarding the celestial bodies in vv. 76–78, or both (R). The Quranic account of Abraham portrays him as engaging in several rhetorical and sometimes dramatic arguments with his people regarding the truth of monotheism and the inanity of idolatry (cf. 2:258; 19:42; 21:51–67; 37:83–96). Al-Rāzī observes that the Quran frequently invokes the story of Abraham in the context of the Prophet's arguments with the Makkan idolaters (as is the case in this *sūrah*), because even the idolatrous Arabs had great respect for Abraham as their prominent and pious ancestor, and they were aware that he was held in great esteem by the Jews and Christians

We gave unto Abraham against his people. We raise in degrees whomsoever We will. Truly thy Lord is Wise, Knowing. (84) And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, each We guided. And We guided Noah before, and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron—thus do We recompense the virtuous. (85) And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias—each

as well (R); given the latter, Abraham is also invoked in Quranic arguments against certain exclusivist religious claims attributed to Jews and Christians (cf. 2:135, 140; 3:65–68). In the Quran, then, Abraham is both the master of argumentation and an important example for the Quran's own arguments against certain religious claims attributed to Jews, Christians, and idolaters. The Quran elsewhere enjoins the Prophet and the believers to argue with their religious opponents in a manner that is clear (18:22) and beautiful (16:125) and to know that *unto God belongs the conclusive argument* (v. 149).

*We raise in degrees whomsoever We will* may refer to degrees of provision and power apportioned in this life (6:165; 43:32); degrees of Divine reward for virtuous action (4:95–96; 9:20; 46:19); degrees of knowledge and wisdom (JJ), since elsewhere the idea of *degrees* or *ranks* is connected specifically with knowledge (12:76; 58:11); or degrees of prophethood, since the Quran mentions degrees or ranks among the prophets (2:253). In this context the implication is that God raised Abraham in degrees by virtue of the *argument* that He gave him against his people (R). For al-Rāzī, this verse is evidence that the literalists who disparage the use of argumentation in religion are wrong, for it is through this *argument* that God raises Abraham *in degrees* (R).

84 *And We bestowed upon him*—that is, upon Abraham—his progeny, *Isaac and Jacob,* as a reward for his obedience and sincerity in worshipping the One God, after he had left his people (IK, Ṭ). All those mentioned by name in vv. 84–86 are considered prophets in Islam. Isaac is usually mentioned along with his father, Abraham, his brother Ishmael, or his son Jacob. Isaac and Jacob are also identified together as prophets in 19:49 and also as a Divine gift to Abraham in 21:72; see commentary on 51:27–30 for the account of Abraham and his wife Sarah receiving the news of Isaac's impending birth. *And We guided Noah before,* since Noah predates Abraham. *And among his progeny* refers to the progeny of Noah, although most of the figures named in vv. 84–86 are also Abraham's progeny. For the story of Noah, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; *Sūrah* 71. For David, see 2:251; 4:163; 17:55; 21:78–80; 27:15–16; 34:10–11; 38:17–26. For Solomon, David's son, see 21:78–82; 27:15–44; 34:12–16; 38:30–40. For Job, who is said to be a descendant of Isaac through his son, Esau (Ṭ), see 21:83–84; 38:41–44. For Joseph, see *Sūrah* 12. Substantial Quranic narratives related to Moses and Aaron are found in 2:49–74; 5:20–26; 7:103–55; 10:75–90; 18:60–82; 20:9–99; 26:10–67; 27:7–14; 28:3–47; 43:46–56; 79:15–26. *Thus do We recompense the virtuous,* such as these prophets, who were recompensed because they were patient and obedient in times of trial (Ṭ).

85 Zachariah is the uncle of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as the father of John; for accounts related to him and his son, John, see 3:37–41; 19:2–15; 21:89–90. For significant passages related to Jesus, see 2:253; 3:45–59; 4:157, 171–72; 5:110–18; 19:34–36, among others. Since this verse continues from the previous one, Jesus is identified as being among the *progeny* of Noah and Abraham; as Jesus' only human parent is Mary, this identification demonstrates that progeny may be determined through the female as well as the male line (IK, JJ). This was a precedent of importance to Shiites and others who held the Prophet's descendants in particular esteem, since all of Muhammad's descendants come through the female line of his daughter Fāṭimah (Qm, Ṭ). Elias is also mentioned in 37:123–32; some commentators report that he was a nephew or descendant of Aaron (JJ, Ṭ), while others identify him with Idrīs (mentioned in 19:56–57 and 21:85), who some say was the grandfather of Noah (Ṭ, Ṭs).

was among the righteous. (86) And Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot—each We favored above the worlds. (87) And from among their fathers, and their progeny, and their brethren, We chose them and guided them unto a straight path. (88) That is the Guidance of God, with which He guides whomsoever He will among His servants. But were they to ascribe partners unto God, all that they were doing would have come to naught. (89) They are those to whom We have given the Book, judgment, and prophethood. So if they do not believe in them,

86 *Ishmael,* the first son of Abraham, is identified as both a messenger (*rasūl*) and a prophet (*nabī*) in 19:54, terms that have a technical distinction in Islamic theology. "Messengers" generally refers to prophets who bring a new religion, establish a religious community, or are recipients of a scripture that is revealed through them; the larger category of "prophet" includes messengers, but also all those sent by God to bring Divine tidings or warnings within the context of an existing religious community, rather than to establish a new one (see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions"). See 2:125–28, where Ishmael and Abraham together raise the Kaʿbah from its foundations and thus reestablish this sacred sanctuary in Arabia. *Elisha* is described as *among the excellent* in 38:48. *Jonah* is mentioned in 10:98, that is, in the *sūrah* that bears his name, although his story is told in greater detail in 37:139–48. *Lot* is a nephew of Abraham, and his story is told in several places; see 7:80–84; 11:77–83; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38; 54:33–38; 66:10. Each of these figures is described as *favored* by God *above the worlds,* which is widely understood to mean "favored above all the people of their time" (Ṭ). The phrase is also used to describe the Children of Israel as a whole (2:47, 122; 7:140).

87 In addition to the figures named in vv. 84–86, some *from among their fathers, and their progeny, and their brethren* were "chosen" and *guided,* but not all, as some of their relatives and offspring were neither chosen nor guided, and in fact some became disbelievers (JJ). To be "chosen" here means chosen for God's religion or chosen to bring His messages to people; it could also mean that God singled them out for His Love (Ṭ).

88 *That is the Guidance of God* refers to the guidance that came through the prophets mentioned in vv. 84–87. God *guides whomsoever He will* is also mentioned in 2:142, 213, 272; 10:25; 14:4; 16:93; 22:16; 24:46; 28:56; 35:8; 39:23; 42:52; 74:31. But if those who were thus guided by God were to *ascribe partners unto God,* and therefore commit the sin of *shirk,* all good deeds they did or had done would *come to naught;* that is, such people would forfeit any reward they might have attained for their deeds, since good deeds are spiritually meaningless when accompanied by *shirk.*

89 *They*—that is, the prophets mentioned in vv. 84–86—are those to whom God gave the *Book* and *judgment. Book* is a reference to scripture, and *judgment* to either the prophet's knowledge of scripture and its decrees or the prophet's innate intellect, which grants him profound understanding of the Book (Ṭ). See also 21:74, 79; 26:21; 28:14, where God grants various prophets judgment, usually in conjunction with knowledge. Somewhat analogously, the prophets are also given *the Book and Wisdom* (2:129, 151, 231; 3:81, 164; 4:54, 113; 5:110; 62:2), the latter term referring to the prophet's knowledge of the scriptures. *So if these*—that is, the Makkans—*do not believe* in the Quran and the prophethood of Muhammad, the benefit of the Quranic revelation and Muhammad's prophethood will be *entrusted . . . to a people who will not disbelieve.* The latter has been interpreted as a reference to the Makkan Emigrants and Madinan Helpers (JJ), to the Madinan Helpers specifically (Ṭ, Ṭū), or to the prophets themselves (Ṭū). Cf. 5:54: *O you who believe! Whosoever among you should renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him.*

We have entrusted them to a people who will not disbelieve in them. (90) They are those whom God has guided, so follow their guidance. Say, "I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds." (91) They did not measure God with His true measure when they said, "God has not sent down aught to any human being." Say, "Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance for mankind, which you make into parchments that you display, while hiding much? And you were taught that which you knew not, neither you nor your fathers." Say, *"Allāh,"* then leave them to play at their vain

90 The Prophet is instructed to say that he seeks no *reward,* monetary or other, for the message he brings; the same assertion is made by the Prophet in 38:86 as well as by Noah (11:29; 26:109); Hūd (11:51; 26:127); Ṣāliḥ (26:145); Lot (26:164), and Shuᶜayb (26:180). See also 36:21, where true messengers are described as *those who ask not of you any reward and who are guided.* The *reminder for the worlds* (cf. 12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 81:27) is the Quran, a description or title indicating that the relevance of its message is universal, not limited to a particular people (R).

91 Several commentators assert that this verse was revealed when a group of Jews, or by some accounts a rabbi named Mālik ibn al-Sayf (JJ, W), came to debate with the Prophet and at one point claimed that *God has not sent down aught to any human being.* In saying this, *they did not measure God with His true measure* (cf. 22:74; 39:67), since by denying God's Revelation to human beings, they did not adequately appreciate either His Majesty (Ṭ) or His Mercy toward them (Bḍ, Z). It seems more likely, however, that the verse reflects the Prophet's ongoing discourse with the idolaters of Makkah, since that is a predominant theme of this *sūrah,* and since the Jews clearly did not reject the idea that God sends down revelation to human beings (Ṭ). The Prophet is instructed to respond to this claim by asking who, then, sent down *the Book that Moses brought,* that is, the Torah, which is described as *a light and a guidance,* two concepts closely associated elsewhere with prophethood and revelation (cf. 7:157; 21:48; 42:52; 64:8).

*Which you make into parchments that you display* seems to indicate that the Prophet is here being commanded to address himself to the Jews, who recorded the Torah on parchment, but it can also be read with slightly different orthography to mean, "which they make into parchments they display" (JJ, Ṭ), suggesting that the Prophet is being commanded to speak about the Jews, not to them; some, including al-Ṭabarī, prefer this latter reading. Despite recording the Torah on *parchments* for *display,* the Jews are also said to be *hiding much* of what is in the Torah. Allusion to the claim that the Jews concealed parts of the Torah from others and from their own people is also made in 2:42, 140, 146; 3:71, 187; 5:15. Commentators often asserted that what they concealed were passages or interpretations of passages that describe the future coming of the Prophet Muhammad (Ṭ) as well as passages containing certain legal injunctions (see 5:15c).

The Prophet is instructed to say *Allāh* as a response to his own question regarding who sent down the Book that Moses brought; cf. vv. 12, 63–64, where the Prophet similarly responds to his own rhetorical questions about God in his discourse with the Makkan idolaters. Having mentioned the name *Allāh,* he is then instructed to *leave them to play at their vain discourse.* This instruction, often repeated and practiced by devout Muslims, appears also elsewhere in the Quran; see vv. 68–69 and commentary. *And you were taught that which you knew not* may be addressed to the Jews, meaning either that they learned through the Torah what they *knew not* (Aj) or that that they had been given knowledge through the Prophet in addition to what is in the Torah (Z). This sentence may also have been addressed to the believing Muslims (Ṭ). Some Sufi commentators consider *Say, "Allāh," then leave them to play at*

discourse. (92) And this is a blessed Book that We have sent down, confirming that which came before it, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are mindful of their prayers. (93) Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, "It has been revealed unto me," though naught has been revealed unto him, and one who says, "I will send down the like of what God has sent down"? If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are in the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, "Yield up your souls! This day shall you be recompensed with the punishment of humiliation for having

*their vain discourse* to be a general instruction to invoke the name *Allāh,* either inwardly or outwardly, in all situations and to abandon concern with all else, leaving everything in God's Hands (Aj, Su).

92 *This . . . blessed Book* is the Quran, which contains much benefit for humanity (R, Z). That the Quran confirms *that which came before it* is a central Quranic theme and is fundamental to the Islamic understanding of the Quran (and also of the Gospel) in relation to previous scriptures (see 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 50, 81; 4:47; 5:46, 48; 10:37; 12:111; 35:31; 46:12, 30; 61:6). *Mother of Cities* is a reference to Makkah. It was given this title because the Kaʿbah, established at its center, is said to have been the first house of worship set up for mankind (see 3:96; Bḍ, R, Z); or because, as some claim, it was the first city built by human beings; or because it represents the direction in which the people of the surrounding Arabian towns turned in prayer and to which they made pilgrimage (Bḍ, R, Z). Thus human beings gather there, just as children gather around their mother (R). Some traditions claim that Makkah earned the title Mother of Cities, because the whole earth was unfolded from beneath the Kaʿbah (Bḍ, R)—an image perhaps meant to evoke, metaphorically, the Kaʿbah's spiritual primordiality and centrality. *And those around her* may refer to the whole Arabian Peninsula or to the whole world (R). The verse asserts that *those who believe in the Hereafter*—that is, in the Day of Resurrection and Judgment—*believe in it*—that is, the Quran—indicating that belief in the reality and consequences of the Hereafter is essential to religion and faith (Z). Such people are also *mindful of their prayers,* since prayer is the pillar of the religious life (Z) and inextricably intertwined with faith. In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet says, "Whosoever leaves off prayer intentionally has disbelieved" (R), although this *ḥadīth* likely refers to those who not only neglect to pray, but consider it to be unnecessary.

93 The rhetorical question *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God* (cf. 6:21, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 29:68; 61:7) invokes a common Quranic criticism of disbelievers. "Fabricating a lie" against God is associated with the idea of creating false idols, inventing false religious beliefs, making false religious assertions (see 6:21c), and, as here, falsely claiming that one's own ideas represent Divine Revelation (see 3:93–94; 5:103; 6:138–40, 144–45; 16:116). In several places Muhammad and other prophets are also accused by their disbelieving people of having "fabricated" their messages (10:38; 11:13, 35; 21:5; 25:4; 28:36; 32:3; 34:8, 43; 42:24; 46:8). Some commentators say that this verse was revealed regarding one or both of the false Arab prophets Musaylimah (JJ, IK, Ṭ, W, Z) and al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī (Z), who were contemporary with the Prophet Muhammad.

Other reports connect this verse with a certain follower of the Prophet named ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Sarḥ, who was asked by the Prophet to record some parts of the Quranic revelation, but who eventually came to think that he himself was capable of receiving the revelation received by Muhammad. He later renounced Islam, only rejoining the community after the conquest of Makkah (W, Z). The verse is nonetheless general

spoken untruth against God, and for waxing arrogant against His signs." (94) And [God will say], "Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and you have left behind that which We had bestowed upon you. We see not with you your intercessors—those whom you claimed were partners [unto God]. Now the bond between you has been severed, and that which you once claimed has forsaken you." (95) Truly God is the Cleaver of the grain and the fruit stone. He brings forth the living from the dead, and He is the One Who brings forth the dead from the living. That is God—how, then,

and criticizes all those who would claim to be able to compose poetry or prose that was the like of the Quran (cf. 8:31; JJ, Ṭ). That *the angels stretch forth their hands* toward those *in the throes of death* (cf. 8:50, where the angels are described as *striking their faces and their backs*) and demand that they *yield up* their souls is consistent with other verses indicating the angels' role in transitioning people from life to death (see 6:61–62c). *Waxing arrogant* is an attitude associated with Satan (2:34; 7:13; 38:74–75) and the disbelievers (14:21; 16:22; 25:21; 28:39; 35:43; 37:35; 40:60; 46:20; 71:7; 74:23), and in several places, as here, *waxing arrogant* specifically describes the disbelievers' attitude toward God's signs as brought by the prophets (7:40, 133; 10:75; 23:45–46, 66–67; 39:59; 45:31).

94 After their souls are taken, God will address them, *Now you have come unto Us alone,* for although the Day of Resurrection is a day of universal judgment, every person will feel utterly alone (cf. 19:95; 22:2; 80:32–37), just as they were *created . . . the first time,* that is, alone (see 74:11c) and naked (JJ). They are also alone in the sense that they will be brought to judgment without the benefit of their worldly means, wealth, associates, and children (Z), which they strove to acquire and which gave them status and protection in worldly life (R), for they will have *left behind* the goods and provision that God *had bestowed* upon them in this world. Al-Rāzī explains that, although worldly goods are left behind and that the connection between these goods and the one who strove to acquire them is *severed,* the effort one has made to acquire knowledge of God and virtue and the good deeds done in this life are, by contrast, "sent forth" to be met again in the Hereafter, for *whatever good you send forth for your souls, you will find it with God better and greater in reward* (73:20). *Your intercessors* here refers to the false idols or deities they had ascribed as partners unto God and to whom they attributed the power of intercession with God (cf. 10:18); on intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. The Quran mentions in several verses that false idols, deities, and authorities, including Satan, will disown and "forsake" those who followed or venerated them in earthly life (see 6:24; 7:37; 14:22; 16:86–87; 25:28–29; 40:73–74).

95 That God *is the Cleaver of the grain and the fruit stone* is connected to His bringing *forth the living from the dead* in that splitting open the grain and fruit stone causes life to come forth from what is (or seems to be) dead (Ṭ). The connection between "cleaving" or "splitting" and creating is also made semantically in the Divine Name *al-Fāṭir,* "the Originator," which is derived from the root meaning "to split" (for the mention of this Divine Name, which is also the title of *Sūrah* 35, see 6:14; 12:101; 14:10; 35:1; 39:46; 42:11, where it always occurs in the context of the phrase *Originator of the heavens and the earth*). He *brings forth the living from the dead* both when He creates human beings the first time and when He brings them forth through resurrection after death. He *brings forth the dead from the living* when He causes death, or the end of their earthly existence; see also 3:27; 10:31; 30:19. In this context it is important to recall the two Divine Names *Muḥyī* (Giver of Life; 30:50; 41:39) and *Mumīt* (Bringer of Death). The living coming forth from the dead and the dead from the living can refer not only to the individual human being, who is given life and then dies, but also to the complementary movements of creation and resurrection, referred to in Islamic discourse as *mabdaʾ* (origin) and *maᶜād* (return),

are you perverted— (96) Cleaver of the dawn. He has made the night for repose, and the sun and the moon for reckoning. Such is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. (97) He it is Who has made for you the stars, that you might be guided by them amid the darkness of land and sea. We have expounded the signs for a people who know. (98) And He it is Who brought you into being from a single soul, and then [has given you] a dwelling place and a repository. We have

by which human souls, and indeed all beings, are transported between this world and the next (see 10:4c). An analogous cycle of death and life is also seen in various ways in the created order, for example, when the apparently "dead" seed comes forth from the living plant and the living plant from the "dead" seed (R, Ṭ).

96–97 The themes of "cleaving" and duality presented in v. 95 continue in these two verses. That God is the *Cleaver of the dawn* alludes to the manner in which the first light of dawn seems to cleave or split the darkness of night (Bḍ, R, Ṭ). That God created *night for repose* is invoked in several places as a mercy God has bestowed upon human beings (cf. 10:67; 25:47; 27:86; 28:73; 40:61; 78:9), as is His having created the sun and moon to be useful *for reckoning* time (2:189c; 10:5; 17:12) and determining the direction of the *qiblah* (R). After invoking the sun and the moon as means of temporal reckoning, v. 97 mentions the stars as a means of spatial orientation by which people can be guided (see also 16:16) in the absence of the sun and the moon (R), that is, *amid the darkness of land and sea,* referring to either the physical darkness of the night or, symbolically, the moral and intellectual darkness of error and misguidance (Ṭ). If the *darkness of land and sea* refers to the darkness of moral and intellectual confusion or error, the sun, moon, and stars can represent different levels of moral guidance and spiritual illumination (see 6:76–78c). The Quran frequently invokes the sun, moon, and stars together: for example, in Abraham's argument in vv. 76–78 and in Joseph's dream about his father and brothers (12:4). These three kinds of celestial bodies are also described as *made subservient by His Command* (7:54; 16:12) and as prostrating to Him (22:18); see also 55:5–6.

God *expounded the signs* (cf. 6:55, 97–98, 126; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 30:28; 41:3; 41:44); that is, He explained them in detail, *for a people who know,* meaning those possessing intellect, who think and reflect correctly and who reason from sensory realities to intellectual ones and from the seen to the unseen (R, Ṭs); cf. v. 98, where the signs are expounded *for a people who understand.*

98 For the idea that God brings humanity *into being from a single soul,* see 4:1c.

Different meanings have been given for *dwelling place* (*mustaqarr*) and *repository* (*mustawdaʿ*), which are also juxtaposed in 11:6: *There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, but that its provision lies with God. And He knows its dwelling place and its repository.* In keeping with the overall theme of life and death, creation and resurrection in this part of the *sūrah,* some consider *dwelling place* to refer to the womb and *repository* to the grave (Ṭ, Z); the womb and the grave each represent a physical space in which the soul transitions from one world to the next—the first being the locus for the descent of the soul from the spiritual to the earthly realm, and the second being the site from which it is resurrected. The most common interpretation, however, is that *repository* refers to the loins of the male, and *dwelling place* to the female womb (IK, R, Ṭ, Z) or, much less commonly, the reverse (R). Still others, however, interpret *dwelling place* as one's temporary dwelling on earth, and *repository* as one's permanent place with God (Ṭ), or inversely, that *repository* is one's temporary home on earth, which is always subject to change, and *dwelling place* is one's place in the next world, because of the ultimate "permanence" of one's state in the Hereafter (R). Taken together, the various interpretations evoke the journey of the soul between its transitory life in this world and its "permanent" abode in the next.

These are signs *expounded . . . for a people who understand,* that is, for a people willing to

expounded the signs for a people who understand. (99) And He it is Who sends down water from the sky. Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant, and from it We bring forth vegetation, from which We bring forth grain in closely packed rows; and from the date palm and from its sheaths, [We bring forth] clusters of dates hanging low, and gardens of grapes, olives, and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Look upon their fruits, as they grow and ripen! Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. (100) They make the jinn partners unto God, though He created them, and falsely attribute sons and daughters to Him, without any knowledge. Glory be to Him! Exalted is He

understand or endowed by God with the power of understanding (R). Here and elsewhere, references to God's having *expounded the signs* can be understood as encouraging contemplation and reflection (Ṭs).

99 God's sending down *water from the sky* is repeatedly mentioned as a sign of Divine Power and Benevolence through which He revives the earth (16:65; 22:63; 29:63; 30:24; 43:11), provides drink for human beings (15:22), and gives them a means to "purify" themselves and *remove the defilement of Satan* (8:11). Here and in several other places, it is specifically cited as the means by which diverse crops and fruits come forth from the earth (see v. 141, whose language is very similar to the present verse, as well as 2:22; 14:32; 16:10–11; 20:53; 23:18–19; 31:10; 35:27; 39:21; 50:9–10; 78:14–16). The verse begins with a reference to God in the third person (*He it is Who sends down water*), but it continues with God speaking in the first-person plural (*Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant*). The juxtaposition of the more distant third person for God's sending down water from above with the more direct and intimate first person for God's bringing forth every plant simultaneously evokes God's Transcendence relative to the earthly realm and His Immanence in all of its minute workings.

The verse encourages wonder that such diverse fruits and produce come forth after being watered with the same water (cf. 13:4; Bḍ; Z) and evokes God's ability to bring forth diversity and multiplicity from singularity, as when He creates the multiplicity of human beings from a *single soul* (v. 98; for a fuller discussion, see 4:1c). The produce mentioned here: *grain* (36:33; 50:9; 55:12; 78:15; 80:27), the *date palm* and *dates* (16:67; 36:34; 50:10; 55:11, 68; 80:29), *grapes* and their vines (16:67; 36:34; 80:28), *olives* (80:29), and *pomegranates* (55:68) are also found in other verses as examples of God's bountiful provision in the world and, in some cases, in the heavenly Garden. For the idea that the fruits of the earth and of Paradise are symbolically analogous or comparable, see 2:25c. *Clusters of dates hanging low* suggests both bounty and ease, as the fruit hangs low when it is heavy and ripe, thus making it easily accessible (cf. 55:54). The produce is *like unto one another and yet not alike,* indicating the resemblance certain plants have to one another, even when their produce is very different (Bḍ, JJ), and further evoking the theme of the interwoven nature of oneness and multiplicity in creation.

*Truly in that are signs* of God's Oneness, Power, and Wisdom (Bḍ), *for a people who believe,* a phrase implicitly linked to *a people who know* in v. 97 and *a people who understand* in v. 98. Those who believe are the real beneficiaries of these *signs,* for they alone are able to see in these signs the proofs of Divine Power and Oneness, whereas those who disbelieve have hearts that are "sealed" against such understanding (Ṭ; cf. 6:46c; 2:26, where the disbelievers are unable to grasp the meaning of God's parables).

100 For an extended discussion of the jinn, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72. Jinn cannot be understood as partners to God, any more than celestial bodies can (see vv. 76–78), because they too are created. According to 55:15, God *created jinn from smokeless fire,* and in 7:12 and 38:76, Satan

above that which they ascribe! (101) The Unique Originator of the heavens and the earth! How should He have a child when He has no consort, and He created all things, and He is Knower of all things? (102) That is God, your Lord, there is no god but He, Creator of all things. So worship Him. And He is Guardian over all things. (103) Sight comprehends Him not, but He compre-

adduces his creation from fire as an argument for his superiority over human beings. People *make the jinn*—and by extension the angels and other subtle beings who are nonetheless created by God (R)—*partners unto God* when they worship or venerate them, when they consider them to be biologically related to God (cf. 37:158; R), or when they follow the "whisperings" (114:4–6) of satans and obey them (cf. v. 121; Bḍ, R). Al-Rāzī considered this verse to be a criticism of the Zoroastrian belief in a God of goodness and light, who creates all good things, and a god of evil and darkness, who creates evil things, thus suggesting that the latter is a cocreator with God (R).

People also *attribute sons and daughters to Him,* which may refer to the Quranic criticism of Christians for having done so with regard to Christ (5:17, 72; 9:30; 19:35; see also 9:30, where certain Jews are said to have considered Ezra to be a son of God) as well as to the idolaters who considered some of the female deities they worshipped or certain angels to be God's "daughters" (16:57; 37:149; 43:16; 52:39; 53:27); see 2:116c; 4:117–19c. That God is *Exalted . . . above that which they ascribe* means that He is above having offspring (JJ).

101–2 *The Unique Originator* translates *Badīʿ,* which literally means what is unique, unprecedented, and without peer or equal. It can also mean one who brings something into existence for the first time, and this is the meaning reflected in the translation here and in 2:117. In v. 101, the impossibility of God having a child is argued on the basis that He has *no consort* (*ṣāḥibah*), meaning no female partner through whom He could beget offspring (see 72:3). In the earthly realm, offspring result from the sexual union of a male and a female of the same species, but no such *consort* or partner could be ascribed to God, for He transcends all species (Z), and *naught is like unto Him* (42:12). Moreover, God creates by fiat, by saying *"Be!" and it is* (2:117; 3:47, 59; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68), not through a partner or by means of a process like biological conception and birth. Finally, siring offspring is a bodily process, requiring that "part" of the male body (namely, sperm) be separated from him and transferred to the body of the female; since God has no body and no "parts," such a process cannot be ascribed to Him (R, Z).

In v. 102, God's Oneness and His uniqueness as Creator is affirmed. The statement in v. 102 that God *is Creator of all things* is understood by Ashʿarites, who subscribed to a voluntarist perspective, as extending also to human acts, and this interpretation is the basis of their belief that God is the author of all human acts (R). Muʿtazilites, however, argued that the statement that God is *Creator of all things* is immediately followed by the command *So worship Him,* which suggests that human acts are not created by God, for it would be purposeless, from their perspective, for God to command human beings to perform an act that He Himself had already created (R).

103 The word *comprehends* here translates *yudriku,* which can also mean to overtake, reach, encompass, or perceive. This verse has much relevance for the theological debate over whether human beings can "see" God. Some Quranic verses indicate that it is impossible to "see God openly" and inappropriate to ask to do so (cf. 2:55; 7:143), and the present verse could be read to suggest the same. Some have argued that this verse clearly indicates that human beings cannot see God in any way, in this world or the next—a position championed by the Muʿtazilite school. The Muʿtazilite commentator al-Zamakhsharī understands this verse to mean that no human sight can attach itself to God and that He cannot be perceived in such a manner, since human sight attaches itself only to forms and bodies (Z). God has no body or form—indeed, He transcends

hends all sight. And He is the Subtle, the Aware. (104) Insight has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever sees clearly, it is to the benefit of his own soul. And whosoever is blind, it is to its detriment, and I am not a keeper over you.

all forms—and thus transcends the possibility of being seen. This interpretation was challenged by the Ashʿarites, some of whom argued that God is not essentially and completely impervious to all perception, since He can see Himself (*He comprehends all sight*), and that although the statement *sight comprehends Him not* indicates that not all sights can perceive Him, it does not necessarily indicate that no sight can perceive Him (R).

Some have posited that God may endow the righteous believers with a "sixth sense" on the Day of Resurrection by which they will be able to see God (R), and Sufi commentators suggest that though human *sight* cannot comprehend God, God comprehends Himself. Thus it may be that human beings are able to see God through a kind of vision acquired from God Himself (Aj, Bq) or that God sees Himself through them. Some Shiite commentators, basing themselves upon traditions attributed to the fifth, sixth, and eighth Imams, asserted that *sight* here does not refer to physical vision at all, but rather to the imagination or the vision of the heart, which cannot, however, "comprehend" or encompass God in His totality (Kā); Sufis also speak of the "eye of the heart" as a faculty for seeing God.

The Ashʿarites and *Ḥadīth* scholars also argued that the righteous believers would see God in the Hereafter on the basis of 75:22–23, *Faces that day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord,* as well as a widely transmitted *ḥadīth* that says, "Verily you will see your Lord on the Day of Resurrection, as you see the moon when it is full, and as you see the sun when it is not obscured by clouds" (Ṭ). Moreover, 83:15 describes sinful disbelievers as being *veiled from their Lord,* suggesting to some that the righteous believers will not be veiled and will thus be able to see their Lord. Given such support for the possibility of seeing God in the Quran and *Ḥadīth,* some have argued that the present verse only precludes the possibility that human sight could fully "comprehend" or encompass Him (R, Ṭ). If *sight* is understood as a metonym for knowledge, then such an interpretation is supported by, for example, 20:110: *He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they encompass Him not in knowledge.* On the basis of 75:22, others have suggested that seeing God was possible in the next life, but not in earthly life (JJ), in contrast to the view of some Sufi authorities.

God is *the Subtle,* and thus cannot be perceived by physical vision, but Himself possesses the subtle and essential reality of "sight" and so "comprehends" all sights and realities, including the subtle ones not accessible to human vision (Z). *The Subtle* translates *al-Laṭīf,* which can also mean "gentle" or "kind," and Islamic tradition has generally understood the Divine Name *al-Laṭīf* to encompass both meanings. In most Quranic contexts, however, it is translated "Subtle" (12:100; 22:63; 31:16; 33:34; 67:14) and is often paired, as here, with the Divine Name *al-Khabīr,* meaning *the Aware,* thus indicating a relationship between subtlety and knowledge that is also suggested by other elements of the present verse. For the one exception, see 42:19, where *Laṭīf* should be translated "kind": *God is kind unto His servants.*

104 *Insight,* literally "insights," translates *baṣāʾir* (sing. *baṣīrah*), which is derived from the same root as *sight* in the previous verse. Some commentators say that *sight* refers to the vision of the physical eye, but *insight* (*baṣīrah*) refers to the "eye of the heart" (Aj) or to the "light of the heart," from which all vision derives (Z). Similarly, others gloss *insight* as "guidance" in the form of the vision of the heart that leads one toward the truth of religion (Ṭ). "Seeing clearly" is opposed to "blindness" in this verse, as it is elsewhere (6:50; 11:24; 13:16; 35:19; 40:58), and in all such cases it refers to spiritual, rather than physical "seeing" and "blindness" (cf. 22:46). *Whosoever sees clearly*—that is, understands the proofs and arguments for God's Oneness and has faith in the truth of the message brought by the Prophet—*it is to the benefit of his own soul,* or literally, "it is for himself"—that is, he shall reap the reward for it (Ṭ); *whosoever is blind* to these matters, *it is to its detriment,* that is, "to the detriment of his soul" or literally, "against him."

(105) Thus do We vary the signs, lest they should say, "You have studied," and that We might make it clear for a people who know. (106) Follow that which has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord—there is no god but He—and turn away from the idolaters. (107) Had God willed, they would not have ascribed partners unto God. We have not made thee a keeper over them, nor art thou their guardian. (108) Do not revile those whom they call upon apart from God, lest they should revile God out of enmity, without any knowledge. Thus have We made the deeds of every community seem fair unto them. Then unto their Lord shall be

It is understood to be the Prophet who says, *I am not a keeper over you* (see also 4:80; 11:86; 42:48), the implication being that God, not the Prophet, is their *keeper* (Aj, Ṭ).

105 For *vary the signs,* see 6:46c. Here this phrase refers to the various arguments and proofs for God's Oneness presented up to this point in the *sūrah* (Ṭ). The idolaters apparently accused the Prophet of having simply *studied* with knowledgeable people among the People of the Book or of having merely read their scriptures. See 16:103: *Indeed, We know that they say, "He has merely been taught by a human being." The tongue of the one whom they falsely implicate is foreign, while this is [in] a clear, Arabic tongue.* See also 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; and 83:13, where the idolaters similarly dismiss the revelations received by the Prophet as merely *fables of those of old,* referring to the same idea.

106–7 V. 106 addresses the Prophet, indicating that after having given many proofs and arguments for God's Oneness to this point in the *sūrah,* he should simply *turn away from the idolaters* if they do not accept the message, for *had God willed, they would not have ascribed partners unto God.* These verses reinforce the idea in v. 104 that the Prophet has no power over, and thus no responsibility for, those who reject the message he has been charged to deliver. *Insight* comes *from your Lord* (v. 104); thus the matter of accepting or rejecting the message brought by the Prophet is the moral responsibility of the individual receiving it, but is also ultimately a matter that lies in God's Hands (cf. 6:66–67c). See also 6:148 and 16:35, where the idolaters themselves claim that their practice of ascribing partners to God was a matter of Divine Will, although this is understood to be an attempt to avoid their own responsibility for spiritual error and deflect punishment from themselves, and thus it is not accepted.

108 The Muslims in Makkah used to revile the gods worshipped by the idolaters—perhaps after the revelation of 21:98, in which the idols are described as *fuel for Hell* (Z)—and the idolaters would revile Allah in response. The leaders of the Quraysh went to the Prophet's uncle, Abū Ṭālib, and asked him to arrange an agreement with Muhammad, according to which each side would cease reviling the God or gods of the other. The Prophet initially said that he would agree to such an arrangement only if they would testify that "there is no god but God." The idolaters refused; this verse was then revealed, instructing the believers to refrain from reviling the Makkan gods (Ṭ, W). This was so that the Muslims would not become the "cause" of idolaters uttering sinful things against God in their ignorance (*without any knowledge;* R, Ṭ, Z). Although reviling idols may seem a proper religious act, this verse indicates that if doing so causes others to sin or to become more entrenched in their opposition to God and the messages brought by the prophets, then it does not serve the larger purpose of bringing people to religious rectitude; cf. 20:44, where Moses and Aaron are instructed to *speak gently* to Pharaoh in order to increase the likelihood that he would accept the message they brought. Al-Rāzī doubts that the Makkans were directly reviling Allah, since even the idolaters among them believed in His existence, and suggests that the verse refers to their invoking the idea of Fate (and consequently denying Divine causality) or to

their return, and He will inform them of that which they used to do. (109) They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that were a sign to come unto them, they would surely believe in it. Say, "Signs are with God alone." What will make you realize that, even if they were to come, they would still not believe? (110) We shall cause their hearts and their sight to waver, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We shall leave them to wander confused in their rebellion.

their reviling the Prophet, which was a way of indirectly reviling God (R).

The idea that people's actions, even wrong actions, are *made* to *seem fair unto them* is repeated in over a dozen places in the Quran. In some cases it is unclear who or what makes their actions "seem fair" to them (6:122; 9:37; 13:33; 40:37; 47:14); in several places it is Satan (6:43; 8:48; 15:39; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38), while other verses, including the present one, suggest that it is God who does this, perhaps as a test (cf. 10:12; 27:4; 41:25). God may "make their actions seem fair" by granting them prosperity or respite from punishment, which leads them to think that God has approved of their actions (cf. 3:178; 7:95; 23:55–56; 34:35–37), or by leading them to think that God had willed or commanded them to engage in corrupt religious practices (cf. 6:148; 7:28; 16:35), perhaps because their fathers had done so (2:170; 5:104; 7:70; 11:62). Upon *their return* to God after death, *He will inform them of that which they used to do* (see also 5:105; 6:60; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 29:8; 31:15; 39:7; 62:8); that is, all human beings will be confronted with their deeds on the Day of Resurrection.

109 The disbelievers and hypocrites elsewhere "swear solemn oaths" when they wish to deceive or make excuses, as in 35:42: *And they swore by God their most solemn oaths that, were a warner to come unto them, they would be more rightly guided than any of the communities. And when a warner came unto them, it increased them in naught but aversion* (cf. 5:53; 24:53). The idea that miraculous signs (or warnings) ultimately have no effect on entrenched disbelievers is mentioned or suggested in many Quranic verses; see 6:7c. The disbelievers claim to want "signs," but the Prophet is instructed to respond, *Signs are with God alone,* since *it was not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave* (13:38; 40:78). Some reports connect the present verse to an incident in which the Makkan idolaters invoked the Quranic accounts of Moses' and Jesus' miracles, as told to them by the Prophet, and then asked the Prophet to perform a similarly impressive miracle by turning Mt. Ṣafā (a sacred hill near the Kaᶜbah and the site of one of the *ḥajj* rituals; see 2:158) into gold. The Prophet began supplicating for this miracle, but was then informed by the Archangel Gabriel that such extraordinary signs were often followed by terrible punishment if people refused to believe in them (as suggested in the following verse), and so the Prophet ceased his supplication (IK, Ṭ, W); see 5:114–15c; 8:23c.

110 *We shall cause their hearts and their sight to waver,* that is, to move from one thought or state to another. *We shall cause . . . to waver* translates *nuqallibu,* which means to turn something over repeatedly. The use of this term connects the present verse with two well-known *aḥādīth.* According to one, "The heart of the believer is between two fingers of the Compassionate; He turns it about (*yuqallibuhu*) as He wills." In the other, the Prophet supplicates, "O Turner of hearts and sights (*Muqallib al-qulūb wa'l-abṣār*)! Make my heart firm in Thy religion" (R). Although the present verse concerns neither the "believer" nor the Prophet, but rather disbelievers, some argue that nonetheless both the *aḥādīth* and the verse suggest God's complete power over human thought and action (R). Because the verse concerns the disbelievers specifically, however, it may also be related to the many places in the Quran where God is said to set a "seal" upon hearts, eyes, and/or ears, such that the disbelievers and wrongdoers cannot perceive or understand the religious warnings or truths that come to them (Z; see 2:7c; 6:46c). In support of this interpretation, the verse indicates that God "causes their hearts to waver" because *they did not believe in it the first time,* suggesting that there are

(111) Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and the dead were to speak to them, and We were to gather all things in front of them, they would still not believe, unless God wills. But most of them are ignorant. (112) Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn, who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive. Had thy Lord willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate, (113) so that the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter may incline toward it, and be content with it, and so commit that which they commit.

some who have an intrinsic resistance to the message, a resistance that perhaps can never be overcome in this world. God allows the disbelievers to *wander confused in their rebellion,* despite the signs and warnings He brings them; that is, He neither interferes with their choice to reject religion and pursue their worldly desires, nor cuts short their earthly life to prevent their further wandering (R; see also 2:15; 7:186; 10:11; 23:75).

111 A further response to the Makkans' implied request for a miraculous sign (v. 109), this verse reinforces the repeated Quranic reminder that even the most tremendous of signs, such as sending down an angel (see vv. 8–9 and commentary), causing the dead to speak (cf. 13:31), or gathering *all things in front of them,* would have no effect *unless God wills.* See 10:100: *It is not for a soul to believe, save by God's Leave.* To *gather all things in front of them* might also be translated "to gather all things in droves" (JJ, Ṭ).

112 *We have made for every prophet an enemy* (cf. 25:31) indicates that the opposition experienced by Muhammad and the other prophets was a general rule and had a Divine purpose (Bḍ). These enemies of the prophets are described as *satans.* Though Satan and satans (in the plural) are usually understood to refer to the Devil and his assistants and to the evil jinn, this verse indicates that human beings who seek to thwart religion and its messengers can also be called *satans.* The early *Ḥadīth* scholar Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. second/eighth century) used to say that the satans among people were worse than the satans among the jinn, for the satans who were jinn were driven away when he called out a formula seeking refuge in God from them, but the human satans persisted (Th). These "satans," here either humans or jinn, *inspire each other with flowery discourse;* that is, they whisper to each other beautiful but vain words (Ṭ), seeking to lead one another farther astray. For the moral danger of "vain discourse" see 6:68c; and for the whispering of jinn and human beings, see 7:20; 20:120; 114:1–6, and also 50:16, where people are subject to the whisperings of their own soul.

Just as God created these *satans,* He also allows them to deceive one another as well as others, for *had thy Lord willed, they would not have done so.* The Prophet is thus instructed to *leave them,* rather than aggressively confront them, *and that which they fabricate,* that is, the false religious thinking to which they incline. Although "leaving" the disbelievers in this way may allow them to continue to "wander" in their moral error and confusion (v. 110; see also 2:15; 7:186; 10:11; 27:4), confronting them aggressively may serve only to harden their resistance to the Quranic message, as suggested in v. 108: *Do not revile those whom they call upon apart from God, lest they should revile God out of enmity.*

113 *Those who believe not in the Hereafter* may refer to disbelievers generally, since some commentators consider belief in the Hereafter to be one of the primary foundations of all religious belief (see 6:92c). The Prophet is told to *leave* such people (v. 112), so that their hearts *may incline toward it,* that is, so that they may continue to pursue their oppositional and deceitful course of action toward the Prophet and the Quranic message. That they are *content with* their wrongful behavior suggests the idea in v. 108 and elsewhere that the disbelievers come to see their deeds as *fair,* meaning

(114) [Say,] "Shall I seek a judge apart from God, when it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book, expounded?" Those unto whom We have given the Book know that it has been sent down from thy Lord in truth; so be not among the doubters. (115) The Word of thy Lord is fulfilled in truth and justice. None

right and good, and so are pleased with themselves. As a result, the disbelievers are left unimpeded by the Prophet (who has been told to "leave them" in v. 112) and by their own conscience (which views their actions as "fair"), and thus they continue to *commit that which they commit.* For Ashʿarite commentators, such as al-Rāzī, this verse serves as an argument for their view that God exercises control over human beings' inclinations toward either belief or disbelief (R). Muʿtazilites, by contrast, argue that verses such as the present one, which suggest that God inclines disbelievers toward disbelief, should be interpreted as referring to one of the means by which God punishes disbelievers and wrongdoers for their rejection of faith and their evil deeds; that is, disbelief and wrongdoing effectively serve as an impetus to entrench oneself in more of the same, while the lack of immediate, tangible punishment can serve to encourage the disbelievers and give them false assurances of their own rectitude or at least of their freedom from any negative consequences for their actions.

114 Here, as elsewhere, the Quran connects proper judgment among human beings directly to the sending down of *the Book* (see also 2:213; 3:23; 4:105; 5:43–49). Most such connections between judgment and the Book, however, occur in Madinan verses, where the context concerns the central need to rely upon the Quran as well as the scriptures of the People of the Book as the basis for judgment among human beings in worldly affairs. The present verse occurs in a Makkan context, however, and relates to the ongoing discussion in this *sūrah* of the Makkans' lack of acceptance of the Prophet and the message he brought and their request for a "sign" or miracle by which they might be certain of the truth of his prophethood. *Shall I seek a judge apart from God, when it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book* can thus mean, "Should I seek a miraculous sign apart from God's having sent down this Quran?" since the Quran itself, with its powerful and inimitable language and message (cf. 2:24; 10:38), is considered by Muslims to be the primary "evidentiary miracle" (*muʿjizah*) proving the truth of Muhammad's prophethood (Bḍ, Z). The verse may also be meant to question why the Prophet or his people should need some other way to judge right from wrong, truth from falsehood, when God has *sent down . . . the Book,* in which the distinction between these matters is *expounded,* that is, explained in detail (Bḍ, R). For the description of the Book as *expounded,* see 6:55c.

Those *unto whom We have given the Book* refers to the People of the Book, Jews and Christians in particular, whose scriptures are considered to support the truth of Muhammad's prophethood, either because they are believed to describe or name him specifically (cf. 7:157; 61:6) or because the Quranic message is in accord with the essential elements of the Jewish and Christian scriptures (Bḍ, Z). See also 10:94: *So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask those who recite the Book before thee. The truth has certainly come unto thee from thy Lord. So be thou not among the doubters.* The warning *so be not among the doubters* (in the present verse as well as in 10:94) may be addressed to the Prophet (cf. 2:147; 3:60; 11:17), since the imperative is in the second-person singular (*lā takūnanna*), but it may also be addressed to the Prophet's community as a whole or in fact to all people (Bḍ, R).

115 *The Word of thy Lord is fulfilled* may mean that God completes His Revelation—namely, the Quran—as a whole (Ṭ); see 6:154, where the same is said of the *Book* given to *Moses,* as well as 9:32 and 61:8, where it is said that *God completes His Light,* which is commonly understood to mean His Guidance or Revelation. Many commentators interpret *the Word of thy Lord* here to refer collectively to the commands, prohibitions, promises, threats, rewards, and punishments contained in the Quran, indicating that they will all

alters His Words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing. (116) Wert thou to obey most of those on earth, they would lead thee astray from the way of God; they follow naught but conjecture, and they do but surmise. (117) Surely thy Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided. (118) So eat of that over which the Name of God has been invoked, if you are believers in His signs. (119) What ails you that you eat not that over which the Name of God has been invoked, when He has expounded for you that which He has forbidden you, unless you are compelled thereto? Indeed, many lead astray through their own caprices, without any knowledge. Surely thy Lord

be fulfilled (Q, R, Ṭ, Z); see 7:137 and 11:119 for contexts in which similar statements are understood in this way. The Quran is *fulfilled in truth;* that is, its accounts and promises are perfectly true, and it is *fulfilled in . . . justice,* in that its rulings and judgments represent perfect justice (Bḍ). For *none alters His Words,* see v. 34 as well as 10:15, 64; 18:27.

116–17 The Prophet is warned in several places not to obey the disbelievers, hypocrites, and wrongdoers (18:28; 25:52; 33:1, 48; 68:8, 10; 76:24; 96:19). Erroneous religious practices and beliefs, especially those of idolaters, are said here and elsewhere to be the result of "following conjecture" and "surmising" rather than certain knowledge (6:148; 10:66; 38:27; 45:24; 53:23). The illiterate among the People of the Book and those who think that Jesus was slain are also said to follow *conjecture* (2:78; 4:157). See 10:36 and 53:28, where *conjecture does not avail against the truth in the least.* The present verses directly precede a discussion of dietary law (in vv. 118–21), and some commentators have said that the warning to the Prophet about obeying others pertained to the idolaters' invitation to him to eat food that had been consecrated to their false deities (Ṭ). The "conjecture" and "surmising" mentioned in v. 116 may also refer to the claim of some idolaters that it was acceptable to eat carrion, since "that which God has killed is worthier to be eaten than that which you have killed" (Sy, Z). Others understand the warning more generally to mean that *most of those on earth* follow their whims or blindly follow what their fathers have taught them, which leads them to *stray from His way* (v. 117), rather than following true guidance (R, Z).

118–19 In these verses, a single dietary rule is put forth, namely, that one should eat only food *over which the Name of God has been invoked,* which some interpret as a condition for all kinds of food that one would eat (Q, Ṭ), but which in the case of meat would forbid the eating of carrion, since God's Name would not have been invoked over it before it died (R; see 6:116–17c, where a debate over the eating of carrion is reported to be the reason for the revelation of the verses). The importance of invoking God's Name over the animals one slaughters for meat is also mentioned in 5:2, where it is embedded in a more complex set of restrictions concerning meat. Both the invocation of God's Name over the animals to be slaughtered and the ritual manner of slaughtering them make the meat *ḥalāl,* or permissible for Muslims to eat. Dietary restrictions, including an explicit prohibition against eating carrion, are also mentioned in 2:172–73; 5:3–5; 16:114–15, where, as here, an exception is made for those who are *compelled* by necessity (*ḍarūrah*), as a result of hunger, and need to eat food normally considered unlawful. For a fuller discussion of dietary laws, see 5:3–5c.

Some commentators have suggested that the statement that God *has expounded for you that which He has forbidden you* refers to the more detailed dietary laws as found in 5:3–5 (Ṭ), although these detailed laws were revealed in Madinah, while the present verse was revealed earlier in Makkah (Q). Given that the fuller dietary laws

is He Who knows best the transgressors. (120) Forsake sin, both outward and inward. Surely those who commit sin shall be recompensed for that which they used to do. (121) And eat not of that over which the Name of God has not been invoked; truly it is iniquity. Indeed, the satans inspire their friends to dispute

were revealed only later in Madinah, al-Qurṭubī suggests the possibility that *He has expounded for you that which He has forbidden* should be understood to mean, "He will expound for you." Those who *lead astray through their own caprices* may refer to those who tried to convince the Prophet and his followers that it was better to eat carrion (which was, in a sense, killed by God), than to eat what their own hands had slaughtered (Q). They lead astray by following *their own caprices* and *without any knowledge,* since their arguments are based upon *conjecture* and *surmise* (see v. 116).

120 *Sin, both outward and inward* refers, respectively, to sin committed publicly and sin committed secretly or in private, or to sin committed with the limbs and sin committed in the heart (Bḍ, Su). *Inward* sin may also refer to the formulation of an intention to sin (Ṭ). Some commentators consider the *outward* and *inward* sin mentioned here to refer specifically to sexual indecencies committed openly or secretly; see 6:151 (*Approach not indecencies, whether outward or inward*) and 7:33 (*Say, "My Lord has only forbidden indecencies—both outward and inward*), where *indecencies* (*fawāḥish*) in both verses is understood to refer to sexual transgression. Some have thus interpreted *outward* sin in the present verse to refer to marrying women who are not permitted to be taken as wives (as described in 4:22–24) and *inward* sin as a reference to adultery and fornication; others have suggested that *outward* sin refers to open adultery or fornication, and *inward* sin to the taking of secret paramours (cf. 4:25; 5:5)—the latter of which was reportedly tolerated by Arabs in the pre-Islamic period (Q, Ṭ). The language of the verse is general, however, and gives no indication that it is meant to refer to specific kinds of sin (Q, Ṭ); moreover, if it were meant to refer to a particular kind of sin or transgression, it would more likely refer to the transgression of dietary laws, since the verse is situated among verses concerned with eating food over which the Name of God has been mentioned (Ṭ). Some Sufi commentary interprets outward sin as seeking after the goods of this world, and inward sin as seeking after the good things of Paradise, both of which distract one from concentration on God, the Real (Su).

121 This verse, like vv. 118–19, can be understood generally to mean that believers should not eat any food (meat or otherwise) *over which the Name of God has not been invoked,* including both the meat of animals slaughtered in the name of false deities or according to pagan practices (see 2:173; 5:3; 16:114–15) and carrion, since the animal would have been killed without God's Name having been invoked over it (JJ, Ṭ). However, the meat of animals slaughtered by Muslims who simply neglect or forget to invoke God's Name during the slaughtering is generally considered licit to consume. Among the founders of the Sunni schools of jurisprudence, Mālik and al-Shāfiᶜī considered it legitimate to consume such meat whether the omission of God's Name was inadvertent or deliberate (JJ, Q, Z), while Abū Ḥanīfah and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) held that if the omission was deliberate, one should not eat the meat (Q, Z).

Despite its general application, this verse is likely a continuing response to the idolaters' argument for the legitimacy of eating carrion, namely, that carrion is meat that has been ultimately "slaughtered by God," even if it effectively comes about through human agency (Q, Ṭ; see 6:116–17c; 6:118–19). According to some accounts, the idolaters' argument appeared persuasive to some of the Prophet's Companions (W), and the present verse was thus revealed to make it clear that eating *that over which the Name of God has not been invoked* is *iniquity,* that is, a clear sin and an act of disobedience (Ṭ). That *the satans,* who may here be human beings or jinn (see 6:71–72c; 6:112), *inspire their friends to dispute with you* can be understood to mean, generally, that those who engage in such disingenuous debate concerning God's Law encourage and incite one another in their disputations (Ṭ). Some reports claimed that

with you, and if you obey them, you are surely idolaters. (122) Is he who was dead, and to whom We give life, making for him a light by which to walk among mankind, like unto one who is in darkness from which he does not emerge? Thus for the disbelievers, what they used to do was made to seem fair unto them. (123) And thus have We made great ones among the guilty in every town, that they may plot therein. But they only plot against themselves, though they

the satans who *inspire their friends to dispute with you* referred to certain Persian Zoroastrians, allied with the Quraysh, who formulated the argument regarding carrion mentioned above and encouraged the idolaters to use it against the Prophet (Ṭ, W), or that the verse concerned a group of Jews who similarly argued with the Prophet on the issue of eating carrion (Q, Ṭ). Most commentators, however, subscribed to the more general interpretation of the verse mentioned above.

122 Cf. 35:22; 39:22. See also 2:28c and 6:95c, where God's bringing forth the living from the dead can be a reference to either original creation or resurrection after death. Here, however, God's giving "life" to one *who was dead* is a metaphor for spiritual awakening, and it is followed by the mention of God's making for him *a light by which to walk among mankind,* that is, a source of religious guidance, or perhaps the Quran specifically (Ṭ). Light is a common Quranic symbol for spiritual guidance and revelation, usually in this life (cf. 5:15; 7:157; 14:1; 21:48; 39:22; 42:52; 64:8), although the Quran also describes the righteous believers in the Hereafter being guided by a light that radiates before them (57:12; 66:8). For the idea of light as a symbol for the means by which one might *walk among mankind*—that is, with guidance in the world—see 57:28: *O you who believe! Reverence God and believe in His Messenger; He will give you a twofold portion of His Mercy, make a light for you by which you may walk, and forgive you;* as well as several places where God or His messengers are said to bring people out of darkness into light (2:257; 5:16; 14:5; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11). For a fuller discussion of the meaning of light and darkness (lit. "darknesses"), see 6:1c; 24:35c. Al-Rāzī interprets the one to whom God "gives life" as a reference to a person whose soul God has prepared to receive the spiritual guidance of revelation, and the *light by which to walk among mankind* as revelation itself.

Although the verse is best understood as a metaphorical comparison between believers and disbelievers generally, it was reportedly revealed in relation to two of the leaders of the Quraysh: Abū Jahl, one of the Prophet's most determined enemies who was killed at the Battle of Badr (2/624), and Ḥamzah, the Prophet's uncle and strong supporter, who embraced Islam in Makkah, migrated to Madinah, and was killed at the Battle of Uḥud (3/625). According to one report, after Abū Jahl insulted the Prophet, the powerful and respected Ḥamzah came to the defense of his nephew and openly embraced Islam. This verse was then revealed, indicating that Ḥamzah, *who was dead,* but was then given "life" and *a light by which to walk among mankind,* cannot be compared with Abū Jahl, *who is in darkness from which he does not emerge* (R, W). Other reports consider the one who is given a *light by which to walk among mankind* a reference to the Prophet himself (R); or to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who had initially opposed the message brought by the Prophet, but converted in Makkah and became one of the Prophet's strongest supporters and eventually the second Caliph (R, Ṭ, Ṭs); or to ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, an early Companion who later become a close supporter of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib after the Prophet's death, and who died fighting with ʿAlī at the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 37/657 (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). That the actions of the disbelievers are *made to seem fair unto them* is found in several places in the Quran, including in vv. 43, 108, and 137 of this *sūrah;* see 6:108c for a fuller discussion.

123 The *great ones* who are *among the guilty in every town* refers to those in a community who stand in strong opposition to the message of a prophet who has come to them (Ṭ); see 25:31: *Thus did We make for every prophet an enemy from*

are unaware. (124) And when a sign comes unto them, they say, "We will not believe till we are given the like of that which was given to the messengers of God." God knows best where to place His message. Humiliation before God and a severe punishment shall soon befall the guilty for that which they used to plot. (125) Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for submission. And whomsoever He wishes to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were climbing to the sky. Thus does God heap defilement

*among the guilty.* The present verse indicates that it is often the most powerful and authoritative members of a community who stand in stubborn resistance to a prophetic messenger (JJ, Q, R, Z), like Abū Jahl in the case of the Prophet; see 6:122c. See also as 43:23 as well as 7:60–127 and 10:75–88, where it is the *notables* in Pharaoh's land and in other communities who most stridently oppose the message of the prophets sent to them. (Although not mentioned in the Quran, the same can be said of Jesus, who was opposed by some of the leaders of his time.) Their plot is only *against themselves* in that it is they who are ultimately ensnared by it. Cf. 2:9 and 3:69, where it is said that those who attempt to deceive or mislead others only deceive or mislead themselves, and correspondingly, 2:272, where it is mentioned that whatever one spends in charity is spent only for oneself. These and other similar verses contribute to a theme of moral reflexivity in the Quran, in which all one's actions are done ultimately and in the deepest sense to or for oneself (see 4:111c); that is, the consequences of one's actions, though often affecting others in this life, will devolve upon only oneself in the Hereafter.

124 Cf. 17:90–93; 74:52. Throughout this *sūrah*, there is repeated mention of God's signs, including the disbelievers' disingenuous request for a sign (vv. 37, 109, 158) or an extraordinary event—such as the coming of an angel (vv. 8, 158) or the descent of a miraculous written book (6:7c)—as proof of Muhammad's prophethood and the truth of the message he brings. This verse indicates that even when a sign does come, the disbelievers do not accept it (cf. vv. 4, 25, 111). Instead, they demand that they themselves be given a sign (JJ, Q, R), *the like of that which was given to the messengers of God,* meaning the prophets and messengers before Muhammad, such as Moses and Jesus (Ṭ), whose extraordinary miracles and signs are recounted in the Quran (see, e.g., 2:60; 3:49; 5:110; 7:106–8; 20:77) and whose stories were likely already known to some extent among the Makkans. According to one report, this verse was revealed after the prominent Makkan Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah claimed that he had greater right to prophethood than Muhammad, since he possessed greater wealth and progeny (Q, R)—two indicators of worldly status that the Quran categorically rejects as markers of spiritual standing (cf. 9:69; 18:39–46; and also 2:247, where the Israelites similarly question God's choice of Saul as their king given his lack of wealth). The response that *God knows best where to place His message* warns the disbelievers neither to doubt His choice of messengers—specifically Muhammad, whom the disbelievers elsewhere consider to have insufficient social standing for the rank of prophethood (43:31)—nor to seek to receive revelations or attain to the rank of prophethood themselves. The *humiliation before God* that will *befall the guilty* stands in direct contrast to the worldly honor and status enjoyed by many of the disbelievers in Makkah and other communities to which prophets were sent (Z); see 6:123c.

125 *Whomsoever God wishes to guide* and *whomsoever He wishes to lead astray* indicate that not all are guided to the truth, a point made in various ways in the Quran; see, for example, v. 35: *Had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance;* and 32:13: *And had We willed, We would have given every soul its guidance.* The Quran also indicates elsewhere that God or His signs and parables may mislead some (see, e.g., 2:26; 4:143; 6:39; 14:4; 74:31), sometimes particularly the disbelievers and wrongdoers (40:34, 74).

upon those who do not believe. (126) This is the path of thy Lord, made straight. We have expounded the signs for a people who take heed. (127) Theirs shall be the Abode of Peace with their Lord, and He shall be their Protector, because of that

The *breast,* mentioned throughout the Quran, is understood to be the seat of inner thoughts and intentions as well as belief or disbelief and is associated with the heart, which lies at its center. The Quran frequently warns that God knows *what lies within breasts* (see, e.g., 5:7; 8:43; 11:5). That God may "expand one's breast" for Islam, or submission to God, is mentioned elsewhere; see 39:22: *Is one whose breast God has expanded for submission, such that he follows a light from his Lord [. . .]?* God's expanding a breast for Islam may be understood as a metaphor for God's making the soul receptive to religious truth and removing any aspects of the soul that might impede acceptance of this truth (Bḍ). The Prophet describes the expansion of the breast in a *ḥadīth* as "a light that God, Glory be to Him, casts into the heart of the believer, so that it is expanded and made spacious for Him." Such persons, the Prophet further noted, could be known by their "constant turning toward the abode of eternity," their "shunning the abode of delusion," and their "preparation for death before it comes." (Bḍ, IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). The expansion of the breast is also associated with the prophets; see 94:1, which addresses Muhammad: *Did We not expand for thee thy breast?* (often thought to refer to the opening of the Prophet's breast and the cleansing of his heart prior to his receiving the Quranic revelation; see 94:1c); and 20:25, in which Moses prays, *"My Lord! Expand for me my breast!"*

In the present verse, as well as in 94:1, the expansion of the breast can be understood as a metaphor for Divine Kindness and Favor (*luṭf*) and perhaps also as a reward for prior willingness to be guided toward belief (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). The expansion of the breast, however, can also be said to relate to what is referred to in Islamic metaphysical discourse as the subtle or psychic body, which transcends the physical body, but is also related to it and affects it, even in a physical way. For example, when people are in a joyful mood, they might be said to be in an "expansive state," which describes their inner psychological state, but also captures something of the outward physiological effects of joy upon their facial expressions and demeanor.

By contrast, people's breasts may be made *narrow* or *constricted* (*ḥaraj*[an]), an image used in the Quran as a metaphorical expression for anxiety, including the prophets' concern about the reception of the message they bring (cf. 11:12; 15:97; 26:13). Here, however, it is used to indicate the inability of some to accept the Quranic message. *Ḥaraj* also denotes a dense cluster of trees whose branches are thickly interwoven (Ṭ), thus evoking the image of a dense woodland whose choking vegetation is such that light cannot penetrate it. The image of *climbing to the sky* is used to convey the sense of a feat that is utterly impossible, indicating that if God wishes to lead someone astray, religious belief is similarly impossible (Bḍ, Ṭ). Some understand this "narrowing" and "constricting" of the breast as a reference to doubt, despair, or even sin (Ṭ). The fifth Shiite Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir is reported to have said that for those who have not attained to truth, it is as if their heart is removed from its place and has risen into the throat, and when they attain to truth, it settles again in its place; he then quoted this verse (Ṭs).

*Thus does God heap defilement upon those who do not believe* could refer to God's punishing the disbelievers in various ways including, perhaps, by permitting Satan authority over them (JJ, Q; cf. 15:42; 16:99, where Satan has no authority over God's believing servants). The *thus* at the beginning of this line may also indicate that God narrows the breasts of those whom *He wishes to lead astray* as a punishment for their prior rejection of belief. In this way, their initial disbelief results in a Divine punishment that only further entrenches them in disbelief and makes the possibility of their later coming to belief more remote (R, Ṭs). One commentator notes that there is no punishment more severe than being oblivious to truth (Qu).

126 For the fundamental Quranic concept of the *straight path,* see 1:6c. For God's having *expounded the signs,* see v. 55 and commentary as well as 6:97–98; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 30:28; 41:3, 44.

127 The *Abode of Peace* (*dār al-salām*) has been understood in several ways in the Islamic tradition;

which they used to do. (128) On the Day when He shall gather them all together [He shall say], "O company of jinn! Many among mankind have you claimed." And their friends among mankind will say, "Our Lord! We have profited from each other, but now we have reached our term which Thou hadst appointed for us." He will say, "The Fire is your abode, to abide therein, except as God wills. Truly thy Lord is Wise, Knowing." (129) Thus do We make the wrongdoers allies of one another because of that which they used to earn. (130) "O company of jinn and human beings! Did not messengers come unto you from among yourselves, recounting unto you My signs, and warning you of the meeting with this your

although in this context it is most commonly considered to be a reference to the paradisal Garden, which God has prepared for His friends (*awliyāᵓ*) in the Hereafter as a reward for the difficulties they faced and to which they responded in this life (Ṭ) and the good actions they performed. The *Abode of the Hereafter* (found, e.g., in 2:94; 6:32; 7:169; 12:109; 16:30) is used in a similar manner to mean the Garden; see also 13:22–24, where the *reward of the Abode* is identified as *Gardens of Eden*. Since *salām* ("peace") is also one of the Divine Names, the *Abode of Peace* has also been understood to mean the Abode of God (Aj, R, Ṭ, Z), although *salām* may simply be a description of the Abode as one characterized by peace (R) or by the greeting "Peace" (Aj; see, e.g., 10:10). The *Abode of Peace* is also mentioned in 10:25: *And God calls unto the Abode of Peace, and guides whomsoever He will unto a straight path.* Some have interpreted the *Abode of Peace* as also referring to the rare state of spiritual peace that some souls may enter even before death (Aj). In connection with this interpretation, Ibn ᶜAjībah comments that there are two Gardens, the Garden of Gnosis (true knowledge of God; *maᶜārif*) and the Garden of Ornaments (*zakhārif*)—that is, of sensual pleasures—and that whoever enters the Garden of Gnosis has no longing for the Garden of Ornaments, for in the Garden of Gnosis nearness to God makes one independent of all else (Aj).

The term *Dār al-salām* ("Abode of Peace") has had much resonance in Islam and is sometimes considered synonymous with *Dar al-islām* ("Abode of Islam"), designating the geographical territory in which Muslims are in the majority. It has also been adopted as the name of certain Islamic cities; for example, Dar es Salam is the name of Tanzania's largest and most important city.

128–29 Addressed to the jinn directly, *many among mankind have you claimed* refers to the many people the jinn led astray through *flowery discourse* (v. 112; Ṭ) or "whispering" (114:4–6). It is important to note that *claimed* here is not meant to suggest that the jinn "possessed" these human beings in the sense of controlling their will, but rather that the jinn merely called or tempted them toward wrongdoing, and that many responded (R). See 14:22, where Satan says to those who followed him, *I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me.* The *term . . . appointed for us* here, as elsewhere, may refer to the onset of the Day of Judgment (R) or simply to the end of their earthly lives (R, Ṭ). The jinn and the human beings they claimed *profited from each other:* human beings profited from the false assurances they received by calling upon the jinn for protection against harm (see 72:6), and the jinn profited from this arrangement insofar as it attributed to them a greatness, power, and authority they did not actually possess (R, Ṭ). The verse concludes with the judgment that *the Fire* is to be their *abode* (here *mathwā*, instead of *dār*, as in v. 127). In v. 129, *We make the wrongdoers allies of one another* may mean that God makes human wrongdoers supporters of each other in this life, that He will make them follow one another into Hellfire, or that some wrongdoers are given authority over others (Ṭ)—all meanings within the semantic range of the verb *nuwallī*.

130 The jinn, as a group, are mentioned in various places in the Quran, but only in Makkan

Day?" They will say, "We bear witness against ourselves." The life of this world deluded them, and they bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers. (131) That is because thy Lord would never destroy towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless. (132) Unto each are degrees in accordance with that which they have done, and thy Lord is not heedless of that which they do. (133) Thy Lord is Self-Sufficient, Possessed of Mercy. If He will, He can remove you, and in your place appoint whomsoever He will to succeed

*sūrahs* (although Satan, who is identified as a jinn in 18:50, is mentioned in Madinan *sūrahs* as well). In the Islamic tradition and in the Quran the jinn, like human beings, have the duty to worship God (51:56) and are mentioned here and elsewhere as addressees and recipients of Divine Revelation and Guidance (46:29–32; 55:33; 72:1–5). Like human beings, they also undergo judgment (37:158; 41:25; 46:18; 55:39) and may be punished in Hellfire (7:38, 179; 11:119; 32:13). In 27:17 and 34:12 they are said to have served the prophet Solomon. The present verse, however, seems to indicate that jinn have also been sent their own messengers who were jinn like themselves, since the question *Did not messengers come to you from among yourselves* is addressed to both *jinn and human beings*. Some commentators accept that there are messengers among the jinn, following a literal interpretation of this verse (R, Ṭ, Z), while others assert that messengers are found only among human beings, sometimes citing 57:26, which indicates that prophethood and revelation were established among the progeny of Noah and Abraham (IK). Some suggest that the jinn may also serve as "warners" among their kind (Ṭ, Th) or as "messengers of the human messengers" (R, Ṭ, Z). When faced with judgment, the jinn and their supporters *bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers;* see 7:37, where human beings do the same.

131 Following the mention of God having sent messengers to human beings and to the jinn in v. 130, the present verse states that God sends such messengers because He would never destroy a town (or a people) for their wrongdoing while they *were heedless,* that is, before they were made fully aware of their wrongdoing and its destructive consequences (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭ, Z). The verse can also be read to mean, "Thy Lord would never destroy towns unjustly," indicating that God would consider it unjust or "wrong" to destroy people for their religious and moral errors before they had been sufficiently warned through the sending of prophets and messengers to them (Ṭ); and as the Quran repeats in many places, God does not wrong people, but they wrong themselves (see, e.g., 3:117; 10:44; 29:40; 30:10). Most commentators, however, prefer the first reading.

132 Here, and in several other places, the Quran speaks of people being distinguished by different *degrees* in accordance with *that which they have done* or, more generally, according to their religious belief and moral and intellectual qualities (cf. 3:163; 4:95; 8:4; 20:75; 46:19; 58:11). In other verses, it is said that God raises some people in degrees above others without tying this distinction explicitly to their actions; see v. 83 regarding Abraham, and v. 165 and commentary, where God raises some people *by degrees above others* as a way of trying them. Although in v. 130 people may be heedless of their wrongdoing, or at least of its consequences, the present verse reiterates the idea, found throughout the Quran in various ways, that God is never *heedless* or unaware of people's actions.

133 The Divine Name *Self-Sufficient* translates *Ghanī,* which means, literally, free from need or "rich" in the sense of being completely independent of everyone and everything. For other instances of this Divine Name, see 2:263, 267; 4:131; 10:68; 14:8; 22:64; 27:40; 31:12, 26; 35:15; 57:24; 60:6; 64:6; also 47:38, where the Name is translated *the Rich* in order to contrast with the description of human beings as *the poor.* The reference to God as *Self-Sufficient* or *Rich* relates not to material wealth or a lack of material need, but to God's ontological fullness and independence of any other reality as contrasted with human existential poverty and

you, just as He brought you into being from the progeny of another people. (134) Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart [it]. (135) Say, "O my people! Work in accordance with your ability; I, too, am working. Soon you shall know whose end is the Abode. Surely the wrongdoers will not prosper." (136) And they dedicate to God a share of the crops and cattle He created, saying, "This belongs to God"—or so they claim—"and this belongs to our partners." But that which is for their partners does not reach God, and that which is for God does reach their partners. Evil indeed is the judgment they

total dependence upon God. In Islamic philosophical terms, as first expressed fully by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037), God is the "Necessary Being" (*wājib al-wujūd*), and in relation to Him all else represents "contingent being" (*mumkin al-wujūd;* R) and therefore has no existence of its own. In this sense, all being and reality can be said to belong ultimately to God, as the Quran repeatedly asserts, *unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth* (e.g., 2:116, 255; 4:171).

In the present verse, human existential dependence on God and God's independence of human beings are conveyed in the reminder that if God wills, *He can remove you,* that is, from earthly life or existence altogether and appoint others *to succeed you.* See 11:57, where the Arabian prophet Hūd warns his people that if they do not heed the message he brings, God will cause them *to be succeeded by a people other than* themselves; and 4:133, where it is said that if God wills, *He can remove you altogether . . . and bring others [in your stead].* See also 10:13–14, which refers to generations destroyed on account of their wrongdoing and to those who are *vicegerents* (which can also mean "successors") after them.

Following vv. 130–31, where it is said that God sends messengers to warn people and jinn and destroys no town without such a warning, the present verse indicates that such messages of warning are only for the benefit of their recipients. God has no need for human beings to accept His messages and warnings (Bḍ); their failure to do so neither harms nor diminishes Him in any way—indeed, as the verse asserts, He can simply destroy them and bring forth others. By failing to accept God's message, people harm only themselves; thus God's warnings to them can be understood as a means of God's Mercy toward them. It is said that God is *Possessed of Mercy* in the most universal and perfect sense (R), since He endows all creatures with existence without need of any of them. That God is *Possessed of Mercy* in conjunction with His being *Self-Sufficient* can be understood to indicate that He possesses all mercy and that no one can be merciful save through His Mercy, since all are dependent upon Him for all of their existential qualities, while He depends upon none (R).

134 That God's Promise will surely *come to pass* and that it cannot be "thwarted" by human effort are repeated in various ways throughout the Quran; cf. 10:51–53; 11:32–33; 16:46; 19:61; 39:51; 21:38–40; 34:29–30. Similarly, that *God's Promise is true* is mentioned repeatedly; see 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21, 98; 30:60; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17.

135 In the face of the continued Makkan opposition, alluded to throughout this *sūrah,* the Prophet is instructed to tell the disbelievers, *Work in accordance with your ability;* that is, continue with what you have been doing, including your opposition to the Quranic message, to the best of your ability, implying the futility of such actions. This statement is therefore not meant as a license, but as a warning and a threat (Ṭ), for the Prophet is also *working* to fulfill the Divine Command and the mission that he has been given. Similarly the Prophet is elsewhere instructed to tell the disbelievers to *wait,* as he too is *waiting* (9:52; 10:20, 102). In the end, it will be seen which of the two has his end in *the Abode,* that is, in the permanent Abode of the Hereafter. Elsewhere, the Quran states that *the end* belongs to the reverent (7:128; 11:49; 13:35; 28:83).

136 The Makkan idolaters reserved shares of the crop for God and for their *partners,* that is, for

make! (137) Likewise have their partners made the slaying of their children seem fair unto many of the idolaters, that they may ruin them and confound them in their religion. Had God willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate. (138) And they say, "These cattle and crops are sacrosanct; none shall eat of them save whom we will"—or so they claim—and [there are] cattle whose backs are forbidden, and cattle over which they do not invoke the Name of God, fabricating against Him. Soon will He recompense them for

the false deities or idols that they took as partners unto God (IK, Ṭ); see 16:56: *And they dedicate a share of that which We have provided them unto that which they know not.* The phrase *or so they claim* indicates that this practice is something they invented and has no basis in a Divine command or revealed Law (Z). *That which is for their partners does not reach God* means that if some of the portion intended for their *partners* became mingled with the portion intended for God, the idolaters would restore it to the partners' share. *That which is for God does reach their partners* means that if some of the portion dedicated to God fell into that dedicated to their partners, they would leave it as it is (JJ, Ṭ), claiming that God is Self-Sufficient and has no need of it (JJ), but also betraying their greater loyalty to the *partners* (Ṭ).

137 These same *partners* have *made the slaying of their children*—that is, the idolaters' slaying of their own children—*seem fair* to them, either because the idolaters considered their false deities to have commanded such practices (JJ) or because *their partners* are satans who inspire the idolaters, through their "whisperings," to slay their children. They do this in order to *ruin them,* that is, to lead them to perdition and to obscure for them true religion—that is, the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition, established by Ishmael among the Arabs (Z)—and thus make them go astray (Ṭ). The pre-Islamic Arabs were reported to have practiced female infanticide in particular, often killing their infant daughters by burying them alive (see 81:8–9c), because of the perceived shame attached to having daughters in pre-Islamic Arabia (see 16:57–59). The Quran also warns against slaying one's children *for fear of poverty* (6:151; 17:31) and states that those who do so are *lost* (v. 140). In 60:12, women seeking to join the Islamic community in Madinah are asked to take a pledge that, among other things, they will not slay their children. For the statement *Had God willed, they would not have done so* and the command to the Prophet to *leave them,* see 6:112c.

138 This verse continues the discussion of arbitrary practices considered religiously necessary by the Makkan idolaters, here referencing their custom of considering certain livestock or crops to be *sacrosanct.* This may have meant that they were prohibited for slaughter or consumption in general, because the Makkans had dedicated them to God or to their false deities and idols, as mentioned in v. 136 (Ṭ), or that they were prohibited for women but allowed for men (see v. 139), for they claimed, *none shall eat of them save whom we will* (Ṭ). Alternately, the exception *save whom we will* was understood by some as a reference to the caretakers of the idols to whom the animals or crops were dedicated (Q). In the case of certain livestock, their *backs are forbidden,* meaning that they could not be ridden or used for bearing burdens (cf. 6:143–44; 16:115–16). Commentators connect these practices with the rituals of *baḥīrah, sā'ibah, waṣīlah,* and *ḥām,* which proscribed the consumption or use of certain livestock and which are mentioned by name in 5:103 (JJ, Ṭ); for detailed discussion of these four pre-Islamic practices, see 5:103c.

The Makkan idolaters are also chastised in the present verse for eating *cattle over which they do not invoke the Name of God,* which may refer to animals slaughtered in the names of their idols instead (Q) or simply to animals slaughtered without invoking the name of any deity. The importance of invoking the Name of God over animals one intends to slaughter for consumption is mentioned in vv. 118–21; see also 2:173; 5:3;

that which they used to fabricate. (139) And they say, "That which is in the bellies of these cattle is reserved for our males, and forbidden to our wives, but if it be stillborn, then all shall have a share therein." Soon will He recompense them for that which they ascribe. Truly He is Wise, Knowing. (140) Lost indeed are those who slay their children foolishly, without knowledge, and make forbidden that which God has provided them, fabricating against God. They indeed have gone astray, and were not rightly guided. (141) He it is Who brings into being gardens, trellised and untrellised, and the date palm and crops with diverse produce, olives and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Eat of their fruit when they grow, and pay the due thereof on the day of its

16:114–15. Here and in vv. 136–37, the invented, rather than revealed, nature of all these idolatrous practices is made explicit by the assertion that they are practices based merely on the idolaters' *claim,* and by the reference to them as practices that they *fabricate.* Some consider these practices to have been inspired by the satans the idolaters had taken as partners unto God (Ṭ).

139 *That which is in the bellies of these cattle* may refer to the fetuses or offspring of female livestock that had been made *sacrosanct* (v. 138); the live offspring of some of these animals—particularly as connected with the practices of *baḥīrah* and *sāʾibah* (see 5:103c)—were permissible exclusively for men, and only their stillborn offspring were permitted to both men and women for consumption (Bḍ, JJ). *Wives* (*azwāj*) here was widely interpreted by commentators to refer to women generally, although some reports claim that it refers to daughters (*banāt;* Q, Ṭ). Other reports understand *that which is in the bellies of these cattle* to refer to the milk produced by these animals, which would then be considered permissible for men, but prohibited to women (Q). See 16:66 and 23:21, where *that which is in their bellies* refers explicitly to the milk provided by livestock. In the present verse, however, *that which is in the bellies* more likely refers to the offspring of the animals the Makkan idolaters considered sacrosanct, given that an exception is made for those that are *stillborn* (*maytat*$^{an}$; lit. "dead"); although the phrase may refer to both milk and offspring (Ṭ), with the exception that *stillborn* applies only to the latter. *That which they ascribe,* like *that which they used to fabricate* in v. 138, refers to the arbitrary ritual prohibitions the Makkan idolaters invented for themselves, but ascribed to God (Ṭ) or to some form of revealed Law.

140 This verse comes as a response to the Makkan idolaters' practice of "slaying their children," mentioned in v. 137, and to the false prohibitions they establish regarding livestock in vv. 136, 138–39, indicating that those who engage in such practices are *lost;* that is, they lose their way in this world and face perdition in the Hereafter. The pre-Islamic Arabs, particularly the Arabs of the northern tribes of Rabīᶜah and Muḍar, would *slay their children,* specifically their daughters, out of fear either that the daughters would be captured and thus become a source of dishonor and humiliation for their families or that the burden of supporting them would impoverish their families (Bḍ, Q, Ṭ). But the Quran states that they *slay their children foolishly* and *without knowledge,* for it is God who provides for them and their children (Bḍ); see v. 151: *Slay not your children for fear of poverty—We will provide for you and for them.* The Quranic prohibition against slaying one's children also serves as a scriptural basis for the general prohibition of abortion in Islam, although some Islamic legal schools allow abortion within the first four months of pregnancy in exceptional cases where it is necessary to save the life of the mother.

141 This verse is very similar to v. 99, which also mentions God's provision of date palms, olives, pomegranates, and other crops *like unto*

harvest, but be not prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal. (142) And [He produces] the cattle, some for burden and some for slaughter. Eat of that which God has provided you, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Truly he is a

*one another and yet not alike* (see 6:99c). In relation to vv. 136 and 140, which mention the pre-Islamic Arabs' practice of slaying their children, often out of fear of being unable to provide for them, as well as in relation to vv. 138–39, which recount the Arabs' arbitrary restrictions on the crops and livestock God has generously provided for their use and consumption, the present verse affirms it is God *Who brings into being* the diverse crops and fruits by which human beings find sustenance. They should therefore trust in God to provide for them and their families and avoid arbitrary prohibitions on themselves or others that would limit access to the bountiful or "bounty of" crops and livestock He has provided (Ṭs).

The verse bids human beings to *eat of* the fruit of these plants and crops *when they grow,* but also to *pay the due thereof on the day of its harvest.* The latter phrase refers to the practice of giving a portion (perhaps as much as 10 percent) of the crop to the needy at the time of the harvest (JJ, Ṭ). Some consider this portion to be part of the mandatory alms (*zakāh;* Q, Ṭ), although others consider the command in the present verse, which was revealed in Makkah, to be distinct from the mandatory alms (*zakāh*) as established in Madinah (Bḍ, Q, Ṭ). Twelver Shiites, basing themselves on a report attributed to the fourth Imam, ᶜAlī Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn, or the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir, hold that this form of charity involves the giving of a few handfuls of grain or other crops as distinct from the specific portion later required as part of the alms (*zakāh*) (Ṭs, Ṭū). Some argue that the mandatory alms, or *zakāh,* on agricultural produce as established by the Prophet's *Sunnah*—which was 10 percent for crops produced by dry farming and 5 percent for crops watered by irrigation (Q)—abrogated the less specific command in this verse (Q, Ṭ). The alms (*zakāh*) on produce pertains only to produce that can be stored for later use, such as grains and dried fruits, to the exclusion of perishable crops.

The command *be not prodigal* may pertain to the portion of the harvest given in charity, indicating that one should not give so much away that one would not have enough to feed oneself and one's dependents (Bḍ, JJ); cf. 17:29. Alternately, *be not prodigal* may mean, here, to avoid being wasteful or excessive in a way that would prevent one from giving this charitable portion (Ṭ). *He loves not the prodigal* (see also 7:31), who are also said to be among the inhabitants of the Fire (40:43).

142 Just as God brings forth diverse crops and fruits in v. 141, so too does He produce *the cattle, some for burden*—that is, to be ridden and to carry loads—which pertains particularly to large livestock such as camels and horses (Ṭ), and *some for slaughter* (*farshᵃⁿ*). *Farsh* derives from a root whose primary meaning is to "spread out." As reflected in the present translation, it is interpreted by many to mean "for slaughter" insofar as the animal is laid or spread out for the act of slaughter (Bḍ, Z). It may also refer, however, to the rugs and coverings (another related meaning of *farsh*) made from the skin of such animals, which are "spread out" for furnishings (Z); in fact some commentators considered *farsh* to refer particularly to sheep, whose skins were often used for this purpose (Q, Ṭ), although *farsh* can mean "carpet" in general. Alternately, it can mean "for riding," since the rider is "spread out" astride the animal when riding (Iṣ). The multivalence of this term points to the variety of ways in which livestock are of use to human beings. Their usefulness for riding and transporting goods, for providing warmth and clothing, for providing food and drink, and even their beauty are invoked in several passages as signs of God's Beneficence toward humanity; see 16:5, 66, 79; 23:21–22; 36:72; 40:79.

The admonition to *eat of that which God has provided you* (cf. 16:114) combined with the subsequent warning to *follow not the footsteps of Satan* as he is *a manifest enemy unto you* is also found in 2:168. That Satan is the *manifest enemy* of human beings is established in the account of the creation of Adam and his temptation by Satan (2:36; 7:24; 20:117, 123) and is repeated as a warning in 2:208; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 35:6; 36:60; 43:62.

manifest enemy unto you. (143) Eight pairs: of sheep, two, and of goats, two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Tell me with knowledge, if you are truthful." (144) And of camels, two, and of oxen, two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you present when God enjoined this upon you?" Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, that he may lead men astray without knowledge? Truly God guides not wrongdoing people. (145) Say, "I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save carrion or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine—for that is surely defilement—or a sinful offering made to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by necessity, without willfully disobeying or transgressing, truly thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful." (146) And unto those who are Jews, We forbade every animal with claws; and of oxen and sheep We forbade them

143–44 *Eight pairs* is a continuation of the description of *the cattle* mentioned in the previous verse and refers to the male and female of each of the four classes of livestock, namely, the *sheep* and *goats* mentioned in v. 143 and the *camels* and *oxen* in v. 144 (JJ). Vv. 143–44 also deride additional prohibitions the idolaters would variously place upon eating the *males* or the *females* of these species or the contents of their *wombs,* mocking the arbitrary nature of these prohibitions by asking, *Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females,* and challenging their knowledge and authority on the matter by asking in v. 144, *Were you present when God enjoined this upon you?* Since the Makkan idolaters did not accept Muhammad's prophethood, or perhaps prophethood at all, as a means for knowing God's commands, the verse questions how they could be certain about the correctness of these various prohibitions, unless they were personally present when God commanded these practices (R). The rhetorical question *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God* is also found in 6:21, 93; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68; 61:7. That *God guides not wrongdoing people* is also stated in 2:258; 3:86; 5:51; 9:19, 109; 28:50; 46:10; 61:7; 62:5.

145 The Prophet is instructed to respond to the Makkan idolaters' various ritual prohibitions concerning the animals whose meat may be consumed by clearly stating that the revelation he received prohibits only *carrion* (which the idolaters reportedly argued was licit; see commentary on 6:116–21); *blood poured forth,* meaning the animal's liquid blood—which had to be drained from the animal's veins before its meat could be eaten—as distinct from its organs or other tissue; *the flesh of swine;* and any animal consecrated to what is *other than God*—that is, to a false deity or idol. An exception here, as in other verses, is made for one who is *compelled by necessity* to eat what is otherwise considered unlawful. These same prohibitions are mentioned in 2:173; 5:3; and 16:115; for a fuller discussion of this issue, see 2:172–73c; 5:3c. In addition to the prohibited sources of meat listed here, some commentators note that on the basis of Prophetic *Sunnah* all carnivorous beasts and birds of prey are also forbidden as sources of meat (JJ, Q).

146 After the criticisms of the arbitrary restrictions on eating meat observed by the Makkan idolaters (vv. 136, 138–39, 143–44) and the listing of the four prohibitions related to the consumption

the fat thereof, save that upon their backs or their entrails or that which is mingled with bone. Thus did We recompense them for their willful disobedience, and surely We are truthful. (147) But if they deny thee, say, "Your Lord is Possessed of vast Mercy, but His Might will not be averted from the guilty people." (148) Those who ascribe partners unto God will say, "Had God willed, we would not have ascribed partners unto God, nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything." Those who were before them had similarly denied, till they tasted Our Might. Say, "Do you have any knowledge that you can produce for

of meat revealed to the Prophet (v. 145), this verse mentions some additional dietary prohibitions imposed by God upon the Jews as a *recompense . . . for their willful disobedience.* That God *forbade* them *every animal with claws* (*dhī ẓufur*) suggests that they are forbidden all carnivorous beasts (which also became part of Islamic dietary law on the basis of Prophetic *Sunnah*). They are further forbidden the *fat* of *oxen and sheep,* except for that *upon their backs* or intermingled with other tissue. Some legal scholars, including the founders of two of the four major schools of Sunni Law, Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfiʿī, held that this prohibition on fat did not pertain to Muslims, citing a report that the Prophet did not forbid one of his followers from eating it during the siege of Khaybar (Q), during which he established other dietary prohibitions on eating beasts and birds of prey as well as donkeys.

The specific dietary prohibitions mentioned for the Jews in the present verse are largely consistent with the extensive dietary prohibitions found in Leviticus 3 and 11, as well as Deuteronomy 14, although they are not identical. For example, in Leviticus 11, the Israelites are forbidden "all that walk on their paws" (v. 27) and several different birds of prey, but also animals with undivided hooves, such as camels—although many Quranic commentators consider *dhī ẓufur* (here translated *with claws*) to mean "with undivided toes" (JJ, Q, Ṭ). In Leviticus 3:9–10, the Israelites are instructed to remove the fat from the backbone and the entrails to be burned as a sacrifice. The Quran here suggests that such dietary prohibitions, which are more complex and restrictive than what is found in Islamic dietary law, were a recompense *for their willful disobedience,* which some gloss as their mistreatment of the needy among themselves (Ṭb) or simply their "wrongdoing" (Z). Cf. 3:93: *All food was lawful unto the Children of Israel, save what Israel had forbidden for himself, before the Torah was sent down,* indicates that there were no Divinely imposed dietary prohibitions on the Israelites prior to the revelation of the Torah.

147 *But if they,* the Jews, *deny thee* by arguing that God's Mercy is so vast that He will not punish them for their disobedience (Ṭ, Z), the Prophet is instructed to respond by affirming that the Lord's Mercy is indeed *vast.* This is so for the righteous believers, but also for the disbelievers and wrongdoers, insofar as God does not send punishment down upon them immediately. This *vast Mercy,* however, should not lead the disbelievers or wrongdoers to think that God's *Might* will be indefinitely *averted from the guilty people* (Ṭ).

148 With this verse, the *sūrah* resumes its engagement with the Makkan idolaters, presenting and then challenging the Makkans' claim that their invented ritual practices were a matter of Divine Will and thus suggesting that these practices were part of a revealed Law (Bḍ). Their argument is that *had God willed,* they would not have *ascribed partners unto God,* nor would they have *forbidden anything,* referring to the foregoing criticism of the ritual prohibitions they observed. See 16:35 and 43:19–20, where the idolaters make a similar claim. In vv. 107 and 137, respectively, the Quran itself affirms that *had God willed,* the idolaters would not have *ascribed partners unto God* or slain their children (cf. 10:99).

us? You follow naught but conjecture, and you merely surmise." (149) Say, "Unto God belongs the conclusive argument. Had He willed, He could surely have guided you all." (150) Say, "Bring forward your witnesses who can bear witness that God has forbidden this." Then if they bear witness, do not bear witness

Although these verses have been read by some to suggest that God willed the idolaters to observe these practices (R), they can also be understood to mean that God is capable of altering the idolaters' practices, but He abstains from doing so in order to allow them to choose freely whether to participate in them or not. The idolaters' own assertion that *had God willed,* they would not have engaged in such practices is thus, on one level, an accurate assertion (Aj), but in a deeper sense it served to underscore their personal responsibility for their own actions. As such it does not have the effect of either proving that their practices have Divine sanction or allowing them to avoid personal responsibility for them. Rather, like those who made similar claims before them, they will "taste the punishment" (for other references to "tasted" punishment, see, e.g., 3:106; 4:56; 6:30; 7:39; 8:35). In response to their claims, the Prophet is instructed to ask, rhetorically, if the idolaters have *any knowledge* that they can produce—that is, any proof for their claims (Bḍ; IK; cf. v. 144), and then to dismiss their assertions and practices as based upon mere *conjecture* and *surmise* (see 6:116–17c).

149 The idolaters in v. 148 *follow naught but conjecture* and, it is understood, can produce no proof that God has ordained their idolatry or their ritual prohibitions. By contrast, God possesses *the conclusive argument,* which is clear and incontrovertible, showing all other arguments to be false, and which thus accomplishes the aim of establishing the truth and removing all doubt about religion (Ṭ, Ṭū). The word *argument* translates *ḥujjah,* which can also mean "proof." Cf. v. 83 where Abraham's argument against his people's idolatry (in vv. 76–78) is described as an argument that God *gave unto Abraham against his people,* meaning a definitive proof or argument against their idolatry. The phrase "proof of God" (*ḥujjat Allāh*) is widely used in the Islamic intellectual tradition to refer to certain and irrefutable proof or knowledge.

According to some, God's argument against humanity is constituted by the messengers He sent them, because of whom they have no excuse for not knowing true religious doctrine and law (Aj, Bḍ); perhaps for this reason, Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi entitled one of his key works dealing with the derivation of Islamic Law from the sayings and precedent of the Prophet *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha,* "The Conclusive Argument (or Proof) of God." Twelver Shiites also explicitly identify the twelve Imams, who are their foundational spiritual guides after the Prophet, as "proofs" (*ḥujaj*) of God. The seventh Shiite Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, is reported to have said, "God has two arguments [or proofs] against mankind, an outward one and an inward one. As for the outward, it is the messengers, prophets, and imams, and as for the inward, it is [their] intellects" (Kā), meaning that God demonstrates conclusively the truth of religion through both the messengers and spiritual leaders He sends to mankind and human beings' own intrinsic intelligence.

*Had He willed, He could surely have guided you all* (cf. v. 35) indicates to some commentators that, since not all were "guided," it must be that it is God's Will to guide some and not others (Aj, IK, R), an idea that may be supported by other verses indicating that God misleads some (cf., e.g., 2:26; 6:125; 40:74; 74:31). Other important commentators, however, read it to mean that although God is capable of bringing all people, involuntarily, to guidance, He wishes to entrust them with the responsibility (*taklīf*) to come to guidance of their own free will and so does not "gather them all to guidance" (v. 35; Ṭū). Indeed, some argue that if God were to bring people forcibly to guidance or to disbelief, He would have no "conclusive proof" or "argument" against the disbelievers, who like those in v. 148, could contend that it was God Himself who willed their spiritual error (Ṭū).

150 Having been asked if they personally were witness to God's ordaining the idolatrous prohibitions and rituals they observe (v. 144), and

with them, and do not follow the caprices of those who deny Our signs, nor those who believe not in the Hereafter and ascribe equals unto their Lord. (151) Say, "Come, I will recite that which your Lord has forbidden you: that you ascribe nothing as partner unto Him, and that you be virtuous toward parents, and that you slay not your children for fear of poverty—We will provide for you and for them—and approach not indecencies, whether outward or inward, and slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may understand." (152) And approach not the orphan's property, save in the best manner, till he reaches maturity. And observe fully the measure and the balance with justice. We task no soul beyond its capacity. And when you speak, be just, even if it be [against] a kinsman, and fulfill the pact of God. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may

challenged to bring *knowledge,* or proof, that God ordained these practices (v. 148), the idolaters are now told to *bring forward . . . witnesses* who can testify that God had indeed instituted the dietary prohibitions they claim for themselves (vv. 136, 138–39, 143–44). If they do presume to *bear witness* to the truth of their claims, the Prophet is instructed not to *bear witness with them,* that is, not to give credence or support to their claims. He is further warned not to *follow* their *caprices* (cf. 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 6:56; 13:37; 42:15; 45:18), that is, the caprices of the idolaters, who are then described as those who *believe not in the Hereafter*—that is, in Resurrection and Judgment—and who *ascribe equals unto their Lord,* committing the sin of *shirk,* or polytheism—their two central religious errors.

151–52 In response to the false prohibitions the idolaters have invented for themselves, the Prophet is instructed to *recite that which your Lord has forbidden* through authentic revelation. The list of prohibitions in these two verses brings together those mentioned elsewhere in the Quran. Throughout this *sūrah* various ways of "ascribing partners to God," or *shirk,* are described, including the worship of idols (v. 74), celestial bodies (vv. 76–78), and jinn (v. 100), and the admonition against *shirk* here refers to all its forms. The paired command to *ascribe nothing as partner unto* God (or to worship only Him) and to *be virtuous toward parents* also appears in 2:83; 4:36; and 17:23; it indicates the importance of filial piety and suggests a relationship between proper worship of God and reverence and care for parents. After God, human beings are most indebted to their parents, given the extensive and solicitous care they were provided when they were young, and for this reason the duty to worship God alone is followed immediately by the mention of duty to parents (R). Immediately following the mention of children's duty to parents, the verse warns parents against "slaying their children" *for fear of poverty,* indicating that they should rely upon God to provide for the needs of themselves and their children. Similar warnings against slaying one's children are found in 6:140 and 17:31, and a promise not to slay one's children was made a condition for women who wanted to join the Muslim community in Madinah as mentioned in 60:12.

The prohibition against slaying any soul *save by right*—that is, when it is warranted as a punishment for capital transgression, such as for murder or "waging war against God and His Messenger" (5:33)—is also mentioned in 4:29, 92–93; 5:32; 17:33; 25:68. For the admonition to avoid *indecencies* in both their *outward* and *inward*—that is, public and private—forms, see also 6:120c; 7:33. *Indecencies* translates *fawāḥish* (sing. *fāḥishah*), which often connotes specifically sexual transgression (see 4:15c; 4:22c), but which here more

remember. (153) This indeed is My path made straight; so follow it, and follow not other ways, lest they separate you from His way. This He has enjoined upon you, that haply you may be reverent. (154) Then We gave unto Moses the Book, complete for those who would be virtuous, as an exposition of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy, that haply they might believe in the meeting with their

likely refers to serious sins and moral transgressions of all sorts. Shunning such sins both outwardly and inwardly demonstrates true piety, for if one were to avoid sin publicly, but commit it privately, it would indicate that one's motivation was simply to avoid public blame and not to obey God (R). Al-Rāzī observes that v. 151 contains five commands or prohibitions that can all be said to pertain to *outward* sin, while v. 152 contains four prohibitions that relate to *inward* sin (R), that is, sin done in private or surreptitiously, without others being witness to it. Some define "inward sin" as the intention to sin formulated in the heart (Q). According to a well-known Islamic principle based upon a *ḥadīth,* "Deeds are according to intentions," meaning that the reward or punishment for a given act is dependent upon the intention of the one who commits it.

In v. 152, *approach not the orphan's property . . . till he reaches maturity* (repeated verbatim in 17:34) means that a guardian should hold the orphan's property in trust until the orphan reaches the age when knowledge and wisdom are sufficiently developed (R)—a standard that is qualitative, rather than a quantitative one measured in years. For a fuller discussion of this and the various ages given for "maturity" in Islamic Law, see 4:6c. The exception *save in the best manner* refers to a situation in which an impoverished guardian may take a small amount from the orphan's property, although he is required to repay it when he is able, or to the guardian's right to use the orphan's property in a way that might help maintain or improve it (Ṭ); for a discussion of the terms and conditions under which a guardian may use the orphan's property, see 4:6c.

To *observe fully the measure and the balance with justice* refers to the requirement to engage in commerce and business transactions with probity and fairness (cf. 7:85; 17:35; 26:182; 55:8–9; and 11:84–85, where the prophet Shuʿayb admonishes his people to do the same). That God tasks *no soul beyond its capacity* is found in several verses (2:286; 7:42; 23:62) and is a central Islamic doctrine; see also 65:7: *God tasks no soul beyond that which He has given it.* The command *When you speak, be just* refers to the importance of truthful testimony, but also to the requirement that one speak with integrity and truthfulness at all times (R). The Quran enjoins speaking honorably or *in a goodly way* to others (2:83, 235; 4:5, 8; 33:32) as well as speaking justly (4:9; 33:70), and the injunction in v. 152 requires that one speak justly *even if it be [against] a kinsman* (cf. 4:135). The importance of fulfilling *the pact* (*ʿahd*) *of God* is also found in 2:40 and 13:20; in the present verse, it is understood to mean obeying the injunctions and prohibitions established by God (Ṭ).

153 *My path made straight* refers to the "straight path" (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) that leads to God and salvation (see 1:6c), and for most commentators it was understood to refer specifically to the religious path of Islam, defined by the guidance and injunctions brought by the Prophet Muhammad—including the Quranic revelation and the Prophet's own example, or *Sunnah* (R). See also 5:15–16: *There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book whereby God guides whosoever seeks His Contentment unto the ways of peace, and brings them forth from darkness into light, by His Leave, and guides them unto a straight path.*

154 *The Book* given to Moses is the Torah, which here as elsewhere is described as a source of *guidance* (cf. 3:3–4; 5:44). It is *complete* in the blessings it provides to those who seek to live a life of virtue (Ṭ). It is important to note that the descriptions of the Torah here are similar to the descriptions the Quran gives elsewhere for itself. See v. 115, where the *Word of thy Lord,* understood to be a reference to the Quran, is *fulfilled* or completed *in truth and justice.* The *Book* of Moses is also said in the present verse to be *an exposition of all things* (*tafṣīl*); see 6:114, where the Quran is described as

Lord. (155) And this is a blessed Book that We have sent down; so follow it and be reverent, that haply you may receive mercy. (156) Lest you should say, "The Book was only sent down upon two groups before us, and we were indeed heedless of their study." (157) Or lest you should say, "If the Book had been sent down upon us, we would surely have been better guided than they." Now there has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord, a guidance and a mercy. So who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God and turns away from them? Soon shall We recompense those who turn away from Our signs with a terrible punishment for their having turned away. (158) Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come, or one of the signs of thy Lord should come? On the day that one of the signs of thy Lord does come, believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand and did not earn some goodness in its belief. Say, "Wait! We, too, are

"expounded" (*mufaṣṣal*), from the same root. This verse serves as a Quranic indication that the Torah remains a valid source of guidance and a path to virtue, even after the revelation of the Quran, an idea made more explicit in 5:43–45.

155–57 After the description of the Torah in the previous verse, the reference to the *blessed Book . . . sent down* in v. 155 is to the Quran. As with the Torah, the Quran provides a means to obtain God's *mercy*. Once the Quran was sent down, the Makkans could no longer excuse their various moral and spiritual errors (mentioned throughout this *sūrah*) by claiming that *the Book*, meaning revelation in general, had not been sent to them, but had been sent only to *two groups:* the Jews and the Christians. For similar arguments from disbelievers that their moral error was a result of a lack of prophetic warning, see 28:47.

*Heedless* in v. 156 translates *ghāfilīn*, which also means to be passively oblivious or unaware. Some understand *heedless of their study* to be a reference to the Arabs' inability to read or understand the Torah or the Gospel (IK, Z). In vv. 156–57, the Quran suggests that the Makkans may have wished to use their inability to read or study the Jewish and Christian scriptures, along with the argument that no revelation had been sent down directly to them (v. 157), as an excuse and explanation for their lack of moral guidance. The response is that such excuses from the Makkan idolaters—as well as their boast that had they been given revelation, they *would surely have been better guided than* the Jews and Christians (cf. 35:42 for similar boast)—are belied, since *a clear proof* had now come to them from God. This *clear proof* is the Quranic revelation itself, which is sent down in *clear Arabic* (Ṭ; see 26:195) and thus easily understandable to them, and which is described as *a guidance and a mercy,* exactly as the Torah is described in v. 154.

*Who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God* takes the same form as many other rhetorical questions; see, for example, 18:57; and 32:22: *And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them?* The phrase *turns away from them* in v. 157 likely means that the idolaters attempt to turn others away from the signs of God (IK, Z; cf. v. 26).

158 *Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come* (cf. 2:210; 16:33) is meant to emphasize the foolishness of the disbelievers' request for powerful heavenly signs of the truth of Muhammad's

waiting." (159) Truly those who have divided their religion and become factions, thou hast nothing to do with them. Their matter rests with God alone; then He will inform them about that which they used to do. (160) Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof; but whosoever brings an evil

warnings of Divine Judgment, for once such signs come, the time during which they could have chosen freely to believe will have come to an end. The disbelievers' apparent waiting for the angels to *come upon them* might mean that they seem to be waiting for their own deaths, which will be heralded by the coming of the angels of death, or for the end of the world itself (Ṭ). See 43:66 and 47:18, where disbelievers seem to be similarly inviting *the Hour*—that is, the end of the world and Final Judgment—to come upon them. In this context, the *signs of thy Lord* may be understood as signs of the end times, such as the sun rising from the West (Ṭ, Z). Once these events have come, *believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand,* for repentance and belief only avail a soul before its own death (cf. 4:17; 6:8–9c; 6:57–58c). The Prophet is finally instructed to tell the disbelievers, who seem to be continually, but disingenuously, waiting for "proof" of Muhammad's prophethood, *Wait! We, too, are waiting.* The *We* in this statement is generally understood as referring to the Prophet and his believing followers, although it could also refer to God. This ominous command is found in various forms elsewhere in the Quran (7:71; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 20:135; 52:31), and is meant as a threat or warning to the disbelievers (R).

159 The Quran here, as elsewhere, criticizes those who become divided in their religion or create sects within it (cf. 3:103–5; 5:14c; 30:32; 42:13–14; 98:4). Those who *have divided their religion* may refer to those who believe in some aspects or doctrines of the religion and disbelieve in others. Alternately, some read the phrase with different voweling to mean "those who separate from their religion," meaning those who leave it altogether (R, Ṭ, Z). Here *those who have . . . become factions* may refer to the Jews and Christians (R, Ṭ, Z); to the idolaters (with whom this *sūrah* is primarily engaged) who differed as to the "partners they took unto God," partners that included idols, celestial bodies, or jinn (R); or to those within the Muslim community who introduce innovation (*bidʿah*) or doubt into religion (Ṭ). In connection with this verse, some commentators cite a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet states that the Jews divided into seventy-one sects, and the Christians into seventy-two sects, before predicting that his own community would divide into seventy-three sects (Z). Regarding such people, the Prophet is told *thou hast nothing to do with them,* meaning that he is instructed to leave them, rather than fight them (Ṭ), for *their matter rests with God alone.* That God will settle religious differences among people in the Hereafter by "informing" *them about that which they used to do* (or elsewhere, "about that wherein they differed") is also mentioned in 5:14, 48; 6:108.

160 This is one of several verses in the Quran indicating God's leniency in judging human actions and His great bounty toward them (Aj, R), multiplying the reward for good deeds, while recompensing evil deeds equitably. See also 4:40: *Truly God commits not so much as a mote's weight of wrong: if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and grant from His Presence a great reward;* and 27:89 and 28:84, where it is said that whoever does a good deed, *he will have that which is better than it.* If the multiplication of good deeds is a manifestation of Divine Bounty, the equitable recompense of evil deeds manifests Divine Justice (Z). According to some commentators, *ten times the like thereof* should not be understood as a precise factor by which one's good deeds will be "multiplied" in reward, but rather as a symbolic figure indicating that the spiritual worth of and reward for good deeds is multiplied many times over (R). Such an interpretation is supported by other Quranic verses that suggest, for example, that the wealth one spends in the way of God will be increased seven hundred times (2:261), or that human behavior, or certain moral acts or qualities, will be rewarded *without reckoning* (39:10).

deed shall be recompensed only with the like thereof, and they shall not be wronged. (161) Say, "Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a *ḥanīf,* and he was not of the idolaters." (162) Say, "Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds. (163) He has no partner. This I am commanded, and I am the

161 This verse mentions together the concepts of a *straight path, upright religion,* the *creed of Abraham,* the religious description *ḥanīf,* and the shunning of idolatry, all of which recur throughout the Quran in close association with one another. The *straight path* is used throughout the Quran to refer to the path of true religion that leads to felicity in this life and the next; for a fuller discussion, see 1:6c. For other references to *upright religion,* see 9:36; 12:40; 30:30, 43; 98:5. The reference to *the creed of Abraham, a* ḥanīf, is also found in similar or verbatim form in 2:130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 16:23. *Creed* here translates *millah,* which sometimes denotes a religious community, but can also refer to its particular belief system or creed. The description *ḥanīf* is usually mentioned in connection with Abraham in the Quran (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:79; 16:120, 123), although in some verses the Prophet Muhammad and his community are called upon directly to be *ḥanīf* (10:105; 22:31; 30:30), and Islamic tradition commonly uses this term to describe Muhammad's religious life and practice even before his call to prophethood. In some contexts, being a *ḥanīf* is distinguished explicitly or implicitly from following the monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity (2:135; 3:67; 4:125), although the Quran indicates that Jews and Christians were also called to be *ḥanīf*s (98:4–5). For fuller discussion of *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c.

162–63 The various arguments presented against the idolaters and their practices throughout this *sūrah* are now brought to a close with the simple but uncompromising statement of commitment to monotheistic worship that the Prophet is instructed to utter in these two verses. *Sacrifice* here renders *nusuk,* which can also refer to religious rites of various kinds (Q, Ṭ) and thus to any ritual act meant to bring one closer to God (Q). In the present context, however, *nusuk* is widely connected with the proper ritual sacrifice of animals, which has been a concern elsewhere in the *sūrah,* specifically as it pertains to invoking the Name of God over the animal to be slaughtered (vv. 118–19, 121; Q, Ṭ, Z). The mention of *prayer* and *sacrifice* together also occurs in 108:2, *So pray to thy Lord and sacrifice,* although in this case, *sacrifice* renders the imperative *anḥar.*

*My living and my dying are for God* indicates complete devotion to God, that all one's actions, even unto death, are done only for the sake of pleasing Him (Z) and drawing near to Him (Q), and that all considerations of self are removed from one's actions (Aj). *I am the first of those who submit* (literally, I am the first of the *muslims*; see also v. 14; 39:12) may simply mean that the Prophet is the first to submit himself to God as a Muslim among his community or among the people of his time (since earlier prophets and their followers are also designated as *muslims* in the Quran). In the context of these two verses and their expression of complete devotion to God, however, the Prophet's assertion that he is *the first of those who submit* may also indicate his submission in the fullest sense, meaning complete surrender to God's Will and Decree (R). The idea that the Prophet was *the first of those who submit* can also be understood in relation to the Islamic metaphysical concept of the Muhammadan Reality (or sometimes "Muhammadan Light," *nūr Muḥammadī*), which preceded all creation; in this sense the Prophet says in a *ḥadīth* that he was a prophet "while Adam was still between water and clay." According to a *ḥadīth* cited by some commentators, the Prophet would recite these two verses, along with Abraham's statement in v. 79, *Truly, as a* ḥanīf, *I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth and I am not of the idolaters,* before beginning his night prayer (Q).

first of those who submit." (164) Say, "Shall I seek a lord other than God, while He is Lord of all things? No soul does evil, save against itself, and none shall bear the burden of another. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will inform you of that wherein you differed." (165) He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you. Truly thy Lord is Swift in retribution, and truly He is Forgiving, Merciful.

164 *Shall I seek a lord other than God* is similar to other rhetorical questions meant to indicate that God suffices all human need and that only one who was ignorant of this truth could worship other deities or "ascribe partners unto Him" (cf. 6:114; 7:140). That *no soul does evil, save against itself* reflects the Quranic principle that the consequences of all moral actions ultimately harm or benefit only the moral agent. Thus, wrongdoers, above all, wrong themselves (2:57; 3:117; 7:160; 10:44); deceivers deceive only themselves (2:9); and *whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves* (2:272). That *none shall bear the burden of another* (see also 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38) reflects the individual nature of moral responsibility and the reality and significance of personal judgment. That God will *inform you* in the Hereafter about your religious differences is also mentioned in 5:48; cf. 2:113; 10:93; and 45:17, where God will judge between people with regard to their religious differences.

165 *Vicegerents* translates *khalā'if* (sing. *khalīfah,* the usual plural of which is *khulafā'*), which means "representatives" or "successors"; in Islamic political terminology the term in the singular became the title of the head of the unified Islamic state (anglicized as "caliph"). The first vicegerent God appointed on earth was Adam (2:30), and insofar as Adam represents humanity as a whole, all human beings can be understood to be God's vicegerents on earth. The Quran also uses *vicegerents upon the earth* to refer to new generations or communities that succeed older ones that have been destroyed for their wrongdoing (7:74, 129; 10:13–14, 73); and in 24:55, the Muslims are promised that if they *believe and perform righteous deeds,* God will make them *vicegerents upon the earth.* Many commentators consider *vicegerents* in the present verse to relate primarily to the idea of generations succeeding others (Ṭ)—meaning either that the Muslim community has succeeded earlier religious communities or that generations of Muslims will succeed one another on earth (R, Z)—or that they have inherited the position of God's representatives on earth (R, Z), although the more universal idea of human vicegerency may also be intended. For a further discussion of this term, see 2:30c.

That God raised some people *by degrees above others* is mentioned in several other verses (see 6:83c). The "degrees" among people mentioned in other verses may pertain to degrees in this world or in the Hereafter, or both. In the present verse, however, the subsequent clause, *that He may try you,* suggests that the *degrees* in this verse are degrees that pertain to earthly existence, since people are tried only in this world; they receive their recompense in the next. Commentators widely interpret the *degrees* mentioned in the present verse as differing degrees of worldly provision and goods (R, Ṭ, Z), nobility (R, Z), or intellect (R). God's appointing people *vicegerents upon the earth* and His worldly provision for them serve as means to *try* human souls as to their trust in Him and gratitude for what they have been given. That God provides for human beings in different *degrees* allows Him to test the generosity and kindness of those given worldly nobility and wealth toward those given less (Z) as well as to test the humility and trust of those given little, inspiring them to emulate the nobler human beings in their midst (Su). God is *Swift in retribution* for those who fail to be thankful and obedient to Him in the face of the gifts they have been given

(R, Ṭ, Z), but *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward those who are grateful for His gifts (Z), who seek to approach Him through obedience (R, Ṭ), and who repent of any sins they may commit (Ṭ). For the commentator al-Tustarī, one should not consider the hardships one suffers in this life as forms of Divine Punishment. Rather, all such hardships are but means of purification and atonement for sins, except for the hardening of the heart. The juxtaposition of the Divine Attributes *Swift in retribution* and *Forgiving, Merciful* (also found in 7:167) inspires both fear and hope, indicating that, although the possibility of irreversible Divine Judgment is ever imminent (R, Z), God remains *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward His creatures.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 7

# The Heights

## *al-Aʿrāf*

A late Makkan *sūrah, al-Aʿrāf* was reportedly revealed after *Ṣād* (*Sūrah* 38) and just before *al-Anʿām* (*Sūrah* 6). Some, however, have considered vv. 163–67 to have been revealed in Madinah (Al, IJ). The content of the *sūrah* primarily concerns the serious consequences of rejecting the signs and messengers of God. In this context, it recounts the sacred history of prophets who had been rejected by their people and the consequent suffering and destruction of these people in this world and the next. The *sūrah* takes its name from the reference to the *Heights* (*al-aʿrāf*) in vv. 46 and 48, variously identified as a high place in Paradise or between Paradise and Hell.

As with *al-Anʿām,* the immediate audience for this *sūrah* is the idolatrous Makkans who refused to believe in Muhammad's prophethood, although it takes a subtler and less polemical approach, making its argument through reference to examples from earlier prophetic history. It begins in vv. 1–10 with a reminder to follow Divine Guidance and a general warning about the consequences of failing to do so. The *sūrah*'s engagement with sacred history begins in vv. 11–27 with a recounting of the story of Adam's creation, temptation, and exile from the Garden. It also recounts the detail of Adam and Eve sewing together leaves from the Garden to cover their newly discovered nakedness (v. 26); this narrative element is then parlayed into a discussion of the virtue and limits of earthly adornment in vv. 31–32. After another general warning about communities not accepting the prophetic messengers sent to them, vv. 44–51 present a dialogue between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell in the Hereafter, including in vv. 46–48 the somewhat cryptic mention of the *inhabitants of the Heights.* This is followed by a brief discourse about the various signs of God to humanity (vv. 52–58), which serves as an introduction to a lengthy segment detailing the destruction of several earlier communities who had rejected their prophets, including the peoples of the prophets Noah (vv. 59–64), Hūd (vv. 65–72), Ṣāliḥ (vv. 73–79), Lot (vv. 80–84), and Shuʿayb (vv. 85–93).

Another lengthy narrative segment concerning Moses follows in vv. 103–56. It contains one of the Quran's most detailed accounts of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and the sorcerers (vv. 104–26), the various punishments or plagues brought upon Egypt (vv. 130–36), the eventual destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts and the deliverance of Israel (vv. 137–41), Moses receiving the Torah on the mountain (vv. 142–47), the Israelites fashioning a calf as an idol in his absence (vv. 148–54), and the subsequent covenant making with the elders of Israel (vv. 155–56). After a verse interjecting mention of the Prophet Muhammad as the "unlettered prophet" described in the Torah and Gospel (v. 157), the *sūrah* continues with a discussion of the Israelites' later disobedience and the future punishments they are said to suffer as a result (vv. 159–71). The various accounts of previous prophets and peoples then concludes in v. 172 with mention of the universal, pretemporal covenant between God and all human beings obligating them to recognize God's Lordship, which is thus understood to be the basis of all future covenants between God and humanity as mediated through the prophets.

The final section repeats the warnings about denying the signs of God and persisting in idolatry (vv. 174–98) and then concludes with several verses dealing with pious and devotional practices, including invoking the Names of God and listening to the recitation of the Quran (vv. 180, 204–5).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Mīm. Ṣād.* (2) [This is] a Book sent down unto thee—so let there be no constriction in thy breast because of it—that thou mayest warn thereby, and a Reminder for the believers. (3) Follow that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord, and follow not any protectors apart from Him. Little do you reflect! (4) How many a town have We destroyed! Our Might came upon them by night, or while they took their ease at midday. (5) Their plea, when Our Might came upon them, was but to say, "Truly we were wrongdoers."

1 The four Arabic letters at the beginning of this *sūrah* are among the "separated letters" (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs*. Among them, this is the only *sūrah* that begins with these particular letters. Although the meaning of these letters is considered ambiguous by many commentators, some have speculated that the letters at the beginning of this *sūrah* may be a Name of God, that they stand for the "greatest Name of God," or that they are a name for the Quran itself (Ṭ). For a fuller discussion of the separated letters, see 2:1c.

2 As with most instances of the "separated letters," those in v. 1 are immediately followed by a mention of the *Book*, meaning the Quran, or perhaps this *sūrah* in particular (R, Z). *Let there be no constriction in thy breast because of it* is addressed to the Prophet, indicating that he should feel no doubt (Ṭ) or anxiety over proclaiming the Quran, for the Book was *sent down* so that the Prophet might *warn thereby* (R, Ṭ). The doubt or anxiety the Prophet might experience would not be about the truth of the revelation, but rather about the response he might receive from his people when he "warns them thereby." *Reminder* (*dhikrā*) is used here to refer to the Quran specifically (see also 20:3; 36:69), although it is used elsewhere to refer to various kinds of Divine reminders, and in 40:54 it is used to describe the scripture given to Moses.

3 The previous verse addressed the Prophet, but the present verse is addressed to the Prophet's community or to people in general (R). *That which has been sent down unto you from your Lord* is a reference to the Quran. The warning not to *follow* or obey (JJ) any other *protectors apart from* God is similar to those in several other verses, including those that state that one has *no protector* other than God (e.g., 6:51; 11:20; 13:11; 18:26; 29:22; 32:4) and those that mention the disbelievers taking *idols* (2:257) or *satans* (7:30; 18:50) as their protectors (R, Z). The *protectors* here might also be a reference to the early Companions' other associates and friends who would incite them to polytheism and idolatry (Ṭ, Z). See also 29:41: *The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a house. Truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house, if they but knew.* The phrase *follow not any protectors apart from Him* might also be rendered "follow not any protectors apart from it" meaning, apart from *that which has been sent down unto you* (R, Z). *Little do you reflect* is a rebuke also found in 27:62; 40:58; 69:42; see 69:41–42c.

4–5 Towns destroyed for their wrongdoing are mentioned by way of warning throughout the Quran, and vv. 59–136 of this *sūrah* contain the first of several lengthy passages in the Quran that recount the fate of successive disbelieving towns or cities (here beginning with the people of Noah and ending with the people of Pharaoh) who rejected their messengers; other accounts of the destroyed towns can be found in 11:25–100; 26:105–89; 27:45–58; 54:9–42. That God's punishment came upon them *by night, or while they*

(6) Then We shall surely question those unto whom Our message was sent, and We shall surely question the messengers. (7) Then We shall recount unto them with knowledge, for We were never absent. (8) And the weighing on that Day is true. So those whose balance is heavy, it is they who shall prosper. (9) And as for those whose balance is light, it is they who have ruined their souls by having

*took their ease at midday* means that once God has warned people through His messengers, Divine chastisement for those who reject the message may come not only after death, but also in this world at any time, and it may come without further warning (cf. v. 97). The Quran sometimes presents disbelievers as denying or excusing their error once they have been called to account (4:97; 6:23–24; 16:28) or admitting their wrongdoing after it is too late for repentance (21:46; 23:106; 26:97; 40:85; 68:29–31; 74:43–47).

6–7 After the punishment has come, those who were the recipients of God's *message*—that is, revelation and particularly the prophetic warning—will be questioned about their response (JJ, Ṭ). Although several verses mention that people will be questioned at the Final Judgment (16:56, 93; 17:36; 29:13; 43:44), elsewhere the Quran states that *the guilty will not be questioned about their sins* (28:78) and that *on that Day no man shall be questioned as to his sins, nor shall any jinn* (55:39). Al-Rāzī resolves this apparent contradiction by asserting that although people will not be questioned regarding their actions as such—for God already has knowledge of their actions, which are also already recorded in the book of their deeds that they will each receive in the Hereafter (see, e.g., 17:71; 69:19)—they will be questioned about why they have done these evil deeds and about what turned them away from good ones (R). Commentators also note that the questioning in v. 6 is done as a means of rebuke (R, Ṭ, Z). The messengers will also be questioned, but only about their delivery of the message (JJ, Ṭ), for the Quran indicates that the duty of the Prophet (as with all prophets) is simply to deliver the message (3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 29:18); the reaction of the people to the message is a matter beyond the Prophet's control and thus something for which he is not accountable.

After questioning the people about their response to His messages and warnings and the prophets' delivery thereof, God shall *recount to them* their deeds *with knowledge*, since He has knowledge of both their inward and outward, public and private acts (Z). In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet says, "There is not one of you to whom his Lord will not speak without an interpreter between them on the Day of Resurrection. And He will say to him, 'Do you remember the day on which you did this and did that?' so that He may remind him of what he did in the world" (Ṭ). In many verses throughout the Quran, it is said that on the Day of Judgment God will "inform" people about their actions in this life; see 5:14, 105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 29:8; 31:15, 23; 39:7; 41:50; 58:6–7; 62:8; 64:7; 75:13. If God's recounting of people's earthly deeds indicates His Omniscience, the subsequent statement that God was *never absent* indicates His Omnipresence and Immanence. See also 57:4: *And He is with you wheresoever you are, and God sees whatsoever you do.*

8–9 *The weighing on that Day* refers to the "weighing" of every individual's deeds and the judgment rendered upon them on the Last Day. The "weighing" is *true* in that it is just (Ṭ). The *balance is heavy* for those who have accumulated many good deeds or for those whose good deeds outweigh bad ones (Ṭ), while the *balance is light* (v. 9) for those whose evil deeds have outweighed good ones. A *ḥadīth* says, "Nothing is heavier in the balance than good character (*ḥusn al-khuluq*)" (Ṭ); and another indicates that belief in the One God and in the prophethood of Muhammad outweighs even a vast record of error and sin (R).

The image of a balance weighing good and evil deeds is used in other Quranic passages as a metaphor for Divine Judgment (21:47; 23:102–3; 101:6–9). This image is consistent with repeated Quranic injunctions to weigh with justice and integrity in commercial transactions (cf. 6:152;

treated Our signs wrongfully. (10) And We have indeed established you upon the earth and placed means of livelihood for you therein. Little do you give thanks! (11) Indeed, We created you, then We formed you, then We said unto the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam." And they all prostrated, save

7:85; 11:84–85; 17:35; 26:182–83; 55:8–9) as well as with the larger Quranic theme that God creates all things "in due balance" and thus "sets [or sends down] the balance" (*al-mīzān*) for everything in the created order (15:18; 42:17; 55:7; 57:25). When considered together with these other Quranic themes, the representation of judgment as the weighing of deeds in a balance suggests the existence of a universal "balance" that is in the nature of all things in the cosmos, forming the basis of just and equitable human transactions in this world and according to which all human actions will be measured and recompensed in the next.

Like the questioning of individuals mentioned in v. 6, the weighing of deeds in scales should not be understood to mean that God needs a source of information or judgment outside Himself in order to know how individual human beings should be judged. Rather, it is intended to serve as a form of rebuke that forces wrongdoers to acknowledge their wrongdoing and surrender all attempts to excuse their actions (Z); the "balance" also serves to assure human beings that they have not been wronged, since all deeds are weighed according to the same scale.

10 This verse is addressed to people generally. God has *established* (*makkannā*) them *upon the earth* may mean that He has given them a dwelling place on the earth (Ṭ; cf. 2:36; 6:98; 7:24), but also that He has given or delegated to them a certain power in the world (JJ). This verse serves as an introduction to the story of Adam's creation and fall that immediately follows, and at the end of two separate Quranic accounts of this same incident God mentions that He is establishing a dwelling for human beings *on the earth* (2:36; 7:24).

11–25 The narrative in these verses represents the second account (in the textual order of the Quran) of Adam's creation, temptation, and banishment; the first account is found in 2:30–39, and later accounts in 17:61–65 and 20:115–24. See also 15:28–43 and 38:71–85, where a similar account is told of the creation and fall of the first human being, but without specific reference to Adam.

11 *We created you, then We formed you* is addressed to all human beings, who are considered to have been originally created along with Adam as the seed in his loins. As such, all human beings can be understood as having participated in the events of the narrative that follows and in the nobility God bestows upon Adam, and are thus subject to the commands and the warnings issued to him. See v. 172, where all human beings bear witness to God's Lordship in a pretemporal covenant: *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yea, we bear witness."* In the present verse, *We created you* is understood as referring to mankind's creation as a whole through the creation of Adam, and *then We formed you* refers to God's shaping each individual, in either the womb of the mother or the loins of Adam (Ṭ, Th). Others considered these statements to refer directly to God's creation and formation of Adam and only indirectly or representatively to the creation of the rest of mankind (R, Ṭ). For God's having created the first human being from clay with His *two Hands*, see 38:71–75.

God's command to the angels to bow to Adam is a key element in all accounts of Adam's creation (2:34; 15:29; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 38:73–74) and can be understood to indicate that primordial human beings, or human beings before the fall, hold a station higher than that of the angels. Because in the Islamic tradition one should not bow to any being but God, commentators sometimes explain the command to prostrate before Adam as being merely symbolic in nature, or they say that the angels were ultimately bowing to God and taking Adam as their *qiblah*, or direction of prayer (R). It is also possible to prostrate in recognition of the spiritual greatness of another rather than as a form of worship; see 12:100, where Joseph's entire family bows to him after being reunited with

Iblīs; he was not among those who prostrated. (12) He said, "What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee?" He said, "I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay." (13) He said, "Get down from it! It is not for thee to wax arrogant here. So go

him. *And they*—that is, the angels—*all prostrated save Iblīs.* The phrasing of this statement, which suggests that Iblīs is among the angels, represents an important Quranic basis for the idea that Iblīs was himself an angel, although in 18:50, in an identical context, Iblīs is said to be *of the jinn.* This has given rise to a debate among Islamic scholars about whether Iblīs should be classified as an angel or a jinn; see 2:30c.

12 Iblīs explains his refusal to prostrate before Adam by asserting his superiority over Adam on the basis of the argument that he was created *from fire,* which he perceives as a more powerful and nobler substance than *clay,* from which Adam was created. This argument also appears explicitly in 38:76 and is implicit in Iblīs's dismissive remarks about Adam being made of clay in 15:33. Iblīs's claim to have been created from fire lends some support to the view that Iblīs was a jinn, since God *created jinn from smokeless fire* (55:15). Iblīs's argument, however, is self-serving and partial, in both senses of the term. Although fire may be luminous, subtle, and characterized by levity and lightness (Q, R, Ṭ), it is also associated with fickleness, recklessness, restlessness, and destructiveness—with grandeur, but also haughtiness, qualities consistent with the arrogance (see v. 13) that ultimately leads to Iblīs's perdition (Q, Ṭ). By contrast, clay or earth is base, heavy, dark, and low lying (R), but also has the properties of gravity, forbearance, humility, and stability. It is these latter qualities in Adam that lead him to seek and receive God's forgiveness after his disobedience (Q, Ṭ; see v. 23). Clay or earth can also serve as a place of prayer. Moreover, in the Islamic context it is the constituent elements of clay—namely, water and earth—that serve as a means of ritual purification (see 4:43; 5:6), not fire (unlike in Zoroastrianism, for example); and it is fire rather than clay that is a means of Divine punishment in the Hereafter (Q).

Iblīs's argument, based purely on the original substance from which Adam was created, makes Iblīs blind to other ways in which God had ennobled Adam, such as creating him with His *two Hands* (38:75), breathing into him His Spirit (15:29; 32:9; 38:72), and endowing him with exceptional knowledge (2:31). Iblīs's argument is based on analogy, an all too human form of reasoning, but he presents it in the face of the direct Divine command to prostrate before Adam. Analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) is one of the four major sources of law in Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence (although generally opposed or used only rarely in the Ḥanbalī school) and is used in the science of logic. Iblīs's contention here, however, was likened by some to a form of *qiyās,* and it is sometimes cited as a reason to discount or reject *qiyās* as a source of law, notably in the Jaʿfarī Shiite school, with the argument that "the first to use analogical reasoning was Iblīs!" (Q, Ṭ). It may be argued, however, that the problem in the case of Iblīs stemmed not from his use of analogical reasoning as such, but rather from his having employed such reasoning in order to oppose or subvert a direct Divine command; those who accept analogical reasoning as a source of law always subordinate its authority to that of the Quran and Prophetic practice (*sunnah;* Q).

13 The command to Iblīs, *Get down from it*—that is, leave the Garden—is also found in 2:36 and 20:123, and in v. 24 a similar command is addressed to Adam and his wife as well. Iblīs is then chastised for "waxing arrogant" (see also 38:75). *It is not for thee to wax arrogant here* also suggests that the Garden itself is a place in which no arrogance can be tolerated, as it is a place for humility and obedience; some have suggested that Iblīs's arrogance, even more than or in addition to his disobedience, was the cause of his exile from the Garden. This verse thus serves as a warning to human beings, who in several verses are accused of "waxing arrogant," since this may bar one from the paradisal Garden (Bḍ).

forth! Thou art surely among those who are humbled." (14) He said, "Grant me respite till the Day they are resurrected." (15) He said, "Truly thou art among those granted respite." (16) He said, "Because Thou hast caused me to err, I shall surely lie in wait for them on Thy straight path. (17) Then I shall come upon them from in front of them and from behind them, and from their right and

14–15 Despite Iblīs's banishment in v. 13, here he asks for, and is granted, respite from God, so that he will neither die nor be punished (Bḍ) *till the Day they are resurrected,* referring to the Day of universal Resurrection and Judgment (cf. 15:36–38; 17:62; 38:79–81).

16 Iblīs claims that God has *caused* him *to err,* and some commentators have considered Iblīs's claim to represent a true statement, albeit one that does not excuse his actions (R, Z), and it may be seen as consistent with Quranic verses that seem to indicate that God "misleads" certain people or allows them to go astray (see, e.g., 2:26; 40:74; 74:31). Others held that God caused Iblīs to err only insofar as His command to Iblīs to prostrate before Adam uncovered Iblīs's hidden pride and stubbornness (R). Nonetheless, this account of Iblīs raised profound questions for certain Islamic theologians and mystics. Some even suggested that in commanding Iblīs to prostrate before Adam, God put Iblīs in a deliberately impossible position—commanding Iblīs to do something He already knew he would not do. Since Iblīs, like all creatures, was charged with worshipping and obeying only God, prostrating before Adam would simultaneously represent an act of obedience to God's command and—according to the thinking some commentators and mystics imaginatively attributed to Iblīs—a compromise of his obligation to worship only God, since prostrating before Adam would mean bowing to someone other than God (see Aj and R for brief references to this idea). The Baghdādī mystic al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) famously imagined Iblīs as a sincere lover of God who could not bring himself to bow to anyone other than Him, even on pain of his own ultimate destruction and eternal banishment from his Beloved.

After blaming God for his fall into error, Iblīs then vowed, *I shall surely lie in wait for them,* that is, for Adam and his progeny. Having despaired of God's Mercy and Forgiveness and thus of ever regaining his position of proximity to God, Iblīs (whose name may be related to *ablasa,* meaning "to despair") became intent on destroying the relationship between God and His newly privileged creature. It may be that Iblīs also blamed Adam or human beings as a whole for his fall into error and wished that he might be, in turn, the cause of their corruption, just as they, in his view, had been the cause of his (Z).

*On Thy straight path* means on the path of Islam, or true religion (R), indicating that Iblīs will seek to target those believing human beings seeking to live in obedience to God. The Quran mentions in several passages the various ways in which Iblīs, or Satan (*Shayṭān,* as he is called after his banishment), fulfills his vow to try to mislead human beings: "whispering" to them, as he does to Adam (7:20; 20:120); "commanding indecency" (2:268; 24:21); "deranging" them with his touch (2:275) or voice (17:64); "making them slip" (3:155); "sowing fear" (3:174); making them (false) promises (4:120; 14:22; 17:64); inciting evil between them (12:100; 17:53), sometimes through wine and gambling (5:90); making their evil deeds "seem fair unto them" (6:43; 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38); causing them to forget God and His commandments (6:68; 12:42; 18:63; 58:19); and even by attempting to alter revelation (22:52).

17 According to al-Rāzī, that Satan will *come upon them from in front of them and from behind them* may refer to his causing them to doubt the reality of Resurrection and Judgment and deluding them into thinking that this world is eternal; to his cutting off their desire for the Hereafter while increasing their desire for worldly things; or to his inciting them to disbelieve in the prophets of their time as well as those of the past. He will also *come upon them . . . from their right and their left,* meaning that he will corrupt them through inciting both disbelief and religious innovation (*bidʿah*).

from their left. And Thou wilt not find most of them thankful." (18) He said, "Go forth from it, disgraced and banished! Whosoever among them follows you, I shall surely fill Hell with you all." (19) "O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat from wheresoever you two will, but approach not this tree, lest you two be among the wrongdoers." (20) Then Satan whispered to them,

In explaining why Satan comes at people from these four directions, but not from above or below them, al-Rāzī says that when Satan made this vow to mislead human beings, the angels' hearts softened toward them, and they asked God how human beings could possibly escape Satan's surrounding influence. God replied that two paths remained free and open to mankind, that above them and that below them, so that if they raised their hands in supplication to God or bowed their heads to the ground in humility, they would be forgiven for their sins (R). The Quran elsewhere indicates that Iblīs's prediction *Thou wilt not find most of them thankful* is indeed accurate, for 34:20 states, *And Iblīs did indeed prove his opinion of them to be true; and they followed him, save for a group among the believers.* See also 10:60; 27:73; 34:13.

18 For similar presentations of the Divine reaction to Iblīs's refusal to prostrate and his argument defending his refusal, see 15:34–35, 43; 17:63; 38:77–78, 85. Here, as in these verses, Iblīs is told *Go forth from it*—that is, from the Garden of Eden—indicating that he has been banished from the Garden, but not necessarily from the celestial realm altogether—hence Iblīs's continued presence in Paradise, so that he is later able to tempt Adam and Eve while they are in the Garden (vv. 20–22). The command here, *Go forth* (*ukhruj*), is different from the command *Get down* (*ihbiṭū*), issued to Iblīs, Adam, and his wife collectively in v. 24, which marks more clearly their collective descent from the celestial realm. The Divine threat regarding those who follow Iblīs (Satan) that He *shall surely fill Hell with you all* suggests that Satan, along with the disbelieving and iniquitous human beings he misleads, will be punished in Hell together. From another perspective, however, Satan can be said to be already in Hell, which exists, in a sense, even now and not just in the future. Other verses, including 11:119; 32:13; 38:85 (this last similarly occurs in the context of a parallel account about Adam), also suggest that Satan, along with evil human beings and jinn, will be in Hell together.

19 Cf. 2:35 and commentary. Adam is here commanded to *dwell . . . in the Garden* along with his *wife;* that is, Eve, or Ḥawwāʾ in Arabic, whose name does not appear in the Quran, although it is commonly used in the Islamic tradition. Until this point, the narrative has focused solely on Adam and Iblīs, but at this point Eve enters the account without any explicit mention of her own origin. Although it is clear in the Quran that Adam also represents all of humanity—male and female—in the account of his original creation, his vicegerency, his Divinely granted knowledge, and the prostration of the angels before him (cf. 2:30–34), the Quran does not explicitly discuss the process by which this primordial Adam is differentiated into the first male and female who "dwell in the Garden" after Iblīs's expulsion from it. The Biblical story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21–22), however, is referenced in the *Ḥadīth,* and many commentators have considered 4:1: *O mankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women,* an oblique reference to the creation of Eve from Adam (see 4:1c). In this case, however, Eve can be said to have been created not from Adam as male, but rather from the original androgynic Adam who is the prototype of all humanity, both male and female. Adam and his wife may eat any of the fruits of the Garden that they wish, but they are warned together not to approach *this tree,* which commentators variously describe as a wheat or grain plant, a fig tree, or a grapevine (see 2:35c). This tree is described as the *Tree of Everlastingness* in 20:120. The description of the tree distinguishes the Quranic account from the Biblical one, where the tree is identified as the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17).

20 Iblīs *whispered to them,* meaning either that he spoke to them openly in a low voice or

that he might expose to them that which was hidden from them of their nakedness. And he said, "Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree, lest you should become angels, or among those who abide [forever]." (21) And he swore unto them, "Truly I am a sincere adviser unto you." (22) Thus he lured them on through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden to cover themselves. And their Lord called out to them, "Did I not forbid you from that

that he spoke subtly to their hearts (R) in order to tempt them toward disobeying God (for Satan's "whispering," see 7:16c; 114:4c) and thereby to *expose . . . their nakedness,* which had been *hidden from them.* See also 20:118–19, where Adam and his wife are told that they will experience no nakedness, hunger, thirst, or heat in the Garden. Adam and Eve's realization of their nakedness is also a key element of the corresponding Biblical narrative (see Genesis 3:7–11). Adam and Eve's act of disobedience is also said to expose *their nakedness* in 20:121, but in the present context a more extensive discussion of human *nakedness* and the Divine gift of *raiment* and *adornment* to cover it follows in vv. 22, 26–27, 31–32. The *nakedness* of Adam and Eve is widely glossed as a reference to their private parts (JJ, Ṭ, Z); according to the early narrator and traditionist Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. early second/eighth century), Adam and Eve were initially cloaked in light, so that their private parts were concealed from them (Ṭ, Z). *Nakedness* translates *sawʾah,* which derives from a root meaning something that is bad or evil, indicating that exposing one's nakedness, or private parts specifically, is corrupting for human beings (R), and many commentators see this verse as evidence that exposing one's private parts (except in legally permitted contexts, such as marriage) is inherently sinful (R, Z).

Iblīs tempts Adam and his wife by suggesting falsely that God had forbidden them the fruit of the tree only because eating it would allow them to *become angels* and to *abide [forever],* that is, to be immortal; cf. 20:120: *Then Satan whispered to him. He said, "O Adam! Shall I show thee the Tree of Everlastingness, and a kingdom that never decays?"* Perhaps it is in reference to this *kingdom* that Iblīs promises them that a minority read *lest you should become angels* (*malakayn*) as "lest you should become sovereigns of the kingdom (*malikayn*)" (Ṭ). By suggesting the possibility of their becoming angels, or immortal, Satan raises in them false hopes and desires, a satanic tactic mentioned elsewhere; see 4:119–20.

21–22 Iblīs (Satan) misleads Adam and Eve, swearing to them—according to commentators, swearing by God (Ṭ, Th, Z)—that he is their *sincere adviser,* although in vv. 16–17 Iblīs expresses his evil intentions toward human beings, and in v. 22 indicates that God had already warned Adam and his wife that Satan was their *manifest enemy* (see also 2:168, 208; 6:142; 12:5; 17:53; 36:60; 43:62). Satan "lures" Adam and his wife *through deception*—that is, through delusion and false promises—and *Satan promises . . . naught but delusion* (17:64; see also 4:120). Delusion and "false promises" are Satan's primary tactics—he is the *Deluder* in 31:33; 35:5; and 57:14—for he has been given no power to compel human beings, and *no authority* over those who are believing servants of God (see 15:42; 16:99; 17:65; 34:21).

*And when they*—that is, Adam and Eve—*tasted of the tree,* they suddenly became aware of their *nakedness,* because their act of disobedience had effectively removed the Divinely ordered cover or light (see 7:20c) that had been concealing it from them. Contrary to the Biblical account in Genesis 3, where Eve is both the immediate object of Satan's temptation and the agent of temptation for Adam, in the Quranic account Adam and Eve are both directly tempted by Satan and succumb to his temptation together. Some commentators do mention reports that Eve had been tempted first (Ṭ, Th), likely on the basis of the Biblical account, but the Quranic account itself is clear that Eve is not the cause of Adam's fall; rather, the two participate equally in the transgression, the fall, and its consequences. That Adam and Eve are

tree, and tell you that Satan is a manifest enemy unto you?" (23) They said, "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou dost not forgive us and have Mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers." (24) He said, "Get down, each of you an enemy to the other! There will be for you on earth a dwelling place, and enjoyment for a while." (25) He said, "Therein you shall live, and therein you

capable of disobeying God in Paradise indicates that they had free will even before the fall.

Adam and Eve's sudden awareness of their *nakedness* suggests their loss of innocence and evokes a profound sense of alienation, even from themselves; that is, from the honored station in which God had created them, worthy as they had been of the angels' prostration. This awareness prompts them to sew together *leaves of the Garden* to cover themselves, which serves as a scriptural basis for the Divine gift of *raiment* for human beings, as discussed in vv. 26–27, 31–32. The leaves they use are said by most traditional sources to be fig leaves (Ṭ, Z), as in the Biblical account, and several commentators mention that Adam attempted to hide from God out of shame, just as he does in Genesis 3:10. When God confronts Adam and Eve with their disobedience and their failure to heed His warning about Satan's enmity, it is said that He *called out to them,* an expression that indicates distance and alienation, in contrast to God's more intimate and direct address to Adam in v. 19 (Qu).

23 Adam and Eve immediately accept blame and seek forgiveness, saying, *We have wronged ourselves* (see also 2:37 and commentary). Their admission indicates an awareness that their disobedience has brought harm only to themselves, for human action does not *harm God in the least* (cf. 3:144, 176; 47:32). They have "wronged themselves" in that their disobedience has alienated them from their original nature and from God (see 7:21–22c); even before God Himself declares their banishment in v. 24, for *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44; see also, e.g., 3:117, 135; 4:97; 9:70; 37:113). The penitent attitude and words of Adam and his wife model the appropriate attitude one should have after one has sinned; see, for example, 4:64, *If, when they had wronged themselves, they had but come to thee and sought forgiveness of God, and the Messenger had sought forgiveness for them, they would surely have found God Relenting, Merciful.* Despite their free admission of their own guilt, some commentators report that Adam added in his own defense that Satan had "sworn unto them by God" that he was their *sincere adviser* (v. 21), and that he (Adam) could not imagine that anyone would swear by God to perpetrate a lie (IK, Ṭ, Th, Z). Adam and his wife's response to Divine chastisement contrasts sharply with that of Iblīs, who, when questioned about his act of disobedience, offers an argument in favor of his behavior (v. 12) and, when it is rejected, asks only for temporary respite from Divine punishment—not forgiveness—that he might take revenge upon human beings. Satan's attitude is thus one of pride but also, it would seem, despair of Divine Forgiveness, whereas Adam's is one of humility and hope in Divine Mercy.

24–25 God's command *Get down, each of you an enemy to the other!* (cf. 2:36; 20:123) is widely considered to be addressed to Adam and Eve and their future progeny as well as to Iblīs, or Satan (Ṭ). The command is taken to indicate their banishment from the celestial realm altogether and is thus different from God's earlier command banishing Iblīs from the Garden specifically (*Get down from it,* v. 13). Some Sufi commentators emphasize the providential and even merciful aspect of the fall of Adam and Eve, noting that their act of disobedience led to their assumption of vicegerency on the earth and offered them the opportunity to draw near to God once again—a drawing near that is only possible after the experience of distance and exile (Aj). Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, an eighth-/fourteenth-century Shādhilī Sufi master, said in his book *al-Ḥikam* ("Aphorisms"), "An act of disobedience that bequeaths humility and need is better than an act of obedience that bequeaths might and pride" (Aj; *al-Ḥikam,* no. 96). Similarly, the fall affords God the opportunity to manifest His Attribute of Forgiveness and offers Adam, and by extension all human beings, the possibility of manifesting humility and repentance and returning to God,

shall die, and from there shall you be brought forth." (26) O Children of Adam! We have indeed sent down upon you raiment to cover your nakedness, and rich adornment. But the raiment of reverence, that is better. This is among the signs of God, that haply they may remember. (27) O Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you, as he caused your parents to go forth from the Garden, stripping them of their raiment to show them their nakedness. Surely he sees you—he and his tribe—whence you see them not. We have indeed made the satans the

through which they attain a degree of perfection that was not possible without the experience of the fall.

*Dwelling place* translates *mustaqarr,* meaning a settled or established place; for a fuller discussion of this term, see 6:98c. The idea that earthly life entails *enjoyment for a while* is repeated in various ways elsewhere in the Quran (see, e.g., 16:80; and 2:36, also in relation to Adam). The fleeting and limited *enjoyment* of this world, however, is frequently compared with the permanence and totality of one's enjoyment or punishment in the Hereafter (3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 10:70; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 40:39; 42:36), a reminder of which is provided by the reference to earthly life, earthly death, and resurrection (being *brought forth*) in v. 25.

26 That God *sent down upon you raiment* may mean that He provided human beings the means with which to make clothing to cover their nakedness (Ṭ), revealed to them after Adam's act of disobedience, or that He decreed or prescribed the wearing of clothing for mankind (Z). Some commentators invoke the blessing of *raiment* mentioned here to castigate the pre-Islamic practice of circumambulating the Kaʿbah in the nude (Ṭ). *Rich adornment* translates *rīsh,* which literally denotes the plumage of birds and metaphorically connotes wealth, finery, beautiful furnishings, and luxurious goods (Iṣ). When used to refer to clothing, it can mean ornamental clothing, especially outer garments that indicate wealth and status, as well as other ornamental items. The verse thus enjoins both clothing that covers one's nakedness and clothing used purely for adornment, indicating that beauty and adornment are a worthy aim (R, Z).

The *raiment of reverence* (*libās al-taqwā*) is sometimes interpreted as referring to armor worn in battle, since the word for *reverence* (*taqwā*) is derived from a root related to "protection," but it can also refer to the clothing one dons for prayer (R). Others suggest that the *raiment of reverence* refers back to the *raiment* used *to cover . . . nakedness,* indicating that the clothing that covers one's nakedness is better than that worn purely for *adornment* (R, Ṭ). The *raiment of reverence* is most widely interpreted, however, as referring to a combination of pious qualities—including faith, modesty, righteous deeds, beautiful comportment, and fear of God (R, Ṭ, Z)—that together can be said to constitute *reverence* (*taqwā*) as the term is used in the Quran (see also 2:2c). For this reason, al-Rāzī maintains that the private parts (or "shame") of believers are always covered, even when they are naked, while those of the profligate are always "uncovered," even when they are clothed (R).

27 *Let not Satan tempt you,* addressed to the *Children of Adam* and thus to human beings as a whole, extends the warning that God issued to Adam about Satan, as implied in His question to Adam in v. 22, *Did I not . . . tell you that Satan is a manifest enemy unto you?* (see also 20:117). *Your parents* refers to Adam and his wife, whose *nakedness* was exposed to them after succumbing to Satan's temptation. The warning continues, reminding human beings that *he*—that is, Satan—*and his tribe* of jinn and other "satans" see human beings, although human beings do not see them, for both Satan and the jinn are considered to have subtle rather than material bodies (R)—a distinction symbolized by the idea that Satan and the jinn are made of fire, while Adam and his progeny are made of clay (see v. 12).

That human beings do not see Satan and *his tribe* also indicates the latter's subtle and deceptive tactics (Z), as they tempt human beings in ways

friends of those who do not believe. (28) When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus." Say, "Truly God commands not indecency. Do you say of God that which you know not?" (29) Say, "My Lord has commanded justice. So set your faces [toward Him] at every place of prayer, and call upon Him, devoting religion entirely to Him.

that they neither anticipate nor immediately recognize, as when Satan swears by God to Adam and his wife that he is their *sincere adviser* (see v. 21; 7:23c). The idea that the disbelievers and wrongdoers have *satans* as their friends and protectors is found elsewhere in the Quran; see 2:14; 7:30. In 2:102, the satans "teach people sorcery," and in 6:121 they *inspire their friends to dispute* with the believers. Although in the present verse *satans* seems to refer to the progeny and minions of Satan among the jinn, "satans" can also come from among human beings; see 6:112: *Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn, who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive.* See also 4:76, which refers to certain human beings—namely, the opponents of the believers—as *the allies* (or "friends") *of Satan* (*awliyāʾ al-Shayṭān*), as opposed to the *friends of God* (*awliyāʾ Allāh*) in 10:62. For Ashʿarite theologians, such as al-Rāzī, and those with a more determinist understanding of Divine-human relations, that God is said to have *made the satans the friends* of the disbelievers indicates God's active role in leading some human beings into error (R).

28 *Indecency* (*fāḥishah*) sometimes refers specifically to sexual transgression (see 4:15c; 4:22c), but elsewhere (e.g., 6:151) it refers to all sin and transgression that is particularly abominable (Ṭ). In the context of the discussion about nakedness in relation to the story of Adam's temptation, some have suggested that the particular *indecency* mentioned here is the pre-Islamic Arab custom of circumambulating the Kaʿbah in the nude (Ṭ, Z). When *they*—that is, the disbelievers who take satans for their friends (v. 27)—commit such indecencies, they seek to excuse themselves by arguing that they are merely following the custom of their fathers (an excuse disbelievers offer in several Quranic verses: 2:170; 5:104; 21:52–53; 31:21), although the excuse of blindly following others in religious belief and practice (*taqlīd*) is never accepted, even if it is ancestors who are being followed. In vv. 172–73, the primordial covenant in which all human beings recognize the Lordship of God prior to their earthly existence is said to nullify all such excuses, for all human beings can be said to know, deep in their soul, the truth about God, although some may have forgotten it. The disbelievers also sometimes argue that the "indecencies" they practice were "commanded" by or otherwise attributable to God (see 6:148 and commentary). But the response is that *God commands not indecency;* rather, it is Satan who *enjoins indecency and wrong* (24:21; see also 2:168–69, 268).

29 God *has commanded justice* (*qisṭ*), not indecency, as the disbelievers allege in v. 28. *Qisṭ* (justice) can also mean, more generally, what is right or proper, and it is connected by some with the testimony of faith, "There is no god but God," following 3:18: *God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice* (*qisṭ;* R). So *set your faces [toward Him]*—that is, toward the *qiblah,* or direction of prayer, which is toward the Sacred Mosque in Makkah (2:144, 150)—*at every place of prayer.* This may mean to turn toward the *qiblah* in prayer "wheresoever you may be" (see 2:144); however, the verse could also mean to turn toward the *qiblah* at every time of prayer (R, Z). "Turning," "setting," or "submitting" one's face toward God is a frequent Quranic image of monotheistic devotion, signifying the orientation of one's whole being toward worship of and obedience to God (see 2:112; 3:20; 6:79; 10:105; 30:30, 43; 31:22).

To *call upon Him* most commonly means to supplicate God for one's spiritual and material needs, although some commentators here consider it a reference to canonical prayer or worship generally (R, Z). As in several other verses, "calling upon God" is followed by the mention of *devoting religion entirely to Him* (see also 10:22; 29:65; 31:32; 39:2, 11, 14; 40:14, 65; 73:8), a phrase connoting sincere worship for the sake of God

Just as He originated you, so shall you return." (30) Some He has rightly guided, and some are deserving of error. Truly they took satans as their protectors apart from God and deem them rightly guided. (31) O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not

alone. *Just as He originated you, so shall you return* is one of several ways in which the Quran indicates the analogous nature of original creation and resurrection, suggesting that God's ability to create, which was widely recognized even by some pre-Islamic Arabs, should allay any doubts about His ability to resurrect human beings (Ṭ). According to a *ḥadīth,* people will be resurrected in the same state as that in which they were born, "barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised" (Ṭ); that is, alone and in utter dependency upon God. See 6:94: *And [God will say], "Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time";* as well as 18:48; 21:104.

30 The influence of God upon the moral destiny of human beings seems to be confirmed by the first line of this verse, *some He has rightly guided,* which, like several other verses, indicates that not all are guided, for *had God willed, He would have gathered them all to guidance* (6:35). Others *are deserving of error,* meaning, according to some, that their actions have made them deserving of the description that they are in error (Z). Muʿtazilite theologians, who believed that human moral destiny was determined by human choice and action, have understood references to God guiding or misleading some but not others as modes of reward and punishment—that is, God guides some as a reward for virtuous acts and misleads others as a form of punishment for evil deeds. In the present context, those who *took satans as their protectors apart from God* are *deserving of error* for having done so (R). Many Ashʿarite theologians, by contrast, have taken the present verse, and others like it, as scriptural evidence for Divine control over human moral destiny (R). Regarding taking *satans* as friends or *protectors,* see 7:27c.

31 *Adornment* translates *zīnah*—a term that has both positive and negative connotations in the Quran, insofar as it refers to worldly sources of beauty or status (cf. 11:15; 16:8; 18:28, 46) that are part of God's provision for human beings, but are also potential sources of pride, temptation, or worldliness that lead to forgetfulness of God and the Hereafter. It may also refer to clothing or any other item used to beautify oneself (Z), but in the present context, following shortly after the account of Satan *stripping* Adam and Eve *of their raiment to show them their nakedness* (v. 27), it most likely refers to clothing used to cover one's nakedness rather than ornamentation (R). The *Children of Adam* are instructed to *put on* their *adornment at every place of worship,* but elsewhere women are instructed to conceal their *adornment* (usually understood to mean parts of their bodies); see 24:31c; 33:33c.

Some commentators see all three injunctions in the present verse, including the encouragement to *eat and drink,* as relating to the practices of the Arabs prior to the coming of Islam, who, as noted earlier, circumambulated the Kaʿbah naked, placed arbitrary restrictions on the consumption of certain foods (see 5:103c; 6:136–39, 143–44), and limited their overall consumption of food during their pilgrimage to the Kaʿbah (R). Some reports indicate that the Quraysh had established a rule that the only clothing that could be worn and the only food that could be eaten in the sacred precincts of Makkah were the clothing and food of the Quraysh, since they were the "people of the Sacred Mosque." Any who wished to enter the sacred precincts of Makkah and perform the pilgrimage thus had to borrow or buy clothing from the Quraysh and eat their food or go naked and abstain from eating (Q). The present verse is thus understood as putting an end to such practices by instructing people to *put on* their *adornment* at *every place of worship,* and so to perform the rites at the Kaʿbah clothed, and to *eat and drink,* that is, of all the good and lawful things that God has provided for them (Ṭ, Z). It should be noted, however, that nowhere in Islamic holy places are men clad as thinly as during the *ḥajj,* as the male *iḥrām,* or pilgrim dress, consists of only two unsewn pieces of cloth. This brings them as close as possible to their original nakedness without actually being naked.

The command to *put on* ... *adornment* for prayer is also related to the injunction, established

prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal. (32) Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of God, which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things among [His] provision?" Say, "These are for those who believe, in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they are for them alone." Thus do We expound the signs for a people who know. (33) Say, "My Lord has only forbidden indecencies—both outward and inward—and sin, and tyranny without right, and that you should ascribe partners unto God, for which He has sent down no authority, and that you should say of God that which you know not." (34) And for every community there is a term appointed. When their term comes, they shall not delay it by a single hour, nor shall they advance it.

by Prophetic practice (*sunnah*), that people should groom themselves when attending prayer, including putting on perfume and their best apparel, but avoid excess or pride in doing so (Z). Indeed, the verse indicates that one should not be *prodigal,* which can mean to exceed the bounds of what is lawful to consume (R, Ṭ) or to be excessive and wasteful in one's consumption (R; see also 10:12c). With regard to the latter meaning, some mention the spiritual and physical benefits that come from eating little or only enough to fulfill one's basic needs (Q). Still others interpret the *adornment* encouraged here to be spiritual rather than material in nature; al-Qushayrī, for example, identifies the adornment of the souls of the worshippers with the marks of prostration (on their foreheads), and the adornment of the hearts of the gnostics with the "lights of being [*wujūd*]." That God *loves not the prodigal* is also found in 6:141.

32 This verse reaffirms the lawfulness of *adornment,* which God has provided for human beings (v. 26), and chastises all those, like the idolatrous Makkans, who would forbid such adornment arbitrarily. *Adornment,* here as elsewhere, may be related to clothing, but may also be related to any type of ornamentation. Some connect this verse with a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet instructs one of his followers to avoid excesses in asceticism and to reject the ascetic impulse to abstain from, among other things, owning property, eating meat, having children, or wearing perfume (R). All of these might fall under the category of "worldly adornment," but this verse and various *aḥādīth* indicate that such things are lawful so long as temperance and propriety are maintained. Such *adornment* is for the believers *in the life of this world*—that is, to be enjoyed here—and *on the Day of Resurrection* it is for them alone. This indicates that though both believers and disbelievers may enjoy various kinds of adornment in their earthly lives, in the Hereafter such adornment is for the believers exclusively (R, Z).

33 Contrary to the arbitrary prohibitions of the idolaters alluded to in vv. 31–32, God forbids only *indecencies . . . and sin* (*indecencies* here refers to particularly abominable sins). He forbids *outward* and *inward* sins, meaning either public and private sins, respectively, or an outward sinful action and its inward intention; see 6:120c; 6:151–52c. In the phrase *tyranny without right, tyranny* translates *baghy,* which connotes oppression and overweening arrogance (Z) as well as rebelliousness (see also 10:23; 42:27, 42). God also forbids the ascribing of *partners unto* Him, or *shirk,* which is identified in 4:48 and 4:116 as the only sin that will not be forgiven if one dies without repenting. For such "partners" God has *sent down no authority,* that is, no revealed warrant or instruction to worship them. Finally, it is forbidden to *say of God that which you know not,* that is, to falsely ascribe ideas, practices, or words to Him, something similarly criticized in 2:80, 169, and 7:28 as well as in the many verses that chastise those who would "fabricate (lies) against God" (see, e.g., 3:94; 4:50; 6:21; 7:37; 10:17).

34 The idea that every community or people has a *term appointed*—that is, a fixed term that can be neither "advanced" nor "delayed" and

(35) O Children of Adam! Should there come unto you messengers from among yourselves, recounting My signs unto you, then whosoever is reverent and makes amends, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (36) But those who deny Our signs and treat them with disdain, it is they who are the inhabitants of the Fire. They shall abide therein. (37) And who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies His signs? For such as these, their portion of the book will reach them, till, when Our messengers come to take them away, they will say, "Where is that which you used to call upon apart from God?" They will respond, "They have forsaken us." And they bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers. (38) He will say, "Enter the Fire

after which they will cease to exist on earth—is referenced in several verses; see 10:49; 15:5; 23:43; 34:30; 71:4. Individual human beings and humanity as a whole are also said to have a "fixed" or "appointed" term as far as life in this world is concerned (16:61; 34:30; 71:4).

35 This verse is similar to 2:38, which also concludes an account of Adam's fall: *We said, "Get down from it, all of you. If guidance should come to you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve."* In both cases, the punishment of exile from the Garden is followed by the consolation that God will send human beings guidance, here in the form of *messengers from among yourselves.* And by virtue of responding to the messengers with reverence and "making amends"—that is, repenting of one's former actions and obeying the commands and prohibitions brought by the messengers (Ṭ)—hope is offered that Adam and his progeny may find their way back to a place—that is, the celestial Garden—in which *no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.* This last clause is repeated in several verses as a reference to success and bliss in the Hereafter; see 2:62, 112, 262, 274, 277; 3:170; 5:69; 6:48; 7:49; 10:62; 46:13.

36 That those who deny the signs of God in this life will face punishment in Hellfire in the next is found in several verses; cf. 2:39; 4:56; 5:10, 86; 22:51, 57; 57:19; 64:10. Denying the signs of God may refer here particularly to rejecting the message of God's Oneness brought by the messengers, to disavowing the other truths and Divine commands they brought, and to being too proud to affirm the truth of the proofs and guidance offered by revelation (Ṭ).

37 *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God* is a rhetorical question found in several verses (6:21, 93, 144; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68; 61:7), and, as here, the same is said of those who reject or deny God's signs (cf. 6:157; 18:57; 32:22). That *their portion of the book will reach them* means that they will receive their portion of worldly provision and longevity (Q, Sy, Ṭ, Z), of good or ill (Ṭ), of punishment (R, Ṭ, Ṭs), or of salvation or damnation in the Hereafter (Ṭ), which has been ordained for them in *the book,* which here refers to the Book of all things that will come to pass or to the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c), rather than to revealed scripture (Ṭ). The *messengers* who will *take them away* are the angels who collect the souls of human beings at death (see 6:61–62c; 32:11). The idea that false idols and authorities as well as Satan, and indeed anything that one calls upon *apart from God,* will forsake one in the Hereafter is found in several verses (6:24, 94; 7:53; 10:30; 11:21; 16:87; 25:29; 28:75; 40:73–74), as is the idea that disbelievers and wrongdoers will ultimately *bear witness against themselves* on the Day of Judgment; see 6:130; 24:24; 36:65; and 41:20–22, where it is parts of one's body that will testify independent of oneself to the sins one has committed.

38–39 *He*—that is, God, or according to some, the guardian of Hell (R)—will command those who "fabricated lies against God" and denied His signs to *enter the Fire* of Hell. The

among communities of jinn and men that have passed away before you!" Every time a community enters, it curses its sister, till, when they have all successively arrived there, the last of them will say of the first of them, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment in the Fire." He will say, "For each of you it shall be doubled, but you know not." (39) And the first of them will say to the last of them, "You are no better than us; so taste the

*communities . . . that have passed away before you* refers to sects or communities following false religious ideas (Ṭ). That each community *curses its sister* means either that each community will curse previous communities or that the later generations of a false religious community or sect will curse the earlier generations of the same community or sect (R, Ṭ). This curse and mutual disowning of the leaders and followers among those who disbelieved reflects the rancor among the denizens of Hell, which contributes to their torment (see, e.g., 2:166–67; 29:25; 34:31–33). Thus not only will the false idols and authorities forsake those who worshipped them (v. 37), but the disbelievers and wrongdoers will forsake one another, and thus the Last Day is also referred to as the *Day of Mutual Dispossession* in 64:9. The rancor among those in Hell contrasts sharply with the relations between the people of Paradise, whose conversation is marked by mutual greetings and exhortations of "Peace" (see 10:10; 14:23; 19:62; 56:25–26), as God has removed all "rancor" from them (see v. 43 as well as 15:47). See also 43:67: *Friends on that Day will be enemies to one another, save for the reverent.*

That *the last of them will* blame *the first of them* for their having gone astray may mean that later generations of a condemned religious community will blame earlier generations (R, Ṭ), that the rank-and-file members of a condemned community will blame their leaders (R, Z), or both (Ṭs), as in 33:67: *They will say, "Our Lord! Truly we obeyed our leaders and elders, and they caused us to stray from the way."* It may, however, mean that later communities as a whole will blame earlier communities (Ṭs). The sixth Shiite Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, glosses the *first of them,* who are blamed for leading others astray, as unjust leaders (Ṭs). The blaming of one's elders and earlier generations of one's community for religious error reflects a similar impulse among disbelievers in this world to reject prophetic warnings with the excuse that they are following their fathers' religious practices (see 7:28c; 2:170; 5:104; 21:52–54). The Quran indicates that excuses are always rejected both in this world and in the Hereafter, and vv. 172–73 make it clear that one cannot excuse one's actions by reference to following one's ancestors.

Those who were led astray by others will ask that those whom they followed be given *a double punishment,* that is, one for their leaders' own disbelief and one for their deceiving others by inciting them to error and preventing them from following the path of God (Ṭ, Ṭs). See also 33:66–68, where those who followed others in religious error make the same request. The followers may be trying to make good on a claim that the leaders of disbelief make in 29:12: *Those who disbelieve say to those who believe, "Follow our path and we shall bear your sins."* However, in the following lines, this promise is shown to be, in a way, both true and false: *But they bear not aught of their sins. Truly they are liars. Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own* (29:12–13); see also 14:21; 40:47. This suggests that though the leaders of error do bear an additional burden for their having led others astray (see also 16:25), this does not actually alleviate the burden of those who followed them, for *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). Thus the response to the followers' request in the present verse that their leaders' punishment be doubled is, *For each of you it shall be doubled,* indicating that their request is granted, in a sense, but that the doubling of their leaders' punishment in no way diminishes their own punishment by comparison.

punishment for that which you have earned." (40) Truly those who deny Our signs and wax arrogant against them, the gates of Heaven shall not be opened for them, nor shall they enter the Garden till the camel pass through the eye of the needle. Thus do We recompense the guilty! (41) Hell shall be their resting place, with coverings above them. And thus do We recompense the wrongdoers! (42) As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds—We task no soul beyond its capacity—it is they who are the inhabitants of the Garden; they

According to al-Rāzī, the leaders do bear additional guilt for having led others astray, but the punishment is nonetheless doubled for both because this is the nature of Hell itself—namely, that its punishments continually follow one upon the other indefinitely (R); see 4:56: *We shall surely cause them to burn in a Fire. As often as their skins are consumed, We shall replace them with other skins, that they may taste the punishment.*

40 The punishment of those who *deny* God's signs and the messages of His prophets and *wax arrogant against them* is mentioned in several verses (6:93; 7:133–36; 23:45–48; 39:59–60; 41:15–16). For such people, *the gates of Heaven shall not be opened for them* in the Hereafter, or even in this life, according to some commentators, insofar as the words and actions of such people, being evil, will not "ascend to" or "be lifted up to" God; see 35:10: *Unto Him ascends the good word, and He uplifts the righteous deed* (R, Ṭ, Z). The image of the camel passing through the eye of the needle is a metaphor for something so difficult as to be impossible and is similarly used in the Gospel to describe the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). *Camel* here translates *jamal,* and many commentators consider the term to be a clear reference to this large animal. Some, however, note that the term could be read as *juml,* meaning a thick cable woven of many strands, such as is used to secure ships (R, Ṭ, Z); al-Zamakhsharī, for example, favors this reading, since the idea of a large cable passing through the eye of a needle seems a more natural metaphor than one referring to a camel. Some Biblical commentaries, such as the Geneva Study Bible, similarly suggest that the term "camel" in the Gospel account may refer to a thick cable, although most indicate that the image of a camel (or in some cases, an elephant) passing through the eye of the needle was a well-known metaphor at that time.

41 *Resting place* translates *mihād,* which is derived from a root meaning to "spread out" and thus connotes level ground, carpet, or other furnishing spread out beneath a person. Just as Hell shall be a resting place spread out beneath them, so too will there be *coverings above them,* and, according to 39:16, both will be of fire: *Above them they shall have canopies of fire and below them canopies; with that does God strike fear into His servants.* See also 29:55: *On the Day when the punishment will cover them from above and from beneath their feet, and We shall say, "Taste that which you used to do!"*

42 The idea that God tasks no soul beyond its given capacity is an important Quranic assertion found in several verses (2:233, 286; 6:152; 23:62; 65:7). It indicates that nothing is asked of a soul that cannot be accomplished, and without overwhelming hardship (Ṭ). Consequently, even the fundamental religious duties of Islam are made easier and less onerous for those in difficult situations; for example, those traveling may shorten their prayers and may postpone a mandatory fast for a later date; while those seriously and chronically ill may leave off fasting altogether, substituting charitable donations for their fast. This is because *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you* (2:185). For al-Zamakhsharī the present verse indicates that the human *capacity* for faith, good works, and righteousness is vast, not narrow or constrained.

shall abide therein. (43) And We shall remove whatever rancor lies within their breasts. Rivers shall run below them. And they will say, "Praise be to God, Who guided us unto this. We would not have been rightly guided, had God not guided us. The messengers of our Lord certainly brought the truth." And a call will be made unto them, "This is the Garden. You have inherited it for that which you used to do." (44) The inhabitants of the Garden will call out to the inhabitants of the Fire, "We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?" They will respond, "Yes." Thereupon a herald shall proclaim in their midst, "The curse of

43 The idea that the inhabitants of Paradise are free of *rancor* and have had it "removed" by God (cf. 15:47) poses a sharp contrast to the mutual recriminations between the inhabitants of Hell (see v. 38–39 and commentary). Some read the beginning of the verse to mean "We shall remove whatever rancor is in their breasts, while rivers run below them" (Ṭs). According to an early report, as the people of Paradise make their way toward the Garden, they will come upon a tree, at the base of which they will find two springs. They will cleanse themselves with one, which will refresh them and restore them to health, and drink from the other and thus be purified of all rancor (Ṭ). That *rivers shall run below them* reflects one of the primary Quranic descriptions of the paradisal Garden as having *rivers running below,* an image invoked in dozens of verses (see 2:25c).

Although this verse, like many others, indicates that paradisal states are earned as a recompense for *that which you used to do*—that is, as a reward for one's deeds in this life (Z)—the attitude of the people of Paradise here is marked not by self-satisfaction, but by pure gratitude toward God for their having been guided toward correct belief and righteous actions in this life and having been guided over the bridge that is said to stretch across Hell and into Paradise in the Hereafter (Ṭs). The Quran frequently presents guidance as the prerogative solely of God: *Truly the Guidance of God is guidance* (2:120; 3:73; 6:71), and *God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will* (14:4; 16:93). Moreover, *whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided* (v. 178) and *whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he* (v. 186); see also 17:97; 18:17; 32:24; 39:36–37; 74:31. Guidance is thus understood as a Divine blessing for which one must be grateful, in both this life (see, e.g., 2:185; 22:37) and the next.

The people of Paradise also recognize that the *messengers . . . brought the truth* (see also v. 53) and that the sending of messengers represents a Divine gift, by which God makes the means of guidance available to all human beings (Z), even if not all are guided. The *call* that is made to the people of Paradise announcing that they have *inherited* the Garden may be made by God or by one of the angels, although commentators usually favor the former (R, Ṭs). Those who are righteous are also said to *inherit* Paradise in 23:10–11 and 39:74. Some commentators indicate that the "inheritance" shown to the believers in this instance are the houses in Paradise, which they "inherit" from the disbelievers—that is, these were houses that would have belonged to the disbelievers in Paradise had they not "forfeited" them through their disbelief and evil deeds (R, Ṭ, Ṭs).

44 There are several places in the Quran where, as here, the disbelievers acknowledge the truth of the promises and warnings brought by the prophets, but only belatedly, when it can bring no benefit to them or avert their punishment. In some cases, their acknowledgment of error comes when faced with judgment immediately upon or after death (6:30, 130), while in others their acknowledgment comes only when they are in or about to enter Hell (39:71; 40:49–50; 46:34; 67:8–10). In the present verse, it is the inhabitants of Paradise who question those in Hell, saying that they, the people of Paradise, have found what the *Lord promised*

God be upon the wrongdoers!" (45) Those who turn from the way of God and seek to make it crooked, disbelieving in the Hereafter. (46) And there will be a veil between them. And upon the Heights are men who know all by their marks. They will call out to the inhabitants of the Garden, "Peace be upon you!" They will not have entered it, though they hope. (47) And when their eyes turn

them by way of reward *to be true,* and asking the people of Hell if they have not found the same regarding their punishment in Hell (cf. 37:55–60; 57:13–14, for other conversations between those in Paradise and those in Hell). After the victory at Badr, the Prophet is reported to have addressed the dead among their Makkan enemies in similar terms, saying, "Have you found the promise of your Lord to be true? Surely I have found what my Lord promised me to be true" (IK). The Quran repeatedly states that *God's Promise is true* (4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21, 98; 30:60; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17), and in 46:16 the Garden is also identified as *the true promise that they*—that is, the righteous believers—*were promised.*

The *herald... in their midst* refers to an angel—perhaps the angel who is the keeper of Hell—who communicates the *curse of God* upon the disbelievers in a manner audible both to them and to those in Paradise (R, Ṭs). Some Shiite traditions, however, identify the herald as ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the close Companion, cousin, and son-in-law of the Prophet as well as the fourth "rightly guided caliph" and the first Shiite Imam (Ṭs). God's *curse* upon them may be a reference to His Wrath and the punishment meted out to them (Ṭs) as well as to their exile and banishment from His Presence.

**45** See 11:19 for a nearly identical verse. The disbelievers are described here as those who *turn from the way of God,* which can mean both that they themselves turn away from the path of God as established by the laws and teachings brought by the prophets and that they seek to turn others away from it. This is done sometimes by force (R) and sometimes by other means, such as seeking to *make it crooked* (see also 3:99; 7:86; 11:19; 14:3), that is, by distorting or altering it (Ṭ) or obscuring it or mixing it with their own whims and desires (Ṭs), so that it is no longer the "straight path"—a phrase the Quran uses in many verses to denote the true religious path that leads to salvation (see, e.g., 1:6 and commentary)—as established by God.

**46–47** The *veil* set between them—that is, between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell—is likened by many commentators to the wall set down between them in 57:13: *On the Day when men who are hypocrites and women who are hypocrites will say to those who believe, "Wait for us that we may borrow from your light," it will be said, "Turn back and seek a light!" Thereupon a wall with a gate will be set down between them, the inner side of which contains mercy, and on the outer side of which lies punishment* (IK, R, Th, Ṭs, Z). Elsewhere *the Heights* are described symbolically as a high sand dune (Qm). *The Heights,* after which this *sūrah* is named, would thus refer to a place atop this barrier or dune between Paradise and Hell, so that those perched atop it can see both Paradise and Hell (Z), or according to some to the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) that stretches over Hell and leads to Paradise (R, Ṭs). *The Heights* translates *aʿrāf,* and some say that this place is so named because, as the verse attests, those who occupy it *know* (*yaʿrifūn,* from the same root) *all by their marks* (IK, Th).

According to one set of interpretations, those *upon the Heights* occupy a middle position between Paradise and Hell and represent Muslims who had been negligent or slacking in their good works (Z) or whose good and bad works are nearly equal (IK, R, Ṭs). A *ḥadīth* indicates that they are those who were killed fighting in the way of God, but who had joined the fight without the permission of their fathers (IK, Th). Such people would enter Paradise only belatedly and may thus be identified with those who *await the Command of God* (9:106; Z)—that is, they remain in a state in which their fate is still unknown to them for a while. They have not yet *entered it*—that is, the Garden—but they *hope* to do so, for they have trust in God's Forgiveness and Mercy and are perhaps awaiting the intercession of the Prophet or, for Shiites, also the Imams (Ṭs). They call out to the *inhabitants of the Garden* with the greeting *Peace be upon you,* the greeting associated in

toward the inhabitants of the Fire, they will say, "Our Lord! Place us not among the wrongdoing people!" (48) And the inhabitants of the Heights will call out to men whom they know by their marks, "Your accumulating has not availed you,

several verses with the paradisal state (see 10:10; 14:23; 19:62; 56:25–26) and the proper greeting between all believers (see 6:54 and commentary). When they see those in Hell, they appeal to God's Mercy (Z), asking Him to spare them—that is, themselves—the fate of being placed among the *wrongdoing people.* Some have likened the *aʿrāf* to a kind of purgatory—a temporary middle ground or *barzakh* for those who are not placed immediately in either Paradise or Hell—and from which its occupants move only upward toward Paradise.

Indeed, most commentators indicate that those on *the Heights* will eventually enter Paradise, but many note that they will be the last to do so (R, Th) or that they are referred to as the "poor" in Paradise (IK, Th). Some have also identified them with those who did not attain to moral responsibility, either because of their youth at the time of their death or as a result of mental deficiency or illness (Ṭb). Al-Ghazzālī identified the people on the Heights as those whom the call to true religion had not reached. They thus occupy this place between Paradise and Hell, where they experience peace, but have neither the joy of being brought near to God nor the torment of being distant from Him (Aj). Insofar as *the Heights* were considered to represent an intermediate state in the Hereafter, there was much additional speculation about those who would occupy this state; suggestions included but were not limited to the offspring of idolaters, the believers among the jinn, and those who did good deeds only for the sake of earthly reward (IK).

Although a literal reading of the verse seems to support the idea that the people *upon the Heights* are believers whose moral record is deficient in some way and who are thus suspended for a time between Paradise and Hell, another quite different, but equally important, set of interpretations considers *the Heights* to be a reference to an exalted spiritual station. Those who hold this view have identified the people *upon the Heights* with various groups possessing exceptional spiritual qualities or status, such as those who are righteous and possess religious knowledge and understanding (Th). According to the Twelver Shiite interpretation of this verse, those *upon the Heights* are the Imams from among the family of the Prophet (Qm, Ṭs). According to this reading, those whom the Imams acknowledge are admitted to Paradise, while those whom they deny enter Hellfire (Ṭs). Another tradition attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās states that those *upon the Heights* are the prominent Companions among the Prophet's clan, the Banū Hāshim, including the Prophet's uncles Ḥamzah and ʿAbbās and his nephews and prominent young Companions ʿAlī and Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (Th, Ṭs).

Some Sufi commentators identify those *upon the Heights* as the people of gnosis, or spiritual knowledge (Kā, ST), who have transcended both Paradise and Hell, because they have left the trappings of the soul and its pleasures behind and are occupied only with the contemplation of God Himself (K). According to the latter interpretation, those have not yet entered Paradise, but *hope* to do so is a reference to the people of Paradise, not to the people of the Heights. Considering *the Heights* to be both an intermediate state and an exalted state, the Sufi commentator Ibn ʿAjībah identifies *the Heights* as a reference to the intermediate region (*barzakh*) between the exoteric Divine Law (*sharīʿah*) and ultimate spiritual Truth (*ḥaqīqah*); the people of *the Heights* are thus those whose status is between that of the spiritual elite and ordinary believers. They are those who are journeying in hope of reaching the Garden of Gnosis (i.e., the Garden of true knowledge of God; see 6:127c), while asking God not to put them in the "Fire of the veil" (i.e., the Fire of ignorance and separation from God). Still other reports have suggested that those upon *the Heights* are angels in the form of human beings (R, Th, Ṭs).

The *marks,* by which those on the Heights *know all*—that is, the people of Paradise and of Hell—are sometimes understood as referring to the "whiteness" or "blackness/darkness" of their faces (Aj, Th; see 3:106–7; 10:26–27; 39:60; 75:22; 80:38–41).

48 Here, the *men whom they know by their marks* refers specifically to those in Hell, to whom

nor has your waxing arrogant. (49) Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that God would not extend any mercy?" "Enter the Garden! No fear shall come upon you, nor shall you grieve." (50) The inhabitants of the Fire will call out to the inhabitants of the Garden, "Pour some water down upon us, or some of that which God has provided you." They will respond, "Truly God has forbidden them both to the disbelievers," (51) who took their religion to be diversion and play, and were deluded by the life of this world. So this Day We forget them, as they forgot the meeting with this Day of theirs, and as they used to

the words of the *inhabitants of the Heights* are addressed. *Your accumulating* may refer both to their acquisition of wealth and to their increasing number (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). Although they may have amassed great wealth in their earthly life and outnumbered the believers, their greater wealth and numbers offer them no protection in the Hereafter; rather, for those who disobey God, their *wealth and children increase them in naught but loss* (71:21). See also 17:6, where though the Israelites were aided by God *with wealth and children* and made *greater in number,* it could not protect them from future punishment, and 34:35–37, where *wealth and children* can neither thwart punishment nor bring one closer to God. The idea that disbelievers and wrongdoers are great in number or perhaps even represent the majority of human beings is suggested in various verses (cf., e.g., 2:243; 5:100; 6:116; 7:102, 187; 10:60; 11:17; 12:21; 13:1; 17:89). *Waxing arrogant* is an attitude commonly attributed to disbelievers (e.g., 6:93; 7:133, 146; 10:75).

49 Those in Hellfire are asked rhetorically and ironically, *Are these*—that is, those who had seemed lowly in earthly life, but who now enjoy great status and bliss in Paradise (R)—*the ones concerning whom you swore that God would not extend any mercy?* The question may be posed by the people of the Heights, as a continuation of the statement in v. 48, but may also be spoken by God (IK, Ṭ) or by the angels (Ṭ); it refers to the disbelievers' tendency to dismiss the idea that God could show favor to those who were of low social status in the life of this world (see, e.g., 6:53 and commentary). For the description of the paradisal state as one in which *no fear shall come upon you, nor shall you grieve,* see 7:35c.

50 The request of the inhabitants of Hell that those in Paradise *pour some water down upon* them suggests that Paradise is situated symbolically above Hell (R, Z) and indicates the terrible heat and thirst generated by the Fire (R, Ṭs). The inhabitants of Hell also request from those in Paradise *some of that which God has provided you,* meaning the other drinks of Paradise (Z), such as honey, milk, or wine, or else the food and fruits that God has provided for them in the Garden (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). This indicates that hunger is also one of the torments of Hell (R). According to al-Zamakhsharī, they ask for relief in this way, even if they despair of it ever being granted to them, because of the confusion and desperation generated by their circumstances. The water that they ask for can be interpreted as a symbol for mercy, while *that which God has provided* may be a reference to the nearness and intimacy with God that those in Paradise have been granted (Su). Both are denied to those in Hell.

51 The disbelievers in Hell are described as those who *took their religion to be diversion and play,* an attitude attributed to them elsewhere (see 5:57c; 6:70; 21:2–3; 43:83; 52:11–12; 70:42), and as having been *deluded by the life of this world* (cf. 6:70, 130; 31:33; 35:5), for it is this world that is merely *play* and *diversion* (6:32; 29:64; 47:36; 57:20; see also 29:64c). The human proclivity toward forgetfulness of God and of moral obligations is an underlying theme in the Quran (see, e.g., 5:13–14; 6:44; 20:115), as is the corresponding and repeated encouragement to remember God and His commandments or to be reminded.

Having forgotten *the meeting with this Day of theirs*—that is, the Day of Judgment—the disbelievers are themselves forgotten by God; see also

reject Our signs. (52) We have indeed brought them a Book, which We have expounded with knowledge, as a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. (53) Do they wait for aught save the full disclosure thereof? The Day when its full disclosure comes, those who forgot it beforehand will say, "The messengers of our Lord indeed brought the truth! Have we any intercessors who might intercede for us? Or might we be returned, that we might do other than what we used to do?" They have surely lost their souls, and that which they used to fabricate has for-

9:67; 20:126; as well as 32:14, where they are forgotten as a punishment for having forgotten God; and 45:34, where their being forgotten is a requital for having forgotten His signs. The reciprocity of "forgetting" and "being forgotten" contributes to the larger theme of moral reflexivity in the Quran—for example, the deceivers are themselves deceived (2:9), and those who spend charitably spend ultimately for themselves (2:272)—and also reflects the Quranic dictum *The recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it* (42:40). To have forgotten *the meeting with this Day of theirs* means to have neglected to prepare for it by acting righteously in this world (R). That God forgets them is said to mean here that He does not respond to their plea for relief or does not show them mercy in this way (R), and that He neglects them and abandons them in their punishment (IK, R). Some commentators argue that God's "forgetting" them does not mean that such people become absent from God's Knowledge, for God does not "forget" in this sense; as it says in 20:52, *He errs not, nor does He forget* (IK). Indeed, from a metaphysical point of view, if God were to forget anything, that thing would cease to exist. Rather, the verse is understood to mean that God acts toward such people as if He had forgotten them; see 9:67c.

52 The *Book* here refers to the Divine Revelation that has been sent to all people (see, e.g., 16:36) or, according to al-Rāzī, to the Quran specifically. That it is *expounded,* in this case *with knowledge,* indicates that the religious truths it contains are laid out clearly and that, in it, truth is clearly distinguished from falsehood (Ṭ); cf. 6:55c, 97–98, 114, 126. It is a source of *guidance* and *a mercy,* but specifically for those *who believe;* see 2:2, where the Book is *a guidance for the reverent,* and 2:26, where it is said regarding the parables God sets forth in it, *He misleads many by it, and He guides many by it, and He misleads none but the iniquitous.*

53 The *full disclosure thereof*—that is, of the *Book* mentioned in v. 52—refers to the fulfillment of its commands, and especially its promises and threats regarding resurrection, judgment, reward, and punishment in the Hereafter (Ṭs, Z). Here *full disclosure* translates *taʾwīl,* which is used elsewhere to refer to the interpretation of Divine Revelation (see 3:7 and commentary) as well as to the prophet Joseph's ability to interpret dreams (*taʾwīl al-aḥādīth*; 12:36). In the Islamic tradition, there are extensive discussions regarding the meaning of *taʾwīl.* While *taʾwīl* is sometimes used to mean simply "interpretation," it can also refer to more intellectual or speculative interpretations of Quranic verses, rather than interpretations transmitted from the Prophet or early authorities. For Shiites and Sufis, it came primarily to signify the inner, esoteric, or hidden meanings of the Quran as opposed to its more literal, outward, and exoteric interpretation (*tafsīr*).

In the present verse, the "hidden meaning" (*taʾwīl*) of the *Book* can be understood to refer to those events, such as Resurrection and Judgment, of which the Quran speaks, but whose reality has not been fully revealed, as they have not yet come to pass. When the *full disclosure* of the Book comes—that is, when its inner meanings are revealed and the unseen things it describes become manifest—the disbelievers' "veil of doubt" will be lifted (Qu), and they will openly recognize *the truth* brought by the messengers (cf. v. 43). But at that point, it will be too late for them—no weeping or supplicating can avert their punishment (Qu).

saken them. (54) Truly your Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then mounted the Throne. He causes the night to cover the day, which pursues it swiftly; and the sun, the moon, and the stars are made subservient by His Command. Do not creation and command belong to Him? Blessed

They will seek *intercessors* on their behalf, although in 2:48 the Quran describes this Day as a *Day when no intercession shall be accepted* for a soul. The Quran does, however, indicate elsewhere that there is a limited possibility of intercession (see 2:255c). The Islamic tradition generally holds that the Prophet (and for Shiites also the Imams) may intercede on behalf of the members of the Islamic community, but there is no such intercession for those who have rejected the messengers, denied the revelations they brought, and thus neglected *the meeting with this Day of theirs* (v. 51).

The disbelievers ask if they can return to earthly life, so that they might live righteously and do *other than what* they *used to do* (see also 6:27–28; 26:102; 35:37). But then it is too late, for *they have surely lost their souls,* and even if they were returned, the Quran suggests elsewhere that they would simply return to their faithless and evil ways (6:28). On this day, *that which they used to fabricate,* including false idols and false religious beliefs, will abandon them and be of no use to them—an idea repeated in 6:24; 10:30; 11:21; 16:87; 28:75.

54 As here, Quranic references to the creation of *the heavens and the earth in six days* (cf. 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 50:38; 57:4) are usually followed by the statement that God *then mounted the Throne* (10:3; 25:59; 32:4). Since mounting the Throne suggests the physical movement and location of a body, while God has no body according to Islamic thought, many commentators note that this phrase is a symbol for God's demonstration of His Sovereignty over His creation (Ṭs). For a fuller discussion of the Throne, see 2:255c.

That God created the heavens and the earth in six days is similar in certain ways to the Biblical creation narrative in which God creates the world in six days, but then rests on the seventh. The Quran, however, attributes no such resting to God, for *neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep* and *protecting* the heavens and the earth *tires Him not* (2:255); and in 50:38, mention of the creation in six days is followed by the statement that *no fatigue touched* Him. For this reason, there is no Sabbath (in the Jewish and Christian sense) in the Islamic tradition. The Quranic account also differs from the Biblical in that it provides no specific sequence for the creation of various phenomena on different days, although some Muslim commentators mention the association of certain days with the creation of various orders of creatures (IK). In the Islamic tradition, the *six days* are said to have begun on Sunday and continued through Friday (*al-jumuʿah*). On this Friday, Islamic tradition maintains that God created Adam and gathered together (*jamaʿa,* from the same root as *al-jumuʿah*) all creation (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), although the name *jumuʿah* (from a root meaning "to gather") seems more directly related to the fact that Friday was the day of congregational prayer. The tradition that Adam was created on this day nonetheless gave Friday a particular religious preeminence in Islam.

Although creation in six days has been understood literally by some (Ṭs), as it has in certain Jewish and Christian interpretations, the *six days* mentioned here are not necessarily meant to be understood as six twenty-four hour periods, since the Quran also states, *Truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of that which you reckon* (22:47; see also 32:5); some thus consider each "day" to be as a thousand years (IK, Q, Sy)—the latter duration is also considered symbolic by some commentators (see 32:5c). The symbolic and not literal meaning of *six days* has been discussed in other Islamic sources, including the work of Islamic scientists. The description of God causing *the night to cover the day* is one of many instances where the Quran invokes the alternation of night and day as a sign of God's Power and Beneficence (see, e.g., 2:164; 3:190; 10:6; 13:3; 17:12; 22:61; 24:44; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 45:5). That the sun, moon, and stars are made subservient to God is also found in 13:2; 29:61; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5.

is God, Lord of the worlds! (55) Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Truly He loves not the transgressors. (56) And work not corruption upon the earth after it has been set aright, but call upon Him in fear and in hope. Surely the

55 Calling upon God *humbly and in secret* is also an act attributed to those in dire need in 6:63. All sincere "calling upon God" entails humility, for it is based upon the realization of one's dependence upon Him. The Prophet said, "There is nothing nobler before God than supplicatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*), for supplication is worship" (R). Calling on God in secret suggests sincerity and lack of hypocrisy in the supplication (R), for it is not done "to be seen of men" (cf. 2:264; 4:38, 142; 8:47; 107:6); see also 19:3, where Zachariah implores God with *a secret cry,* as well as verses that approve of those who "fear God in secret" (5:94; 21:49). God *loves not the transgressors;* that is, those who exceed the proper bounds in anything (Z). Both crying out in an unnecessarily loud manner and being excessively long and elaborate in one's supplication are discouraged, according to some. The Prophet once criticized those who were excessive in supplication, and said, "It is sufficient for a man to say, 'O God, I ask Thee [to grant me] the Garden and whatever words or works draw me near to it; and I seek refuge in Thee from the Fire and from whatever words or works draw me near to it'" (Z).

56 The warning to *work not corruption upon the earth* can be understood in a general way to mean avoiding idolatry or polytheism and acting in obedience to God (Ṭ), but "working corruption upon the earth" is elsewhere associated with morally egregious acts and serious sins, particularly violence against others (see 5:32–33c) as well as inciting others to do the same and thus spreading *corruption upon the earth.* Al-Rāzī considers the warning against "working corruption upon the earth" to be a prohibition against any act that corrupts bodies (through violence), wealth (through fraud or theft), religion (through disbelief and innovation), lineage (through adultery and slander), and intellect (through intoxication). "Working corruption upon the earth" may also be understood as referring to human actions that pollute or destroy the natural environment. The human ability to "work corruption upon the earth" is juxtaposed here with the earth's having been *set aright,* that is, by God. God's "setting aright" can thus mean His establishment, through the revelations and laws brought by His messengers, of a just and moral social order (Ṭ) as well as His creating the harmony and balance that pervades the natural order. In light of mankind's contemporary capability to corrupt the earth physically through environmentally destructive behavior, this verse might therefore also be taken to mean that human beings should not physically corrupt the earth itself after God had "set it aright" with regard to its beauty, its inherent balance and harmony, and its beneficence for mankind—all of which are alluded to in many places throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 16:3–18; 55:5–24). For further commentary on the Quranic warning against "working corruption upon the earth," see 30:41c.

Just as one is instructed to call upon God *humbly and in secret* in v. 55, here one is enjoined to supplicate Him *in fear and in hope.* From the Islamic perspective, fear and hope can be considered the twin poles of human religious consciousness, as believers should always be suspended between fear of God's Wrath and hope in His Mercy. According to a *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*), "When God decreed the created realm, He prescribed for Himself in a Book that is with Him, 'My Mercy prevails over My Wrath'" (see also 6:12–13c), an idea supported by the statement here that *the Mercy of God is ever nigh unto the virtuous.* A constant balance between fear and hope, moreover, is considered spiritually beneficial in that it prevents a person from falling into either moral lassitude or spiritual despair. See 32:16, which praises those *whose sides shun [their] beds, who call upon their Lord out of fear and hope and who spend from that which We have provided them.* If God's Mercy is *nigh unto the virtuous* in particular, it is because *God singles out for His Mercy whomsoever He will* (2:105; 3:74); and *God may cause whomsoever He will to enter into His Mercy* (48:25; see also 42:8; 76:31), though His Mercy *encompasses all things* (v. 156).

Mercy of God is ever nigh unto the virtuous. (57) He it is Who sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy, so that when they bear heavy-laden clouds, We may drive them toward a land that is dead, and send down water upon it, and thereby bring forth every kind of fruit. Thus shall We bring forth the dead, that haply you may remember. (58) As for the good land, its vegetation comes forth by the leave of its Lord. And as for the bad, it comes forth but sparsely. Thus do We vary the signs for a people who give thanks. (59) Indeed, We sent Noah unto his people, and he said, "O my people! Worship God! You

57 The idea that God *sends forth the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy* is also found in 25:48; 27:63; 30:46. In these verses, God's Mercy is closely associated with rain, which al-Zamakhsharī describes as among the most majestic and beautiful of God's blessings. The mention of *winds* in the plural form is generally a sign or harbinger of Divine Mercy and Bounty, although *wind* in the singular is also invoked in certain verses as a destructive force under God's command (see, e.g., 3:117; 30:48–49c; 35:9c). Similarly, the *heavy-laden clouds* portend life-giving rain, reviving *a land that is dead.* Here, as in many other places, the revival of drought-stricken lands through rain is offered as a metaphor and a symbolic proof for the resurrection of human beings after their death (see, e.g., 30:19; 35:9; 43:11; 50:11). But a rainstorm can also prove destructive—thus it is something to be both feared and hoped for—and the image of a gathering storm invoked in this verse may also serve as a potent reminder that one must always call upon God *in fear and in hope* (v. 56). See 13:12 and 30:24, where lightning, which also signals a coming storm, and therefore rain, is said to engender both *fear and hope.* That *haply you may remember* refers to remembrance of the resurrection, remembrance that may be encouraged by reflecting on the revival of dead land.

58 This verse continues the metaphor of rain and its revival of dead land, but adds a word of warning to this image. Although the rain, as a symbol of God's Mercy, falls upon the land and causes it to *bring forth every kind of fruit* (v. 57), the quality and abundance of the vegetation produced also depends on the quality or receptivity of the land, which symbolizes the human heart and its receptivity to Divine Mercy and Revelation. When rain falls upon *good land,* like His Mercy upon a believing heart, it produces fruits *by the leave of its Lord;* but when it falls upon *bad* land, or a disbelieving and "hardened" heart, its fruits come forth *but sparsely.* Commentators also connect the coming of Divine Mercy, the descent of the rain, and the descent of the Quran and indicate that the Quran's words are meant to take root in the soul of believers and bear fruit through their thoughts and actions, but will bring no benefit to those who are predisposed to disbelief (R, Ṭ). See 2:26: *As for those who believe, they know it is the truth from their Lord, and as for those who disbelieve, they say, "What did God mean by this parable?" He misleads many by it, and He guides many by it, and He misleads none but the iniquitous.* The parable in the present verse is similar to the well-known Gospel parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.

That God "varies the signs" means that He demonstrates the truth in multiple ways, including through the use of symbols and parables, *for a people who give thanks*—that is, for those inclined to reflect upon the spiritual meaning of natural phenomena (Z). This parable concerning the varying receptivity of hearts to Divine Mercy can be read as an opening commentary on the following series of accounts (in vv. 59–169) of communities who rejected the messages of warning that God had sent to them through various prophets. For these communities, like the bad land in this verse, the prophetic warnings from God yielded sparse results among them.

59 This verse begins a long section (vv. 59–136) that details the missions of several prophets

have no god other than Him. Truly I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day!" (60) The notables among his people said, "Truly we think that you are in manifest error." (61) He said, "O my people! There is no error in me, but rather I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. (62) I deliver unto you the messages of my Lord, and advise you sincerely, and I know from God what you

who were rejected by those to whom they were sent and whose rejection brought terrible punishments upon their people. The accounts of these prophets and their missions as presented here share many thematic and textual similarities that serve to underline the fundamental unity of purpose shared by all prophets as well as the common human tendencies that often have led various communities to reject the prophets and dismiss their warnings. Similar serial presentations of these "punishment accounts" are found in 11:25–100; 26:105–90; 54:9–42.

As in all serial presentations of these punishment accounts, this section begins with the story of Noah, his call to his people to worship the One God, and his warning of a punishment to come if they did not heed his call. The story of Noah in vv. 59–64 represents the first narrative account of Noah in the textual order of the Quran; other accounts of Noah's story can be found in 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 54:9–15; and in *Sūrah* 71. Noah is identified in the Islamic tradition as Nūḥ ibn Lamak (Lamech) ibn Mitūshalah (Methushael) ibn Ukhnūkh (Enoch), the last being identified in the Islamic tradition with Idrīs, a Quranic prophet (19:56; 21:85; IK, R, Z). Others trace Noah's lineage back to Adam through the latter's son Shīth (Seth; IK, Th). Noah is also said to have been a carpenter and to have been fifty years old at the time of his prophetic call (Th, Z). In the chronological line of prophets, Noah is said to have been the prophet sent by God after Idrīs (Ṭs).

In this narrative, Noah's initial call to his people is an injunction to worship the One God, including a modified version of the Islamic testament of faith: *You have no god other than Him* (see also 11:26; 23:23). This call, which is also made by Hūd in v. 65, Ṣāliḥ in v. 73, and Shuʿayb in v. 85, functions as a unifying element of the prophetic narratives in this section. That the missions of these prophets, like that of Muhammad, are founded upon a call to worship the One God indicates the fundamental unity of the messages brought by the prophets and furthers the Islamic understanding of Muhammad as a restorer of the one original and true religion brought by all the prophets, rather than as the founder of an entirely "new" one; see 46:9, where Muhammad is instructed to say *I am no innovation among the messengers,* and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." Although the Biblical account of Noah makes no mention of his people's worship of other gods, the Quran indicates that they worshipped false deities whom Noah's opponents mention by name in 71:23 as Wadd, Suwāʿ, Yagūth, Yaʿūq, and Nasr. According to some, these were the names of their ancestors whom Noah's people had, over time, come to worship (IK). The *punishment of a tremendous day* may refer to the earthly punishment of the flood, the punishment decreed on the Day of Judgment (R, Z), or both.

60–62 *The notables among his people* are the ones who voice their opposition to Noah's call, perhaps as representatives of his community at large. It is the *notables* or "leaders" who articulate their people's rejection of the prophets in most of the punishment accounts in this *sūrah* (see vv. 66, 75, 88, 103) and elsewhere in the Quran (see 10:75, 88; 11:27, 38, 97; 23:24, 33, 46; 26:34; 28:20, 32; 38:6; 43:23, 46). See also 6:123, in which the *great ones* are said to be *among the guilty in every town.* The prophetic narratives in the Quran were meant, in part, to console and reassure the Prophet as he faced the rejection of his own people (R, Ṭs), and the repeated mention of the *notables* as being among the previous prophets' most outspoken critics may have been of particular comfort to Muhammad as he struggled with the leaders or notables of the Quraysh and their persistent opposition to the message he brought. As in all such cases, however, the recounting of

know not. (63) Or do you marvel that a reminder from your Lord should come unto you by means of a man from among yourselves, so as to warn you, that you might be reverent, and that haply you may receive mercy?" (64) Yet they denied him. So We saved him and those who were with him in the Ark, and We drowned those who denied Our signs. Truly they were a blind people. (65) And unto ʿĀd, their brother, Hūd. He said, "O my people! Worship God! You

God's assistance to the righteous against those who reject His religion could serve as comfort for all believers.

The people of Noah consider him to be *in manifest error* for having rejected worship of their idols (Ṭs), but Noah responds that his function as *a messenger from the Lord of the worlds* is simply to *deliver . . . the messages of my Lord*—as is the case with all prophets (IK; cf. 3:20; 13:40; 29:18)—and to serve as a "sincere adviser" to them. Similar claims of being a "sincere" or "trustworthy" adviser to their people are made by Noah in 11:34, Hūd in vv. 67–68, and Ṣāliḥ in vv. 79, 93. The prophets' description as "sincere advisers" to their people may be contrasted with Satan's false claim to be a *sincere adviser* to Adam and Eve in v. 21. Noah's warning, *I know from God what you know not* refers, most directly, to the great punishment that is about to come upon his people (Th).

63 Here Noah challenges his people by articulating one basis of their rejection of his message, namely, that they cannot believe that God would send a message *by means of a man* like themselves (see 11:27 and 23:24, where they state this objection themselves). See also v. 69, where Hūd makes an identical challenge to his people. The Quraysh who rejected the Prophet Muhammad also did so, in part, because they were incredulous that God would send His message through a human being like themselves, rather than by means of or accompanied by an angel (see 6:8; 11:12; 17:94–95; 25:7), or by someone who enjoyed greater prestige among them than did Muhammad (see 43:31). That Noah and Hūd (in v. 69) faced similar attitudes from their people was also meant, like other elements of these prophetic narratives, to strengthen the resolve of the Prophet in the face of his own struggles with the Quraysh.

64 Noah's people continued their denial and so were *drowned* in the ensuing flood; see 54:11–12 for descriptions of the flood and the Islamic understanding of this event. God spares Noah, however, *and those who were with him in the Ark,* as we also find in the Biblical account (Genesis 7–9). In the punishment accounts in the Quran, the prophets are always saved from the destruction brought upon their people, as are their believing family members or other followers, for as the Quran asks rhetorically, *Were the Punishment of God to come upon you suddenly or openly, would any be destroyed save the wrongdoing people?* (6:47). In Noah's case, those spared along with him included members of his family (11:40), except for one of his sons (see 11:42–43) and perhaps his wife, whom the Quran describes as a disbeliever in 66:10. Those aboard the ark are said to have included his three sons, Sām (Shem), Ḥām (Ham), and Yāfath (Japheth), perhaps their wives, and six other believers (Ṭ, Z). Other accounts indicate that there were eighty people (forty men and forty women) saved in the ark (IK, Z). As in the Biblical account, *the Ark* in which Noah, his family, and a handful of believers were saved is described as a wooden vessel (54:13) built by Noah himself, upon God's command (11:37–38; 23:27).

65 Hūd is an Arab prophet whose story is also told in some detail in 11:50–60; 26:123–39; 46:21–25; 54:18–21. Although Hūd has no counterpart in the Biblical text, the Islamic tradition maintains that he and his people are descendants of Noah through the latter's son Sām (Shem; IK, Ṭs). In one account, the lineage of Hūd is given as Hūd ibn Shalikh (Shaleh) ibn Arfakhshath (Arpachshad) ibn Sām (Shem) ibn Nūḥ (Noah; Ṭs, Z), with all of his ancestors having Biblical counterparts (see Genesis 10:21–24). Another account identifies Hūd as Hūd ibn ʿĀd ibn Iram ibn ʿAwṣ ibn Sām ibn Nūḥ (IK, Ṭs), based on 89:6–7: *Hast thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with ʿĀd, Iram the pillared.* Hūd's call to his people to worship

have no god other than Him. Will you not be reverent?" (66) The notables among his people who disbelieved said, "Truly we think that you are foolish, and we consider you to be among the liars." (67) He said, "O my people! There is no foolishness in me, but rather I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. (68) I deliver unto you the messages of my Lord, and truly I am a trustworthy adviser unto you. (69) Or do you marvel that a reminder from your Lord should come to you by means of a man from among yourselves, so as to warn you? Remember when He made you vicegerents after the people of Noah, and increased you amply in stature. So remember the boons of God, that haply you may prosper." (70) They said, "Have you come unto us so that we may worship God alone, and leave aside what our fathers worshipped? Then bring upon us that wherewith you

the One God is identical to that of Noah in v. 59 (see commentary on this verse). The ʿĀd people are said to have originated in southern Arabia, between Ḥaḍramawt in southern Yemen and Oman (IK, Z). This was a region with many sand dunes (*aḥqāf;* Th)—the latter being the name of *Sūrah* 46, which includes an account of the ʿĀd (IK, Z).

66–68 Hūd's people reject his call by claiming that he is *foolish* and *among the liars,* whereas Noah's people had accused him of being in *error* (v. 60). The response of both prophets is similar, however, denying their people's accusations and asserting that their purpose is simply to deliver *the messages* from God and to serve as a sincere or *trustworthy adviser* to their people—qualities Ibn Kathīr notes are common to all prophets (see 7:60–62c). Noah, however, is said to have been rejected by the *notables among his people* in general, while Hūd is opposed only by *the notables among his people who disbelieved* (also in 23:33), since some of the leading members of Hūd's people were reportedly believers in his message (Z).

69 Like Noah, Hūd challenges his people's inability to accept that God would send a message through a mere human being like themselves (see 7:63c). The people of ʿĀd were made *vicegerents after the people of Noah,* meaning that they were their successors on the earth and inherited a position of sovereignty (Z)—both successorship and inheritance being implied in the Arabic word for *vicegerents* (*khulafāʾ*). That God *increased* them *amply in stature* refers to their reportedly gigantic size. Legendary accounts say that the smallest of them was 60 and the largest 100 cubits in height, or between 120 and 200 feet tall (Ṭs, Z). The *boons of God* thus refer to their succession and sovereignty on the earth and their great size (Z). In addition to calling his people to monotheistic worship, Hūd is also said to have warned them against behaving oppressively toward others. Some accounts report that because of their large size, they were able to conquer much territory beyond their native region (IK).

70 The people of ʿĀd respond to Hūd's call in ways that are common to many communities of disbelievers who reject their prophets. Their first response is a stated unwillingness to abandon the false gods and deities worshipped by their fathers (see also, e.g., 2:170; 5:104; 7:28; 10:78; 11:62, 87; 14:10; 31:21; 34:43; 43:22). The claims of those who observe false religious practices that they should be excused on the basis that they were simply "following their fathers" is never accepted in any context in the Quran. Vv. 172–73 recount God's taking a pretemporal covenant with all of humanity in which they acknowledged His Lordship, because of which the excuse that people's forefathers had misled them in their religious beliefs could never be accepted. The second response of Hūd's people is to challenge the prophet to bring about the punishment and destruction with which he has threatened them (cf. 46:22); the same challenge is issued to Noah in 11:32, and a nearly identical statement is made to Ṣāliḥ

have threatened us, if you are truthful." (71) He said, "Defilement and wrath have already come upon you from your Lord. Do you dispute with me over names that you have named—you and your fathers—for which God has sent down no authority? Then wait! Truly I am waiting along with you." (72) So We saved him and those who were with him through a mercy from Us, and We cut off the last remnant of those who denied Our signs and were not believers. (73) And unto Thamūd, their brother, Ṣāliḥ. He said, "O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. There has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord. This she-camel of God is a sign unto you. Leave her to graze freely on God's earth, and cause her no harm, lest a painful punishment

in v. 77. Such audacious challenges to the warnings brought by the prophets indicate a complete lack of faith, and in response to similar challenges elsewhere the Quran intimates that there is danger in seeking to hasten God's punishment; see 10:48–50; 21:37–38; 27:71–72, and especially 46:24, where the cloud that brings the destructive wind upon the ʿĀd is described to them as *what you sought to hasten.*

71 *Defilement* translates *rijs,* which can mean a state of filth that results from a physical soiling or the shame that stems from moral disgrace. Commentators note, however, that *rijs* overlaps in meaning with the similar Quranic term *rijz* (Ṭ), which means both filth or defilement and punishment (see 29:33–34c). In the present context, then, *rijs* is said, like *rijz,* to refer to the imminent punishment or Divine Wrath that has already been engendered by the ʿĀd's rejection of Hūd and that will soon be visited upon them (IK, Ṭ, Th, Z). The idolatry of the ʿĀd, which they defend as the worship *what our fathers worshipped* (v. 70), is dismissed by Hūd as the worship of mere *names that you have named* (cf. 12:40; 53:23), for God is the only legitimate recipient of worship and He alone gives and teaches human beings the "names" of all things (2:31). The *names that you have named* and *for which God has sent down no authority* thus have no ontological reality, and worshipping them is futile, for they can bring neither harm nor benefit (IK, Ṭ). Hūd tells his people, by way of a threat (IK), *Wait! Truly I am waiting along with you;* that is, "Wait for God to judge between us" (Ṭ). The Prophet Muhammad is instructed to respond to his people in a similar manner on several occasions; see 6:158; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 52:31.

72 That God *cut off the last remnant of those* who denied the *signs* brought by Hūd refers to their collective punishment by means of a fierce wind that destroyed all but Hūd *and those who were with him* (cf. 41:16; 54:19; 69:6–7). According to some accounts, when the ʿĀd rejected Hūd's call, God punished them with drought for three years. A group of them went to Makkah to pray and beseech God to relieve them, although they continued to disbelieve in Hūd and his warning. In response to their prayers three clouds appeared, one white, one red, and one black, and a heavenly herald asked them to choose among them. They chose the black cloud, which God then drove until it reached their town. Its inhabitants initially took the cloud to be a good sign and a harbinger of life-giving rain (cf. 46:24), but the cloud soon brought down upon them a violent, destructive wind that is described in another verse as *tearing out people as if they were uprooted palm trunks* (54:20; Bg, IK, Th, Ṭs, Z). Thereafter, Hūd and the believers among his people were said to have traveled to Makkah and to have worshipped there until they died (Z).

73 This verse begins the account of the Arabian prophet Ṣāliḥ, sent to his people, the Thamūd, who, like the tribe of ʿĀd, were reportedly descendants of Noah's son Shem (Ṭ, Z). Ṣāliḥ's full name is given as Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿUbayd ibn Asif ibn Māsikh ibn ʿUbayd ibn Khādir ibn Thamūd (Th). He is described as having been among the noblest and

seize you. (74) Remember when He made you vicegerents after ʿĀd and settled you on the earth: you build castles for yourselves on the open plain and hew dwellings in the mountains. So remember the boons of God, and behave not wickedly upon the earth, working corruption." (75) The notables among his people who were arrogant said to those among them who believed and whom they deemed weak, "Do you know that Ṣāliḥ has been sent by his Lord?" They said, "Truly we believe in that wherewith he has been sent." (76) Those who were

most well respected members of the Thamūd prior to his prophetic mission (Ṭ, Th), which began when he was still a youth (Th). The Thamūd were said to inhabit a high rocky plain known as al-Ḥijr located in western Arabia, between the Ḥijāz and Syria. Al-Ḥijr is also the title of *Sūrah* 15; and 15:80–83 briefly recounts the story of the Thamūd, who are identified in this passage as *the inhabitants of al-Ḥijr*. Other narrative accounts of Ṣāliḥ are found in 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31. Ṣāliḥ's account, like that of Noah and Hūd before him, begins with a call to monotheistic belief and worship (see also vv. 59, 65; 11:61).

*Clear proof* is used throughout the Quran to refer to scriptural revelations, prophetic warnings, and miracles given to the prophets to convince their people (see, e.g., 2:87; 3:105; 4:153; 5:32; 6:157; 7:101; 9:70; 10:13; 14:9; 16:44; 19:73). In the case of Ṣāliḥ, the *clear proof* was the pregnant *she-camel* that he miraculously brought forth from a large rock after his people had requested a sign confirming his prophethood (Ṭ, Z; see also 26:154). Insofar as the Thamūd are eventually destroyed for slaughtering the *she-camel* that they had requested as a sign, the story serves as one of many Quranic warnings about those who treat the signs of God with disdain as well as a more particular warning about the danger of asking for signs and the necessity of believing in them once they have been granted (see also 5:112–15c).

The Thamūd are instructed to allow the camel to *graze freely on God's earth* without harm (see also 11:64). The command to treat the sacred *she-camel* in this way bears similarities to the pagan Arab practices of allowing certain camels to roam and graze without interference, while forbidding their use or slaughter, although the Quran criticizes these latter practices for the arbitrary manner in which the sacrosanct nature of such animals was assigned to them by the pagan Arabs themselves (see 5:103c; 6:138c). In the case of Ṣāliḥ and his people, however, the *she-camel* is a miraculously produced sign for the Thamūd, whom Ṣāliḥ warns of a *painful punishment* if they were to harm her in any way (see also 26:156). They were also instructed to allow the *she-camel* sole access to the drinking well every other day and to alternate access to the well between themselves and the camel (54:28; 26:155). Although the she-camel, after having drunk from the well, would produce abundant milk to supply all the Thamūd, they grew resentful of sharing the well and complained that the camel's enormous size tended to frighten off their other livestock (Ṭ, Z).

74 Ṣāliḥ, like Hūd, reminds his people of the *boons of God* (cf. v. 69), among which is that He made them *vicegerents after ʿĀd*, meaning that they were given sovereignty after them, just as the ʿĀd had been vicegerents after Noah (see v. 69 and commentary). Among the *boons of God* was also their famed building ability, including their construction of *dwellings in the mountains* (cf. 15:82; 26:149; 89:9), vestiges of which were known to the Arabs of the Prophet's time and indeed remain to the present day. The Prophet and his army are said to have stopped near the remains of their mountain abodes on their way to an anticipated military campaign in Tabūk in 9/631. The Prophet, however, forbade his followers from drinking or using water from their wells and would not allow them to approach the well used by the sacred she-camel, lest they suffer the same fate as the Thamūd (IK). For a discussion of the Quranic concept of *working corruption*, see 7:56c.

75–76 As with Noah and Hūd, it is especially the *notables* among Ṣāliḥ's people who are too

arrogant said, "Truly we believe not in that which you believe." (77) So they hamstrung the she-camel and insolently defied the Command of their Lord. And they said, "O Ṣāliḥ! Bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are among those sent [by God]." (78) So the earthquake seized them, and morning found them lying lifeless in their abode. (79) So he turned away from them and said, "O my people! I indeed delivered unto you the message of my

proud to accept his message (see v. 60; 7:60–62c; as well as vv. 66, 88, 90); and v. 75 suggests that those among the Thamūd who did believe in his prophethood were those *deemed weak*, that is, considered to be of lower social and economic standing (Ṭ). There are reports that some leading figures among the Thamūd believed, but they were overwhelmed by others, including the keeper of their idols, who strongly rejected Ṣāliḥ (IK, Th).

77–78 Despite the divisions among the Thamūd regarding Ṣāliḥ and the message he brought, the commentators report that all the Thamūd eventually consented to a plot to hamstring and kill the she-camel (IK, Th, Z), thus indicating their collective guilt and liability to Divine punishment. According to some accounts, the killing of the she-camel was instigated by two women, one of whom was the wife of Dhiʾāb ibn ʿAmr, one of the leading disbelievers among the Thamūd (see 7:75–76c). She is said to have recruited a young man, who in turn recruited eight others, to carry out the slaughter; see 27:48, which refers to a group of *nine persons working corruption* among the Thamūd. After killing the she-camel, the camel's young offspring ran off in distress and eventually disappeared. Ṣāliḥ then realized that the punishment of which he had been warning was imminent; he told his people that it would be visited upon them in three days, and that on each successive morning until that time, they would wake with their faces having turned yellow, then red, and finally black before their final destruction (IK, Ṭ, Th, Z). Like other peoples who rejected their prophets, the Thamūd revealed their disbelief by calling upon Ṣāliḥ to prove the truth of his prophethood by bringing upon them the punishment about which he had warned them (see 7:70c). After Ṣāliḥ issued his final warning, the same nine men who slaughtered the she-camel are said to have attempted to kill Ṣāliḥ himself, calculating spitefully that even if Ṣāliḥ's warnings of imminent destruction were true, they would at least succeed in hastening Ṣāliḥ's own death. Their attempt was thwarted, in one account, when the would-be assassins, on their way to kill Ṣāliḥ, were stoned to death by angels (Th).

As Ṣāliḥ had warned, the people woke on the third day with blackened faces and prepared themselves for death. Knowing that their punishment was certain and imminent, they laid themselves out on the floor in expectation of their demise. *Earthquake* here translates *rajfah*, and the destructive event was said to have entailed not only a violent shaking, but also a loud sound, like the crack of lightning accompanied by the cry of all living things on earth, which stopped the hearts of the people instantly in their breasts (Th), leaving them *lying lifeless in their abode* (see also 11:67). The same fate is said to have befallen the people of Midian in 7:91; 11:94; 29:37.

79 Ṣāliḥ's "turning away from them" may refer to his abandonment of the Thamūd in advance of their punishment, leaving their settlement along with a small number of believers (Ṭ, Z); or it may refer to his reaction to the destruction of his people, either when he turned back, saw smoke rising from their residences, and knew that they had been destroyed or after returning to find them *lying lifeless in their abode* (v. 78; Z). Like Noah and Hūd before him, Ṣāliḥ affirmed that he has fulfilled his responsibility to God and his people, having *delivered . . . the message of my Lord* and *advised* his people *sincerely*—the two essential vocations of the Quranic prophets (see v. 68; 7:60–62c). But although Noah and Hūd make their statements in a mood of warning, Ṣāliḥ says this with sadness and regret that, for all his efforts, he could not persuade his people to mend their ways (Z), or he says it by way of posthumous chastisement for his people's stubborn disbelief (IK).

Lord, and advised you sincerely, but you love not sincere advisers." (80) And Lot, when he said to his people, "What! Do you commit an indecency such as none in the world committed before you? (81) Verily you come with desire unto men instead of women. Indeed, you are a prodigal people!" (82) And the reply of his people was but to say, "Expel them from your town! Truly they are a people who

That the dead can hear such rebukes from the living is supported by the report that the Prophet addressed the dead at the Battle of Badr, asking them if they had found God's Promise to be true. When ʿUmar expressed surprise at the Prophet's addressing the dead, the Prophet replied that the dead could hear as well as the living, even if they could not respond (IK).

Some reports indicate that Ṣāliḥ and those who believed in him returned to the settlement of the Thamūd and took up residence in the homes of those who had been killed (Z), while others suggest that Ṣāliḥ, like other Arabian prophets whose people were destroyed, migrated to Makkah and settled there (IK).

80–81 Lot (Lūṭ in Arabic) is the nephew of Abraham, and *his people* refers to the people of Sodom. Lot reportedly settled in Sodom, but was unrelated to its native inhabitants. Lot's full name is given as Lūṭ ibn Hārān ibn Āzar or Tirākh (Terah, the Biblical name of Abraham's father; IK, Ṭs); another report identifies him as Abraham's maternal cousin and as the brother of Abraham's wife Sarah (Sārā; Ṭs). For other narrative accounts of Lot and his people, see 11:77–83; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38; 54:33–38; and the similar Biblical narrative in Genesis 19. Lot is said to have become a believer along with Abraham and to have traveled with him to Syria (Ṭs); but while Abraham went on to Palestine, Lot turned toward Jordan (Th). He is said to have been sent by God as a messenger to Sodom and the surrounding towns to call them to worship the One God, and abandon their sinful and prodigal behavior (IK, Ṭs).

The *indecency* for which Lot chastises his people is that of men coming *with desire unto men instead of women,* understood by the traditional commentators to refer to the practice of homosexuality (Ṭ; cf. 26:165–66; 27:55; 29:29) and sodomy specifically (Th, Ṭs), a practice that the verse indicates originated with the Sodomites of Lot's time. One report indicates that the people of Sodom engaged in this practice only with those who were outsiders in their town (Ṭs), which is consistent with their having demanded access to the angels who had visited Lot, whom they clearly perceived as foreigners (see commentary on 11:77–78; 15:61–70); other commentators, however, suggest that the men of Sodom preferred sexual relations with men to relations with women on a regular basis (IK, Th). The aggressive behavior of the men of Sodom in the Biblical account as well as in 11:77–79 and 15:67–71 has led some to speculate that the real crime of the people of Lot was forcible sodomy, rather than consensual homosexual relations. Although the emphasis in v. 81 as well as in parallel accounts in 26:165–66; 27:55; 29:29 is explicitly on the act of men desiring men *instead of women,* the insolent and violent manner in which the men of Sodom sought to fulfill their desires is clearly implied in the account of Lot found in 11:77–80. Lot describes them as *a prodigal people,* understood to mean that they transgressed the limits of what is lawful to consume or enjoy by having sexual relations with men, rather than with women, the latter being those made lawful for them (Ṭs). *Prodigal* translates *musrifūn,* which can also mean to be excessive and wasteful (see 7:31c; 10:12c). Al-Zamakhsharī describes "prodigality" (*isrāf*) as the root of all evil, and in 6:141 and 7:31 it is said that God *loves not the prodigal.*

82 The threat or plan to *expel them*—that is, the family of Lot (cf. 26:167; 27:56)—extended, according to some commentators, to a group of believing followers of Lot as well (Ṭ, Z). The disbelievers among the people of Sodom also deride Lot and his followers' moral probity, describing them as those *who keep themselves pure* (cf. 27:56). Their "purity," according to some commentators,

keep themselves pure." (83) So We saved him and his family, except for his wife; she was among those who lagged behind. (84) And We sent down a rain upon them; so behold how the guilty fared in the end. (85) And unto Midian, their brother, Shuʿayb. He said, "O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. There has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord. So observe fully the measure and the balance and diminish not people's goods, nor work corruption upon the earth after it has been set aright. That is better for you, if you are

was a reference to their refusal to participate in the sexual practices of the Sodomites (Ṭ, Z).

83 As with the other prophets discussed in this section, God saved Lot *and his family,* which is widely understood as including the believers who followed Lot as well as his immediate family (Ṭ). Lot's wife, however, was *one of those who lagged behind* and thus perished with the rest of Sodom (see also 15:60; 26:171; 27:57; 29:32). She is said to have followed the religion of Lot, at least outwardly, but to have been inwardly a disbeliever (Ṭ, Ṭs); also see 29:31–32c. In the Biblical account, Lot's wife left with him, but turned to look back and so became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). A similar version of events is also mentioned by some commentators (Z) and is suggested in 15:65, where Lot is commanded: *So set out with thy family during the night, and follow behind them, and let not any of you turn around, but go forth wheresoever you are commanded.*

84 That Lot's people were destroyed by a catastrophic *rain,* described by commentators as a rain of stones (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), is also found in 11:82 and 15:74 (in both these verses it is a rain of *stones of baked clay*) as well as in 26:173 and 27:58. In 29:34, they are destroyed by *a torment from Heaven,* and in 54:34, by a *torrent of stones.* The command to *behold how the guilty fared in the end* is repeated verbatim or in similar form in several verses and is often preceded by the mention of "journeying upon the earth," indicating that the Arabs were able not only to reflect on the stories of these earlier peoples, but in some cases could see for themselves the ruins of their civilizations that remained in parts of Arabia (cf., e.g., 3:137; 6:11; 10:40; 16:36; 27:14). This command to consider the fate of *the guilty* is addressed to the Prophet, enjoining him to reflect on the fate of those who had rejected their messengers, even as he faced rejection by many of his own people. This and similar passages were meant as a warning that the people of Makkah could expect the same fate, should they persist in their denial of Muhammad's prophethood (Ṭ).

85 Shuʿayb's full name is given by the early historian Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) as Shuʿayb ibn Mīkīl ibn Yashjar (or Yashḥab; Ṭ, Ṭs); others have identified him as Shuʿayb ibn Tawbah (or Buwayb or Nuwayb) ibn Midian (Th, Ṭs). Shuʿayb is referred to in Islamic tradition as the "Orator of the Prophets" (*Khaṭīb al-anbiyāʾ*) because of the eloquence and rhetorical power of his preaching (IK, Ṭ, Th). He is considered an Arab prophet, although the people of Midian are known in the Bible, and Shuʿayb is usually identified with the Biblical figure Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, since the Quran mentions that Moses met his future wife and father-in-law in the area of Midian (see 26:22–23). The people of Midian are said to have resided in northwestern Arabia, near Maʿān in Jordan (IK), and to have descended from Midian, a son of Abraham (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). In Genesis 25:2, Midian is mentioned as a son born to Abraham through a wife named Keturah, whom Abraham takes after the death of Sarah; some rabbinic commentators have identified Keturah with Hagar, although most reject this opinion. Midian is said to have married the daughter of Lot (Ṭs, Z), thus making the Midianites descendants of both Lot and Abraham. According to some commentators Shuʿayb was sent to both the people of Midian and the people of al-Aykah, "the Thicket" (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z; cf. 15:78; 26:176; 38:13; 50:14), while others consider the two to be references to the same people

believers. (86) And do not lie in wait on every path, threatening and turning away those who believe in Him from the way of God, and seeking to make it crooked. And remember when you were few, and He made you many. And

(IK, Th). For other narrative accounts of Shuʿayb, see 11:84–95; 26:176–89.

Shuʿayb's mission to the people of Midian begins, like that of Noah, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ, with a call to worship the One God (cf. 29:36). Like Ṣāliḥ, he defends the truth of his message by asserting that a *clear proof* had come to them from God. As mentioned in 7:73c, *clear proof* is used throughout the Quran to refer to scriptural revelations, prophetic warnings, and miracles given to prophets to convince their people. Some commentators suggested that the *clear proofs,* in Shuʿayb's case, may refer to evidentiary miracles (*muʿjizāt*) that he and, according to Islamic tradition, all prophets were given to perform as a confirmation of their prophethood, although no specific miracles are attributed to Shuʿayb in the Quran (Ṭs, Z).

The injunction to *observe fully the measure and the balance* is a call to integrity and honesty in commercial transactions, and by extension other dealings, an injunction also found in several other passages (see 6:151–52c; 17:35; 18:1–3; 83:1–4). That they should not *diminish . . . people's goods* means that they should render to them in full the goods for which they had paid. Among the Quranic prophets, it is Shuʿayb whose mission is particularly associated with the call to avoid fraudulent commercial practices; see 11:84–85 and 26:181–83, where he makes an identical call to the people of Midian and al-Aykah ("the Thicket"), respectively. In the Bible and in Biblical commentaries, the Midianites were considered to be merchants who worked along the incense routes, an idea that is consistent with Shuʿayb's particular call to them. The idea of measurement and balance is a prominent theme in the Quran, having not only commercial but also cosmological significance; several passages indicate that God measures out all created existence and sets the created order in balance (cf., e.g., 13:8; 15:19–21; 23:18; 25:2; 42:27; 54:49; 65:3; 73:20).

In some passages, a relationship is suggested between God's measuring and balancing, and the moral requirement that human beings observe proper measure and balance; see 55:7–9. Shuʿayb's warning against working *corruption upon the earth* is also part of his essential message, both to the people of Midian and those of al-Aykah; cf. 11:85; 26:183; 29:36. Ṣāliḥ similarly warns his people against "working corruption" in v. 74. For further discussion of "working corruption upon the earth," see 7:56c. That the earth *has been set aright*—that is, by God—indicates not only that He has established balance and harmony in its natural order, but also that He has provided the means of "setting matters aright" in human society, through His prophets and the commands and prohibitions they establish (Ṭ, Z).

86 Shuʿayb further urges the people of Midian not to *lie in wait on every path, threatening* and diverting people from *the way of God,* which is the course of action to which Satan dedicates himself after he is expelled from the Divine Presence (see v. 16). In the specific case of the people of Midian, this may mean that they turned people away from the right path by denouncing Shuʿayb as a liar (Ṭs, Z) or by threatening or otherwise hindering those who came along the road seeking to become followers of Shuʿayb (IK, Ṭs). It may also mean that they inhibited people journeying along the physical road by blocking it or collecting tithes (IK, Z), perhaps in an exploitative or threatening manner (IK), given their apparent penchant for unethical commercial practices and their reported location along important trade routes (see 7:85c).

Although the verse may refer to specific practices of the people of Midian, its more general spiritual significance is clear from the terms and phrases used to describe them. *Path* here translates *ṣirāṭ,* which in the Quran refers to the path to truth and serves as a symbol for a life lived according to Divine guidance; see commentary on 1:6–7. It is essentially synonymous with *the way of God* (*sabīl Allāh*), mentioned in this same verse. Although commentators assert that the *path* to God is a single "straight path," *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm* (Z; see, e.g., 1:6; 2:142; 3:51; 4:68; 5:16), *on every path* here seems to suggest that there is more than one straight path. Al-Zamakhsharī explains that although the path is one, it has many branches, and it is this path

behold how the workers of corruption fared in the end! (87) If a group of you believe in that wherewith I have been sent, and a group of you believe not, then be patient till God shall judge between us, and He is the best of judges." (88) The notables among his people who were arrogant said, "We shall surely expel you, O Shuʿayb, and those who believe along with you from our town, unless you revert to our creed." He said, "What! Even though we are unwilling? (89) We would be fabricating a lie against God were we to revert to your creed after God had delivered us from it. It is not for us to revert thereto unless God, our Lord, should will. Our Lord encompasses all things in knowledge. In God do we trust. Our Lord! Decide between us and our people in truth, and Thou art the best of deciders." (90) The notables among his people who disbelieved said,

with its branches to which reference is made here. The idea of *seeking to make . . . crooked* the way of God—understood to mean seeking to convince others that the way of God is crooked (Z)—is also found in 3:99; 7:45; 11:19; 14:3; see 7:45c.

87 Shuʿayb instructs his people to *be patient till God shall judge between us,* that is, by aiding the believers and affirmers of truth over the disbelievers and champions of falsehood (Z). He says this as a means of warning the disbelievers (Z), but also of encouraging the believers (Ṭs). In the case of the Midianites, as with the people of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Lot, Divine punishment takes various forms of earthly destruction from which the prophets and their followers are spared. The ominous instruction to "wait" or "be patient" is also made by Noah (v. 71) and by Muhammad, who is told to respond to the Quraysh's continued denial in a similar manner in 6:158; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 20:135; 52:31. That God is the best of judges is also stated in 10:109; 11:45; 12:80; 95:8. In 6:57 and 7:89, He is similarly said to be the *best of deciders.*

88–89 For a discussion of *the notables* and their particularly outspoken opposition to the prophets in several Quranic narratives, see 7:60–62c. Shuʿayb, like Lot (v. 82), is threatened with having himself and his followers "expelled" from the town, unless he should *revert* to the creed and religious practices of the Midianites. Reverting to such a creed, Shuʿayb asserts, would amount to *fabricating a lie against God,* something the Quran identifies as among the greatest sins, for *who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God?* (6:21, 93, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 19:68; 61:7). Reverting in this way would also make Shuʿayb and his followers effectively "apostates," who are, according to some commentators, worse than disbelievers, because such people presumably are capable of discerning true religion from false religion since they were followers of the former, but nonetheless have now renounced it and follow what they know to be false (Z). That God *encompasses all things in knowledge* is also found in 6:80; 20:98; 65:12. Shuʿayb's exclamation *in God do we trust* demonstrates his confidence that God would protect and deliver him and his followers from the threats of the disbelievers (Th), but also points to the central spiritual virtue of trust in God (*tawakkul*); see 14:11–12c; 39:38c. His request to God that He *decide between us and our people in truth* is similar to his statement in v. 87 bidding his people to wait for God's decision between the believers and the disbelievers.

90 The *notables,* or leaders among the disbelievers, warned that those who followed Shuʿayb would *be the losers,* meaning those who are deceived with regard to their religion, and that abandoning their native religious practice to follow Shuʿayb would lead to destruction (Ṭ). In v. 92, however, it is *those who denied Shuʿayb* who *were the losers.*

"Verily if you follow Shuᶜayb, you shall surely be the losers." (91) So the earthquake seized them, and morning found them lying lifeless in their abode. (92) Those who denied Shuᶜayb, it was as though they had never dwelt there. Those who denied Shuᶜayb, they themselves were the losers. (93) So he turned away from them and said, "O my people! I indeed delivered unto you the messages of my Lord, and advised you sincerely. So how can I grieve for a disbelieving people?" (94) We sent no prophet to a town but that We seized its people with misfortune and hardship, that haply they would humble themselves. (95) Then We replaced evil [circumstances] with good, till they multiplied and said, "Hardship and ease visited our fathers [as well]." Then We seized them suddenly, while they were unaware. (96) Had the people of the towns believed

91–92 The description of the destruction of the Midianites is identical to that of the Thamūd, the people of Ṣāliḥ. See v. 78 and commentary. It is reported that when the people of Midian denied Shuᶜayb, God first sent upon them such a terrible heat that even shade and water could provide no relief. God then sent upon them a cloud, bearing cool, refreshing breezes. When all the people of Midian had gathered beneath this cloud, it unleashed upon them flame and fire (IK, Ṭ, Th), followed by a terrible cry and an earthquake that instantly extinguished their spirits and left them suddenly *lifeless* (IK). The people of Midian were so thoroughly effaced by *the earthquake* that *it was as though they had never dwelt there.* In response to the Midianite disbelievers' description of Shuᶜayb's followers as *the losers* in v. 90, the present verse affirms that it is the disbelievers who were *the losers,* that is, deceived or deluded about true religion and destroyed as a result.

93 Shuᶜayb's address to his people (except for the last sentence) is identical to that of Ṣāliḥ, and the same question arises as to whether this address was delivered after his people had been thoroughly destroyed or only after the prophet became certain that their destruction was imminent and unavoidable; see v. 79 and commentary.

94–95 These verses begin a section, vv. 94–102, that serves as a commentary on and conclusion to the prophetic narratives of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuᶜayb. In both general and specific ways, the Quran indicates that the sending of a prophetic messenger is often accompanied by some form of adversity for his people as a moral test. In v. 94, *misfortune and hardship* refer to poverty, hunger, illness, and various forms of loss (see 6:42–44c). In some cases, as mentioned in v. 95, the test consists of an alternation between *hardship and ease,* since God tries people with good and bad fortune (cf. v. 168) to engender both humility and gratitude. The good fortune that replaced their earlier adversity continued *till they multiplied*—that is, until they increased in both wealth and children (Ṭ), the two worldly goods that give people a false sense of "security" (cf. vv. 97–99) with regard to both the vicissitudes of this life and punishment in the next; see, for example, 34:34–35: *And We sent no warner unto a town, but that those living in luxury therein said, "We disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent." And they say, "We are greater in wealth and children, and we shall not be punished."* In v. 95, some fail the test by attributing both adversity and ease to the normal course of earthly life (R, Z), rather than understanding them as a test or a gift from God. As a result, they become heedless and complacent, and thus are *seized . . . suddenly* by Divine punishment while in this state of ease and thus *unaware.* See commentary on the very similar passage in 6:42–44.

96 If, by contrast, the people of the towns had believed, God would have *opened unto them*

and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth. But they denied, so We seized them for that which they used to earn. (97) Did the people of the towns feel secure from Our Might coming upon them by night, while they were sleeping? (98) Or did the people of the towns feel secure from Our Might coming upon them in broad daylight, while they were playing? (99) Did they feel secure from God's plotting? None feels secure from God's plotting, save the people who are losers. (100) Does it not serve as guidance unto those who inherited the earth after its [earlier] inhabitants that, if We willed, We could smite them for their sins and set a seal upon their hearts such that they would not hear? (101) These are the towns whose stories We have

*blessings from Heaven and earth,* which may refer to the opening of the heavens to send down rain, so that crops would grow abundantly on the earth (IK, R, Z), but could also refer metaphorically and by extension to God's providing them with all manner of good things (Z), including security and peace (R), which can also be understood spiritually to mean security and peace for the soul.

97–99 The series of rhetorical questions in these verses emphasizes the foolishness of feeling "secure" in the life in the world or "secure" from God's punishment, which may come in either this world or the next. This idea is found in other verses, such as 10:7–8: *Truly those who anticipate not the meeting with Us, and who are content with the life of this world and feel secure therein, and who are heedless of Our signs, it is they whose refuge shall be the Fire for that which they used to earn;* and 16:45: *Do those who have plotted evil deeds feel secure that God will not cause the earth to engulf them, or that the punishment will not come upon them whence they are not aware?* (cf. 12:107; 17:68–69; 67:16–17).

The questions posed in vv. 97–98 indicate that God's punishment may descend *by night,* while people are asleep, and so unconscious and unaware, or *in broad daylight, while they were playing,* that is, distracted by their engagement with affairs of this world, which is itself described as mere *play and diversion* in several verses (6:32; 29:64; 47:36; 57:20). According to al-Rāzī, God will send down punishment upon such disbelievers when they are in the greatest state of heedlessness. God's *plotting* is mentioned in several verses and refers to God's ultimate control over the outcome of all events; it is frequently juxtaposed with the futility of human "plotting" by comparison (cf. 3:54; 10:21; 13:42; 14:46; 16:26; 27:50). Here, God's *plotting* may refer specifically to His seizing them with punishment *while they were unaware* (v. 95; R, Z), that is, while they *were sleeping* or *playing.*

100 This verse indicates that the stories of past peoples and their destruction on account of their sins and their rejection of their messengers is meant as a warning for *those who inherited the earth* after them, that is, all later peoples who might be similarly destroyed *for their sins.* In the context of the Prophet's life, however, this was perhaps directed specifically at the Quraysh (R), since, like the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb before them, they rejected their prophet, Muhammad, and drove him from Makkah, his native city. The idea that God may *set a seal upon* people's *hearts* so that they cannot hear or understand religious truth—a punishment particularly for wrongdoing or disbelief—is found in several verses throughout the Quran (see 2:7c; 4:155; 6:46; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 30:59; 40:35; 42:24; 45:23; 47:16; 63:3).

101 Cf. 11:100, where a nearly identical verse concludes a similar series of prophetic narratives of earthly destruction. The *stories* are *recounted unto thee*—that is, to the Prophet most specifically—so that he would be assured that God aids His prophets and the believers against

recounted unto thee. Their messengers certainly brought them clear proofs, but they would not believe in what they had denied earlier. Thus does God set a seal upon the hearts of the disbelievers. (102) We did not find most of them [faithful to

their enemies in this world (Ṭ) as well as rewarding them in the next, and so that he might warn his own people, the Quraysh, of the fate that awaited them if they persisted in disbelief (R, Ṭs). Though all the messengers brought *clear proofs* of their prophethood and the Divine origin of their message, most of their people *would not believe in what they had denied earlier.* For some commentators, this last statement refers to the making of the pretemporal covenant with all Children of Adam, in which all human beings testified to the Lordship of God (v. 172). According to these commentators, their "earlier denial" was manifested even at the moment of the pretemporal covenant, in which they bore witness to God's Lordship only reluctantly and insincerely (R, Ṭ); or their denial was manifest at this pretemporal event insofar as their ultimate moral status as believers or disbelievers was already known to God at that time (Ṭ). This statement may also be connected with other verses that indicate that if the disbelievers, after being brought to judgment in the Hereafter, were to be returned to earthly life to mend their ways, *they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden* (6:28); that is, they would return to the same pattern of disbelief and wrongdoing (R, Ṭ, Ṭs).

Others interpret *they would not believe in what they had denied earlier* as a reference to the stubborn and unrelenting disbelief of most of the people of those towns—and by extension, other peoples—for whom no amount of warning, preaching, or even evidentiary miracles could bring them to accept the messengers sent to them and to their persisting in their state of denial and disbelief until death (R, Z). Some have proposed that it was only because He was aware of the futility of future preaching for bringing these people to belief that God destroyed them (Ṭs). The statement might also be read transhistorically to mean that disbelievers of any generation will not believe in what those like them among previous peoples *had denied earlier* (Ṭs). That God has *set a seal upon the hearts of the disbelievers* indicates that some will never believe (R; see 2:7c; 4:155c).

102 *We did not find most of them [faithful to their] pact* is an idiomatic rendering of the Arabic, which literally reads, "We found no pact for most of them." Although all major commentators understand this statement as rendered, al-Rāzī also notes that in being unfaithful to their *pact* with God, it is as if they had made no pact at all with God. *Most of them* may refer to most of those among the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb—namely, the majority of them who rejected their messengers and the warnings they brought—but may also refer to most human beings in general (Z). Consistent with the latter reading, *pact* here may be understood as a reference to the pretemporal covenant that God makes with all of humanity, requiring them to bear witness to His Lordship, as recounted in v. 172 (R, Ṭ). That they were not "faithful to their pact" would thus mean that they did not continue to recognize God's Lordship and His claim to their obedience and worship during the course of their earthly lives. Even without specific or explicit reference to the pretemporal covenant, most commentators understand the statement that *most of them* were not faithful to their *pact* to mean that most people fail to act upon the intrinsic knowledge and moral responsibility that God has given them regarding the necessity of worshipping only the One God and abandoning idolatry, being obedient to His messengers, being reverent, obeying His laws, being thankful for one's blessings, and performing virtuous deeds while avoiding abominable ones (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

That God *found most of them to be iniquitous* may again refer to the destroyed peoples of the past, to all past generations, or to all humanity. If it is understood to refer to all humanity, it would be consistent with many other Quranic verses stating that most people are ungrateful (2:243; 10:60; 12:38; 27:63; 40:61), are unaware of spiritual truths (7:187; 12:21, 40, 68; 16:38, 75; 27:61; 30:6, 30; 34:28, 36; 39:29, 49; 40:57; 44:39; 45:26), and are not believers (11:17; 12:103–6; 13:1; 17:89; 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190; 40:59). In *Sūrah* 26, which contains a discussion of past prophets and

their] pact. Indeed, We found most of them to be iniquitous. (103) Then after them We sent Moses with Our signs unto Pharaoh and his notables, but they treated them wrongfully; so behold how the workers of corruption fared in the end. (104) And Moses said, "O Pharaoh! I am truly a messenger from the Lord of the worlds, (105) obligated to speak naught about God save the truth. I have brought you a clear proof from your Lord; so send forth with me the Children of Israel." (106) He said, "If you have brought a sign, then bring it forth, if you are among the truthful." (107) So he cast his staff and, behold, it was a serpent manifest. (108) And he drew forth his hand and, behold, it was white to the onlookers.

their struggles with their peoples similar to that found in the present *sūrah,* the statement that most of humanity does not believe functions as something of a refrain throughout that *sūrah.*

103 This verse begins a lengthy segment (vv. 103–56) concerning the prophet Moses, who was sent *after them,* that is, after the previous prophets mentioned in vv. 59–93. Other narrative accounts of Moses' life are found in 5:20–26; 10:75–93; 18:60–82; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46; 40:23–45; 43:46–56; 79:15–25. As with the previous prophets mentioned in this *sūrah,* the opposition to Moses is led, in part, by the *notables* among the people to whom he was sent (cf. vv. 60, 75, 88–90). The *notables,* in particular, are guilty of having *treated* God's signs *wrongfully* (cf. v. 10) by disbelieving in them (Ṭ, Z) or by turning others away from them (Z) as well as of being *workers of corruption* (see 7:56c). The command *so behold* is addressed to the Prophet, indicating that these prophetic narratives were meant to give him confidence that God aids His messengers against their enemies. Like the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb, those who rejected Moses and his warnings met with utter destruction *in the end.*

104 See 43:46 for an identical verse as well as vv. 61, 68, where Noah and Hūd similarly identify themselves as messengers from the *Lord of the worlds*—a title for God found throughout the Quran, beginning with the opening *sūrah;* see 1:2c. God also identifies Himself to Moses as the *Lord of the worlds* when the latter first encounters Him and receives his prophetic vocation (28:30).

105 According to one account, after Moses articulated his claim to be *a messenger from the Lord of the worlds* (v. 104), Pharaoh replied that he was lying. In the present verse, Moses can be understood as responding to that charge by indicating that he would *speak naught about God save the truth* (Th, Z). See also 7:169, where speaking truthfully about God is a condition of the Israelites' covenant with God. Throughout the Quran, the prophets often claim that they are bringing *a clear proof* (or *clear proofs*) from God or that they stand upon *a clear proof;* in this *sūrah* similar claims are made by the prophet Ṣāliḥ in v. 73 and the prophet Shuʿayb in v. 85. *Clear proof* (*bayyinah*) may refer to scriptural revelations, prophetic warnings, or evidentiary miracles performed by the prophets (see, e.g., 2:87; 3:105; 4:153; 5:32; 6:157; 7:101; 9:70; 10:13; 14:9; 16:44; 19:73). In this case, the *clear proof* to which Moses refers is the miracles that he would subsequently perform (Ṭs) as well as the force of his call to Pharaoh to accept the message he brings and to *send forth . . . the Children of Israel* (see also 20:47; 26:17; 44:18), that is, to free them from servitude and allow them to return to the Holy Land (Ṭs, Z).

106–8 Pharaoh asks Moses for *a sign,* that is, a proof of the truth of the message he brings (Ṭ) or a proof of God Himself (Ṭs). The two evidentiary miracles Moses produces in response—his thrown staff transforms into a serpent and his hand turns white (see also 26:32–33)—were acts in which he had been previously instructed by God (20:18–22; 27:10–12; 28:30–32). The serpent produced from his staff was said to be of supernaturally large size and to have frightened Pharaoh from his throne (Th, Ṭs).

(109) The notables among Pharaoh's people said, "Truly this is a knowledgeable sorcerer. (110) He desires to expel you from your land; so what do you command?" (111) They said, "Put him and his brother off for a while, and send marshalers to the cities (112) to bring you every knowledgeable sorcerer." (113) And the sorcerers came unto Pharaoh. They said, "We shall surely have a reward if it is we who are victorious." (114) He said, "Yes, and indeed you shall be among those brought nigh."

According to a legendary account, the staff had been Adam's staff and was bequeathed to successive prophets, including Shuʿayb, the father-in-law of Moses, until it reached Moses himself (Ṭs). When Moses speaks with God for the first time, God questions Moses about his staff (20:17–18), and Moses later uses the staff to miraculously produce twelve streams of water from a rock (2:60; 7:160) and to part the sea (26:63). Some commentators note that it was Pharaoh's request for a second sign that prompted Moses to put his hand into the hollow or sleeve of his cloak and then to "draw it forth" as white as snow (Th, Ṭs).

109–10 The *notables* consider Moses a *knowledgeable sorcerer* (cf. 26:34, where it is Pharaoh who describes Moses as a *knowledgeable* sorcerer to his notables) and accuse him of seeking to *expel* Pharaoh from his land.

111–26 The reaction of the notables in vv. 109–10 sets up the competition between Moses and the sorcerers of Egypt, which is also recounted in 20:58–70 and 26:36–48 (cf. 10:79–82, where the sorcerers challenge Moses with their feats, but he does not respond in kind). The Bible provides a very short account of the competition with the Egyptian sorcerers, in which it is Aaron who casts the staff (Exodus 7:8–13). In the Quran, the story of Moses and the sorcerers provides a meditation on the relationship between prophethood, miracles, and sorcery and the differences between miracles and sorcery with regard to their causality, power, and reality. Moses is accused by Pharaoh and his people of sorcery elsewhere (10:76; 20:57, 63; 26:34; 27:13; 28:36; 40:24; 51:39), as are other prophets, including Muhammad and Jesus, by their own people (cf. 5:110; 10:2; 11:7; 34:43; 37:15; 38:4; 43:30; 46:7; 51:52; 54:2; 61:6; 74:24). Given that the miracles of the prophets are often dismissed as mere sorcery by their detractors and have no effect upon certain disbelievers, it seems that the primary function of these miracles is to encourage belief among those who are already inwardly disposed to it—like the sorcerers in this pericope—as well as those wavering between belief and disbelief. These miracles, like the prophetic messages themselves, serve to distinguish the inherently good, but merely misguided, members of a disbelieving community from those, like Pharaoh, whose hearts were so hardened as to be impervious to any prophetic sign or message. See also 43:49c.

111–12 The call for sorcerers to challenge Moses is also mentioned in 10:79 and 26:36–67. The notables' suggestion that Pharaoh *put him* (Moses) *and his brother off for a while* is understood to be a suggestion that he detain them by either delaying their departure or imprisoning them (IK, Ṭ). According to one report, the marshaled sorcerers boast of their superior skill in the manipulation of staffs, ropes, and snakes (Ṭ), and other reports indicate that the marshalers sought out sorcerers capable of feats similar to those produced by Moses (IK).

113–14 Cf. 26:41–42. The sorcerers seek *a reward* if they *are victorious* over Moses. Pharaoh replies that their reward will be that they *shall be among those brought nigh,* meaning that they will become honored members of his court or his inner circle (IK, Ṭ). Although these verses, on a literal level, articulate the worldly desire for reward on the part of the sorcerers and Pharaoh's worldly manner of fulfilling it, the ambiguity of the language suggests that the sorcerers, and Pharaoh unwittingly, but presciently, utter truths that will come to be realized in a manner other than the one they envision. The sorcerers are defeated by Moses, but their subsequent submission to God and to Moses can be understood as a spiritual "victory," for which they will *surely have a reward* with God. Although not mentioned in

(115) They said, "O Moses! either you cast, or we will be the ones who cast." (116) He said, "Cast!" And when they cast, they bewitched the eyes of the people and struck them with awe, and they brought forth a mighty sorcery. (117) And We revealed unto Moses, "Cast thy staff!" And, behold, it devoured all their deceptions. (118) Thus the truth came to pass, and whatsoever they did was shown

the well-known commentaries, it is noteworthy that Pharaoh's promise that they *shall be among those brought nigh* (*muqarrabīn*) is identical to a description used elsewhere in the Quran for prophets, angels, and the most righteous who are rewarded with the highest Paradise (cf. 3:45c; 4:172; 56:10–11, 88; 83:21, 28). Vv. 124–26 suggest that the sorcerers were martyred for their belief and may therefore be among *those brought nigh* in the Hereafter.

115–16 Cf. 20:65. Some commentators indicate that the sorcerers demonstrated proper etiquette by allowing Moses to choose who should cast the staff first (R, Z), even as they clearly preferred to cast first (Z). Some commentators propose that it is as a reward for their graciousness and proper demeanor toward Moses that God causes faith to enter their hearts, so that they ultimately come to be believers in God and in Moses' prophethood (R). Moreover, this demonstration of outward etiquette, or *adab,* toward Moses may have been recounted here, because it suggests that the sorcerers possessed an inner sincerity that allowed them to perceive Moses as a person of noble character, deserving of respect. Moses responds graciously by letting them cast first, both because he understands their desire to do so and because he is certain that God will aid him and that no sorcery can defeat a miracle (*muʿjizah;* R, Z), which has a Divine cause and is inimitable through mere human agency. Moreover, the sorcerers' casting first allows Moses to demonstrate more easily the powerlessness of their deceptions in the face of the truth (IK, R), since the power of his own staff is then able to "devour all their deceptions" (v. 117).

The sorcerers produced tricks that *bewitched the eyes of the people* through slight of hand and illusion (Z); see also 20:69, where their feat is described as merely *a sorcerer's trick.* The people were *struck with awe* by the sorcerers' feats; cf. 20:67, where because of their display Moses *conceived a fear in his soul.* The sorcerers cast ropes and wooden staffs (see 26:44) that were painted so as to create the illusion of writhing snakes filling the ground, one upon another (IK, R, Z). Others report that the sorcerers had placed mercury inside the staffs and ropes so that they began to move in the hot sun (R, Ṭs, Z), as the competition was held in the open desert at the hottest time of the day (see 20:58–59).

117 Cf. 20:69; 26:45. Although Moses is expected to cast his staff to produce a great feat, he waits until God *revealed unto* him the direct instruction to cast it—a command heard only by Moses (R, Ṭs)—indicating that the power and will behind this feat belong to God alone; cf. 3:49 and 5:110, where Jesus' miracles are explicitly performed *by God's Leave.* Moses' staff becomes a serpent, as it did before Pharaoh alone in v. 107, and this serpent is reported to have literally *devoured* the sorcerers' deception, that is, to have swallowed up the staffs and ropes that had been made to look like writhing serpents (Ṭ). When Moses grasped the staff again, it returned to its previous form, as it did when God first instructed him in this miraculous sign *in the holy valley of Ṭuwā* (20:12).

118 That *the truth came to pass* means that it became plainly manifest and victorious over the sorcerers' deceptions (Ṭ) and that Moses' prophethood was validated (Ṭs). *Came to pass* translates *waqaʿa,* which can also mean to "fall" or "alight," and some have suggested that here it means that the truth alighted upon the hearts of the sorcerers (Z), for in the following verses they submit themselves to God and Moses. *Whatsoever they did* refers to the deceptions of the sorcerers, which were *shown to be false.* The statement in this verse is similar to others that juxtapose truth and falsehood in order to demonstrate the invincibility of the truth. See, for example, 17:81: *Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished.*

to be false. (119) Then and there they were vanquished and turned back, humbled. (120) And the sorcerers were cast down prostrate. (121) They said, "We believe in the Lord of the worlds, (122) the Lord of Moses and Aaron." (123) Pharaoh said, "You believe in him before I grant you leave! This is surely a plot you have devised in the

*Truly falsehood is ever vanishing"*; 21:18: *Nay, but We cast truth against falsehood, and it crushes it, and, behold, it vanishes;* and 42:24: *God wipes out falsehood and verifies the truth through His Words.* See also 10:81–82, where Moses states, after the sorcerers have cast their staffs, *That which you have produced is sorcery; God will soon bring it to naught. . . . God verifies the truth through His Words, though the guilty be averse.*

119–20 Cf. 20:70; 26:46–48. *They*—that is, both Pharaoh and the sorcerers—were *vanquished* by Moses' feat, and Pharaoh reportedly released Moses from detainment or imprisonment (Ṭs; see 7:111–12c). Because the sorcerers knew that their own feats were mere deception, they recognized that the feat produced by Moses could only have been of Divine provenance (IK, Ṭs, Z). They *turned back,* meaning that they had an immediate change of heart, and were *humbled* and amazed before the awesome power displayed by Moses. *Were cast down prostrate* translates the same verb used in the preceding verses to denote the action of casting down the staffs, thus indicating the speed and force with which they prostrated themselves—as if they were literally "cast down," involuntarily, by what they had observed (Ṭs, Z). The use of this same verb also sharpens the contrast between their earlier "casting" of the staffs for the purposes of deception and their now "being cast" into sincere submission to God. They made themselves *prostrate,* in a display of utter humility and submission to God (Ṭ).

According to al-Rāzī, the master sorcerers' immediate realization of the Divine provenance of Moses' feat and their subsequent submission to God and Moses is an indication of the spiritual value of knowledge, for it was the sorcerers' advanced knowledge of their own art that allowed them to recognize that Moses' actions were not sorcery at all. In other words, full knowledge even of worldly sciences should also engender an understanding of the limits and inadequacies of those sciences in relation to sciences based upon spiritual realities and higher principles, particularly when one is directly confronted with the latter. For this reason, the Islamic tradition argues that each messenger was sent with miracles that demonstrated an inimitable mastery of the leading arts and sciences of the people to whom they had been sent. Moses is thus sent with miracles that are similar to, but that utterly transcend, those of the sorcerers of his day, in a society where sorcery and the occult sciences seem to have been held in great esteem; Jesus was sent with healing miracles in an age when medical science enjoyed great prestige; and Muhammad was sent to the Arabs, whose major art form was poetry and eloquent speech, with a scripture whose literary and linguistic style was considered to be of unsurpassed beauty and power.

121–22 The sorcerers profess belief in *the Lord of the worlds,* a common title for God found throughout the Quran (see 1:2c); it is invoked several times in this *sūrah* (see vv. 54, 61, 67, 104) and is common in the accounts of the pre-Islamic prophets. The sorcerers' identification of the God they now recognize as *the Lord of Moses and Aaron* was, according to some, a means of making it clear that they were prostrating to the One God, and not to Pharaoh, who also considered himself a god (see 28:38). Al-Rāzī also suggests that the sorcerers invoked both Moses and Aaron here, because if they had only mentioned "the Lord of Moses," Pharaoh might still think that they were prostrating to him, since Pharaoh had "raised" (*rabba,* from the same root as *rabb,* meaning "Lord") Moses as a child (see 26:18; 28:7–9). Aaron, Moses' brother, is also identified as a prophet in the Quran (19:53). As in the Biblical account, he is sent by God to accompany Moses to Egypt—at Moses' request—to confront Pharaoh (10:75; 28:34–35; Exodus 4:10–16), and he also served as Moses' close aide as he wandered through the desert with the Israelites (7:142; 20:25–36).

123 Cf. 20:71. Pharaoh is outraged that the sorcerers would *believe in him*—that is, in

city, that you might expel its people therefrom. Soon you shall know. (124) I shall surely cut off your hands and your feet on alternate sides; then I shall surely crucify you all!" (125) They said, "Truly we turn unto our Lord. (126) You take vengeance upon us only because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came unto us. Our Lord, shower us with patience, and let us die as submitters." (127) The

Moses—before Pharaoh "grants them leave." In contrast to the sorcerers, who immediately recognized that Moses' power came from the One God, Pharaoh considered Moses' feat no more than a sorcerer's trick, albeit a superior one. He describes the entire competition, including Moses' victory and the sorcerers' submission, as *a plot* devised by Moses and the sorcerers together (IK, Ṭ, Th, Ṭs) to *expel* the people of Egypt from Egypt, so that the Israelites could settle there (Z). According to one report, before the competition began, Moses approached the head of the sorcerers to ask if they would believe in him and witness to the truth of his message if Moses were victorious, and the sorcerers agreed that they would. Pharaoh reportedly overheard the exchange, and when it came to pass, he declared the whole affair to have been a prearranged plot (IK, Ṭ). See also 20:71, where Pharaoh accuses Moses of being the sorcerers' secret master. Pharaoh then warns them, *soon you shall know;* that is, they will know the terrible punishment Pharaoh intends to impose on them (Th), as described in the following verse.

124 The punishment here is similar to the punishment ordained for *those who wage war against God and His Messenger* and *endeavor to work corruption upon the earth* in 5:33. The commentators report that the first person to execute the punishment of "cutting off hands and feet on alternate sides" and crucifixion was Pharaoh (Q, Ṭs, Z), who crucified his victims on palm trees on the banks of the Nile (Ṭs); this latter detail is mentioned in Pharaoh's threat as uttered in 20:71.

125–26 The sorcerers respond to Pharaoh's threat by affirming that they "turn unto" their Lord, indicating that they were not troubled by the threat of death, since they now looked only toward the meeting with God (Z) with love and longing (Bq) and with the hope that they would be rewarded for the pain they suffered under Pharaoh's torments (Z). The sorcerers' humble complaint to Pharaoh, *You take vengeance upon us only because we believed in the signs of our Lord,* is similar to the words of a secret believer in Pharaoh's court who asks Pharaoh if he would kill a man *for saying, "My Lord is God"* (40:28); see also 5:59 and 85:9, which chastise those who would be *vengeful* toward others simply on account of their belief in God and His signs.

The *signs of our Lord* refers to the feats performed by Moses (R). The sorcerers' subsequent supplication, *shower us with patience* (see 2:250, where the same supplication is made by the Israelites facing the army of Goliath), is a request that God aid them in remaining steadfast in the face of torture and death at the hands of Pharaoh, lest they revert to disbelief under this extreme duress (Ṭ, Ṭs). According to some, the painful death suffered by the sorcerers purified them of their past sins (Z).

*Submitters* translates *muslimīn* (*muslims*), used here in the universal sense of those who submit themselves fully to the One God. Pharaoh reportedly had the sorcerers killed and crucified that very day, and several early commentators observed that the sorcerers "began the day as sorcerers and ended it as martyrs" (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). Their request, *let us die as submitters,* can also be translated "take us to Thyself as submitters" and might therefore be understood as a plea for God to take them to Himself immediately so that they might be spared the punishment of Pharaoh (R). Cf. 20:72–73 and 26:50–51 for similar accounts of the sorcerers' response to Pharaoh's threats.

127 Although Pharaoh killed the sorcerers, he allowed Moses to go free. Pharaoh's *notables* thus express concern that he would *leave Moses and his people,* the Israelites, to live and to worship as they prefer, *and to leave you* (Pharaoh) *and your gods,* that is, to abandon the worship of Pharaoh and his gods for obedience to Moses and the worship of the One God (Ṭ). The commentators are unclear on the identity of Pharaoh's *gods* men-

notables among Pharaoh's people said, "Will you leave Moses and his people to work corruption in the land and to leave you and your gods?" He said, "We shall slay their sons and spare their women. Truly we are above them, dominant." (128) Moses said unto his people, "Seek help from God and be patient. Truly the land belongs to God; He bequeaths it to whomsoever He will among His servants. And the end belongs to the reverent." (129) They said, "We were persecuted before you came to us, and after you came to us." He said, "It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemies and make you vicegerents

tioned in this verse; some say he worshipped the sun or certain sacred cattle, hence the Israelites' inclination to make an idol in the form of a calf in v. 148 (Ṭ, Ṭs). Still others assert that Pharaoh was himself worshipped, but did not worship anything himself (Ṭ), or that the *gods* referred to here were idols that Pharaoh had made and that he had commanded people to worship as a way of worshipping him (Ṭs, Z). The question posed by the notables might also be rendered, "Will you leave Moses and his people to work corruption upon the earth, when they have left you and your gods?" (Ṭ). See also 40:26, where Pharaoh indicates that he will kill Moses himself, fearing that Moses will *alter* their *religion* or *cause corruption to appear in the land* by leading people away from the worship of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's threat to all those who followed Moses that he would *slay their sons*—that is, their young sons—*and spare their women* is consistent with his means of collective punishment mentioned elsewhere (see v. 141; 2:49; 14:6; 28:4; 40:25). Although Pharaoh did not harm Moses, out of fear of his great power, he reportedly carried out his threat upon his Israelite followers, hoping to weaken Moses indirectly by terrifying his supporters (R). *Dominant* translates *qāhirūn,* a plural form of *qāhir,* which is a Name or Attribute of God in the Quran; see 6:18, *He is Dominant over His servants.* That Pharaoh speaks of himself in terms used elsewhere in the Quran for God alone suggests Pharaoh's claim of divinity and lordship for himself (see 26:29; 28:38; 79:24; 7:123c).

128 When his people are facing the terrible punishment of Pharaoh, described in v. 127, Moses advises them to *seek help from God* (see 1:5c) and to have patience in the same manner that the Quran enjoins believers to *seek help in patience and prayer* as a general spiritual attitude (see 2:45, 153), for *God is with the patient* (8:46). Moses encourages his people by reminding them that *the land,* meaning Pharaoh's domain (R), *belongs to God* and that He may cause others to inherit it after him; and indeed in v. 137 God bequeaths the *eastern and western parts of the land that We blessed* to the Israelites (cf. 28:5–6) as a reward for their *patience.* Moses further promises that *the end belongs to the reverent* (a general promise also made in 11:49 and 28:83). The *end* may refer to the reward of the reverent in the Hereafter, to the later worldly success of the Israelites in vanquishing their enemies (v. 129) and settling in the land, or both (R).

129 The Israelites respond that they *were persecuted before* Moses came to them—since the Quran elsewhere indicates that the punishment of slaying sons was inflicted by Pharaoh upon the Israelites at the time of Moses' infancy (28:4–9)—and that they are now being persecuted in the same way again. Moses' display of power had raised the Israelites' hopes of being delivered from Pharaoh's oppression; but when they heard Pharaoh announce the same brutal collective punishment he had inflicted on them earlier, they became despondent (R). Moses, seeking to strengthen their resolve (IK), reminded them that God may yet *destroy* their *enemies* and make them *vicegerents upon the earth* after Pharaoh and his people. The successive vicegerency of different peoples is a recurring idea in this *sūrah;* see 6:165c; 7:69c. If God grants them victory, it will be so *that He may observe how* they *behave,* that is, whether or not the people continue to worship the One God and obey His commands (R).

upon the earth, that He may observe how you behave." (130) And We indeed afflicted the House of Pharaoh with drought and a shortage of crops, that haply they would be reminded. (131) But whenever good came to them, they would say, "This is ours." And if an evil befell them, they would consider it an ill omen on account of Moses and those who were with him. Nay, their ill omen lies with God, though most of them know not. (132) And they said, "Whatever sign you may bring to bewitch us thereby, we will not believe in you." (133) So We sent against them the flood and the locusts, and the lice and the frogs and the blood—signs expounded. But they waxed arrogant, and they were a guilty

130 Cf. v. 133, where other plagues sent against Pharaoh and his people are mentioned. That *drought and a shortage of crops* were visited upon the people of Pharaoh during the time of Moses' mission to them is consistent with other verses indicating that the adversity suffered by a people in connection with the coming of a prophet is meant to make them humble and to cause them to hearken to God's message. See, for example, 6:42: *We have indeed sent messengers unto communities before thee, and We seized them with misfortune and hardship, that they might humble themselves* (see also v. 94). *That haply they would be reminded* indicates that the famine and drought were meant to be an admonition to Pharaoh and his people and to frighten them, so that they would repent and believe in God (Ṭ). Adversity in general may also have the effect of "softening the heart" (R, Ṭs), although not in the case of Pharaoh, whose heart, according to the Biblical account, was increasingly hardened by the successive plagues (see Exodus 9–11), and here too he remains unrepentant (see 7:133c). Some commentators see this verse as proof that God does not compel people toward belief or disbelief, but rather arranges matters so as to encourage belief, but then allows people to choose how they will react (Ṭs); others cast doubt on this interpretation, noting that these apparent trials only further entrenched Pharaoh in disbelief (R).

131 Pharaoh and his supporters would consider any good fortune they enjoyed to be something they deserved, rather than a blessing for which they should be grateful (Ṭ, Z). Yet, they considered any *evil* that befell them, such as drought and famine (v. 130), to be an *ill omen on account of Moses* and his followers, meaning that their presence had brought these difficulties upon them. In 27:47, the Thamūd similarly considered Ṣāliḥ to be an "ill omen" for them; see also 4:78–79 and commentary, where certain Jews or hypocrites in Madinah considered any good that befell the city to be from God, but any evil to be on account of the presence of the Prophet. In the latter case, the Quranic response is that all good is from God, and all evil is from oneself. In the present verse, the response is that *their ill omen lies with God,* meaning that all good or bad fortune happens according to God's Will and Wisdom (Ṭ, Z).

132 This verse encapsulates one of the key ideas presented in this account as a whole, namely, that no miraculous sign, no matter how powerful or convincing, can change the hearts of those who stubbornly refuse to believe. In v. 146, this stubbornness is engendered by pride, since God "turns away from His signs" those who, like Pharaoh and his notables, *wax arrogant upon the earth.* For the idea that some are impervious to all signs of God, see 6:25; 10:96–97.

133 This verse lists five punishments sent against Pharaoh and his people in response to their failure to believe in the One God and in Moses' prophethood and to their continued oppression of the Israelites. Four of these five—the *locusts, lice, frogs,* and *blood*—are identical to four of the ten plagues visited upon Pharaoh's people in the Biblical account (see Exodus 9–11). In 17:101, the Quran states that Moses was given *nine clear signs,* although these nine are understood as including the miracles of his staff and

people. (134) And when the torment came down upon them, they said, "O Moses! Call upon your Lord for us by the covenant He has made with you. If you lift this torment from us, we shall surely believe in you, and we shall surely send forth the Children of Israel with you." (135) But when We lifted the torment from them, for a term they were to fulfill, behold, they reneged. (136) So We took

his hand, not just the punishments visited upon Pharaoh; see 17:101c. *Flood* here translates *ṭūfān* (related to the word "typhoon"), the word also used to describe the flood of Noah (29:14), which usually connotes a complete deluge that brings sudden and rapid death. Some commentators, however, interpret it to mean death that comes from all sides or by all means, since it derives from a root meaning "to surround," a view supported by a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet glossed *ṭūfān* simply as "death" (IK, Ṭ). According to one report, the rain persisted for eight days and flooded the houses of the Egyptians, but did not enter those of the Israelites (Z).

*Lice* translates *qummal,* which may denote a variety of tiny insects, including fleas or ticks (Ṭ). According to some, the *locusts* consumed most of the crops in the fields, and when this did not cause Pharaoh to repent, the *qummal* consumed the rest of the crops (Ṭ, Z). Pharaoh's continued stubbornness led to subsequent punishments in the form of the *frogs,* which filled the houses of the Egyptians and ruined them (Ṭ), and the *blood,* which was what any water drawn by the Egyptians turned into, while water drawn from the same sources by Israelites was clean (Ṭ, Z). This is similar to the description of the plague of blood as described in the Biblical account (see Exodus 9). According to one report, each punishment lasted a week, and when it was lifted on account of Pharaoh's plea and Moses' supplication to God, Pharaoh's state of repentance lasted only a month, after which he resumed his disbelieving and oppressive ways (Ṭ, Z). The verse describes these punishments as *signs expounded* (*āyāt mufaṣṣalāt*), which some interpret to mean signs that any reasonable person would know came from God (Z), and others interpret to mean successive signs, that is, distinct from one another in time (Ṭ, Z). That Pharaoh and his people continued to "wax arrogant" in the face of these signs proved that they were truly *a guilty people,* stubborn and incorrigible in their sinful behavior.

134–35 Cf. 43:49–50. *Torment* here translates *rijz,* which can mean filth and defilement as well as Divine punishment (see 7:71c; 29:34). According to some commentators, the *torment* here refers to a sudden illness that took the lives of seventy thousand Egyptians in a single night, while sparing the Israelites who had marked their doors with sheep's blood (Ṭ, Ṭs). These details suggest that this refers to the same event as the plague that, according to the Bible, struck the firstborn among the Egyptians, as recounted in Exodus 11–12. Commentators also note, however, that *the torment* here may be a collective reference to the various punishments inflicted upon Pharaoh's people in v. 133 (IK, R, Ṭ), and that the present verses describe the reaction of Pharaoh and his associates to each one—namely, their imploring Moses to ask God to lift the punishment in return for becoming believers and freeing the Israelites, and then reneging shortly thereafter. For other examples of the human tendency to call upon God in moments of peril and to make promises of worship and belief that are soon broken when the peril has passed, see 6:63–64; 10:22–23; 29:65; 30:33; 31:32.

Pharaoh and his notables beseech Moses, *call upon your Lord by the covenant He has made with you,* referring to the special relationship they understand Moses to have had with God, given his ability to perform miraculous signs (Ṭs, Z). V. 135 confirms that God responded by lifting the punishment, but only *for a term they were to fulfill.* This *term* is said by some to refer to a period of respite before they would be destroyed completely (R). That they *reneged* refers to their obstinate refusal to recognize Moses' prophethood or release the Israelites, as they had promised in v. 134.

136 That God *took vengeance upon them* means that He punished them for their evil deeds

vengeance upon them and drowned them in the sea for their having denied Our signs and for having been heedless of them. (137) And We bequeathed unto the people who were oppressed the eastern and western parts of the land that We blessed. And the most beautiful Word of thy Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because they were patient. And We demolished all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought and that which they used to build. (138) And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea, and they came upon a people clinging to their idols. They said, "O Moses! Make for us a god as they have gods." He said, "Truly you are an ignorant people! (139) As for these, what they

and because they were *heedless* of the signs and clear proofs of Moses' prophethood (Ṭs). The Quran, like the Bible, recounts that Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned in the sea, which Moses had miraculously parted to allow the Israelites to pass through unharmed. When Pharaoh and his men attempted to pursue them through the parted waters, the sea returned to its normal state and drowned them; see 2:50; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 26:65–66; 28:40; 43:55; 44:24; 51:40. *Sea* here translates *yamm,* which is similar to the Hebrew word used in the Biblical reference to the sea that Moses parted (Exodus 14–15). This word, rather than the more common Arabic word for sea, *baḥr,* is used in the Quran only in connection with the Mosaic narratives (in 20:39, 78, 97; 28:7, 40; 51:40). *Yamm* may also refer to a sea of unfathomable depths (Z) or, alternately, to the loud roar of the sea or to its vastness (Z).

137 This verse seems to be a fulfillment of Moses' words in v. 128. God bequeaths the land to those *who were oppressed* (*yustaḍʿafūn*)—that is, the Israelites—as a reward *because they were patient* under Pharaoh's oppression (v. 127). The verse can also be taken in a more general sense to indicate that those who face adversity with patience and the anticipation of Divine Succor will be granted deliverance. *The land that We blessed* is thought by many to refer to the area encompassing Syria and Palestine (Shām in Arabic; Ṭ, Ṭs), since this is the land understood elsewhere in the Quran as being ordained for the Israelites (5:21), but not necessarily only the Israelites, since it is holy and *blessed for all peoples* (21:71); others claim that *the land* here refers to the domain of Pharaoh in Egypt (R, Ṭ, Ṭs) or to both Egypt and Syria/Palestine (R, Ṭs, Z). The land is called *blessed* because it has been endowed with fertility and abundance (Ṭs, Z). The *most beautiful Word* that was *fulfilled for the Children of Israel* refers to the triumph of the Israelites over Pharaoh (Ṭ) and is also considered to be the fulfillment of God's Promise in 28:5–6: *Yet We desired to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them* imāms*, and to make them the heirs, and to establish them in the land, and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts that which they dreaded from them.* The destruction of *all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought* or built is a reference to the destruction of their palaces, gardens, fields, and orchards (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

138–39 The Children of Israel were brought *across the sea* when Moses miraculously parted it with his staff, by Divine command (see 2:50; 20:77; 26:63; and the Biblical account in Exodus 14). Shortly thereafter—according to some, even before their feet were dry from their walk across the divided sea (Z)—*they came upon a people clinging to idols.* Commentators speculate that these may have been the Canaanites (Ṭ) or Lakhmites who had settled in the area (Ṭ, Ṭs) or descendants of Abraham's idolatrous people (JJ). Their idols were said to be in the form of a calf (Ṭ, Z), which is also the form of the idol later made by the Israelites (see v. 148). In response, Moses derides them as *an ignorant people* (*qawm tajhalūn*); the word for *ignorant* being derived from the same root as *jāhiliyyah,* the pre-Islamic pagan era in Arabia. In both cases, ignorance refers to ignorance of the Greatness of God, of the duty to worship

practice shall perish, and vain is that which they used to do." (140) He said, "Shall I seek for you a god other than God, when He has favored you above the worlds?" (141) And when We saved you from the House of Pharaoh, who inflicted terrible punishment upon you, slaying your sons and sparing your women. And in this was a great trial from your Lord. (142) And We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and We completed them with ten [more]; thus was completed the appointed term of his Lord: forty nights. And Moses said unto his brother, Aaron, "Take my place among my people, set matters aright, and follow not the way of those who work corruption." (143) And when Moses came to Our appointed meeting and his Lord spoke unto him, he said, "My Lord, show me, that I might look upon Thee." He said, "Thou shalt not see Me; but look upon the mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then thou wilt see Me." And when his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon. And when he recovered, he said, "Glory be to Thee! I turn

Him, and of the prohibition against worshipping anything else (Ṭ). *As for these* refers to the idolaters whom the Israelites have come upon, whose practices *shall perish. That which they used to do* is described as *vain,* since it neither brings them any benefit nor deflects from them any harm (R). This desire for an idol foreshadows the Israelites making and worshipping the calf in v. 148.

140–41 Cf. 14:6; 20:80. That God has *favored* the Israelites *above the worlds* may mean that He favored them above all other people of their time or that the miraculous signs and deliverance (invoked in v. 141) that He granted them through Moses were not granted to any other people (R); see 2:47c. For the punishment of *slaying your sons and sparing your women,* see 7:127c.

142 Moses spent forty nights on Mt. Sinai, the sacred mountain referred to in 95:2 and elsewhere simply called "the Mount" (see 2:63, 93; 4:154); see also 2:51; Exodus 24:18. This event is widely reported to have taken place during a period that corresponds in the Islamic calendar to the month of Dhu'l-Qa͑dah and the first ten days of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah (Mw, Ṭ, Z)—the last two months of the Arab calendar, which were considered sacred since the pre-Islamic era—and concluded on the day of the Islamic Feast of Sacrifice (*͑Īd al-aḍḥā;* Ṭ). During this time Moses reportedly fasted and engaged in intimate discourse with God (Mw, R, Ṭs, Z). Some report that he fasted for the first thirty days and that the Torah was revealed to him during the final ten days (R, Ṭū). According to some, Moses originally indicated that he would be on the mountain for thirty days, but God had him stay an additional ten, so as to test the faith of the Israelites when Moses did not return after the thirty days (Qm). Moses asks his brother Aaron to "take his place" temporarily as leader of his people, while he is gone. *Take my place* translates *ukhlufnī,* which is related to *khalīfah,* meaning "representative" or "successor," a term that is used for the leaders of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet. Aaron is instructed to *set matters aright,* that is, to encourage the Israelites to worship God and obey Him (Ṭ) or to correct the corrupt among them while Moses was away (Ṭs).

143 This verse speaks directly to the issue of the human ability or inability to "see" God and seems to support the view that God cannot be

seen by human beings, at least in the ordinary sense of seeing, in this world. It is consistent with the statement in 6:103: *Sight comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all sight.* Moses' desire to see God is engendered by the state of intimacy he experienced with Him upon the mountain. There *his Lord spoke unto him* without intermediary (Ṭs, Z); and, according to a legendary report, God was so close that Moses could hear the scratching of the pen across the tablets as they were being written upon by God (Ṭ). With this closeness and the sweetness of God's speaking to him (Su), Moses was overcome with spiritual ecstasy (Qu), yearned to be yet nearer to God, and was emboldened to ask, *My Lord, show me, that I might look upon Thee* (Ṭ). Some argued that Moses, who surely knew that God transcended all form and corporeality and thus could not be seen physically, asks this only to satisfy the Israelites, who in 2:55 declare, *O Moses, we will not believe thee till we see God openly* (Ṭs, Z). Still others suggest that Moses was not asking for a physical vision, but rather for such complete spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of God that it would be as if he were able to see Him directly (Ṭs, Z).

The verb *show me* might also be translated "cause me to see"—that is, "grant me the ability to see"—so that Moses might *look upon* God and attain the vision he desires. Some commentators understand God's response, *Thou shalt not see Me,* to mean that God is not seen in this world, but may be in the next (IK, Ṭ), sometimes invoking 75:23, which speaks of the righteous *gazing upon their Lord* in the Hereafter; and Sufi writers speak of the ability to see God inwardly, with the eye of the heart. Others, however, argue that the response *Thou shalt not see Me* is stated in an emphatic form, indicating that God will not be seen, even in the next world (Ṭs, Z). In the Biblical account, Moses is told that none can see the Face of God "and live" (Exodus 33:20), and some commentators mention this as well (IK, Ṭ) or note that, had Moses not looked at the mountain when God manifested Himself, he would have died (Su). According to one report, Moses responded that he would rather see God and die than live without seeing Him (Ṭ). For Sufis, this may be connected with the idea that the vision of God in this life is only possible after the "death of the ego," when one has completely "died" to the passions and desires of the soul. The annihilating power of God's Self-Manifestation is similarly suggested in the saying attributed to the Prophet, "His veil is light. Were He to remove it, the Glory of His Face would burn up everything His Sight reached" (Su).

That the mountain crumbles after God says of it, *if it remains firm in its place, then thou wilt see Me,* indicates that seeing God with the physical eye is as impossible as the mountain being able to withstand God's Self-Manifestation (Z); it demonstrates the annihilating power of that vision, since even the mountain, so much larger and stronger than Moses himself, was incapable of bearing it (IK). *He made it crumble to dust* might also be translated "He leveled it to the ground." Elsewhere, mountains are awed or moved by the Power of God; see, for example, 33:72, where the mountains fear accepting the *Trust* of God, and 19:90–91, where it is said that the earth would be rent asunder and the mountains destroyed by the claim that God has a son.

Moses *fell down in a swoon* out of sheer awe (Z) or as the result of being passed over by one of the angels (Ṭ, Z). *In a swoon* translates *ṣāʿiqᵃⁿ,* which might also be translated "thunderstruck," from the same root as the *thunderbolt* (*ṣāʿiqah*) that is said to have struck the Israelites for asking a similar question in 2:55. Some indicate that Moses actually died in this moment and was brought back to life (Qm, Ṭ, Z), although others argue that *recovered* (*afāqa*) connotes arousal from a state of unconsciousness, rather than from physical death. Upon recovering, Moses "turns in repentance," repenting of having asked to see God (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Moses' assertion that he is *the first of believers* may mean that he was the first among the Israelites of his time to believe (Ṭ), that he was the first to believe that God could not be seen physically (IK, Qm, Ṭs, Z), or that he was the foremost believer of his time.

The Sufi tradition speaks of those who seek, and sometimes receive, the blessing of "seeing," or "witnessing" God, or receiving an inward vision of God. Al-Sulamī, commenting on this verse, indicates that "nothing can withstand the witnessing of God save the hearts of the gnostics," which God has adorned with spiritual knowledge of Himself and illuminated with His Light. Even so, al-Sulamī indicates that this "witnessing" really describes God's witnessing or seeing Himself, "for the Real is witnessed by none but Himself."

unto Thee in repentance, and I am the first of the believers." (144) He said, "O Moses! Verily I have chosen thee above mankind through My messages and My speaking [unto thee]. So take that which I have given thee, and be among the thankful." (145) And We wrote for him upon the Tablets an exhortation concerning all things, and an elaboration of all things. "Take hold of them with strength, and command thy people to hold to the best of them. Soon I shall show thee the abode of the iniquitous." (146) I shall turn away from My signs those who wax arrogant upon the earth without right. Even if they were to see every sign, they would not believe in them. And if they were to see the way of sound judgment,

144 According to some commentators, this verse recounts the consolation that was given to Moses after he was denied the vision of God (v. 143) and indicates the great blessing he had been given, for which he should be *among the thankful* (Qu, R). That Moses was *chosen . . . above mankind* indicates his status among the people of his time (Z); see also 20:13, where Moses is again called *chosen,* and 3:42, where Mary, the mother of Jesus, is described as *chosen . . . above the women of the worlds.* The Prophet Muhammad also has the name *al-Muṣṭafā* (the "Chosen One"), from the same root as the verb in *I have chosen thee* (*iṣṭafaytuka*). Moses is distinguished by the *messages* he received from God, meaning the Torah (Z), and by God's having spoken directly to him; see also 4:164. In Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10, Moses is similarly distinguished by having spoken to God "face-to-face." Because of this distinction, Moses is given the honorific title in the Islamic tradition of *Kalīm Allāh,* "he with whom God spoke." The Prophet Muhammad is also said to have spoken to God without intermediary at the *lote tree of the boundary* (53:14; Ṭs) during his Night Journey and Ascension (*miʿrāj*); see 53:14–15c.

145 God *wrote* the Torah *upon the Tablets,* indicating that it was originally a written revelation; see also Exodus 31:18, where the Tablets were "written with the Finger of God." Commentators generally consider there to have been two Tablets, as in the Biblical narrative, although the fact that *Tablets* is grammatically plural rather than dual has led to speculation that there could have been more than two, some saying seven or ten (Z). Various reports indicate that the *Tablets* were made of emerald, ruby, or wood and that they were brought to Moses by the Archangel Gabriel (Th, Ṭs, Z); others say they were made of "stone" cut by Moses himself (Ṭs, Z), which is similar to the Biblical account in Exodus 34.

The *Tablets* contained an *elaboration of all things,* meaning that they contained all that the people needed to know for the purposes of their religion (Ṭ, Z) or that, like the Quran, they were revealed *as a clarification of all things* (16:89). Moses is commanded to *take hold of them with strength;* that is, to obey in earnest the commands and prohibitions given in them (Ṭ). Although Moses himself is instructed to *take hold of them with strength,* without qualification, the Israelites are told to *hold to the best of them,* which might also be translated "hold to the most beautiful of them." This may mean simply that they should perform the good and virtuous actions commanded them in the Torah (Ṭ, Ṭs) or that they should try to inculcate the virtues—such as temperance, modesty, and patience—enjoined in it (Z). In 39:55, the Prophet is similarly instructed to enjoin his people to *follow the most beautiful of that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord.* The *abode of the iniquitous* may refer to the place of the sinful in the Hereafter (Ṭ, Z), to the land of Canaan (Ṭ), or to the land of Pharaoh (Z).

146 That God will *turn away from* His signs those who *wax arrogant* may mean that He will prevent them from understanding the revelation given to them (Ṭ, Z), perhaps by "sealing their hearts" so that they do not understand (Z; see, e.g., 9:87; 40:35) or by allowing them to be distracted

they would not take it as a way, but if they were to see the way of error, they would take it as a way. That is because they denied Our signs and were heedless of them. (147) As for those who deny Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter, their deeds have come to naught. Are they recompensed for aught save that which they used to do? (148) And while he was away, the people of Moses took a calf [made] from their ornaments—a body that lowed. Did they not consider that it spoke not unto them, nor guided them to any way? They took it up, and

by their worldly desires (Z). "Signs" here may indicate all of God's signs and proofs, including both those present in nature and those found in the human soul (see 41:53c), in addition to scriptural revelation; that God "turns them away" from His signs thus means that He prevents them from contemplating them or benefitting from them (Ṭ, Z), since some signs benefit only those whose hearts are already in a state of belief (R).

Those Muslims who subscribed to the Ashʿarite school of theology appealed to this verse to support their view that God might prevent certain people from believing, but Muʿtazilites and others interpreted God's turning people from His signs as a punishment for their having freely chosen to *wax arrogant* and "deny" the signs of God beforehand (R, Ṭ). *Wax arrogant* translates *yatakabbarūn,* which means, literally, to make oneself out to be grand and, by implication, to belittle others. God is *the Proud* (*Mutakabbir,* from the same root, in 59:23), but all others *wax arrogant... without right,* since God alone has the right to assert His Greatness and Superiority over all beings (Z); thus *Proud* is positive when applied to God, but often negative when applied to human beings or other creatures. Alternately, waxing arrogant *without right* might refer to asserting one's superiority over others when it is not merited (Z); see, for example, 7:12–13, where Iblīs's assertion of his superiority over Adam is dismissed as "waxing arrogant." *The way of sound judgment* means the path of guidance, truth, and correct knowledge and action, leading to felicity in this world and in the Hereafter (R, Z).

147 The *meeting of the Hereafter* refers to the Day of Resurrection and Judgment. Those who deny this key element of belief and the *signs* of God will have *their deeds come to naught;* that is, they will not benefit from them or receive reward for them, nor will their deeds, however seemingly good, be able to shield them from punishment for their denial and disbelief. Elsewhere it is said that disbelievers, idolaters, hypocrites, and those who persecute the prophets and the righteous will have *their deeds come to naught* (see, e.g., 2:217; 3:22; 5:5, 53; 9:17; 18:105). Rhetorical questions similar to *Are they recompensed for aught save that which they used to do?* are also posed in 10:52 and 27:90.

148 Cf. 2:51–54, 92–93; and especially 20:86–97, for the most extensive account in the Quran of the Israelites making and worshipping the calf. The Biblical account of this event is found in Exodus 32. *While he was away*—that is, while Moses was still speaking with God on the mountain—the Israelites *took a calf [made] from their ornaments,* meaning that they fashioned from precious metals, usually understood to be gold, an idol in the form of a calf and made it an object of worship, saying, *This is* our *god and the god of Moses* (20:88). Although Aaron was left in charge, commentators indicate that Aaron did not participate in making or worshipping the calf, which was directed by another Israelite referred to as al-Sāmirī (the "Samaritan"), as indicated in 20:87, 95–97. Rather, Aaron tried to stop this action (see 20:90).

The calf is described as *a body that lowed*—that is, emitted the sound of a live calf—leading some to think that it possessed a supernatural power, although 20:95–96 indicates that the lowing sound was the result of a kind of sorcery on the part of "the Samaritan" (al-Sāmirī). Others suggest that the calf was fashioned with carefully placed holes and hollows, and when the wind blew through them, it generated a lowing sound (R). Despite the lowing sound, the calf *spoke not unto them, nor guided them to any way.*

they were wrongdoers. (149) And when they wrung their hands and saw that they had gone astray, they said, "If our Lord does not have mercy upon us and forgive us, we shall surely be among the losers!" (150) And when Moses returned unto his people angry and aggrieved, he said, "How evil is the course you have followed after me! Would you hasten the Command of your Lord?" And he cast down the Tablets and seized his brother by the head, dragging him toward himself. He said, "Son of my mother! Truly the people deemed me weak, and they were about to kill me. So let not the enemies rejoice in my misfortune, and place me

The Quranic narrative of this event offers a further reflection on the nature of prophetic guidance and miracles as contrasted with sorcery, indicating that unusual feats are not themselves indications of spiritual power or worthy of worship and are no substitute for Divine revelation. True prophethood and its signs can be distinguished from the mere conjuring of a sorcerer, because the former bring guidance and clarity, while the latter, like the feats of the sorcerers in v. 116, are ultimately powerless and illusory. *They were wrongdoers,* in that they "wronged themselves" by taking a powerless idol as an object of worship (R, Ṭ). Sufi commentators understand the calf and the Israelites' willingness to worship it, despite God's tremendous favor toward them, to be indicative of a tendency in human beings to allow worldly phenomena to distract them from the worship of God. It is a reminder that none are free of this temptation toward idolatry save those who have "slain their souls" (ST) by conquering its worldly passions.

149 *Wrung their hands,* in remorse, might be literally translated "[remorse] fell into their hands," that is, settled into their hearts (R). Some suggest the image is an allusion to the tendency of the remorseful to bite their hands, as if they were attacking the site of their remorse (R, Z). Alternately, that remorse "fell into their hands" may mean that they now realized it was their responsibility to make amends and set matters right with their own "hands" (R). The Israelites' statement is one of immediate and utter contrition, casting themselves upon the Mercy of God, rather than offering excuses. It is identical to what is uttered by Adam and Eve in v. 23, and by Noah in 11:47.

150 Cf. 20:86. Moses returned to his people already *angry and aggrieved,* even before seeing them, because God made him aware of their having gone astray while he was still on the mountain (see 20:83–85; 20:83–84c). *Aggrieved* translates *asif*[an], which may connote sadness, but also intense anger (Mw, Ṭ, Z). His anger was at his people, but also perhaps at himself for having left them (Mw, Su), while his grief was both for his people's grave error and for his having to leave the intimate discourse with God (Mw, Su), since the narrative of this event in 20:83–85 suggests that Moses had to cut short his time on the mountain to address the matter. *How evil is the course you have followed after me* may have been directed at the Israelites generally or at the leaders among them, including Aaron (Z); *after me* may mean while Moses was away (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs) or after Moses had set the example of true monotheism (R, Z). *Would you hasten the Command of your Lord* may pertain to the command that they wait for Moses' return. It thus addresses their impatience concerning—and their ultimate hastening of—Moses' return from his appointed meeting with God (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). See 7:142c, which mentions that Moses' forty-day stay upon the mountain was reportedly ten days longer than his people had expected. It may also refer to their hastening God's judgment upon them through their actions (R), a repeated Quranic warning to disbelievers (see, e.g., 6:57–58; 10:50–51). More broadly, the question might also be meant to chastise them for their impatience regarding God's fulfillment of His Promise to them; see 20:86, where Moses asks in the same context: *Did your Lord not make you a goodly promise? Did the pact seem too long for you?*

not with the wrongdoing people." (151) He said, "My Lord, forgive me and my brother and bring us into Thy Mercy, for Thou art the most Merciful of the merciful." (152) As for those who took up the calf, anger from their Lord shall seize them, and abasement in the life of this world. Thus do We recompense those who fabricate. (153) But as for those who commit evil deeds and then repent thereafter and believe, surely, thereafter, thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.

Moses throws down the *Tablets* in anger (Ṭ) and shock (Z) upon seeing his people's idolatrous worship, breaking them (R, Ṭ, Z), as in the Biblical account (Exodus 32:19). He then seizes *his brother,* Aaron, in anger for his having failed in his charge of preserving the Israelites in righteousness (see 7:142c). For another narrative of Moses' confrontation with Aaron, see 20:92–94. Aaron pleads with Moses, calling him *son of my mother,* rather than just "my brother," in a bid to evoke Moses' tenderness and mercy toward him (IK, Ṭ, Z). He excuses his own actions by arguing that *the people deemed* him *weak,* meaning that they no longer recognized his authority (R, Ṭ)—as suggested by their having followed instead the directives of al-Sāmirī, while ignoring Aaron's pleas for them to desist (20:90)—and were moreover prepared to slay him; see also 20:94, where Aaron argues that he feared he would be blamed for causing discord among the Israelites, had he been more forceful with them. Aaron further asks Moses not to let their enemies *rejoice in* his *misfortune*—that is, to gloat over his further humiliation at the hands of Moses—and not to place him *with the wrongdoing people,* that is, not to consider him guilty of idolatry and so punish him along with the others (Ṭ, Z).

151 Moses' request for forgiveness for himself and his brother is considered by the commentators to be an indication of their complete dedication to God and their desire to draw near to Him, rather than an acknowledgment of sin or wrongdoing on their part (Ṭs), since the prophets are believed to be immune from sin according to the Islamic doctrine of the *ʿiṣmah,* or "inerrancy," of the prophets. Others suggest that Moses asked God to forgive him for his anger and to forgive Aaron for not being forceful enough with the Israelites (R)—neither of which may be understood as rising to the level of "serious sin." Moses' anger is also said by some to have been not a personal anger, but a "holy anger" for God's sake, motivated by his intense desire to preserve worship for God alone. It was not an anger that reflected lack of control of the passions, but was rather an anger manifested outwardly, in the form of holy wrath for the sake of religion, while Moses' inner state remained characterized by calm and mercy (Aj).

152 That *Anger from their Lord shall seize* the Israelites who worshipped the calf is thought by some to be a reference to the command that they atone for their sins by "slaying their own" in 2:54 (Ṭ, Z), which some commentators understand to mean that the Israelites were to slay those among their own people who were most guilty for the calf incident, and others understand as a form of collective punishment; see 2:54c. Some commentators understand both God's *anger* and the Israelites' *abasement in the life of this world* (see also 2:61) as references to later hardships that were to be suffered by the Israelites and their descendants (R, Z) or suggest that God's *anger* refers to His punishment of them in the Hereafter, while the *abasement* refers to their future adversity in this world (Z). Others argue that the Israelites' repentance and atonement (in 2:61) meant that their punishment would be only in this world and not in the next (R). *Those who fabricate* refers to those who initiate false religious beliefs or practices (see, e.g., 4:48–50; 5:103; 6:93; 10:59–60; 16:56).

153 The reminder that God forgives those who are truly repentant and mend their ways is found throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:160; 3:89; 5:39; 16:119). In 4:17 the Quran states, *God only accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and then turn quickly in repentance,* and in v. 149 it is clear that the Israelites' repentance is quick and unconditional.

(154) And when the anger abated from Moses, he took up the Tablets; and in their inscription lay a guidance and a mercy for those who are in awe of their Lord. (155) And Moses chose seventy men from his people for Our meeting. And when the earthquake seized them, he said, "My Lord! Hadst Thou willed, Thou wouldst have destroyed them and me beforehand. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the fools among us have done? It is naught but Thy trial, whereby Thou leadest astray whomsoever Thou wilt, and guidest whomsoever Thou wilt. Thou art our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy upon us, and Thou art the best

154 Moses took up *the Tablets* after previously casting them down in anger (v. 150). *In their inscription lay a guidance and a mercy* may simply indicate that the contents of the *Tablets*—namely, the Torah—contained *guidance and mercy* (Ṭ, Z)—a description associated with both the Torah and the Quran (see, e.g., 6:154; 7:52; 16:64; 28:43; 31:2–3). *Inscription* here translates *nuskhah,* a word that generally denotes a written copy of something, but whose root meaning relates to substituting one thing for another, particularly as regards a text. Some commentators therefore understand *nuskhah* as referring to new *Tablets* that Moses was given, which contained a "copy" of what had been inscribed on the originals (Q, R). *Nuskhah* may also refer more generally to the notion that guidance and mercy were inscribed upon, or copied onto, the Torah *Tablets* from the heavenly *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c), from which all Divine Revelation derives (Q).

155 Most commentators indicate that this *meeting* with the elders followed upon the calf incident and was connected with the Israelites' attempt to atone for their sin. The seventy chosen by Moses, at God's command, were said to be among those elders who had not directly participated in making or worshipping the calf (R). Some reports say that Moses chose six men from each of the twelve tribes for a total of seventy-two men; two of those, Joshua and Caleb, were chosen to remain behind and supervise the Israelites in the camp (R, Ṭ, Th, Z). The other seventy were instructed to fast and purify themselves and their clothing in preparation for the meeting (R, Ṭ, Th, Z). When they approached the mountain, *the earthquake seized them; earthquake* translates *rajfah,* the same word used to denote the physical event that destroyed the Thamūd (v. 78) and the people of Midian (v. 91). This *earthquake* was meant as a punishment for the seventy, who had not worshipped the calf, but nonetheless had not done enough to stop those who did (Mw, R). Some commentators indicate that the elders were, in fact, killed by the quake, but then revived at Moses' plea (R, Ṭ); others say that the quake shook them violently, but relented before they died (R).

A common narrative associated with this verse connects it with the incident in which the Israelites ask to see God openly (2:55). According to this account, as Moses and the seventy elders approached Mt. Sinai, a cloud descended and enveloped the mountain. Moses entered the cloud alone, but the elders followed. As they entered they were cast down prostrate, but could hear Moses speaking with God. Eventually the cloud lifted, and they approached Moses and asked to see God directly, at which *the earthquake seized them* for their insolence (Mw, Ṭ, Th, Z).

*Hadst Thou willed, Thou wouldst have destroyed them and me beforehand* is said to indicate that Moses would have preferred that, if God intended to kill them, He would have done so while they were still in the camp, for he feared that if God killed the elders on the mountain, the Israelites would blame Moses for their deaths (R). *Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the fools among us have done,* the *fools* being those Israelites who directly participated in the calf worship. According to al-Rāzī, Moses knew that God would not punish some for the sins of others, and his question was a way of indicating that he was, in fact, certain that God would not do this, as if to say, "I

of forgivers! (156) And prescribe good for us in the life of this world, and in the Hereafter; truly we have turned unto Thee." He said, "I cause My Punishment to smite whomsoever I will, though My Mercy encompasses all things. I shall prescribe it for those who are reverent, and give alms, and those who believe in

know Thou wouldst not destroy us for the wrongdoing of others" (R)—an interpretation apparently supported by Moses' subsequent statement, *It is naught but Thy trial.* That some are guided by the trial while others are led astray by it is similar to what is said in other verses regarding Divine Revelation and its dichotomous effect on different souls (cf. 2:26; 9:124–25). That God may both guide and lead astray is also found throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 6:39; 7:178; 13:27; 14:4; 16:93; 17:97; 18:17; 35:8); some Muslim theologians argue that such statements indicate that all faith or disbelief is determined by God, and others argue that God leads people astray only as a punishment for previous wrongdoing or iniquity.

156 Moses' supplication beseeching God for *good . . . in the life of this world, and in the Hereafter* is an example of the proper mode of supplication for believers; see also 2:201. *Good . . . in the life of this world* may mean physical goods, such as health and physical well-being (Sh, Z), but may also mean moral integrity and success in obeying God's commandments (Q, Sh, Ṭ, Z); *good in the Hereafter* means forgiveness for one's sins and reward in Paradise for one's good deeds (Q, Sh, Ṭ, Z). Praying for good only in this life would be a sign of worldliness, whereas praying for good only in the Hereafter might indicate a failure to recognize one's dependence on God in this life and His ability or willingness to intervene in worldly matters.

*We have turned unto Thee* means that they turn in repentance to God (Ṭ, Z). According to al-Rāzī, because God is a Protector for His servants and because Moses and his people have expressed sincere repentance and humility (v. 155), it is appropriate for them to seek from God both protection against harm and the acquisition of benefit (R). *He said* refers to God's response, which begins with the warning, *I cause My Punishment to smite whomsoever I will* (*man ashāʾ*). Some see this phrase as a specific reference to the *earthquake* that seized the Israelites in v. 155 (Sh) or to the atonement ordained by God in 2:54 that they should "slay their own," thus indicating that Moses has no power to deflect the punishment that God has decreed. Although this line asserts God's freedom and power to punish as He wishes, commentators often qualify this to mean that He punishes only those deserving of it, in accordance with His Wisdom (Q, Z). Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) reads this line slightly differently to mean "I cause My Punishment to smite whosoever does evil (*man asāʾa*)" (Bg, R, Z). God's Mercy, unlike His punishment, is an essential Attribute of God and thus infinite and eternal (Qu).

*My Mercy encompasses all things* is a statement that has great metaphysical importance in Islamic thought. It is similar to 40:7, where those who bear the Divine Throne say, *Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge; so forgive those who repent and follow Thy way, and shield them from the punishment of Hellfire.* God's Knowledge is the only other Divine Attribute described in such an all-embracing manner in the Quran (cf. 6:80; 7:89; 20:98; 65:12). The preeminence of God's Mercy is expressed in the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*) in which God states, "My Mercy precedes My Wrath," and in other verses God is said to have *prescribed Mercy for Himself* (see 6:12–13c; 6:54). Some commentators understand these verses, including the present one, to indicate that God's Mercy is infinite (Q) and that it is tantamount to His Will for the good in and for all created beings (R). Commentators assert that God's all-embracing Mercy is the source of every mercy between human beings, and even between animals, who manifest God's Mercy in their tenderness and attachment to their young (IK, Q, R).

God's Mercy, as manifested in His Forgiveness, is said to be so vast that even Iblīs will stretch forth his neck on the Day of Resurrection, hoping to be touched by it (IK). Indeed, some commentators observe that Iblīs too is embraced by God's Mercy insofar as he exists (Q). This alludes to the more profound point made by some

Our signs, (157) those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them, who enjoins upon them what is right, and forbids them what is wrong, and makes good things lawful for them, and forbids them bad things, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles that were upon them. Thus those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with

commentators and Islamic metaphysicians that there is a fundamental connection between Divine Mercy and existence itself (R; Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt,* III, 429). *Mercy* translates *raḥmah,* from the same root as the word for "womb" (*raḥim*). God's Mercy thus embraces creation as the womb embraces the unborn child and brings it into the world. For Ibn ʿArabī and many other Sufis, existence itself is none other than Divine Mercy, and the "Breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-Raḥmān*) is the very substance of the universe through which all things are brought into being and sustained and to which all things return (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt,* II, 313.24–25; III, 429.4–16).

Some commentators maintain that Divine Mercy, while described here as "embracing all things," is nonetheless meant specifically for the believers (IJ, R). Other Islamic thinkers, however, have delineated two kinds of Divine Mercy: one is universal, infinite, bestowed upon all creatures in this world, and metaphysically identical to existence itself; and the other is particular and specific, bestowed upon those who have earned it through belief and righteousness (Ibn ʿArabī; R; Sy). It is this specific mercy that is alluded to in the subsequent statement, *I shall prescribe it for those who are reverent, and give alms, and those who believe in Our signs.* The *reverent* here indicates those who are marked by piety and who avoid idolatry and major sins (IK); those who *give alms* (*zakāh*) may here refer to those who give the *zakāh* in the sense of alms to the poor, but may also refer to those who engage in the purification of souls (*zakāt al-nufūs;* IJ, IK, Mw, Ṭs). The Israelites who followed Moses as well as the pious among the People of the Book in general may be described by these qualities and hence are recipients of this specific Divine Mercy.

157 This verse continues the list of qualities that describe those for whom God will *prescribe* His Mercy (v. 156). They include following *the Messenger,* that is, the Prophet Muhammad, who is uniquely identified in the Quran and Islamic tradition as *the unlettered Prophet* (*al-nabī al-ummī*). The description of the Prophet as *unlettered* (*ummī*) is traditionally understood to mean that he was unable to read and write (Ṭ), a fact that is affirmed in various ways in the *sīrah,* or biographical literature concerning him. That the Prophet was unable to read and write serves, in Islamic tradition, as a fundamental proof of the miraculous nature of the Quran and the purity of the soul of the Prophet who was the recipient of it (R) and of its Divine provenance, since it would be otherwise impossible for a man who had not "studied" earlier works to produce eloquent verses containing knowledge of past peoples and prophets (cf. 6:105, which implies that the pagan Arabs accused the Prophet of having *studied*). That the Prophet was unlettered is understood to mean that his soul was not defiled by profane knowledge and that it was a *tabula rasa* upon which the Divine Word could be "inscribed" in its purest form, untainted by humanly acquired knowledge and learning. This doctrine is analogous in an essential way to the virginal purity of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who represented a pure conduit through which Jesus, described as a Word from God (3:45)—like the Quran, which is the Divine Word—could be brought into the world. *Ummī* is also related directly to *umm,* "mother." The Sufi master Ibn ʿArabī thus understands *ummī* as a kind of spiritual "infancy" (*Futūḥāt,* II, 644–45), connoting a state devoid of external, discursive knowledge, for *God brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers, knowing naught* (16:78), but also in a state of innocence, purity, and utter receptivity.

Although in one instance the plural of this term (*ummiyyūn*) is used to refer to uneducated or

him; it is they who shall prosper." (158) Say, "O mankind! Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you all—Him to Whom belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. There is no god but He. He gives life and causes death.

illiterate Jews (see 2:78c), *unlettered* (*ummī*) when used in relation to the Prophet Muhammad also seems to be related to his place in sacred history in that he was not of Jewish origin, but rather hailed from the Arab people, who were largely (though not entirely) "illiterate" at this time (Iṣ, R, Ṭs) and who had not read or studied the Torah, in particular. In 6:156, for example, the pagan Arabs are described as those who have not studied previous scriptures, and in 34:44 as those without *any book that they study.* In 7:169, by contrast, those who were given the *covenant of the Book,* meaning the People of the Book, are described as those who have *studied what is in it.* Thus when *ummī* is used, as it is in the present verse, in the context of a discussion of the People of the Book (cf. 3:20; 62:2), it may be intended to indicate not only that the Prophet had not studied previous scriptures, but also that he was of non-Jewish heritage, since the Jews, in particular, were skeptical about Muhammad's prophethood at least partly because he was not a prophet in the Israelite line. Some have added that *ummī* can also be related to Makkah—that is, that Muhammad was the "Makkan Prophet"—insofar as Makkah is described as the *Mother of Cities* (*Umm al-qurā*) in 42:7 (Ṭs).

The Prophet is also said here to be *inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel,* meaning for most commentators that the qualities that identify and describe him as a prophet are mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel (Ṭ). See 61:6, where Jesus says that he brings *glad tidings of a Messenger to come after* him *whose name is Aḥmad*—Aḥmad is one of the most often used names of the Prophet in the Islamic tradition (see 61:6c). According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet was described in the Torah with some of the same qualities attributed to him in the Quran, including that he is a giver of glad tidings and a warner, that he does not do evil to those who do evil to him, that he is kind and forgiving, that he is not rude or loud in the marketplace, and that he is a guardian for the unlettered (*ummiyyūn*), here probably referring to the Arabs. The *ḥadīth* goes on to say that he will cause even those who are astray to utter, "There is no god but God," and hence open eyes, ears, and hearts (Q, Ṭ). Some commentators mention particular statements in the Torah and Gospel that were interpreted by Muslims as references to the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, including prophecies about the descendants of Ishmael in Genesis 16–17 and Jesus' reference to a spiritual "comforter," the "Paraclete" (*Fāraqlīṭ,* which was understood to mean Aḥmad), who would come after him and "will speak whatever he hears" (John 16:7–14; Ṭs).

The Prophet *enjoins upon them what is right, and forbids them what is wrong,* which is a moral requirement and characteristic of every believer and of the believing community mentioned in several verses; see 3:110, 114; 9:67, 71; 22:41; 31:17; and the essay "Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society." The Prophet *makes good things lawful for them,* meaning that through his prophethood the ritualistic restrictions that the pagan Arabs had placed on themselves, without Divine sanction, were abolished (Ṭ; see 5:103c). He also *forbids them bad things,* such as the consumption of swine flesh and the practice of usury (Ṭ). He *relieves them,* in this case the Jews, *of their burden and the shackles that were upon them,* referring to some of the difficult and onerous commands and prohibitions in the Torah (Z), which the Jews were specifically obligated to follow as part of the covenant they made with God (Ṭ, Ṭs), but which were abrogated by the Quran. In this regard, the commentators mention a prohibition against taking spoils in warfare in earlier scriptures (Ṭ, Z) as well as certain dietary restrictions. See also 3:50, where Jesus confirms the Torah, but also makes *lawful . . . part of that which was forbidden unto you. The light that has been sent down with him* refers to the Quran (Z), which along with other scriptures is described as being or containing *light* (see 5:15c; 3:184; 6:91).

158 In this verse, the Quran interrupts the account of Moses and his people to issue a command to the Prophet to identify himself as *the Messenger of God unto you all.* This statement, situated at the end of a series of accounts about

So believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His Words; and follow him, that haply you may be guided." (159) And among the people of Moses is a community that guides by the truth and does

previous prophets, is understood by some commentators to mean that the Prophet Muhammad is distinguished from earlier prophets in that each of those prophets was a prophet to his people or the people of his region, but Muhammad is a prophet for all of humanity (R, Ṭ). In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet states that his having been sent to all humanity is one of five distinctions given specifically to him by God (IK, Ṭ). The claim of such a distinction for Muhammad may be based upon the fact that the Prophet's mission was to both the People of the Book and the "unlettered"—that is, the Arabs or those without a scripture (see 3:20). Although the universality of the Prophet's mission is supported by several verses describing the Quran or the Prophet as a *reminder for the worlds* (6:90; 12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 81:27), the assertion that he was completely unique in this regard does not seem to be entirely consistent with other Quranic verses that, for example, describe the Book brought by Moses as a *guidance for mankind* (6:91) or describe Jesus, Mary, and Noah as *a sign for the worlds* (see 21:91; 29:15). Moreover, the quality of universality cannot be entirely unique to Muhammad, insofar as Adam could also be described as a prophet for all human beings (R).

That God *gives life and causes death* is found throughout the Quran (2:258; 3:156; 9:116; 10:56; 23:80; 40:68; 44:8; 53:44; 57:2) and is reflected in the Divine Names *al-Muḥyī* (the One who gives life) and *al-Mumīt* (the One who causes death). *His Words,* which the *unlettered Prophet believes in,* are all of God's signs (Ṭ), or the three Abrahamic scriptures—the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran (Q), and by implication all sacred scriptures. According to some reports, *His Words* refers specifically to Jesus, the prophet who most closely precedes Muhammad and who is referred to as *a Word from* God (3:45; Ṭ), although such an interpretation seems less plausible in this context.

159 Commentators differed regarding the identity of *a community* (*ummah*) among the followers of Moses that *guides by the truth and does justice,* that is, renders judgment according to the principles of truth (R). See also v. 181, where the same description is given to a community *among those We have created.*

Despite the clear statement in this verse that among the *people of Moses*—that is, the Jews—are those who are just and rightly guided, commentators have often sought to limit the application of this statement. According to some legendary accounts, for example, the *ummah* in the present verse refers to a group (or a tribe) of Israelites who separated themselves from the rest, when the latter began to go astray, and then traveled eastward beyond China (Q, R, Ṭ). Some say that they continue to live according to the law brought by Moses, although others say they became Muslims (Q, R, Th). Still others assert that this is a reference to those Jews in Madinah in the Prophet's time who became Muslims, although this seems inconsistent with the verse's description of this group as a *community* (*ummah*), which often connotes an independent religious community or at least a sizable group of people (R). Moreover, Jews who became Muslim were thereafter considered part of the Muslim *ummah,* rather than a separate *ummah* unto themselves.

These various attempts to qualify the reference to this righteous *ummah* among the people of Moses contradict the plain sense of the verse, which indicates that a group *among the people of Moses,* in the sense of being followers of Jewish Law and ritual, continue to live and worship righteously according to the teachings of the Torah. Other verses support the literal reading as well, including v. 168, which indicates that there were communities of righteous Jews still existing at the time of the revelation of the Quran (see also 3:113–15, 199 and commentary). The commentators do not usually support the most literal and obvious meaning of this verse, however, perhaps because it seems inconsistent with the common interpretation of v. 157 as meaning that all human beings should recognize and follow Muhammad as their prophet.

justice thereby. (160) And We divided them into twelve tribes, communities. And We revealed to Moses, when his people asked him for water, "Strike the rock with thy staff." Then twelve springs gushed forth from it: all the people knew their drinking place. And We shaded them with clouds, and sent down manna and quails upon them, "Eat of the good things We have provided you." And they wronged Us not, but themselves did they wrong. (161) And when it was said unto them, "Settle in this town, and eat of that which is therein wheresoever you will, and say, 'Remove the burden!' And enter the gate prostrating, that We may forgive you your iniquities. We shall increase the virtuous." (162) Then those among them who did wrong substituted a word other than that which had been said unto them. So We sent down upon them a torment from heaven for the wrong they used to do. (163) And ask them about the town that was by the sea,

160–62 Cf. 2:57–60 for a similar account of these events. Regarding the division of the Israelites into twelve tribes, see also 5:12: *God had made a covenant with the Children of Israel, and We raised among them twelve chieftains.* For Moses' striking of the rock and the gushing forth of twelve streams, see 2:60c. The Bible, in Exodus 15:27, mentions the Israelites coming upon a place in the desert called Elim, where there were twelve wells, and Exodus 17:1–6 recounts Moses being instructed by God to strike a rock with his staff to produce water for his people, although no mention is made of twelve springs specifically. Regarding God's shading the Israelites and providing them with *manna and quails* and the command to *eat of the good things We have provided you,* see commentary on a nearly identical passage in 2:57; see also 20:80–81. The Quran repeatedly exhorts people to eat the wholesome and lawful food provided by God; for other examples not exclusively addressed to the Israelites, see 2:168, 172; 6:141–42; 16:69, 114; 23:51; 67:15.

Regarding the command that begins *Settle in this town,* see 2:58c and the brief allusion to it in 4:154. The *town* here is said by some to be Jerusalem (Ṭ, Z) or the land of Syria (or Palestine) generally (Mw). *Remove the burden* is an exclamation the Israelites are told to utter, indicating their desire to be forgiven for their sins (Ṭ).

Regarding the Israelites substituting another word for the word of repentance they had been commanded to say, see commentary on 2:58–59. The word of repentance was *ḥiṭṭah,* here translated *remove the burden.* The Israelites are reported to have said, instead, *ḥinṭah,* meaning "wheat," as an act of defiance and ridicule. *Torment from heaven* translates *rijz,* which can also mean punishment and defilement and can, moreover, be a general reference to God's Wrath.

163 The commentators speculate about *the town that was by the sea;* some reports identify it as a town called Aylah (Eilat), between Midian and Sinai, while others say that it refers to Tiberias or Midian itself (Ṭ, Ṣs, Z). *They*—that is, the Israelites—*transgressed the Sabbath* by performing acts, such as working, that God had forbidden on the day that was reserved for worship alone. Although in Islam there is no "Sabbath" in the same sense that one practices it in Judaism, with its extensive set of ritual practices and proscriptions, the Quran nonetheless understands the observation of the Sabbath to be a requirement established in the Torah for the Children of Israel and the Jews (the Quran uses both terms) in particular (see also 2:65; 4:47, 154; 16:124).

According to the present verse, *on the day of their Sabbath,* the Israelite people of this town would fish, although this was against the rules

when they transgressed the Sabbath. Their fish would come to them, surfacing on the day of their Sabbath, but on the day when they did not observe the Sabbath, they would not come to them. Thus did We try them for their having been iniquitous. (164) And when a community among them said, "Why do you admonish a people whom God is about to destroy or punish with a severe punishment?" They said, "As an excuse before your Lord, and that haply they may be reverent." (165) And when they forgot that whereof they had been reminded, We saved those who forbade evil, and We seized those who did wrong with a dreadful punishment for their having committed iniquity. (166) When they were insolent concerning that which they had been forbidden, We said unto them, "Be you apes, outcast." (167) And when thy Lord proclaimed that He would surely send against them, till the Day of

pertaining to the Sabbath, and the fish would appear all around them on the surface of the water (Ṭ). But on other days of the week, *when they did not observe the Sabbath,* and so hunting and fishing were permitted, the fish would remain hidden below the surface. This situation thus made it tempting for the Israelites to fish on the Sabbath (R), since fishing was especially easy and fruitful on that day. In this sense, it was a way for God to *try them for their having been iniquitous.* According to one report, the question of fishing on the Sabbath divided the Israelites in the town; a third of them wanted to fish, a third admonished against it, and a third neither fished themselves, nor admonished others (Aj, JJ, Sy).

164 *A community among them* refers to those Israelites in the town who did not participate in fishing on the Sabbath, but also did not admonish those who did (R, Ṭ). Here this group addresses those who tried actively to forbid or discourage those fishing on the Sabbath, asking why they make the effort to *admonish a people whom God is about to destroy or punish.* Their response is that it serves *as an excuse* before God, meaning that they consider themselves to be obligated to "forbid wrong," and having done so, they have fulfilled their moral duty (IK, Ṭ). *And that haply they may be reverent* indicates that the admonishers also hoped that their warnings might succeed in bringing the Sabbath violators back to reverence for God and for Mosaic Law.

165 When those who were violating the Sabbath *forgot that whereof they had been reminded* by those who admonished them, God punished the violators and saved *those who forbade evil*—that is, by exhorting their fellow Israelites to observe the Sabbath. The commentators are divided on the fate of those who abstained both from fishing on the Sabbath and from forbidding others to do so (Mw, R); some consider them to be among the saved (Z).

166 When the Sabbath violators continued to be *insolent* concerning the Sabbath, despite the warnings and reminders they had been given, they were punished severely. *Be you apes, outcast* is understood by many commentators to mean that they were physically transformed into apes, since the Divine imperative here may be taken to be a command that brings the named thing into being (Ṭ, Z). But some reject this literal reading and suggest, rather, that the hearts of the Sabbath violators were transformed to be like those of *apes,* but not their physical form; on this statement, see 2:65c. The Divine imperative *Be you apes, outcast* may also indicate that God is leaving them to indulge their baser instincts, which can lead only to their humiliation and their being *outcast* in their community. The latter seems consistent with the Biblical statement that one who works on the Sabbath shall be "cut off from among the people" (Exodus 31:14).

167 *Thy Lord proclaimed* indicates that He decreed, commanded, or swore (Ṭ, Ṭs). That He will

Resurrection, those who would inflict upon them a terrible punishment. Truly thy Lord is swift in retribution, and truly He is Forgiving, Merciful. (168) And We divided them into communities on the earth: some of them are righteous and some are otherwise. And We tried them with good things and with evil things, that haply they would return. (169) Then a generation succeeded them who inherited the Book. They grasp the ephemeralities of this lower world and say, "It will be forgiven us." And if other ephemeralities like them were to come their way, they would grasp them [also]. Did not the covenant of the Book commit them to say naught of God save the truth? They have studied what is in it. And the Abode of

*send against them . . . those who would inflict . . . punishment* may mean that He will grant other people authority over them (Ṭs, Z). Some mention that prior to the coming of Islam the Zoroastrian Persians (Z) as well as the Greeks, Romans, and Christians (IK) had gained authority over the Jewish community. Those whom God "sends against them" could also refer to the Arabs or Muslims (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), who assumed political authority over much of the Jewish population after the early Islamic conquests. See 2:61 and 3:112, which speak of the Israelites as having been *struck with abasement* for their transgressions, understood by some commentators as indicating a state of weakness for them relative to other peoples (Ṭ, Ṭs). See also 17:5–8, where the Quran mentions the destruction of Jewish homes and land as well as their Temple by others *possessed of great might*. All of this suggests that the punishment Jews received for their transgressions occurred in this world and was inherited by later generations of their descendants, which is similar to the perspective found in the Hebrew scriptures, although from the Islamic perspective this does not exclude punishment in the Hereafter. Unlike the people of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb, the Israelites were not destroyed as a people, but their transgenerational punishment in this world extends the point made by those earlier accounts that Divine punishment can be meted out in this life as well as in the Hereafter; on this subject, see also 2:84c. God is *swift in retribution* against those who invite His Punishment through their disobedience and lack of faith, but *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward the repentant (Ṭ, Z). See also 6:165c on that same description of God.

168 That the Israelites are *divided . . . into communities on the earth* is taken as a reference to the Diaspora, the existence of smaller communities of Jews in various locations throughout the world (Ṭ). *Some of them are righteous:* a life of righteousness continues to be possible for those who follow Jewish Law and ritual as prescribed in the Torah, as indicated, for example, by the importance the Quran places on the observance of the Sabbath, a ritual that has no direct parallel in Islam (see 7:163c). Those who *are otherwise* refers to those who do not follow the law, although they continue to be members of this community. Many commentators tend to see the Quranic affirmation of righteousness among some Jews (e.g., in v. 159; 3:113, 199) to pertain to the Jewish community of the past, before the coming of the Prophet Muhammad or even before the coming of Jesus (Ṭ, Ṭs), or else to the Jews in Madinah who became Muslim (R). Such interpretations are open to question, however, because the verse is clearly in the present tense, indicating that it pertains to the present and the indefinite future, and the reference is seemingly to those who have remained Jews, not those who have joined the Islamic community. The *good things* with which God tries them include worldly provision and ease; the *evil things* are various forms of worldly adversity. The trial by both good and bad fortune is not particular to the Jewish population, but is meant in a more general sense; see 21:35: *We try you with evil and with good, as a test, and unto Us shall you be returned.*

169 The *generation* who *succeeded* the followers of Moses is understood by commentators

the Hereafter is better for those who are reverent. Will you not understand? (170) As for those who cling to the Book and perform the prayer—surely We neglect not the reward of the workers of righteousness. (171) And when We lifted the mountain above them, as if it were a canopy, and they thought it would fall upon them, "Take hold of that which We have given you with strength, and remember what is therein, that haply you may be reverent." (172) And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yea, we bear witness"—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Truly of this we were heedless,"

to refer to some later Jews, and Jewish religious leaders in particular, who brought about a certain corruption in the teachings and Law of Moses by allowing some commands and prohibitions to be neglected (R, Ṭ, Z). Some commentators suggest that certain Jewish leaders took bribery in exchange for easing the requirements of the law for certain people (R, Ṭ, Z). See also 19:59, regarding the descendants of Abraham and Israel: *Then they were succeeded by a generation who neglected prayer and followed base desires.* The corrupt among this later generation *grasp the ephemeralities of this lower world,* meaning that they take whatever they desire of fleeting, worldly things, whether they are lawful or unlawful, or even sinful, and assume they will be forgiven for it. Other Quranic passages suggest that certain Jews were overly confident about God's leniency in judgment toward them; see 2:80 and 3:24, where they claim, *the Fire will not touch us save for days numbered.* Yet if *other ephemeralities* come to them, they grasp those as well, indicating that they are not truly repentant, and that their intention is to persist in their acts of disobedience.

The *covenant of the Book* refers to the covenantal obligations imposed on the Jews by the Torah, one of which was to speak only truthfully about God in accordance with what is taught in the scripture, including that God's forgiveness is only for those who are truly repentant and mend their ways, not for those who persist in their errors (Z). For Quranic statements about this see, for example, 16:119: *Then truly thy Lord—for those who commit evil in ignorance, then later repent and make amends—truly thy Lord thereafter is Forgiving, Merciful.* That for the reverent the Hereafter is better than this world is also mentioned in 4:77 and 6:32.

170 *Those who cling to the Book* means those who continue to adhere to the teachings, commands, and prohibitions established in the Torah (Q, Ṭ). That God does not *neglect . . . the reward* of those who are righteous means that He will not fail to reward them for their deeds (cf. 3:171; 9:120; 11:115; 12:56, 90; 18:30). This verse indicates that those who are Jews and continue to follow the Torah and Mosaic Law will be rewarded for their good deeds; see also 2:62, which states that Jews, Sabeans, and Christians who believe and "work righteousness" *shall have their reward with their Lord* (cf. 5:69).

171 That God *lifted the mountain above them* is similar to the description *We raised the Mount over them* in 2:63, 93 and 4:154, and in all cases refers to the making of the covenant at Sinai, as mentioned explicitly in these three verses. *We lifted* translates *nataqnā,* a verb that means literally to pluck something out from its roots and suggests God's removing the mountain physically from its earthly base and causing it to hover above them *as if it were a canopy.* Some indicate that this was done as a means of threatening the Israelites to accept the covenant of the Torah, as some of them had hesitated because of the difficult nature of the obligations the covenant imposed upon them (IK, R). The command *Take hold of that which We have given you* refers to their covenantal obligation to obey the commands and prohibitions in the Torah.

172 This verse is in many ways the cornerstone of Islamic sacred history and anthropology

and establishes that the fundamental relationship between God and all human beings is premised upon the simple, unmediated recognition of His Lordship at the moment of their pretemporal creation (see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions"). The event recounted in this verse is widely referred to as a pretemporal covenant (*mīthāq*) or pact (*ʿahd*)—although these terms do not appear in the verse itself—made by God with all of humanity prior to their earthly existence (Aj, R, Ṭ). It is connected by commentators with a pretemporal covenant between God and the prophets (3:81; 33:7) and considered by some to be subsequent to it (ST).

The Quran mentions covenants or pacts between God and the believers generally (5:1, 7; 6:152; 13:20, 25; 16:91, 95; 57:8) as well as covenants with Abraham (2:124–25), the Israelites (2:40, 63, 83–84, 93; 4:154; 5:70), the Christians (5:14), and the People of the Book collectively (3:187). But the making of the covenant described in the present verse is unmediated and universal—contracted directly between God and all humanity—and can thus be interpreted as the basis of all later and specific covenants mediated by the prophets. This verse is also connected with the Quranic notion of the *fiṭrah* (IK, Ṭ), the *primordial nature* (30:30) with which all human beings were originally endowed, indicating that the innate recognition of God's Oneness constitutes the essence of being human (see 30:30c). Even though human beings do not remember the pretemporal covenant, their testimony to God's Lordship is understood to have left an indelible imprint upon their souls and to have established moral responsibility for them (Q). When these souls are engendered in earthly bodies and reach the age of moral understanding and accountability, the innate knowledge is reawakened in those who believe by their encounter with prophetic teachings, scriptures, and Divine laws, which serve as a reminder and renewal of their initial covenant with God (Aj). Therefore, if a child dies before reaching the age of moral and religious responsibility, he or she is considered to have died according to the first covenant (*mīthāq*) and the original *fiṭrah,* and so in a state of moral purity. However, for those who fail to affirm the original covenant by rejecting the later covenant—that is, by denying the messages brought to them by their prophets and scriptures—their initial covenant will not benefit them (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

Some describe this pretemporal event as one in which God brought forth all the progeny of Adam from his loins, specifically; some argue that this was done immediately after God had blown His Spirit into Adam (15:29; 32:9; 38:72; Ṭ), and others debate whether it occurred before or after his fall to earth (Mw, Q). Many observe, however, that God takes the progeny not from Adam, but *from the Children of Adam* and *from their loins* (plural; IK, R, Ṭ), indicating simply that He brought forth all future generations that have appeared and will appear until the end of time (Mw). *Progeny* translates *dhurriyyāh* (or in some readings, the plural *dhurriyyāt*), which derives from a root that in its most literal sense denotes small particles, atoms, or seeds that are scattered, but also connotes "progeny" or "offspring" in over a dozen Quranic verses (e.g., 2:124; 3:34; 4:9).

Some commentators indicate that the progeny were drawn forth in the form of "particles" or "seeds" (*dharr*; IK, R, Ṭ), suggesting the physically unformed state of the children of Adam during this encounter. But some questioned how it was possible for the progeny as "particles" to hear and respond to God's question; and because the intellect was not considered to manifest itself in human beings until years after birth, they also questioned how these "particles" knew what they were saying or could be held accountable for it (R). Given these issues, some commentators consider this verse a symbolic description of an innate covenant (Z) or a symbolic description of the temporal process by which human beings realize Divine Oneness—arguing that as individuals grow in intellect and contemplate the world around them, the existence of a single God becomes innately clear to them, and they witness to this truth inwardly (Q, R, Ṭs, Ṭū), since they bear this knowledge already in their primordial nature. Others, however, reject this interpretation as against the plain meaning of the text and argue that God temporarily bestowed faculties of intellect, hearing, and speech on the "particles," or human "seed," just as He did when He caused the heavens and the earth to respond to Him (41:11; R, Ṭ); see also 41:21, where God endows bodily organs and faculties with the ability to testify.

God causes the Children of Adam to *bear witness concerning themselves,* or "against themselves." The Quran mentions human beings bearing witness against themselves, in both this world and

the Hereafter, through their deeds and their very bodies (cf. 6:130; 7:37; 24:24; 36:65; 41:20–22). In the present verse, their witnessing takes the form of a response to God's question *Am I not your Lord?* (*A-lastu bi-rabbikum?*), understood to be a declarative statement in the form of a question, requiring the hearers to bear witness to its truth. Poetically, some Muslim authors, such as Rūmī, have described the event in this verse as the "Day of *Alast,*" referring to the first part of the question *Am I not your Lord?;* "Day of *Alast*" therefore refers in Islamic thought to a day beyond all days reckoned in time. Their response is *Yea* (*balā,* a classical affirmative connoting certainty), *we bear witness.* Some reports consider *we bear witness* to have been spoken by other witnesses to their testimony—identified variously as the angels, Adam, the heavens and the earth, or God Himself (IJ, IK, Q, R, Ṭ)—although most consider this a less likely reading.

The verse ends by explaining that the purpose of this questioning and witnessing was so that human beings could not come on the *Day of Resurrection* claiming to have been unaware of God's Lordship or their duty to worship Him. One may question how one can be responsible, during earthly life, for a testimony one cannot remember having made prior to coming into this world (R). Some commentators have argued that it is precisely this human inability to remember the event described in this verse that points to its symbolic nature and thus reject the idea that a pretemporal covenant, of which most human beings are not conscious and that they cannot recall, could be the basis of a responsibility that is binding upon them (R). When this verse is read in the wider Quranic context and juxtaposed with Quranic prophetic history, however, this pretemporal recognition of God's Lordship can be understood as creating an innate disposition in human beings toward recognizing and worshipping God during earthly life and toward accepting the prophets and the messages they bring as "reminders" of what human beings already know inwardly, but have merely forgotten. Those who reject the prophets, therefore, are considered willfully ignorant, denying truths that should, in any sincere and morally uncorrupted soul, resonate with a deep but forgotten knowledge of God that nevertheless still exists within them. In this sense, those who deny and reject the prophetic messages sent to them are described as *kuffār,* a word most commonly translated "disbelievers," but whose etymological meaning signifies the "covering over" of something, which in the religious sense refers to covering over the innate awareness of the truth of God's Lordship and Oneness that they bear within themselves. The pretemporal covenant, then, in conjunction with God's sending of messengers to all people serves as a "proof" against the disbelievers who capriciously or cynically deny prophetic messages that they know deep within themselves to be true.

This verse is also the basis for more elaborate narrations, some of which are attributed to the Prophet, that connect the pretemporal covenant with predestinarian notions. Although the literal reading of this verse suggests that all human beings have made the same covenant recognizing God's Lordship and therefore have the same possibility for realizing it in earthly life, several reports suggest that human moral destiny is linked to distinctions made among the covenanters on the occasion of this pretemporal covenant. Some reports assert that God removed some progeny from the right side of Adam or with His Right Hand, and these human beings were destined for the Garden, while others were removed from Adam's left side or with God's other Hand and were thus destined for Hell (Q, Ṭ). Still other reports indicate that some covenanters bore witness only reluctantly or deceptively (IJ, Qm, ST, Ṭ), although this interpretation is rejected by other authorities. Some early Twelver Shiite traditions indicate that the covenanters on this day were also asked to bear witness to the prophethood of Muhammad and the spiritual authority of the Shiite Imams, but that only some accepted the latter (ʿAy, Qm). Similarly, some early Sufi authors, including al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (third/ninth century), referred to the pretemporal covenant as a moment in which the spiritual elect (*khawāṣṣ*) were distinguished from the common people (*ʿawāmm*).

Given the great importance in Islamic thought of this verse and the event it describes, it was natural for some thinkers to link it with various notions of a spiritual hierarchy among human beings and with the concept of predestination.

(173) or lest you should say, "[It is] only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God beforehand, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?" (174) Thus do We expound the signs, that haply they may return. (175) And recite unto them the account of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he cast them off. So Satan made him his follower, and he became one of the deviant. (176) Had We willed, We would surely have elevated him thereby, but he inclined toward the earth and followed his caprice. Thus his parable is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, and if you leave him alone, he lolls out his tongue. That is the

Yet, although this pretemporal covenant may indeed be linked to human moral destiny in a foundational way, because it created in human beings an innate ability to recognize religious truth, the plain meaning of the verse more plausibly indicates the universal potential in all human beings for moral and spiritual attainment and the acceptance of revelation.

173 This verse indicates that the pretemporal covenant was also made with all, and not some, human beings, so that they could not offer the excuse, on the Day of Judgment, that they were merely following their fathers' practices of idolatry or "ascribing partners unto God." In several Quranic accounts, people reject their prophets' warnings against idolatry and sin by arguing that they are following the practices of their fathers (2:170; 5:104; 7:28; 11:62, 87; 14:10; 21:53–54; 26:74; 31:21; 34:43; 43:22–24). This excuse is dismissed and mocked in the Quran (see 2:170; 5:104; 31:21; 43:24), and the present verse makes it clear that it can never be accepted, since God has endowed all human beings, by virtue of the pretemporal covenant made with Adam and all his progeny (v. 172), with an innate understanding of religious truth and of His sole Lordship. This basic Quranic teaching is connected to the widespread disparaging in Islamic tradition of "blind imitation," or *taqlīd*, of the religious views of others (R). *Taqlīd* is considered permissible regarding matters of religious Law that are not based necessarily upon an innate moral or spiritual understanding (e.g., the time of day for the canonical prayers or the specific physical movements required in the prayer), and with regard to following the *Sunnah*, or practice, of the Prophet; but mere *taqlīd* is not allowed in matters of fundamental religious beliefs and principles, which one must accept with one's own intelligence to the extent possible. *Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?* is similar in form to Moses' plea to God, *Wilt Thou destroy us for that which fools among us have done?* in v. 155.

174 That God "expounds the signs" (see also 6:55, 97–98, 126; 7:32, 52; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 11:1; 13:2; 30:28; and 41:3, where it serves also as the basis for the title of *Sūrah* 41, "Expounded") means that He provides a variety of arguments and indications for His Oneness and Lordship; see 6:55c; 41:3c.

175–76 The opening command *recite unto them* is addressed to the Prophet. These verses, coming at the end of several narratives about people who rejected their prophets and the messages and signs they brought may be read as a general warning about the moral fate of those who "cast off" and deny the signs that God has sent them. Al-Rāzī prefers this general reading, but many early commentators considered *the one to whom We gave Our signs* to refer to Balʿām Bāʿūrāʾ (Balaam of Beor)—a spiritually gifted man, capable of receiving certain Divine messages and having his supplications answered by God (Ṭ,

likeness of the people who deny Our signs. So recount the stories, that haply they may reflect. (177) Evil is the parable of the people who denied Our signs and wronged themselves. (178) Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and

Z)—who was compelled or bribed to utter imprecations against Moses (IK, JJ, Ṭ, W, Z).

The various narratives of Balaam provided in the Quranic commentaries have many details in common with the Biblical narrative of this same figure (cf. Numbers 22–24), but they also differ, significantly, from it in that the Biblical Balaam—though rebuked by God—refused to curse Moses and his people and instead conveyed God's blessing upon them. In most Quranic commentary accounts, Balaam is similarly reluctant to curse the Israelites, but in the end is persuaded to do so. Also, reports included in some commentaries identify Balaam as an Israelite, while in the Biblical account he is a prophetic figure from a different people. Thus despite the widespread association of these verses with Balaam, the connection seems tenuous.

Alternately, some reports identify *the one to whom We gave Our signs* as an Arab named Umayyah ibn Abī al-Ṣalt, who had studied the Jewish and Christian scriptures and hoped he would be the prophet that he believed these sources had been predicting. Unlike many Arabs of his time, he is said to have believed in the Oneness of God and in the Hereafter (R). But when Muhammad arose as a prophet, Umayyah was resentful and refused to accept him or the Quranic message (IK, R, Ṭ, W).

For those who consider the verses as a reference to Balaam, commentators gloss *Our signs* here as referring to either Balaam's "prophethood" generally (Ṭ) or his reported knowledge of the "greatest Name of God" (Ṭ), although it more likely indicates knowledge of the scriptures, which would apply in all interpretations of the verse (JJ, Ṭ, Z). This knowledge was then *cast . . . off*, "like a snake shedding its skin" (JJ), when he abandoned and denied the signs. *Satan made him his follower* may also be interpreted to mean "Satan overtook him," as one overtakes another on a path (R, Z). In either case this verse suggests that rejecting God's signs leaves one vulnerable to the influence of Satan (cf. 15:42, which says that Satan does not have authority over God's faithful servants).

*Had We willed, We would surely have elevated him thereby,* that is, by virtue of the signs he had been given (v. 175). Some understand this statement to mean that God did not will him to be spiritually ennobled in this way and thus caused or allowed him to turn his back on these signs (R). It could also be interpreted, by contrast, to mean that had God willed, He could have compelled him to remain faithful to the signs that he had been given, but allowed him instead to make freely his own moral choice (Z). That the person *inclined toward the earth* and *followed his caprice* means that he became enamored of worldly goods and pursued them (IK, R, Ṭ, Z).

The comparison of those who deny God's signs to *a dog* (a ritually unclean animal in many interpretations of Islamic Law), which "lolls out its tongue" (or "pants") whether "attacked" or "left alone," suggests that such people are devoid of the spiritual discernment to know what is good or harmful for them and are thus impervious to guidance (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). It is similar to the idea expressed in 2:6: *Truly it is the same for the disbelievers whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe.* Other verses compare human beings to cattle (see 7:179) and frightened asses (see 74:49–51) to indicate their lack of spiritual discernment; see also 2:65c.

For al-Rāzī, these verses serve as a warning to all people of learning that the spiritual knowledge they have been given by God can be removed if they incline toward base desires and worldly concerns, citing the *ḥadīth,* "Whoever increases in knowledge, but does not increase in guidance, increases in naught but distance from God" (R). The command *recount the stories* is addressed to the Prophet, and *the stories* refers to the accounts of past communities mentioned in this *sūrah.*

177 This verse suggests that the foregoing discussion of *the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he cast them off* (v. 175) is meant to refer in a general way to all those who reject the signs given to them. In doing so, they "wrong themselves," an idea that recurs throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 9:70; 16:33; 29:40; 30:9).

178 That God guides, but may also "lead astray," is indicated in several verses, causing some

whomsoever He leads astray, it is they who are the losers. (179) We have indeed created for Hell many among jinn and men: they have hearts with which they understand not; they have eyes with which they see not; and they have ears with which they hear not. Such as these are like cattle. Nay, they are even further

to hold that all guidance and leading astray is a matter of God's Will (R). *Whomsoever God guides* is said to be *rightly guided,* so that *none shall lead him astray* (39:37), while *whomsoever He leads astray* are *losers,* in both this world and the Hereafter (R), and are elsewhere said to have *no protector* (17:97; 18:17). Although this is presented as a matter of God's Will (6:125; 74:31), God is said, more specifically, to "lead astray" *the iniquitous* (2:26), *the disbelievers* (40:74), and the *prodigal doubter* (40:34), suggesting to many theologians that God leads people astray only as a consequence or punishment for their actions (Ṭs).

179 The meaning of God's having *created for Hell many among jinn and men* goes to the heart of the issue of the relationship between human and Divine control of human moral choice and destiny. For many Ashʿarites, the verse should be read literally to mean that God created certain human beings and jinn in such a way that they are innately inclined toward acts that lead inevitably to their perdition (R). For those who preferred this literal reading, the verse is consistent with other verses indicating that God guides some and misleads others (see 7:178c). It is also consistent with several *aḥādīth,* including one that indicates that while the child is still unborn, God commands an angel to write down his or her worldly provision, life span, works, and fate as either blissful or wretched in the Hereafter (IK).

Muʿtazilites and many others, however, read the verse to mean that God has foreknowledge of individuals' moral choices and destinies, but does not determine them (Ṭ). The statement that He created them *for Hell* may simply be meant to indicate their final end, as if to say, "We have created many jinn and men only to have them end up in Hellfire"; or it may express the idea that some jinn and men are so deeply entrenched in disbelief that it is as if they were created for Hell (Z). For Muʿtazilites, interpreting this verse to mean that God literally creates some individuals to disobey His commands would be to assert that God has given certain individuals moral commands that they are innately incapable of fulfilling, something that would be futile, unjust, and unmerciful and thus cannot be attributed to God (R). Moreover, they note that a literal reading of this verse would conflict with a literal reading of other verses, such as 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me.*

The *eyes,* the *ears,* and the *heart*—the last of which is considered the seat of understanding, intelligence, and knowledge (R)—comprise the faculties and organs by which individuals can be guided to the truth (IK). But for some people, these faculties do not fulfill their Divinely intended function (see e.g., 2:18; 18:101; 47:23), either because God has "sealed" or "covered" them (see, e.g., 2:7; 47:16) or because human beings have refused to employ them properly. Their hearts do not contemplate the various signs of God and His Oneness or the messages sent through His prophets (Ṭ, Z); their eyes do not see the obvious signs of God's creative Power in the world around them (Aj, Qu, Ṭ); and their ears do not hear the teachings of the scriptures (Ṭ, Z), but only the call of temptation (Qu). See 41:5, where the disbelievers say to the Prophet, *Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and in our ears is a deafness, and between us and you there is a veil.*

Finally, the verse compares such persons to *cattle* (see also 25:44), for cattle do not possess an intellect with which to understand religious truth (Ṭ, Z). Those who do not employ their intellect are thus no better than beasts (R)—in fact, they are even worse for squandering the gift of intellect, which they have been given precisely for the purpose of discerning truth. Like cattle, such persons are concerned only with fulfilling base desires for food and comfort (Aj). The verse then asserts that they are *even further astray* than cattle, since even cattle know enough to flee from what is harmful for them and to seek out what nourishes them (Aj, R, Ṭ, Z), while the disbelievers work toward their

astray. It is they who are heedless. (180) Unto God belong the Most Beautiful Names; so call Him by them, and leave those who deviate with regard to His Names. Soon they shall be recompensed for that which they used to do.

own spiritual destruction. Moreover, Islamic tradition holds that animals and all natural phenomena recognize their Creator, but the disbelievers do not (R); and although cattle can be guided by the call of their herdsman, even if they hear it only as *a call and a shout* (2:171), the disbelievers refuse to be guided at all (IK).

180 Following the mention of those who are *heedless* in v. 179, this verse instructs people to call upon God with His *Most Beautiful Names*. The verb that translates *call upon* also means "to supplicate" and is here connected by commentators with the practice of remembering and invoking God (*dhikr;* R). This verse is thus one of the scriptural bases for the practice of *dhikr* in Islamic spirituality and especially Sufism. Mention of God's *Most Beautiful Names* is also found in 20:8; 59:24; and a similar command to call upon them is made in 17:110: *Say, "Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate. Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names."*

God's Names are described as *the Most Beautiful* (*al-ḥusnā*), a word also related to goodness and virtue, and are said to be beautiful to the ear as well as the heart (Q). On the basis of a widely reported *ḥadīth* (see 59:24c), God is traditionally said to have ninety-nine Beautiful Names. While the list of those Names varies slightly in different reports, and several lists contain more than ninety-nine, the Names attributed to God in Islamic tradition are sanctified by the Islamic scripture in that they are based upon or derived from the many terms used to describe Him in the Quran, including those repeated frequently throughout the text such as Compassionate, Merciful, Sovereign, Holy, One, Hearer, Seer, Knower, and Powerful. In some cases, a particular Name of God does not appear in the Quran, but is recognized as a Divine Name on the basis of related Divine actions described in the text.

That God has many Names is not considered to compromise His Oneness or to indicate that He has parts or qualities that would compromise His Oneness; rather, the Names are considered to represent Attributes or Qualities of His undifferentiated Essence, which are differentiated through the Self-manifestation of the Essence and then perceived in the mind of the one who is calling Him by them. They also reveal different Attributes of God, some pertaining to His Essence, and others to the different ways in which He relates to His creation. Nonetheless, each Name is understood to possess a real Divine Presence or Quality, for as al-Ṭabrisī notes there are no empty titles for God. In fact, in Islamic metaphysics, the whole of the cosmos is considered to be in reality nothing but reflections or theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) of the Divine Names and Qualities.

The discussion of God's Names and Qualities is a very important issue in Islamic theology, philosophy, and Sufism; and the science of Divine Names (*ʿilm al-asmāʾ*), which includes the science of *al-jafr*—that is, the science of the symbolic numerical significance of the Names and their constituent letters—is among the most important of the esoteric Islamic sciences. Most Islamic thinkers agree that God's Names are His Attributes (*ṣifāt*), which can be divided into Attributes of Essence (e.g., Knowing, Powerful, Living, Hearing, Seeing, Holy) and Attributes of action (e.g., Creator, Provider, Originator, Forgiver, Judge), although there are some differences in traditional sources regarding which Names belong to which category and the extent to which the Divine Attributes are distinct from or identical with the God's Essence. In Islamic esoterism, God and His Names are considered one. God is understood to be present in His sanctified Names, each of which is a ladder leading to Him.

God's Names have also been commonly divided into those of Beauty (*jamāl*), such as Compassionate, Merciful, Gentle, Kind, and Pardoner, and those of Majesty (*jalāl*), such as Judge, Compeller, Reckoner, and Possessor of Vengeance. Along these same lines, the Names have been also divided into those that could be manifested in human beings (Kind, Generous) and those that belong to God alone (Sovereign, Sublime, Holy; R). In the Islamic

(181) And among those We have created, there is a community that guides by the truth and does justice thereby. (182) And as for those who deny Our signs, We shall lead them on little by little, whence they know not. (183) And I will grant

world, human beings are allowed to have as their names those Divine Names that represent qualities that can be manifested in human beings, such as the name *Karīm* (Generous), but not those that belong to God alone, such as *Quddūs* (Holy). There are also names belonging to both categories, such as *ʿAlī,* which can also be used as human names.

Although all of God's Names can be described as *the Most Beautiful* (Ṭs), some suggest that here *the Most Beautiful Names* refers specifically to the Names of Beauty, which believers are encouraged to call upon in seeking God's Forgiveness and Mercy, to the exclusion of the Names of Majesty or Wrath (Ṭs), which they are generally discouraged from invoking. Others assert that one can call upon God by any Name or description of God found in the Quran; for example, one may address Him as "completer of His Light" (61:8); "the best of plotters" (3:54); or "the fourth of three" (cf. 58:7; Q). God's supreme Name is *Allāh,* which is said to encompass all of His other Names (Q). Sufi practitioners of *dhikr* regularly invoke the Divine Name *Allāh,* but it is also common for them to repeatedly invoke other Divine Names under the instruction of a *shaykh,* or spiritual guide, in order to cultivate certain spiritual attitudes or virtues or as antidotes to certain ailments or difficulties existing in the soul (symbolically speaking, to transform the substance of the soul from lead into gold). According to Sufi commentators, behind God's Names and Attributes mentioned in the Quran are other Attributes that surpass human understanding; the Names thus represent in a sense the limits of our knowledge of God (Aj, ST, Su, Qu), but also gates to His infinite Reality and the forms made available to human beings to acquire knowledge of God without being limited to what is humanly accessible.

Those *who deviate with regard to His Names* are said to be those who refer to Him using specifically human attributes, such as "father" or "son" (R), those who attribute evil actions or intentions to God, or those who have an anthropomorphic understanding of the Divinity and thus describe Him in terms that are ignorant or unworthy of Him (Ṭs, Z). Several commentators assert that one should not refer to God using any name or description not found in the Quran or the *Sunnah,* even if it is a synonym for a known Name of God found in these sources (R, Ṭs). Whenever the invocation of God's Names is done ritually, the Names have to be invoked in Arabic, although in the context of personal supplication, rather than canonical prayer or Sufi *dhikr,* it is permissible to use non-Arabic references to God, such as *Khudā* in Persian or "God" in English. To *deviate with regard to His Names* can also refer to those who use His Names or derivations from them to designate false gods or idols, such as the pagan Makkans who worshipped *Allāt,* whose name appears to be a feminine form of *Allāh* (IK, Q, R, Ṭs, Z).

181 See v. 159, where the same description is applied to a community *among the people of Moses.* In the present verse the *community* is widely considered to be a reference specifically to the Islamic community (Ṭ, Ṭs). Some narrow the reference further on the basis of a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says, "Verily among my community is a group who will [live] according to the truth until the return of Jesus, peace be upon him" (R, Ṭs, Z); this group is sometimes identified as the religious scholars or those who call others to Islam (Z), while some Shiite traditions consider it a reference to the Shiite community specifically (Ṭs). More generally, the verse can indicate that God will never leave the world without someone who calls to the truth (Q, R). In Shiite tradition, there is a well-known *ḥadīth* that says, "The earth will never be left without a Proof of God (*ḥujjat Allāh*)."

182–83 See also 68:44–45. That God *shall lead them on little by little,* or "by degrees," may refer to the various ways in which God "leads astray" those who disbelieve or do wrong as punishment for their disbelief and wrongdoing, including "granting them respite" (v. 183; see also 13:32; 22:44, 48; 35:8; 68:44–45) or making their wrongdoing "seem fair" to them (3:14; 6:108; 10:12), so that they falsely assume that they enjoy

them respite; truly My scheme is firm. (184) Have they not reflected? There is no madness in their companion. He is naught but a clear warner. (185) Or have they not contemplated the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and what things God has created, and that their term may already have drawn nigh? So in what discourse after this will they believe? (186) Whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. And He leaves them to wander confused in their rebellion. (187) They question thee about the Hour, when it will set in. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with my Lord. None save He shall manifest it at its proper

Divine favor and thus continue along this path toward their own punishment (Ṭ). That God "schemes" against the disbelievers and that His scheming is superior to theirs are alluded to in other verses (see 7:99; 10:21; 52:42; 86:15–17); the latter is similar to the idea that God is the *best of plotters* (see 3:54; 8:30 and commentary) and that *unto God belongs plotting altogether* (13:42; cf. 14:46); see also 27:50.

184 *Their companion* is a reference to the Prophet Muhammad, and the statement that *there is no madness* in him is a rebuttal to the Makkans' claims that he was "mad" or, literally, "possessed by jinn" (*majnūn*); see 15:6; 23:70; 34:8; 37:36; 44:14; 68:51; 81:22. The Quran also assures Muhammad personally that he is not possessed in 52:29 and 68:2. According to one report, the Prophet had been atop the hill of Ṣafā calling to each clan among the Quraysh and warning them of God's punishment. Someone in the crowd remarked that he seemed possessed, raising his voice in warning all night long. This verse was then revealed in response (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). Al-Rāzī suggests more generally that some Makkans dismissed the Prophet as "possessed," because his religious practice was so different from their own or because, when revelation came upon him, his physical appearance and demeanor changed dramatically (R). The rhetorical question *Have they not reflected?* is intended to spur the pagan Makkans to consider the known character and virtue of the Prophet in assessing the truth and soundness of the message he brings; as the Prophet is told to say to his Makkan detractors in 10:16, *I tarried among you for a lifetime before it,* meaning that they should know well his character. The Prophet is instructed to describe himself as *a clear warner* in several verses, including 15:89; 22:49; 29:50; 38:70; 46:9; 67:26; Noah also describes himself as *a clear warner* in 11:25; 26:115; 71:2.

185 This is one of several passages where people, and here the Makkans in particular, are asked to consider and reflect upon the wonders of God's creation as proof of His Reality and Power; see also 14:19; 17:99; 21:30; 22:65; 26:7; 27:86; 29:19; 31:20; 88:17–20. *Their term* refers to their individual deaths, or to the end of the world and their impending judgment before God (Z), or to both. They should consider that this term *may already have drawn nigh,* for death and judgment are always imminent. The rhetorical question *In what discourse after this*—that is, the Quran—*will they believe?* (cf. 45:6; 77:50) is meant to indicate that it should not be difficult for them to believe in the clear message of the Quran, conveyed in their own language by a man already known to them as a man of good, sound, and truthful character. According to commentators, the Divine provenance of the Quran should have been obvious to the Makkans, since its language has a literary quality and clarity that none could imitate or challenge (Ṭs; see 2:23; 10:38; 11:13).

186 *Whomsoever God leads astray* has *no guide,* for as the Quran states in 3:73, the only *guidance is God's Guidance;* see also 13:33; 39:23, 36; 40:33. That God *leaves them to wander confused in their rebellion* refers to the respite that God gives disbelievers and wrongdoers in this life, a respite that may allow for their repentance, but may also give them the opportunity to persist in the wrongdoing that assures their punishment (Ṭ); see also 2:15; 6:110; 10:11; 23:76; 27:4.

187 *The Hour* refers here and throughout the Quran to the onset of the apocalypse and the

time. Heavy shall it weigh upon the heavens and the earth. It shall not come upon you but suddenly." They question thee as if thou knew it well. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with God, but most of mankind know not." (188) Say, "I have no power over what benefit or harm may come to me, save as God wills. Had I knowledge of the unseen, I would have acquired much good, and no evil would have touched me. I am naught save a warner and a bearer of glad tidings

final end of the world or eschaton. That knowledge of the Hour *lies only with my Lord* indicates that the coming of the Hour is among the "unseen" matters known to God alone (Ṭ); regarding His exclusive knowledge of the Hour, see 31:34; 33:63; 41:47; 43:85; 79:42–44. In a well-known *ḥadīth,* when the Archangel Gabriel questions the Prophet about when the Hour will arrive, he responds, "The one who is questioned knows no more than the questioner" (R). According to some commentators, not knowing when the Hour will arrive, like not knowing the moment of one's own death, serves to encourage good deeds and discourage evil ones, since one never knows when one may be called to account (R, Z). That the Hour will come upon people *suddenly* (cf. 6:31; 12:107; 21:40; 22:55; 43:66; 47:18) indicates that the time of its coming will always remain beyond the knowledge of human beings, even the prophets. This verse has great importance, therefore, for the understanding of Islamic eschatology. Although a number of people have made predictions about the coming of the Hour or even claimed to be the Mahdī, the rightly-guided leader who will set matters right on earth before the final apocalypse, as widely described in the *Ḥadīth,* the Quran and the Prophet himself explicitly reject the idea that the Prophet, or indeed anyone but God, had knowledge of when the Hour and the events leading up to it would arrive.

*Heavy shall it weigh upon the heavens and the earth* may refer to the destructive events associated with the apocalypse as described in the Quran, including the splitting of the heavens (82:1, 84:1), the convulsing of the earth (99:1), the destruction of the mountains (101:5), and the boiling of the seas (81:6; 82:3; R). It may also mean that the coming of the Hour will weigh heavily upon those in the heavens and the earth—that is, upon angels, jinn, and human beings—because the uncertainty about the time of its arrival is difficult for them to bear or because they dread its coming (R, Ṭ, Z).

The Makkans questioned the Prophet about the Hour *as if* he *knew it well,* meaning they assumed that the Prophet had acquired knowledge of the coming of the Hour (JJ, Z) and that he welcomed questions about it and was willing to discuss it (Ṭ); moreover, the Prophet's open and welcoming demeanor gave them confidence that he would disclose this secret matter to them because of their close relationship to him (R, Ṭ, Z). The verse concludes by again asserting God's exclusive knowledge of the Hour. But regarding this truth as well as other important religious truths, *most of mankind know not* (cf. 34:28, 36; 45:26).

188 That the Prophet has *no power* over benefit or harm to himself or others and that he is as utterly subject to Divine Will as are all other human beings is also found in 10:49 and 72:21–22. *Knowledge of the unseen* includes knowledge of all realms of reality that transcend the ordinary ken of human beings, including knowledge of the celestial realm, of the inner intentions, thoughts, and spiritual destiny of others, and of the Hour (v. 187) as well all future events. In this verse, the Prophet argues that if he had access to such knowledge, particularly regarding the future (Ṭ), he could have used it to prevent harm or *evil* to himself and *acquired much good,* meaning the accumulation of good works (R, Ṭ), although some indicate that, in theory, this could also mean the acquisition of worldly benefits (R, Ṭ, Z). According to one report, some of the Quraysh asked the Prophet if God had informed him about the time of rising and falling prices, that they might benefit from this information in their mercantile activity (R).

The description of Muhammad and other prophets as simply "warners" and "bearers of glad

unto a people who believe. (189) He it is Who created you from a single soul, and made from it its mate, that he might find rest in her. Then, when he covered her, she bore a light burden, and carried it about. But when she had grown heavy, they called upon God, their Lord, "If Thou givest us a healthy child, we shall surely be among the thankful." (190) Then, when He gave them a healthy child, they ascribed partners unto Him with regard to that which He had given them. Exalted is God above the partners they ascribe. (191) Do they ascribe as partners those who created naught and are themselves created? (192) Those who can neither

tidings" is repeated throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:119, 213; 4:165; 5:19; 6:48; 11:2; 17:105; 18:56; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 48:8).

189–90 Regarding God's creation of human beings *from a single soul,* see 4:1c; 39:6c. In v. 189, as in 4:1, the *single soul* is commonly identified as Adam and *its mate* as Eve (JJ, R, Ṭ, Z), although these terms may be used to refer to the generation of human beings from male and female spouses generally. God made its mate *that he might find rest in her* is similar to the statement in 30:21: *And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you.* Thus, among the most important benefits of marriage are the emotional and physical comforts that each spouse provides for the other (see also 2:187), not merely the opportunity for procreation (mentioned in 16:72). To find *rest in* one's spouse means to enjoy love, peace, and intimacy together, which is natural, in a sense, because spouses have been created *from a single soul* (Z). Al-Zamakhsharī maintains that the love for one's spouse is therefore similar to the love for one's child, insofar as the love of both derive, to some extent, from the sense that they are part of one's very being.

Given the commentators' tendency to gloss the original human *soul* and its *mate* (which is also a soul like it), in various Quranic contexts, as references to Adam and Eve, some commentators also interpret the subsequent narrative in vv. 189–90 as pertaining specifically to Adam and Eve. In this interpretation, when Adam *covered* Eve—that is, had sexual relations with her—Eve *bore a light burden,* meaning the seed of Adam that she now *carried . . . about* inside her. *But when she had grown heavy* with child, the couple together prayed that the child would be *healthy* and sound (R, Ṭ, Z). Yet when they were given a sound child, *they ascribed partners unto* God. Given this spiritually reprehensible response to the blessing they had received, it is difficult to see how this narrative can be said to concern Adam, who is a prophet according to the Islamic tradition. Therefore, some indicate that when the verse turns to the discussion of ascribing partners to God, it is referring not to Adam and Eve, but to their offspring, that is—human beings in general (R, Z)—yet the verb tenses continue to be in the dual. Given all these considerations, it seems most reasonable to understand this narrative as a parable relating to married couples in general and demonstrating the human tendency to beseech God when one feels helpless and afraid, but to attribute good fortune to other natural or supernatural causes after God has answered one's prayers (R). For similar parables, see, e.g., 6:63–64; 10:22–23; 17:67; 29:65; 30:33; 31:32. The statement that God is *exalted . . . above the partners* human beings *ascribe* to Him is also found in 9:31; 10:18; 16:1, 3.

191–92 These verses contain a common Quranic argument demonstrating the foolishness of worshipping anything other than God. Since God is the only Creator, anything other than Him is itself *created* (cf. 6:100; 13:16; 16:20; 25:3; 31:11; 35:40; 46:4; 52:35–36). All objects of worship other than God are therefore created beings themselves, ultimately incapable of helping others or even themselves outside of God's Will and thus

help them, nor help themselves? (193) And if you call them to guidance, they follow you not. It is the same for you whether you call them or whether you remain silent. (194) Truly those whom they call upon apart from God are servants like you. So call upon them! Let them answer you, if you are truthful. (195) Have they feet with which they walk? Have they hands with which they grasp? Have they eyes with which they perceive? Have they ears with which they hear? Say, "Call upon your partners, then scheme against me, and grant me no respite. (196) Truly my Protector is God, Who sent down the Book, and He protects the righteous. (197) And those whom you call upon apart from Him can neither help you, nor

unable to bring benefit or harm to themselves or others; see v. 188 and 10:49, where the Prophet indicates that he too is incapable in this regard, as well as 5:76; 6:71; 10:18; 13:16; 21:43; 36:74–75; 20:88–89; 21:66; 22:12; 25:3, 55; 26:71–73, which relate to all idols and false deities.

193 *If you call them to guidance,* meaning if one calls the idols themselves to guidance, *they follow you not;* that is, they do not respond (JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs). Others suggest this may mean that when one calls upon the idols for guidance, they do not respond to the request (Z). They cannot respond in any way because, as suggested in v. 195, they do not have *ears with which they hear;* nor do they have faculties of intellect and speech. Alternately, *if you call them to guidance* may refer to the attempt to call the idolaters, or those who ascribe partners to God (vv. 190–92), to guidance (Ṭs). In either case, because of their inability or unwillingness to respond to this call, it does not matter *whether you call them or whether you remain silent* (Ṭ) The seeming imperviousness of certain people to guidance and truth is alluded to metaphorically in v. 179, where such people are likened to cattle, and is also mentioned in 2:6 and 36:10.

194–96 These three verses challenge the idolaters to call upon the idols and false deities they ascribe as partners to God, while mocking these false objects of worship as merely *servants* like themselves (v. 194), belonging to God and subject to His Sovereignty. Moreover, the capabilities of such idols fall short of those enjoyed even by the human beings who worship them, for as the rhetorical questions in v. 195 remind them, the idols have no feet to walk upon, no hands to grasp, no eyes to perceive, no ears to hear. How, then, the questions imply, can one worship what is less capable than oneself? (IK, Mw). The challenge the Prophet is told to issue at the end of v. 195, *scheme against me, and grant me no respite,* is that they try their best to thwart God and the mission of His Prophet. This is identical or similar to statements made by Noah and Hūd to their disbelieving peoples; see 10:71; 11:55. See also 77:39, where God challenges the deniers on the Day of Judgment, saying, *So if you have a scheme, then scheme against Me!* The disbelievers are invited to *scheme* and *grant no respite,* but it is understood that their schemes will ultimately fail, for *naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God* (35:44), while by contrast God's *scheme is firm* despite His "granting them respite" (see 7:182–83c).

The Prophet's invitation to his detractors to scheme against him demonstrates his utter confidence in God's Succor and Protection (Z), as indicated in the Prophet's statement in v. 196: *Truly my Protector is God. Protector* translates *Walī,* a Divine Name invoked several times in the Quran (e.g., 4:45; 6:127; 42:9, 28; 59:23; 66:4), which in addition to "Protector" also means "Friend." God *protects the righteous,* specifically, as He protects the reverent (45:19) and the believers (2:257; 3:68).

197 This verse is a reiteration of the statement in vv. 191–92 about the helplessness of idols and false deities; see commentary on these verses. That these false idols cannot even *help themselves* and are in need of the help of their human adherents is

help themselves." (198) If thou callest them unto guidance, they hear not. Thou seest them looking upon thee, but they see not. (199) Take to pardoning, and enjoin right, and turn away from the ignorant. (200) And should a temptation from

illustrated with irony in 21:68, where the idolaters among Abraham's people seek to kill Abraham in order to "help their gods."

198 Cf. 35:14. According to most commentators, *if thou callest them unto guidance* refers to the attempt to call the idols to guidance (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). The idols have been fashioned to appear as if they have eyes, which are directed toward those in front of them, so that they seem to be *looking upon* those standing before them, but *they see not* (IK, Ṭ, Z). Some commentators mention a minority interpretation indicating that this verse refers to calling the idolaters, rather than the idols, *unto guidance* (IK, Q, R, Ṭs). The ambiguity that allows for the possibility that the verse is describing either the idols or the idolaters makes a strong rhetorical point. Reading this verse in conjunction with v. 179, which describes the idolaters as having eyes, ears, and hearts that do not function so as to allow them to know and be rightly guided, and v. 195, which describes the false idols they worship as without functioning eyes and ears at all, suggests that in worshipping the blind and deaf idols, the idolaters become similarly blind and deaf—or that the idolaters are already blind and deaf; otherwise they would not worship idols. Although the idolaters, unlike the idols themselves, do have physically functional eyes and ears, these faculties have become atrophied and spiritually dysfunctional, effectively making the idolaters as impervious to guidance as the idols themselves.

199 This is one of many verses encouraging forbearance toward others, including one's religious opponents or those by whom one has been wronged; see also 2:109; 3:159; 5:13; 23:96–98; 24:22; 41:34–35; 45:14; 64:14. What is meant here is forgiving and excusing people's failings of character and deed and being gentle rather than harsh. When this verse was revealed, the Prophet reportedly asked the Archangel Gabriel what was meant, and after consulting with God, Gabriel stated that it meant that one should "maintain the ties of kinship with one who would cut himself off from you; give to the one who withholds from you; and pardon the one who wrongs you" (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). The Prophet also reportedly advised his followers, "Be easy; do not be difficult" (Z). *Pardoning* translates *ʿafw,* which can also mean "a surplus," and a minority interpretation understands this verse as commanding the Prophet to collect the surplus wealth of his followers for the purposes of charity prior to the Divine commandment to establish the obligatory alms (*zakāh;* R, Ṭ).

*Enjoin right* is an injunction found in several verses, although in these cases, *right* translates *maʿrūf,* while here it translates the related term *ʿurf,* which means what is considered right according to custom or tradition. Both terms connote proper, normative, and honorable behavior (Z; cf. 3:104, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112; 22:41; 31:17); see 3:104c. *Turn away from the ignorant* means to be patient with foolish or bad behavior, to avert one's eyes from behavior that is offensive (R), and to leave people alone once one has apprised them of the truth (Ṭs), rather than arguing with them or responding to them in kind (Z). See also 4:63; 6:68, 106, 112, 137; 9:95; 15:94; 32:30; 43:83; 51:54; 70:42 for similar injunctions.

This verse thus sums up the attitudes that represent nobility of character (Z). Although some have suggested that verses like this, which counsel forbearance toward idolaters or disbelievers, were abrogated by later Madinan verses that commanded the Prophet to fight his religious opponents, others argue that this is not the case, since an injunction toward gentleness and leniency with one's religious opponents does not stand in contradiction to the command to fight them when necessary or to claim one's rights when justified (R, Ṭ). As stated in 42:40: *The recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it. Yet, whosoever pardons and sets matters aright, his reward is with God. Truly He loves not the wrongdoers.*

200 See also 41:36 for an identical verse. Although the present verse is addressed to the Prophet, the injunction it contains applies to all

Satan provoke thee, seek refuge in God. Truly He is Hearing, Knowing. (201) Truly those who are reverent, when they are touched by a visitation from Satan, they remember; then behold, they see. (202) But as for their brethren, they draw them ever further into error, and then they cease not. (203) And when thou bringest them not a sign, they say, "Why do you not choose it?" Say, "I only follow that which is revealed unto me from my Lord. These are insights from your

believers (R). In context, this verse may mean specifically that if one is provoked by a Satanic temptation to respond with anger to *the ignorant* ones mentioned in v. 199, rather than turning away from them and being patient, one should *seek refuge in God* (Ṭ); however, the application of the injunction is general, as Muslims are always encouraged to seek God's help against Satanic provocation, given Satan's threat to mislead human beings (7:16–17; 15:39; 17:62). The formula "I seek refuge in God from the outcast Satan" (*Aʿūdhu bi'Llāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm*) is frequently uttered in Muslim daily life, not only when one fears evil forces or temptations, but also at the beginning of various ritual or religious acts. For example, when making ablutions, praying, or reciting Quranic verses, one begins by uttering the formula of seeking refuge with God, known as the *istiʿādhah,* prior to the *basmalah,* the formula of invoking the Name of God; see 16:98c, where seeking refuge with God from Satan is specifically enjoined before reciting the Quran.

201 To be *touched by a visitation from Satan* means to be tempted by him, perhaps in a dream or apparition, which is the lexical meaning of *ṭā'if* (Z), translated here as "visitation." Some consider *a visitation from Satan* to refer here to the impulse toward anger (Ṭ) or to any Satanic insinuation ("whispering"; see 114:4c) that tempts one toward a moral or intellectual lapse (Ṭ). The *reverent,* when faced with such a Satanic visitation or temptation of this kind, *remember*—that is, they remember God, and in particular they remember the commands of God and the threat of His punishment—and so return to obedience (Ṭ). *Remember* translates *tadhakkarū,* which can also mean to "reflect" or "take heed." After remembering, the reverent again *see,* meaning that they are restored to sound judgment and guidance (Ṭs) and return to what is right and what God has commanded (Ṭ). According to al-Zamakhsharī "remembering" God in this way whenever one is tempted is the regular habit of the *reverent.*

202 *Their brethren*—that is, the brethren of Satan, or satans (since Satan can be a collective reference to satans as a group)—may be a reference to the ignorant (v. 199) or to the idolaters in general (Ṭs); see also 2:14c. Such people, in contrast to the *reverent* in v. 201, allow themselves to be drawn *ever further into error;* that is, they are literally helped along in their error by Satanic temptation, until they err continuously, having no fear of God to give them pause (Ṭ). Given the ambiguity of the pronouns in this verse, it may also mean that the satans do not cease in their attempts to lead such people further into error (Ṭ, Ṭs).

203 The disbelievers' request for *a sign* from the prophets who had been sent to them is a theme repeated throughout the Quran; see 6:37c. Here they ask the Prophet, *Why do you not choose it?* since they assume that the signs or miracles brought by the prophets are matters of their own choosing, and that the Prophet can simply select at will a sign to present to them (Ṭ). The response that he is instructed to give, *I only follow that which is revealed unto me from my Lord* (see also 6:50; 10:15; 46:9), is similar to other statements he makes indicating that whatever power or knowledge he has is limited to what God has given him, for example, that he is simply a *warner and bearer of glad tidings* (v. 188). With their question, the idolaters may also be asking, "Why have you not received a sign from your Lord?" (Ṭ).

*These are insights from your Lord* refers to the Quranic verses, which are *revealed* to the Prophet (Ṭ, Z). They are further described as *a guidance and a mercy.* These same three descriptions are given of the Quran (implicitly) in 45:20 and of the Torah in 28:43. Elsewhere, both the Quran and the Torah are described as a *guidance* and a *mercy;*

Lord, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe." (204) And when the Quran is recited, hearken unto it, and listen, that haply you may receive mercy. (205) And remember thy Lord within thy soul, humbly and in awe, being not loud

see 6:154; 7:52, 154; 10:57; 16:64, 89; 27:77; 31:3. According to Ibn Kathīr, the Prophet's response to the idolaters' request for a sign concludes with a reference to the Quran in order to indicate that the Quranic verses themselves are the Prophet's greatest miracle or "sign."

204 The command to both *hearken unto* and *listen* to the Quran, employing two words that are nearly synonyms, serves to emphasize the care with which one should listen to the sacred sound of the recited Quran, paying full attention in order to understand its meaning as well as reflecting upon its teachings (Aj, Ṭ) and acting according to its prescriptions (Q, Z). *Listen* translates *anṣitū,* which connotes listening silently, and which some indicate was particularly important when the Prophet was reciting the Quran (Q). This injunction also has specific importance for the etiquette of communal prayer, requiring all those praying behind the imam to be silent and listen attentively to the Quranic passages that the imam recites, neither engaging in conversation with fellow worshippers nor uttering the recitations themselves (Aj, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Some commentators assert that the command to listen attentively to the recited Quran applies to any context in which one hears it (Aj, Q, Z). Listening silently and with pure receptivity to the recited Quran is considered by some as a means of developing the quality of pure servitude toward God (Su) or of coming into the Presence of God, who is the ultimate "Speaker" behind the recited words (Aj). Since the Quran is described in v. 203 as *a mercy,* one should hearken to its recited words so one *may receive mercy.* Ibn ʿAjībah states that "mercy is the closest thing to the one listening to the Quran."

205 The command to *remember thy Lord* is addressed to the Prophet, but applies to all people (R). It likely refers to both the invocation (*dhikr*) of God with the tongue and the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God in the heart—the latter indicated by the call to remember God *within thy soul.* This "remembrance" may also take the form of reciting the Quran or uttering words of praise and glorification for God as well as the testament to His Oneness (Z). Read in connection with the previous verse, *remember thy Lord* may be an injunction to remember God when one hears the Quran being recited (Ṭ). To remember God *within thy soul* may also mean to remember Him "within thyself," and al-Ṭabarī connects this verse with a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*), "When My servant remembers Me in himself, I remember him in Myself; when he remembers Me in solitude, I remember him in solitude; when he remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in an assembly that is nobler" (Ṭ). The present verse is one of the most important in suggesting the spiritual importance of *dhikr* (remembrance or invocation), encouraged, particularly by Sufis, as a means of attaining an "unveiling" by which one arrives at a more profound understanding of God (R) and realizes that God is ever near and witness to one's thoughts and deeds (ST) and indeed as a means of experiencing His Presence and one's immersion "in the ocean of Divinity." According to a *ḥadīth,* "All that is on the earth is accursed save the remembrance of God." Concerning *dhikr,* see also 13:28c; 29:45c; 33:41c.

The command to remember God *humbly and in awe, being not loud of voice,* is similar to the command to call upon Him *humbly and in secret* (6:63; 7:55) and can be understood as directions for the performance of *dhikr* in Sufism. Lowering one's voice is also enjoined during supplicatory prayer (17:110), when speaking in the presence of the Prophet (49:2–3), and as part of one's general comportment, for the *vilest of voices are those of asses* (31:19). To pray quietly reflects sincerity in one's prayer (Aj, R, Z), indicating that one is not praying *to be seen of men* (4:142), and is best suited to facilitating reflection and recollection (Z). The Prophet was once asked by some Companions whether God was near, so that they should whisper to Him, or far away, so that they should

of voice, in the morning and the evening, and be not among those who are heedless. ﴿206﴾ Surely those who are with thy Lord are not too arrogant to worship Him. And they glorify Him, and prostrate unto Him.

shout, after which 2:186 was then revealed, *When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me* (IK).

Al-Rāzī explains that the invocation or remembrance enjoined here should be done not silently, but in a voice low enough that it can be heard only by oneself, since there is a profound connection between the body, soul, and spirit—each of which is a door to the others—a connection that is activated by the process of remembering or invoking God. Hearing the invocation uttered by the bodily tongue moves the imagination and soul of the one invoking, which in turn strengthens the remembrance in the spiritual heart. The act of remembrance thus takes place simultaneously on all three levels, each reflecting upon and strengthening the others. Because of the injunction to remember God quietly, some might consider this verse as prohibiting the loud, communal *dhikr* practiced by Sufi groups. Ibn ʿAjībah, however, rejects this interpretation, noting that this verse was revealed in Makkah, when the believers had to be circumspect in their worship, and that when the community migrated to Madinah, the Prophet and Companions would conduct public *dhikr* sessions in the mosque.

*The morning and the evening* are mentioned here and elsewhere as times particularly suited to remembering, supplicating, or praising God (see 3:41; 6:52; 18:28; 19:11; 24:36; 33:41–42; 48:9; 76:25). These two times of day may also be mentioned as a way of saying that one should remember and praise God at all times (Aj, Z). These two times, marking the beginning and end of the day, are mentioned specifically because of the spiritual symbolism they entail—each being a time of transition between light and darkness, sleeping and waking, and thus suggestive of death and resurrection (Aj, R).

206 *Those who are with thy Lord* are understood to be the angels, who are "with" Him in the sense of being near to His Mercy and Bounty (R, Z). The implication of this verse is that if the angels, with their spiritual purity and nearness to God, *are not too arrogant to worship Him,* how can it be that human beings, with their spiritual imperfections and distance from God, are reluctant to worship Him? (R). See also 4:172, where neither the messiah (Jesus) nor the angels *would disdain to be a servant,* or "worshipper," of God. The angels' constant praise and glorification of God is mentioned in several places in the Quran (see, e.g., 13:13; 39:75; 42:5). That they *prostrate unto Him* is also mentioned in 16:49. Because this verse includes a reference to prostrating, this is one of fifteen verses known as *sajdah* (prostration) verses; see 19:58c. These verses are noted as such in official Arabic texts of the Quran, indicating that Muslims should physically prostrate upon reciting them or hearing them recited although this is not required by Islamic law.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 8

# The Spoils

## *al-Anfāl*

*Al-Anfāl* takes its name from the reference to *spoils* in v. 1. It is an early Madinan *sūrah,* though some maintain that v. 30 (Āl) is or vv. 30–36 (IJ, Q, Ṭs) are from the Makkan period, as they are understood by some to refer to the attempts made on the Prophet's life by the Quraysh before he migrated to Madinah. Some also maintain that v. 63 is Makkan, since it is reported to have been revealed when ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb embraced Islam (Āl).

A major theme of this *sūrah* is the Battle of Badr (2/624), fought a year after the *hijrah* (the migration from Makkah to Madinah), the first major military confrontation between the Muslim community and the Quraysh of Makkah, who had continued their hostility toward the Muslim community after it had moved to Madinah. It discusses also the matter of the spoils of war and their just distribution (vv. 1, 41), a topic that did not need to be addressed in the days when Muslims were an oppressed minority in Makkah. The spiritual dimensions of battle are also treated, including the assistance of angels (vv. 9, 12) and the Will of God in determining victory, as in the famous statement from v. 17, *You did not slay when you slew, but God slew them, and thou threwest not when thou threwest, but God threw.*

*Al-Anfāl* also describes the challenges and trials of battle (vv. 10–11, 43–46) and the triumph of the sincere believers over great odds (vv. 65–66) and provides important guidelines for dealing with captives (vv. 67–70) as well as the observation of treaties (vv. 56–59). The Battle of Badr was an important first victory for the young Muslim community and is cited in the commentary on many verses in the Quran as evidence of God's Favor upon it. The last part of the *sūrah* addresses the relationship between those Muslims who had already migrated from Makkah to Madinah and those who had not, outlining their responsibilities toward one another.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) They question thee concerning the spoils. Say, "The spoils belong to God and the Messenger." So reverence God and set matters aright among yourselves. And obey God and His Messenger, if you are believers. (2) Only they are believers whose hearts quake with fear when God is mentioned, and when His signs are recited unto them, they increase them in faith, and they trust in their Lord,

1 This *sūrah* discusses events of the Battle of Badr, but does not always treat them in their chronological order (see 8:5c for the background to the battle). It is reported that at the end of the Battle of Badr, a group of Companions pursued the enemy as they fled, a second group remained to guard the Prophet, and a third group watched over the prisoners and the spoils. When the group of pursuers returned, they laid claim to the spoils by virtue of their having fought and given chase to the enemy, but the group protecting the Prophet claimed more right to the spoils by virtue of protecting the Prophet (Q). In another account, the disagreement pertained to certain Muslims who for various reasons were not present at the battle (e.g., two were sent by the Prophet on a scouting mission), but who were given spoils by the Prophet, to which others objected (R). Though differing in the details, all these accounts point to disagreements over how the spoils should be apportioned among those with varying levels of participation and exposure to danger in the battle.

The word for *spoils* here is *anfāl,* a word whose root generally means "excess" or "beyond what is necessary or required." Some have connected this word with the Islamic belief that, among all religious communities, only Muslims were allowed to take spoils of war (R), based upon a *ḥadīth* stating that this was one trait by which the Prophet was distinguished. Some commentators have made a distinction between *anfāl* and *ghanā'im,* the latter being a more common and inclusive term for spoils of war in Islamic Law (Q; see 8:41c). Other jurists have stated that *anfāl* refers to wealth received by means other than war (Q) or that it refers to the fifth of the spoils (*khumus*) mentioned in v. 41 (Q). According to some, *anfāl* does not refer to all spoils, but only to the spoils a warrior takes directly from his slain opponents, such as their armor and sword (R).

It is said that because of the disagreements regarding the *anfāl,* the Prophet was asked about the matter and this verse was revealed (Q). Some say that it was abrogated by v. 41: *And know that whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and the Messenger, and kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler.* However, no question of abrogation arises if this verse is interpreted to mean that God and the Prophet have control over the distribution of the spoils, and v. 41 is read as specifying how the spoils will then be distributed (Q, R).

The question of spoils is a complex issue in classical Islamic Law and addresses such matters as the authority of a political or military leader to designate the distribution of spoils (both in promising beforehand what can be taken and in managing the distribution afterward); the kinds and amounts of items that can be taken (e.g., horses and weapons would be treated differently than land); how they are to be distributed; and to whom they are given (see 8:41c).

2 Hearts that *quake with fear* are also mentioned in 22:35 and 23:60. The various ways in which the heart is described in the Quran is discussed in 2:7c; see also the introduction to *Sūrah* 47. The reactions of believers in their soul and even their physical body to hearing about God or listening to the Quran are mentioned in verses such as 5:83, 39:23, and 48:4. The idea of being "increased" in faith or belief (*īmān*) also appears in 3:173 and 9:124; similarly, one can also be "increased" in humility (17:109) and guidance (47:17).

(3) who perform the prayer and spend from that which We have provided them. (4) It is they who truly are believers. For them are ranks in the sight of their Lord, and forgiveness and a generous provision. (5) [Remember] how thy Lord brought thee forth from thy home in truth, while a group of the believers were averse, (6) disputing with thee concerning the truth after it had become clear, as though they were being driven to death as they looked on. (7) And [remember] when God promised you that one of the two companies was to be yours, and you wished that the unarmed one would be yours. But God desires to verify the truth through His Words, and to cut off the last remnant of the

3 Cf. 2:3; 4:39; 13:22; 14:31; 22:35; 28:54; 32:16; 42:38.

4 This verse is similar to others that speak of people being ranked in the Sight of God, such as 12:76; 17:21; 18:48; 20:75; 46:19; 58:11; and in 40:15 God is spoken of as *the Raiser of degrees* (*Rafīʿ al-darajāt*).

5 According to the traditional account, after the *hijrah* (the migration of the Prophet and his Companions from Makkah, where they were persecuted by the Quraysh, to Madinah, where they found refuge), engaging in battle, which had been previously forbidden for the Muslim community, was now made permissible; see 4:74–77c; 22:39c; and the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran," which discusses this question at length. At first this fighting was only in the form of raids on the caravans of the Quraysh, who were then the enemies of Muslims, but these raids were only modestly successful. However, a particularly large and rich caravan of goods led by Abū Sufyān (a notable Makkan of wealth and social position who was a leader of the forces against the Prophet) was returning from Syria to Makkah, and the Prophet made plans to attack it, but Abū Sufyān managed to send word to the Quraysh that the caravan might be attacked. In response the Makkans mustered an army of approximately one thousand men to come to the aid of the caravan. Many in Makkah had a personal financial stake in the caravan, and, moreover, they hoped to have a chance to eliminate the threat they perceived to be posed by Muhammad and the new Muslim community.

By the time the Prophet and his army reached Badr, a common stop on the caravan route (approximately 115 kilometers southwest of Madinah) where they planned to wage their attack, they realized that the Makkan army was already close and that there was no chance of a successful attack against Abū Sufyān's caravan, which in any case had taken a route closer to the sea rather than through Badr. The Prophet and his Companions were thus presented with the choice of either turning back or facing a battle against a much larger force. When the Prophet consulted with his Companions regarding the new situation, *a group of the believers were averse;* that is, they were hesitant to press the fight, having been prepared to face only the relatively unarmed caravan, not an army of one thousand. According to traditional beliefs, the Prophet nevertheless received a sign from God to proceed and was given the promise of Divine Help.

6 *The truth after it had become clear* refers to the fact that the Prophet had promised them victory, having received assurance from God, but they still disputed with him about it (R). *Driven to death as they looked on* means that it was as though they had certain knowledge that they were being compelled into death (Q).

7 *One of the two companies* refers to the Makkan army and the caravan from Syria, the latter being the one that was *unarmed.* The prospect of taking the caravan seemed realistic, but some of the Prophet's followers were less enthusiastic about facing the Makkan army and tried to persuade the Prophet not to go out to face the

disbelievers, (8) so that He may verify the truth and prove falsehood to be false, though the guilty be averse. (9) When you sought succor from your Lord, He responded to you, "I shall aid you with a thousand angels rank upon rank." (10) And God made it not save as a glad tiding, and that your hearts may be at peace thereby. And victory comes from God alone; truly God is Mighty, Wise. (11) Behold, He covered you with sleepiness, security from Him, and sent down upon you water from the sky to purify you thereby, to remove the defilement of Satan from you, to fortify your hearts, and to make firm your steps thereby.

enemy (R). Rather than simply acquiring the fleeting wealth of the caravan, doing battle with the Makkan army would lead to a decisive victory that would fundamentally undermine the enemy and change the strategic balance between Muslims and their enemies (R).

*Verify the truth* refers to the rise and triumph of Islam (Q). The phrase can also be rendered "make true/real the truth" or "establish the truth." In a larger sense this clause provides a justification for the use of force, namely, the strengthening and affirmation of the truth and the abolishment of falsehood. In Islamic Law, one of the fundamental necessities of human life that societies must protect is religion itself, an imperative to which allusion is made in 22:40, which speaks of the protection of *monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God's Name is mentioned much* as a reason for *God's repelling people, some by means of others.* This is in addition to other causes justifying the use of force, such as people being *expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God."*

8 Here *verify the truth* (cf. v. 7) is paired with *prove falsehood to be false* (*yubṭila al-bāṭil*), which could also be translated "render vain what is vain" or "nullify what is false."

9–10 The matter of the angels helping the believers during the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uḥud is discussed in 3:124–26c. It is generally accepted that angels fought during the Battle of Badr and not in other battles, but the precise nature of this Divinely ordained martial participation has varied accounts, some of which describe certain miraculous occurrences on the battlefield (R). With regard to whether the angels provided physical or spiritual help (discussed in 3:124–26c), this verse seems to support an understanding that the angels did not participate in a physical manner, but gave spiritual power and strength to the believers that were directed not at their bodies, but at their inner being, so that their *hearts may be at peace thereby,* producing, moreover, the opposite effect in the enemy. A later verse states that God will *cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve* (v. 12).

11 Cf. 3:154, which also mentions *sleepiness* in the midst of battle and links it with *security.* It is said that the sleepiness descended the night before the battle, when anxiety would ordinarily have been at its highest. As discussed in 3:154c, commentators see this sleepiness as a kind of miracle that gave the practical advantage of physical rest before the battle and demonstrated in a most concrete fashion an attitude of contentment and trust.

There are disagreements regarding when the rain fell, but in any case the Muslims were able to benefit from it. In one account, before they had reached the wells that they were able to control and use to their advantage, rain fell to the point that it pooled and the believers were able to drink and also make their ablutions from its water (R). Moreover, the ground on which they stood, which was sandy and soft to the point of making it difficult to walk, was hardened by the water, enabling them to walk more easily upon it (Ṭ). It is further reported that the water had the opposite effect on the enemy, whose ground was constituted in such a way as to become muddy and more difficult to walk upon when it was drenched by rain (R).

The *defilement of Satan* is thought by some to refer to the state of ritual impurity that makes it necessary to perform ablutions with water (if water is available) as a condition for performing the canonical prayer (R, Ṭ). At a spiritual level,

(12) Behold, thy Lord revealed unto the angels, "Truly I am with you; so make firm those who believe. I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So strike above the neck, and strike their every fingertip." (13) That is because they are in schism with God and His Messenger. And whosoever opposes God and His Messenger—truly God is severe in retribution. (14) Thus it is, so taste it, and [know] that the disbelievers shall have the punishment of the Fire. (15) O you who believe! When you meet those who disbelieve arrayed [for battle], turn not your backs to them. (16) And whosoever turns his back to them that day—unless it be a stratagem of battle or to withdraw to another company—shall certainly earn wrath from God. And his refuge shall be

the defilement is seen as a result of the whisperings of Satan in the hearts of the believers, from which they are cleansed spiritually as water cleanses them bodily. Indeed, the ritual ablution by water in Islam (see 4:43c; 5:6c), far from being a simple matter of physical cleanliness, symbolizes and even actualizes the purification of the soul by the waters of the spirit, hence the language of *water from the sky,* which has both a literal and a symbolic significance, as the place it originates is understood as both physical heaven and spiritual Heaven. The water made their physical steps more firm and at the same time made their spiritual stance more secure and confident.

12 *Truly I am with you* is understood to address the angels directly or is meant to express more generally the fact that God is with the believers (R). *Revealed* can mean that God informed by way of inspiration, but since angels are themselves the means of revelation and inspiration, the very sending of the angels means that God is with the believers. God uses the angels to inspire and strengthen the souls of the believers just as He uses them to *cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve.* Moreover, since the message of *I am with you* is meant as a reassurance, it could not be directed at the angels themselves, since they are not subject to any manner of fear (R). The believers were made firm either by virtue of the angels telling the Prophet that they would achieve victory, an assurance that the Prophet then conveyed to the believers, or by the angels casting inspiration into their hearts, as opposed to Satan does when he whispers evil promptings to the soul (R). One interpretation of the last sentence of this verse is that it means that the believers should strike at their enemies however they can, from their head to the tips of their extremities (R).

13–14 To be *in schism with God and His Messenger* is an idea that comes up in other verses such as 2:137; 22:53; 47:32; 59:4. *Taste it* means taste the aforementioned *retribution* (Z).

15–16 These verses instruct believers, when they meet enemies in battle, to not retreat unless it is an intentional feint or unless they are joining another group from their own army with the intention of rejoining the battle (Q, Ṭ). Presumably this latter action is to be differentiated from an outright desertion, leaving the group to carry on the fight without help. In the context of the Battle of Badr, the stakes were such that a defeat might have cost the young community its very existence, since it had not yet established a base of power anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula outside of Madinah (indeed, all later generations of Muslims understood the Battle of Badr as a turning point in the very survival of Islam as such). To run away from the battlefield completely without seeking to rejoin some other group of fighters would have been tantamount to abandoning and forsaking the community as such.

Some commentators mention accounts that some warriors returned to the Prophet from having left the fighting and were afraid that they would be condemned as deserters, but the Prophet said, "I am your company (*fi'ah*)" (IK, Q); v. 16

Hell. What an evil journey's end! (17) You did not slay them, but God slew them, and thou threwest not when thou threwest, but God threw, that He might try the believers with a beautiful trial from Him. Truly God is Hearing,

uses the same term, *fi'ah*. Similar accounts are given regarding ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who lamented hearing that a certain warrior died while standing his ground though greatly outnumbered and said, "If he had returned, I would have been his company (*fi'ah*)" (IK). This may be part of the reason why many commentators consider the threat of punishment here for desertion to be specific to the participants of the Battle of Badr, though jurists are divided on the question of whether fleeing from the enemy is a grave sin (*kabīrah*) in general or not (Q, Ṭ). The question of forgiveness for fleeing from a battle is mentioned in the context of the Battle of Uḥud in 3:159.

17 This verse may be related to several accounts that describe the Prophet picking up a handful of pebbles or dust and throwing it at the enemy, saying, "Curse your faces!" (*shāhat al-wujūh;* Ṭ). In one version it is three pebbles, one cast to the right, one to the left, and one to the middle, and the disbelievers, struck by fear (in one account because of a voice from Heaven), fled. In another version the Prophet took a handful of dust and threw it, and the dust was carried by the wind and blinded them, at which they ran away (Ṭ). In another account, the "throwing" to which this verse refers took place at Uḥud. One of the prisoners of the Battle of Badr, Ubayy ibn Khalaf, was ransomed, but he vowed to kill the Prophet and told the Prophet he kept his horse ready every day to accomplish the deed. During the Battle of Uḥud, Ubayy charged the Prophet and some Companions intervened, but the Prophet told them to stand down, at which he personally hurled a spear at Ubayy and mortally wounded him (Th, Ṭ).

As a spiritual allegory, this verse has been interpreted as meaning that one cannot kill one's carnal soul (i.e., one's egotism and vices) with one's own strength, but needs the Help of God to enable the spiritual grace to manifest itself in the soul (Aj). From another perspective, it is understood to mean that truly only God threw and only God killed, expressing a mystery about the relationship between God and His creation. In a famous sacred saying, or *ḥadīth qudsī,* God is described as saying of human beings, whom He loves, "I will be his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hands by which he grasps, and his feet by which he walks." Sufis also connect this verse with other Quranic verses, such as 2:115: *Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God;* 28:88: *All things perish, save His Face;* 55:26–27: *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty;* 57:4: *He is with you wheresoever you are;* and 58:7: *He is with them wheresoever they are.*

V. 17 is used numerous times in Sufi writings. It is used in Sufism as a scriptural basis for the station of perfect submission, in which one's actions become God's Action and one's will God's Will. A Sufi such as Ibn ʿArabī points to the explicit negation in this verse, *thou threwest not,* coupled with the explicit affirmation, *when thou threwest,* to indicate the irreducible tension between the world's nearness and the distance from God, or between its existential otherness and existential "identity" in relation to Him; that is, creation is not God, but is also not in its essential reality wholly other than God. This irreducibility is also expressed in 42:11, *Naught is like unto Him, and He is the Hearer, the Seer,* which is to say, it denies that God is like anything, but then affirms of Him the Qualities of hearing and seeing. Seen in this way, the verse hinders facile generalizations regarding the world's identity with God, but also prevents one from seeing the world as a reality utterly separate from God in its essential reality. At a theological but no less mystical and esoteric level, scholastic theologians have seen in this verse a proof that God is the Creator of all acts and that human beings "acquire" (*kasb*) them from Him.

Some interpret this verse to mean that the effect of filling the eyes of the disbelievers was from God, since a single handful of dust thrown by a man would not have been enough under ordinary circumstances to accomplish this feat (R); or that death refers to the separation of the spirit from the body, which is the direct Act of God and not the result of the wound inflicted by human beings (R, Th).

Knowing. (18) Thus it is, and [know] that God makes feeble the scheming of the disbelievers. (19) If you seek victory, then victory has come to you. And if you desist, it would be better for you. And if you return, We shall return, and your company will not avail you aught, even if they be many. And [know] that God is with the believers. (20) O you who believe! Obey God and His Messenger, and turn not away from him, even as you hear [him]. (21) And be not like those who say, "We hear," though they hear not. (22) Truly the worst of beasts in the sight of God are the deaf and the dumb who understand not. (23) Had God known of any good in them, He would have caused them to hear; yet had He caused them

The idea of a *beautiful trial* is often glossed as meaning "a beautiful blessing" (Q, R, Ṭ), in the sense that even good things such as victory are tests from God in response to which one can be either virtuous or vicious. For the role of trials in the spiritual life as mentioned in the Quran, see commentary on 29:2–3.

18 The weakness of the schemes of those who oppose God is also mentioned in 3:120; 4:76; 52:46.

19 This verse is understood in three ways. Some see it as an address to the disbelievers, who also prayed for victory and who are thus ironically informed that victory has arrived—but with the disbelievers as the vanquished, not the victors. A second opinion sees it addressed to the believers, who are given victory, but who are warned against their conduct regarding the spoils (see 8:1c). A third opinion considers the first sentence to be addressed to the believers; then *if you desist* begins a new address to the disbelievers, meaning that they should desist from their hostility toward the Prophet (Q). *And if you return, We shall return* means that if the disbelievers return to hostilities, God will return as well. The last sentence of the verse is read by some as a continuation of v. 18, while others read it as meaning "Truly God is with the believers" (Z).

20 On the question of obeying the Prophet, see commentary on 3:32: *Say, "Obey God and obey the Messenger." If they turn away, then truly God loves not the disbelievers.* See also 4:80; 5:92; 24:54; 33:33; 47:33; 49:14; 64:12. Such passages describe obedience to the Prophet as second only to obedience to God and set in place the normative character of the Prophet's teachings and actions.

21 The commentators note that this verse describes different groups of people, from the idolaters who heard the Prophet's message but paid it no heed, to the hypocrites who heard it with their ears and assented to it outwardly, but did not hear it with their hearts (R, Ṭ), that is, did not reflect and meditate upon what they had heard (Q). Moreover, one must act upon commandments or prohibitions or one cannot be said to have truly heard them (Q).

22 Many verses in the Quran mention being dumb or unable to speak (2:18, 171; 6:39), and spiritual deafness and blindness are also mentioned frequently (e.g., 5:71; 6:25, 39; 10:42–43); this blindness is a blindness of the heart, not the outward eyes (22:46). The loss of one's spiritual, and hence properly human, faculties resulting in a state comparable to that of animals is also mentioned in 2:171; 7:176, 179; 62:5.

23 This verse is said to have been revealed after the idolaters challenged the Prophet to resurrect the dead as proof of his prophethood (R, Q). It makes explicit a seeming tension between God's allowing understanding to enter people's hearts and people's responsibility for their own actions. Commenting on this verse, some offer a somewhat predestinarian explanation, saying that they would not have believed given "His eternal Knowledge of their state of disbelief (*kufr*)" (Q, R). This would mean that in His eternal Knowledge God knows them to be disbelievers; so it would be impossible for them to become believers

to hear, they would have turned away in rejection. (24) O you who believe! Respond to God and the Messenger when he calls you unto that which will give you life. And know that God comes between a man and his heart, and that unto Him shall you be gathered. (25) And be mindful of a trial that will not befall only those among you who do wrong; and know that God is severe in retribution. (26) And remember when you were few, deemed weak in the land, fearing that the people would snatch you away. Then He sheltered you, and strengthened you with His help, and provided you with good things, that haply

after being made to hear the truth, since this would entail God knowing something that was not (R). It is used as a support for the notion that some people are destined for Hell and that this is unchangeable. See the essay "The Quran and Islamic Schools of Theology and Philosophy."

From another perspective, this verse evokes the Quranic theme that knowledge can be a trial and that, in a sense, it exposes the recipient of that knowledge to the danger of rejecting it. Jesus' apostles are warned against this after they ask for a table from Heaven, to which God says in 5:115: *I shall indeed send it down unto you. But whosoever among you disbelieves thereafter, I shall surely punish him.* From one point of view it can be said that it is a mercy to conceal from someone, if only temporarily, a truth that they may reject, because such rejection could possibly cement in them an attitude of disbelief and rejection. From another perspective, as discussed in 2:7c, to be cut off from hearing or understanding the truth is a punishment as such, and not only because it leads to perdition in the Hereafter.

24 *That which will give you life* is the truth, or the Quran itself (Ṭ), meaning something that gives life to the heart (Q) or that bears the commands and prohibitions that will lead to the mode of everlasting life in the Hereafter (Q). This verse could also mean that one should respond to the call to fighting in the way of God, since death in the way of God would lead to everlasting felicity (Q).

That *God comes between a man and his heart* is interpreted to mean that He comes between a disbeliever and faith, or between a believer and disbelief (Ṭ), or that nothing is hidden from God, even the innermost dimensions of one's being (Ṭ). In this sense it resembles the statement in 50:16: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.* It can also mean that God has the power to change hearts, as when He changed the fear in the hearts of the participants of the Battle of Badr into a sense of security (Q; see v. 11). The notion of being gathered unto God is mentioned throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:203; 3:158; 5:96; 6:38; 23:79; 58:9; 67:24) and is related to the idea, also often mentioned in the Quran, of all things being returned to God (e.g., 2:210; 3:109; 8:44).

25 *Trial* renders *fitnah*, a word that can also mean "temptation," "sedition," or "strife" (see 2:190–94c). Many interpret the verse as pertaining specifically to those participants in the Battle of Badr who later came to fight each other on the Battle of the Camel (i.e., the initial battle of the First Civil War during the caliphate of ʿAlī). One Companion is quoted as having referenced this verse in the context of that battle, "I did not know what was meant by that verse until today" (Q).

Al-Qurṭubī mentions a *ḥadīth* that sets forth the parable of a ship with some people above deck and others below. If, rather than ask those above for water, those riding below punctured a hole in the hull to get water themselves, the whole ship would sink (Q). This means that doing wrong and allowing wrong to be done can have an effect that spreads to those who had no role in it, since human beings often have no choice but to be affected by the actions and states of others with whom they exist in community.

26 This verse refers to the weak and persecuted state in which the Muslims were living in Makkah, before they migrated to Madinah,

you may give thanks. (27) O you who believe! Betray not God and the Messenger, and betray not your trusts knowingly. (28) And know that your property and your children are only a trial, and that God—with Him is a great reward. (29) O you who believe! If you reverence God, He will make for you a criterion, and absolve you of your evil deeds, and forgive you. And God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. (30) And [remember] when those who disbelieve plotted against thee, to capture thee, or to slay thee, or to expel thee. They plotted, and God plotted. And God is the best of plotters. (31) And when Our signs are recited unto them they say, "We have heard already. Had we willed, we could have

where they were *sheltered* and strengthened, as evidenced by their success at the Battle of Badr (IK, Q).

27 The significance of being faithful to one's trust is also mentioned in 2:283, 4:58, 23:8; 70:32. Some commentators try to link this Command to have trust with certain historical incidents related to later battles, but those would seem to be out of sequence in what is essentially a discussion of the Battle of Badr.

28 This verse is similar in message to 64:14: *Among your spouses and your children there is indeed an enemy unto you; so be wary of them.* This verse would also reflect the general theme of this part of the *sūrah* that good things can also be trials, such as victory on the battlefield (v. 17) and the spoils of war (v. 1).

29 *Criterion* renders *furqān,* a word that has different shades of meaning in the Quran and is itself a name for the Quran; see 3:3–4c; 2:53, 185; 21:48; 25:1. *Furqān* comes from a root with the meaning of separation and division and can mean "discernment," or that by which things are distinguished. It can also refer to a faculty or light within one's heart by which one is able to separate truth from falsehood, as in 39:22, which speaks of *one whose breast God has expanded for submission, such that he follows a light from his Lord* (IK, R). This latter verse sets up illumination or knowledge as a consequence of reverence or goodness, and al-Rāzī says, "When the heart becomes illuminated by obedience to God, darkness falls away from it, because the knowledge of God is a light, and these faults are different kinds of darkness, and when light manifests itself it necessarily leads to the disappearance of darkness."

30 This verse refers to the persecution that the Prophet personally suffered in Makkah, when, after losing the protection of his uncle Abū Ṭālib, he was often exposed to mortal danger and to sanctions that eventually resulted in the migration to Madinah, during which he was pursued by Makkans who wished to eliminate him. The final refrain of this verse is almost identical to 3:54, and a similar message about God's plotting overcoming the plots of human beings can be found in 10:21; 13:42; 14:46; 16:26; 27:50; it is also related to 68:45: *Truly My scheme is firm.* When used of God, "plotter" (*mākir*) does not have the pejorative connotation usually connected with it. Rather, it means that God is a better "planner" than those who plot against Him.

31 The disbelievers' attempts to dismiss the Quran as being nothing more than *fables of those of old* is also mentioned in 6:25; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15. The disbelievers' claim that they *could have said the like of this* is also related to the question of the inimitability or miraculous nature of the Quran as a sacred book. See commentary on 2:23: *If you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down unto Our servant, then bring a* sūrah *like it, and call your witnesses apart from God if you are truthful,* and the essay "Obstacles Faced in the Translation of the Quran." Similar challenges to produce something like the Quran are made in 10:38; 11:13; 17:88.

said the like of this. This is naught but fables of those of old." (32) And [remember] when they said, "O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment." (33) But God will not punish them while thou art among them. And God will not punish them while they seek forgiveness. (34) What have they to keep God from punishing them, while they turn [others] from the Sacred Mosque though they are not its protectors? Its protectors are none but the reverent, but most of them know not. (35) Their prayer at the House is naught but whistling and clapping. So taste the punishment for having disbelieved! (36) Truly those who disbelieve spend their wealth to turn [others] from the way of God. They will spend it; then it will be a source of regret for them, and then they will be overcome. And the disbelievers will be gathered unto Hell, (37) that God may separate the bad from the good,

32 This verse contains an example of the type of cynical challenges, made by those who deny the Prophet, to bring down a punishment upon them if he is telling the truth, as in 17:90–93; 22:47; 26:204; 29:53; 37:176; 42:18; 51:14.

33–34 When read in connection with the previous verse, these verses evoke the message of 29:31–32, where the destruction of Lot's people takes place only after he and his family leave the city, as well as the account of Hūd in 11:58. In this case, on the one hand, the punishment is withheld by the presence of the Prophet or a sincere state of repentance among some of the people (*while they seek forgiveness*), but, on the other, unjust control and restriction of the Kaʿbah leave the Quraysh gravely liable to such punishment. *While they seek forgiveness* is interpreted to mean "If they seek forgiveness," that is, on the condition that they seek forgiveness (IK, Ṭ). Or it can refer to either the believers who were still in Makkah and had not migrated to Madinah (Q, Ṭ) or the meager amount of repentance or forgiveness sought by those idolaters who at least had some notion of God, since they would also pray for forgiveness when they made their circumambulations around the Kaʿbah (Q).

The idolaters kept the Muslims who had migrated to Madinah from visiting the Kaʿbah to perform their rituals there. Being allowed to visit Makkah to perform the rites would later be made a condition of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (628); see 2:114c; 2:190–94c; and *Sūrah* 48. *Protectors,* which renders *awliyāʾ* (sing. *walī*), has here the sense of "custodians," specifically referring to the Kaʿbah's rightful protectors and custodians.

35 It is said that while the Prophet was still in Makkah and would pray near the Kaʿbah, the idolaters would attempt to disrupt his prayer by *whistling and clapping* beside him (R). However, others said that the *whistling and clapping* was actually an established part of the pagan rituals performed at the Kaʿbah in pre-Islamic times (R).

36 The Makkans created and gave material support to the army that set out to fight the Prophet and his followers, since many had a stake in the caravan that was coming from Syria (Z; see 8:5c). Some think that this verse refers especially to Abū Sufyān, who used his wealth to fight the Prophet (R).

37 Similar language is used in 3:179, which also speaks of God separating *the bad from the good.* The plain sense would seem to point to this separation taking place in the Hereafter, but some say it can also refer to good and bad being separated from each other in this world (IK), as when the fighting in the context of the Battle of Uḥud (3:179) separated the sincere followers of the Prophet from the hypocrites.

and place the bad one upon the other and heap them all together, and place them in Hell. It is they who are the losers. (38) Say to the disbelievers that, if they desist, what is past will be forgiven them, but if they relapse, then the wont of those of old has already passed. (39) And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is wholly for God. But if they desist, then truly God sees whatsoever they do. (40) And if they turn away, know that God is your Master—an excellent Master, an excellent Helper! (41) And know that whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and the Messenger, and for kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler, if you believe in God and what We sent down upon Our servant on the Day of Discrimination, the day the two hosts met—and God is

38 According to some commentators, this verse means that the disbelievers should stop their enmity and hostility and embrace Islam (IK). The last clause refers to God's wont of destroying persistently corrupt and evil peoples (IK). *Wont* can also refer to both what people do and what they undergo. In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "Submission (*islām*) cuts off what came before it, and repentance cuts off what came before it."

However, this verse says nothing explicitly about the disbelievers becoming Muslims, and "forgiveness" can refer to the cessation of hostilities and the resolution of grievances. Cf. 2:192–93: *But if they desist, then truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers.*

39–40 For v. 39, see also the similar verse 2:193: *And fight them until there is no strife, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers.* Al-Rāzī explains that *strife* (*fitnah*), which can also mean "trial" or "temptation," refers to the persecution the Muslims endured at the hands of the Makkan idolaters, both before and after the *hijrah*. Even after the *hijrah,* Muslims still residing in Makkah were treated badly and oppressed severely by the idolaters. This verse orders the believers to fight until this strife or trial (*fitnah*) is gone. In al-Rāzī's view, they must be fought until religion is wholly for God, but he understands it as pertaining only to the environs around Makkah and not extended to the whole world. According to al-Rāzī, the reason for fighting is the cessation of *fitnah,* which is only possible with the disappearance of the forces of disbelief.

Some gloss *strife* as meaning idolatry or polytheism (*shirk;* IK, Ṭ). Others maintain that, in keeping with al-Rāzī's reasoning above, it means one should struggle until Muslims are not tried in their own religion (IK). On the question of fighting until there is no more *fitnah,* or strife, see 2:216c, and for a more general discussion of these topics see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

41 Here *take as spoils* renders the verbal form of *ghanīmah,* which has the meaning of anything one acquires through exertion, but which has taken on the technical meaning in Sunni legal tradition of those things that are taken legitimately in war (Q). It is usually distinguished from *fayʾah,* which refers to anything that is taken through peaceful means, such as a property tax (*kharāj*) or the indemnity or tax on non-Muslims (*jizyah*). Others, however, consider the two terms to be synonymous (Q). This verse is usually discussed in relation to v. 1 (see 8:1c); some jurists believe that one abrogates the other, though most see v. 41 as a specification of the ruling given in v. 1 (Q, R).

Many maintain that the fifth that is *for God and the Messenger* is itself divided into five parts, the other four parts going to *kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler,* though a minority opinion states this fifth should be divided into six parts, with God and the Messenger receiving two individual sixths and the other four a sixth each

Powerful over all things— 42 when you were on the near slope and they were on the far slope, and the caravan was below you. And had you made a tryst with each other, you would have failed the tryst. But [it came to pass] so that God may conclude a matter that was to be done, so that whosoever should perish, perishes according to a clear proof, and whosoever should live, lives according to a clear proof. And truly God is Hearing, Knowing. 43 [Remember] when God showed them in thy dream as being few. And hadst thou seen them as being many, you would have surely faltered and quarreled over the matter. But

(R). Most Sunnīs accept that after the Prophet the political leader of the community assumes responsibility for this fifth and for the distribution of the spoils more generally. The commentators note that there is disagreement regarding the identity of *kinsfolk* (*dhu'l-qurbā*), but insofar as it concerns the degree of closeness to the Prophet, some restrict it to his immediate clan, the Banū Hāshim, while other opinions extend it to the entire tribe of Quraysh (IK, R, Ṭs).

Shiites have a much more expansive view of *ghanīmah,* and thus the fifth is taken from sources that extend to income beyond spoils of war, including minerals extracted from the land or from the sea (which is also applied in a much more restricted way by Sunnis); surplus income from trade or work beyond a certain level; and found treasure; as well as spoils of war (Ṭs). The recipients of this fifth, or *khumus,* include the descendants of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*); after the period of the Prophet and the Imams, it is the Shiite scholars (or more exactly the *mujtahids,* those who are qualified to independently interpret Islamic Law) who act as representatives of the Hidden Imam and who receive and distribute this wealth.

The *Day of Discrimination* (*furqān*) refers to the Battle of Badr, meaning that it was a day when truth was separated from falsehood (Q); "separation" is one of the meanings of *furqān* (see 8:29c). *The two hosts* refer to the armies of the believers and the idolaters (R).

42 *Near slope . . . far slope . . . caravan below:* the two armies were on two sides of a valley with the caravan of Abū Sufyān below them in the direction of the sea (R). *You would have failed the tryst* means that the Muslims would not have agreed to go out to meet such a superior army in battle if they had prior knowledge of it (Q); for more detail on the events leading up to the battle, see 8:5c.

To *live* or *perish according to a clear proof* echoes the separation of *the bad from the good* in v. 37 and the idea that the Battle of Badr was a *Day of Discrimination* between one side and the other, in that *the good and the bad,* the true and the false, were put to the test and made manifest through the Battle of Badr.

The battle is described as *a matter that was to be done,* meaning that it necessarily had to come to pass (R). *A clear proof* is interpreted by some to refer to the rain that came just before the battle and miraculously reversed the advantage the Makkans had of being on firmer ground with the Muslims on softer ground (see 8:11c); others see it more broadly as the fact that the smaller and poorly equipped army of the Muslims defeated the well-armed contingent of Quraysh, which was three times its size (R).

43 According to commentators the Prophet had a dream before the battle in which he saw the opposing army as being relatively few in number, and he conveyed this message to the believers; a minority opinion states that this vision was not during sleep (usually denoted by the word used in this verse, *manām*), but occurred in a waking state (Q, R). The verse then switches from the second-person singular (*hadst thou seen*) to the second-person plural (*you would have*), denoting a shift from addressing the Prophet to addressing the believers as a whole, and repeats a message similar to that of v. 42, namely, that had they known what

God delivered [you]. Truly He knows what lies within breasts. (44) And [remember] when He showed them to you, when you met them, as being few in your eyes, and made you appear to be few in their eyes, so that God may conclude a matter that was to be done. And unto God are all matters returned. (45) O you who believe! When you meet a company in battle, be firm and remember God much, that haply you may prosper. (46) And obey God and His Messenger, and do not quarrel among yourselves lest you falter and your good fortune depart. And be patient; truly God is with the patient. (47) And be not like those who left their homes boastfully and to be seen of men, and to turn [others] from the way of God. And God encompasses whatsoever they do.

they would be facing, they would have lost heart and avoided the battle.

44 In this verse it is the believers who are shown the opposing army as being few in number. It is reported that the Companion Ibn Masᶜūd said to a man beside him, "Would you say they are seventy?" to which the man replied, "They are close to a hundred." Later, they asked a prisoner how many they were, and he said, "We were a thousand" (Q); for more on the question of perceiving the opposing army as being of a different size, see 3:13c. Some interpret the verse to mean that God made each side appear smaller to the other, so that neither would shrink from the battle and God could *conclude a matter that was to be done* (see also v. 42; IK).

45 This verse is understood to show the paramount importance of remembering God in even the most distracting and tumultuous situations and that one's heart should never be empty of the remembrance of God (R). The idea of remembering God much is also mentioned in 26:227; 33:21, 35, 41; 62:10, the last of which is most similar to this verse. Some see this as being a more specific Command to pray to God for help and victory when they are going into battle (R). To truly prosper is not to seek after worldly spoils, but to achieve everlasting felicity, which is only possible through sincere intention and achieved through remembering God (R).

46 Here *good fortune* renders *rīḥ* (lit. "wind"), which some commentators gloss as "a turn [in fortune]" (Z) or victory (Ṭ); it is an idiomatic usage denoting the passing of advantage or power from someone to someone else (Q). Some explain that the "wind" of the Companions departed at the Battle of Uḥud when they did precisely what this verse warns against (R). The wind is something over which one has no control (Aj) and thus can symbolize turns of fortune. Among the Arabs the "west wind" (*dabūr*), meaning from the west, was considered unpropitious, while the "east wind" (*ṣabā*), meaning from the east, was thought to be a harbinger of blessings. In this regard, some commentators mention a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "I was helped by the east wind, and the ᶜĀd were destroyed by the west wind" (Q). The wind that destroyed them is mentioned in 41:16, 46:24, 51:41; 54:19; 69:6. The theme of the wind, which had a rich vocabulary even among the pre-Islamic Arabs, is an important theme in the Quran; see 30:48–49c.

47 This verse refers to the Makkans who left their homes to protect their caravan (see 8:5c) and to defeat the Prophet and his followers (Q). Here, as in many other instances, *to turn* (*ṣadda*) can have the meaning both of hindering someone from a path and of diverting oneself from a path. Therefore, though the most obvious sense of the verse is that the Makkans sought to stop the believers from following the way of God, the verb *ṣadda* can also be read to mean that they themselves abandoned and forsook the way of God. *Encompasses* (*muḥīṭ*) carries the sense of encompassing knowledge and awareness (R) as well as presence or power.

Regarding *those who left their homes boastfully*, it is reported that the Quraysh led by Abū Jahl

(48) And [remember] when Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them, and said, "None among mankind shall overcome you today, and I am indeed your defender." But when the two hosts saw each other, he turned on his heels and said, "I am quit of you! Truly I see what you see not. Truly I fear God, and God is severe in retribution." (49) [Remember] when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease said, "Their religion has deluded them." But whosoever trusts in God, truly God is Mighty, Wise. (50) And if only thou couldst see when the angels take those who disbelieve, striking their faces and their backs, and

were given the news that the caravan that they sought to protect was now safe, since it had taken the road near the sea, away from Badr, where the Muslims were planning to meet them. But the Makkans pressed on, and Abū Jahl was reported to have boasted that he would not turn back until they reached Badr, enjoyed wine and song, and let other groups of people remain in fear of them, that is, the Makkans (Q).

48 That *Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them* (cf. 16:63; 27:24; 29:38) is interpreted by some to mean that he whispered to them not physically, but inwardly to their souls (R). According to this interpretation, they were impelled by the pride and vanity mentioned in the previous verse, but when they came to the battlefield, their overconfidence disappeared, which caused them to suffer a defeat.

Other commentators mention an account in which Satan took the form of a leader of a tribe whom the Quraysh feared would attack them because they had killed one of its men; they were thus exposed to a two-front battle with the Muslims on one side and tribal enemies on the other. According to this version, Satan (in human form) promised the Makkans the help of his tribe, but left before the battle began (Q).

*I see what you see not* refers to seeing the angels who were on the side of the Muslims (R). According to the interpretation that the idolaters were goaded by the whisperings of Satan, this could mean that the power of the angels in giving strength and resolve to the believers was too great to resist; in any case Satan would not have had the best interests of the idolaters in mind, since they too were human beings created by God, all of whom Satan vowed to mislead (see 4:117–19c; 7:16–17c). Assuming that the angels did actually participate in battle, this would have meant an actual retreat by Satan from the battlefield in the form he had allegedly assumed.

49 Some commentators, such as al-Qurṭubī, believe that the *hypocrites* and *those in whose hearts is a disease* are simply descriptions of the same people and do not refer to distinct groups (cf. 33:12). For others, the *hypocrites* refers to some members of the Madinan tribes of Aws and Khazraj, while *those in whose hearts is a disease* refers to certain Muslims who became Muslim while the Prophet was in Makkah, but whose faith was not strong enough to make them migrate to Madinah (R). These people are said to have believed that the Prophet and his followers were deluded, because they left with a little over three hundred people against a well-equipped army of a thousand (R); some commentators connect this alleged delusion with their small numbers being made to seem even smaller (Ṭ; see 8:44c), meaning they believed that the believers were deluded because they appeared to be even fewer than they were.

50 At one level, the disbelievers, who themselves struck at the faces and the backs of the believers, will have the same punishment inflicted upon them after they die (R). Al-Rāzī gives a deeper interpretation of this verse, saying that *striking at their faces* refers to the fact that when the disbelievers are taken in death by the angels and face the Hereafter, all that is before them will be dark, and *striking at . . . their backs* means they will leave the worldly goods they love behind them and will long to recover them. See also 6:93:

[saying], "Taste the punishment of the burning! (51) This is for what your hands sent forth, and because God wrongs not His servants." (52) [Theirs was] like the way of the House of Pharaoh and those before them; they disbelieved in the signs of God; so God seized them for their sins. Truly God is Strong, severe in retribution. (53) That is because God never changes a blessing by which He blesses a people until they change what is in themselves, and because God is Hearing, Knowing. (54) [Theirs was] like the way of the House of Pharaoh and those before them; they denied the signs of their Lord, so We destroyed them for their sins, and drowned the House of Pharaoh, for all were wrongdoers. (55) Truly the worst of beasts in the sight of God are those who have disbelieved and will not believe, (56) those among them with whom thou madest a pact and who then break their pact every time, and who are not reverent. (57) So if thou comest upon them in war, use them to scatter those who will come after them, that haply they might be reminded. (58) And if thou fearest treachery from a people, withdraw from them in a just way. Truly God loves not the treacherous.

*If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are in the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, "Yield up your souls!"*

51 Cf. 3:182; 22:10. *And because God wrongs not [His] servants,* which is interpreted to mean that their punishment is just (Z), is understood grammatically by some to be a new sentence, so that it would read, "And truly God wrongs not..." (R).

52–54 Here the word *way* renders *da'b,* which means a habit, custom, or practice; cf. 3:11. Some commentators understand this *da'b* as both what they did as a matter of habit and what happened to them, namely, destruction or defeat for their evil actions (Q); that is, their way was both what they perpetrated and what they suffered.

In its most general sense, *God never changes a blessing by which He blesses a people until they change what is in themselves* means that God gives human beings intelligence, strength, free will, and good things in life, so that they can worship God and do good, but when they turn away from these blessings in favor of sin and lack of faith, they have changed what is in themselves (R; cf. 13:11). In this specific context, some see this verse as referring to God's blessing the Quraysh by sending them a prophet who was one of them, in response to which they denied him and chased him out (Ṭ). For a longer account of the story of Moses and Pharaoh, see 7:103–36.

55 On the *worst of beasts,* see v. 22.

56 It is thought that, beyond the general message, this verse is referencing the tribes of al-Naḍīr and Qurayẓah, who, though they had initially made an alliance with the Prophet, betrayed him by later cooperating with the idolaters (Q).

57 The instruction in this verse is to make an example of those who break pacts in order to give pause to those who would come after them and also would seek to break their pacts (Q, R, Ṭ).

58 When the believers make a treaty and there are clear signs that the other group is going to act treacherously, the believers are commanded to give them fair warning that they will withdraw from the treaty, without acting under any pretense that they (the believers) are still abiding by the terms of the treaty. However, if the other side breaks the treaty first, there is no obligation to give them any warning (R). In discussing how suspicion, and not certainty, could lead to withdrawing from an

(59) And let not those who disbelieve suppose that they have outstripped [anyone]. Indeed, they thwart nothing. (60) And prepare for them what you can of strength [of arms] and horses tethered [for battle], frightening thereby the enemy of God and your enemy, and others besides them whom you know not. God knows them. Whatsoever you spend in the way of God shall be paid unto you in full. And you shall not be wronged. (61) And if they incline toward peace, incline thou toward it, and trust in God. Truly He is the Hearing, the Know-

agreement, al-Qurṭubī argues that if the other side withdraws patently by breaking the terms, withdrawal from the agreement is moot, since the treaty is broken by their very action. One enters into a treaty only when one has a reasonable expectation that the other side will uphold it, and conversely one can reasonably withdraw when that expectation no longer holds. The verse is worded as it is so that there will be an "equality of knowledge" between the two sides, meaning that the withdrawal will be done to bring the two sides back to their situation before the treaty was signed; the withdrawal is not to be used as a stratagem of war. *In a just way* renders *ʿalā sawāʾ*, and some commentators state that this phrase indicates that the reason for withdrawal is not to create an unfair advantage, but to make things equal or level (*sawāʾ*) between the two sides (Q).

59 Some read the first part of this verse to mean, "Do not suppose that those who disbelieve have outstripped" (Q, R, Ṭ). "Outstrip" here is understood to mean something like "escape" (IK, Z). The notion of the disbelievers not being able to thwart or frustrate God or His signs appears several times in the Quran, including in 9:2–3; 11:20; 24:57; 29:22; 35:44; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12.

60 On *horses tethered*, see the discussion of *ribāṭ* ("tethering") in 3:200c. *Strength [of arms]* refers to the weapons of war (Q). Some commentators interpret *others . . . whom you know not* to mean any unknown or yet to be known enemy (Q), but some say the unknown enemy here refers to the hypocrites who claimed to be Muslims, but kept their enmity toward the Prophet a secret (Ṭ). Others say that it refers to people in other lands (such as the Persians or Byzantines) or even to the jinn (Ṭ). *Whatsoever you spend* refers to the expenditure that the believers are commanded to make in order to prepare themselves for battle against the enemy, mentioned earlier in the verse (Aj). As with many passages dealing with warfare, this verse can also be interpreted symbolically and as a spiritual allegory, referring to the combat that the soul undertakes against its enemies—namely, its worldly desires and ignorance. According to this interpretation, *others besides them whom you know not* refers to the hidden vices of the soul, like secret pride (Aj). *Whatsoever you spend . . . shall be paid unto you in full* and similar phrases constitute a common refrain in the Quran (e.g., 2:281; 3:161; 16:111).

61 Like other verses pertaining to peace and war with non-Muslims, there is disagreement over whether verses such as this one, which have a message of peace and reconciliation, are abrogated by verses thought to be revealed later in time that command the believers to fight. For some, this verse instructing the Muslims *to incline toward* peace if their enemies do the same is not abrogated and is consistent with the practice of accepting the *jizyah* (see 9:29)—an indemnity paid by non-Muslims living peacefully within the Islamic state; on these and similar questions see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran." Al-Qurṭubī points out that the Prophet and the early Companions accepted *jizyah* and left people as they were, even though they were capable of destroying them.

Al-Qurṭubī also discusses the notion of a truce or armistice (*hudnah*) with idolaters, such as the one the Prophet himself entered into at Ḥudaybiyah, whose term was ten years; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48. Although there are various opinions regarding the term of such a truce, most specify ten years, following the Prophet's example at Ḥudaybiyah; some, however, argue that it should be less than this, while others say there

ing. (62) And if they desire to deceive thee, then God suffices thee. He it is Who supports thee with His Help, and with the believers, (63) and joined their hearts. Hadst thou spent all that is on the earth, it would not have joined their hearts. But God joined them together. Truly He is Mighty, Wise. (64) O Prophet! God suffices thee and those believers who follow thee. (65) O Prophet! Rouse the believers to fight. If there be twenty steadfast among you, they shall overcome two hundred. And if there be one hundred of you, they shall overcome one thousand of those who disbelieve, because they are a people who understand not. (66) Now God has lightened your burden, for He knows that there is weakness in you. And if there be one hundred steadfast among you, they shall overcome

is no limit to how long a truce can last. He also mentions different kinds of arrangements, including those where no wealth or tax was transferred to the Islamic state, and even arrangements where the Muslims might pay the enemy, as in the case after the Battle of the Trench (5/627) when the Prophet gave a third of the date harvest of Madinah to the Ghaṭafān tribe, so that they would leave and forsake the Quraysh.

62 This verse, which continues from the previous one, concerns the *desire to deceive* in the peace overtures (R). It is understood to mean that one should rely on the outward actions of those who *incline toward peace* (v. 61), which is to be distinguished from the fear of treachery mentioned in v. 58; that is, there is a difference between passive hypocrisy and a concrete intention to act maliciously. Al-Rāzī believes that v. 58 refers to the latter, while this verse refers to the former; see also 9:1–4c, which addresses the withdrawal from a treaty. *With His help, and with the believers* means that God supports the Prophet by means of help directly from Him and from the believers who follow him, which is to say both directly and indirectly (R).

63 This verse is generally believed to refer to the Helpers (*Anṣār*), the Arab tribes of Madinah who embraced Islam and welcomed the Prophet and the Makkan Muslims who came with him (the *Muhājirūn,* or Emigrants). Madinah's two main Arab tribes, the Aws and Khazraj, had a long history of conflict and hostility (see also 2:84; 3:100, 122) resulting from a vendetta culture of pride and honor (Q, R). That their enmity was overcome and replaced by mutual love and sacrifice is considered to be a proof of the Prophet's veracity and sincerity (Q, R, Ṭ).

64–66 Most commentators take vv. 65–66 to constitute Commands and not only descriptions, because if they were descriptions of what actually happens, they would always hold true, since it is God speaking, but they do not in fact always hold true (Aj, R). In one interpretation of how these verses fit together, it is said that v. 65 was revealed and caused alarm among some Companions, who lamented their state of exile and weakness in the face of the enemy, after which God lightened their burden by revealing v. 66 (IK). According to some v. 65 refers to the time when Muslims were few in number, but later, when they became greater in number, the obligation was changed (R).

Those who deny any kind of abrogation (such as Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī) state that v. 65 was a Command, but with the condition that they be capable of patience and steadfastness in the face of ten-to-one odds, and that v. 66 shows that this patience was not present in them; thus v. 65 states what the Command is, given certain conditions (namely, the presence of that level of patience), while v. 66 shows that this level of patience was not reached, and God knew this weakness was in them. Another reason to suppose that there is no abrogation is that one verse immediately follows the other, and such abrogation is considered unusual and unlikely (R).

two hundred. And if there be one thousand, they shall overcome two thousand by God's Leave. And God is with the steadfast. (67) It is not for a prophet to take captives until he overwhelms [his enemy] in the land. You desire the ephemeralities of this world, while God desires the Hereafter. And God is Mighty, Wise. (68) Were it not for a decree that had already gone forth from God, a great punishment would have befallen you for what you took. (69) So consume the spoils you have taken, lawfully and in a good way, and reverence God. Truly God is

Al-Rāzī offers an interpretation "known only to those of spiritual discipline and vision," namely, that those whose hearts are filled with spiritual knowledge and understanding are fearsome to creation, and when hearts are mastered by the light of knowing God, it strengthens and empowers them, and they are capable of actions not possible before.

67–69 In most accounts, before deciding what to do with the seventy prisoners taken at the Battle of Badr, the Prophet consulted his Companions. Abū Bakr was in favor of letting them live and releasing them for ransom, arguing that even though they were enemies, they were still kin, that the money received for their release would strengthen the Muslim community, and that in the fullness of time perhaps they would even be guided to Islam. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb argued that they should be executed, because of their previous acts of aggression and persecution against the Prophet and his community, and because some of them were important leaders in this hostility (IK, Q, Ṭ). The prisoners were eventually ransomed.

One interpretation of this passage is that some of the believers were hasty in taking spoils. It is an Islamic belief that up until this point no prophet was permitted to take spoils (see 8:1c); rather, spoils were destroyed (Ṭ). This may refer to the *herem* ban in the Torah tradition that required certain conquered cities to be utterly destroyed, including any spoils; Saul is rebuked by Samuel for sparing the king of the Amalekites and keeping their best cattle (1 Samuel 15). *You desire the ephemeralities of this world* (spoken in the second-person plural, denoting the believers as a group) is understood as a reference to the haste with which the spoils were pursued, not by the Prophet, but by some of his followers.

The verb rendered by *overwhelms* has the sense both of manifesting power and of sapping the power of one's opponent. It is often incorrectly translated "make wide slaughter," but this meaning applies only when the verb is in a construction with the word "slaughter/killing," which it is not here. To kill many of the enemy is an interpretation offered by some commentators (Ṭ), but this is not based upon the literal meaning of the word.

That *God desires the Hereafter* means that the Hereafter is superior to this world and is the greatest good (Q). *Were it not for a decree* is interpreted to mean either that the rules on taking spoils were already decided, or that there was a special dispensation for the participants of the Battle of Badr, or that in a general way God would not take anyone to account until they were first warned about the rightness or wrongness of a deed (Q). Some interpret this to mean that those who commit a deed that they believe to be forbidden, but that is not forbidden in the Eyes of God, are not punished for it (Q). For some it means that God first "rebuked" them for it, then made it permissible (Ṭ).

Al-Rāzī interprets vv. 67–69 to mean that the reason that the Prophet should not take prisoners until he becomes an overwhelming force that enervates his enemies is to create fear and awe in the disbelievers, so that they would not rise up in war against the believers again; according to this argument, taking prisoners and ransoming them would lead only to greater death and bloodshed in the future, because the enemy would be emboldened with a belief that they could still strike an effective blow, thus prolonging and widening the harm. One could further interpret this verse to mean that, if one has reached the point of taking prisoners, one is already in the situation of open war. Early in such hostilities, it is unlikely that the enemy would rest after paying ransom

Forgiving, Merciful. (70) O Prophet! Say to those captives in your custody, "If God knows there to be any good in your hearts, He will give you what is better than that which was taken from you, and will forgive you. And God is Forgiving, Merciful." (71) But if they desire treachery against thee, they have been treacherous with God before and He gave [thee] power over them. And God is Knowing, Wise. (72) Truly those who believe, and migrate, and strive with their wealth and themselves in the way of God, and those who sheltered and helped—they are protectors of one another. As for those who believe and did not migrate, you owe them no protection until they migrate. But if they ask your help for the sake of religion, then help is a duty upon you, except against a people

for prisoners. In fact, it is reported that some Companions, including ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, said regarding the prisoners of Badr, "If you wish, ransom them and enjoy the ransom, and have the like number of you become martyrs."

As a spiritual allegory, this passage is interpreted to mean that for those on the spiritual path, their goal should not be to have followers or devotees over whom they could exert influence—rather they must totally dominate and slay the ego (Aj).

70 It is thought that this verse refers to the Prophet's uncle ʿAbbās and others who were with him. According to one account, the Prophet demanded a certain amount of ransom for the release of ʿAbbās that was more than that requested for other prisoners. When ʿAbbās claimed to be unable to pay that amount, the Prophet said, "What about the gold you entrusted to your wife?" ʿAbbās, stunned that the Prophet could know what only his wife would know, testified that he must be a true prophet and accepted Islam (although some doubt the authenticity of this account). In any case, the ransom still had to be paid, and ʿAbbās's ransom released ʿAbbās and three others (Q). The Prophet is commanded to say to them—meaning those who claimed to be Muslims, but who were still prisoners paying a ransom—that God *will give you what is better than that which was taken from you,* referring to material goods in this life, in comparison with the rewards of the Hereafter (Q).

71 This is understood to mean that if the captives are not true in their attestations to faith and go back to their old ways, then they were treacherous before and God still gave the believers *power over them;* namely, He gave them a victory at the Battle of Badr (R).

72 Those who *migrate, and strive with their wealth and themselves in the way of God* refers to the Emigrants, who migrated from Makkah with the Prophet to Madinah, and *those who sheltered and helped* refers to the Helpers, residents of Madinah who had already embraced Islam and received the Emigrants (Q, R, Ṭ). Here *protection* renders *walāyah,* which has multiple meanings, including friendship, closeness, political authority, protection, and even a relationship of inheritance. Many commentators consider this verse to refer to the relationship of inheritance that the Prophet established between the Emigrants and the Helpers: after the *hijrah* (the migration from Makkah to Madinah) he joined one Helper to each Emigrant in a symbolic brotherhood that entailed a relationship of inheritance and established filiations between them (see 4:33c).

Other commentators see the *walāyah* here as a reference to a relationship of rule or political responsibility, meaning that until the believers who still resided in Makkah migrated to Madinah, the believers in Madinah would have no political authority over them or claim to them (Q, R). Because it is a duty upon the Madinan believers to help the Makkan believers *if they ask your help for the sake of religion,* commentators such as al-Rāzī interpret *you owe them no protection* (*walāyah*) to be a command that is qualified by *then* [such] *help is a*

with whom you have a covenant. And God sees whatsoever you do. (73) As for those who disbelieve, they are protectors of one another. Unless you do the same, there will be a strife in the land, and a great corruption. (74) As for those who believe, and migrate, and strive in the way of God, and those who sheltered and helped, it is they who truly are believers. Theirs is forgiveness and a generous provision. (75) As for those who believe after you and migrate and strive with you, they are [to be counted] among you. But family relations have the strongest claim on one another in the Book of God. Truly God is Knower of all things.

*duty upon you, except against a people with whom you have a covenant;* that is, in general terms they cannot be treated with the same level of *walāyah* as those who migrated and helped, but neither are they to be left without support. One way of understanding al-Rāzī's view is that the nonemigrating believers were not owed protection in an official or legal sense, but were nevertheless brothers in religion and were owed help as a moral and spiritual obligation. Disagreement over whether *walāyah,* rendered here as *protection,* refers to a relationship of inheritance, help, or political alliance has led to general disagreement among commentators over the interpretation of vv. 72–75.

As a spiritual allegory, *those who believe, and migrate . . . and those who sheltered and helped* refers to those who give their whole self to the spiritual life and plunge as deeply as they can into the mysteries of spiritual knowledge, while *those who believe and did not migrate* refers to ordinary believers who are unable to embark on that path, but who nonetheless can benefit from the first group of spiritual travelers in cases of religious doubt and bewilderment (Aj).

73 This verse would seem to indicate that the word rendered as *protection* (*walāyah*) in the previous verse refers not to inheritance, but to help and support, and some commentators interpret it this way, while others hold to the interpretation that this verse means that the disbelievers inherit from one another (Q). *Unless you do the same* means unless you are *protectors of one another.* Warnings against *strife* (*fitnah*) or *corruption* (*fasād*) in the land are found throughout the Quran and refer to a state of conflict, fear, persecution, and mistrust. *Corruption* can refer to both political, moral, and social matters in addition to the degradation and destruction of the natural environment (see commentary on 2:11–12, 30, 205; and especially 30:41).

74 This verse is understood to exalt the Emigrants and the Helpers above all other categories of Muslims, and this rank is seen by most Muslims as forever restricted to them, based upon a *ḥadīth* that states, "There is no migration (*hijrah*) after the victory," thought by most to refer to the conquest of Makkah, but by others to refer to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, which enabled open travel between Makkah and Madinah for the two years previous to the final conquest of Makkah by the Prophet and his followers. Some commentators mention opinions that describe leaving one's homeland to campaign in the way of God as a kind of *hijrah* (Q, R).

75 Even after the initial migration of the Prophet and the Emigrants from Makkah, there was a period—before the conquest of Makkah, which ended the period of migration to Madinah (see 8:74c)—when Muslims in Makkah could still undertake the migration (*hijrah*) and join the other believers in Madinah.

*But family relations have the strongest claim* is often thought to refer to the rights of inheritance. Many commentators mention the relationship of kinship established by the Prophet between the Emigrants and the Helpers, which allowed them to inherit from each other while forbidding them to inherit from disbelievers even if they were blood relations (see 4:33c). Some thus interpret this verse to abrogate that legal situation and replace it with the system of inheritance through blood kinship outlined in 4:11–12. But even on this question there is disagreement; some jurists

see *family* (lit. "womb") *relations* as referring to the agnatic line (male inheritors through male relatives), while others viewed it as referring to female inheritors through female relations (Q). Still others believe that this verse was revealed to eliminate the practice among some people of the time of establishing inheritance relationships by declaration, where one party would agree to inherit from another party and vice versa (R).

Commentators such as al-Rāzī do not believe that there is any abrogation at all. He thus sees this verse as a way of making clear that the *walāyah* mentioned in the previous verses does not extend to inheritance, and that the rights of blood kinsfolk are to be respected. In this interpretation, the *Book of God* refers to the fact that these rules of inheritance are laid out explicitly in the Quran.

# 9

# Repentance

## *al-Tawbah*

The name of this *sūrah, al-Tawbah,* comes from the reference to repentance in v. 3, though some connect it with God's "relenting" toward the Prophet and the believers as mentioned in vv. 117–18 (Āl), since "repent" and "relent" render the same verb with a different preposition following it. Another common name for this *sūrah* is *al-Barāʾah* ("The Repudiation"), a word that appears in its first verse, and several other names are also mentioned by commentators.

This Madinan *sūrah* contains some of the most important passages in the Quran concerning the conduct of war and political relations during peacetime, opening with a passage about how and why the believers should fight the idolatrous Arabs and also certain groups among the People of the Book (vv. 1–29), which is followed by a criticism of the corruption of religious leaders (vv. 29–32). A long passage describes the trials and disagreements that took place within the community over setting out on a military campaign and expands upon the dissension created by the hypocrites in Madinah who did not wish to go out to fight alongside the Prophet (vv. 38–106, 117–27). Loyalty and allegiance are major themes in the latter part of this *sūrah* and are applied to the attitudes of the nomadic Arabs (vv. 97–101), the efforts of some hypocrites to establish a competing mosque in Madinah (vv. 107–110), and the wavering and weakness of some Muslims in their commitment to following the Prophet into battle (vv. 117–18). The rules governing the *zakāh,* or alms, and the giving of charity also figure prominently in this *sūrah* (vv. 58–60, 103–4).

This is the only *sūrah* of the Quran that does not begin with the *basmalah,* the formula *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.* It is reported that Ibn ʿAbbās asked ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib why there was no *basmalah* at the start of this *sūrah.* He responded that the *basmalah* is a statement of security, and this *sūrah* begins with the severing of a covenant and a declaration of conflict, which indicate the opposite of a state of security. When it was pointed out to him that the Prophet sent letters beginning with the *basmalah* to call various hostile groups to embrace Islam, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib responded that this was

precisely a call to God, not the rescinding of a pact; the former leads to peace, the latter to war. Commentators note that it was a custom, even in pre-Islamic times, to omit *In the Name of God* in a message breaking a treaty (Q).

One interpretation of the absence of the *basmalah* at the start of *al-Tawbah* is that it reinforces the connection between the final verse of the previous *sūrah,* which emphasizes the need to separate from the disbelievers—a message given in a different form at the start of this *sūrah* (R). One question that the absence of the *basmalah* has raised for some is whether *al-Anfāl* (*Sūrah* 8) and *al-Tawbah* (*Sūrah* 9) are two *sūrah*s or together make up a single *sūrah,* and it is recorded that there was disagreement among some of the Companions over this question. According to an account attributed to ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, throughout the period of revelation the Prophet would give specific instructions on the placement of *sūrah*s and verses. *Al-Tawbah* was one of the last *sūrah*s to be revealed, and because of its content some Companions believed that it belonged with the preceding *sūrah.* However, because they were unsure whether it was one *sūrah* or two, they placed them next to each other, but without the *basmalah* at the start of *al-Tawbah* (Q, R). In this way, some interpret the absence of the *basmalah* as preserving the difference of opinion between the Companions over the question of the arrangement of the *sūrah*s. Nevertheless, the traditional view accepted by consensus is that it was the Prophet himself who gave the order for the *sūrah*s in the Quran, including considering *Sūrah*s 8 and 9 separate *sūrah*s.

(1) A repudiation from God and His Messenger to those idolaters with whom you made a treaty. (2) So travel freely throughout the land for four months, and know that you cannot thwart God, and that God shall disgrace the disbelievers. (3) And an announcement from God and His Messenger to the people on the day of the greater *ḥajj:* that God and His Messenger have repudiated the idolaters. So, if you repent, it would be better for you. And if you turn away, then know that you cannot thwart God. And give the disbelievers glad tidings of a painful punishment, (4) save for those idolaters with whom you have made a treaty, and who thereafter commit no breach against you, nor support anyone against you. So fulfill the treaty with them for its duration. Truly God loves the

1–4 The first verse of this *sūrah* is an announcement of the annulment of a treaty between the Prophet and the idolaters. *Repudiation* (*barāʾah*) has the sense of being or becoming unallied, being innocent of, or being disassociated from something. Here it means that the existing truce or treaty has come to an end. Regarding the circumstances and the interpretation of this verse there is what Ibn Kathīr calls "considerable disagreement." In one account, this verse is said to refer to the breaking of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, a treaty contracted between the Prophet and the Quraysh that had established a ten-year truce (see *Sūrah* 48). This treaty not only included the Prophet and the Quraysh, but also their respective allies, among whom were the tribes of Banū Khuzāʿah on the side of the Prophet and Banū Bakr on the side of the Quraysh. Banū Bakr later launched an attack on the Banū Khuzāʿah, stemming from a vendetta that preexisted the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, and it was reported that the Quraysh assisted the Banū Bakr with arms and a small number of men (Q). The Prophet considered this act to be a breach of the treaty, thereby nullifying the need to observe the truce, and this ultimately led to the final conquest of Makkah by the Prophet and his followers. According to this account, the repudiation of the treaty is addressed to the Makkans.

According to the majority of commentators, however, this verse was revealed after the conquest of Makkah in 8/630, a year after the breach of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah. There is considerable difference of opinion as to which idolaters are addressed and the legal import of both the *repudiation* (v. 1) and the *announcement* (v. 3). One opinion is that if some idolaters had an existing treaty with the Prophet, a treaty whose term had more than four months remaining, it was reduced to four months, and if they had one that was to expire before four months, it would be extended to a period of four months. Others add to this latter group those with whom the Prophet had made no treaty, so that they would be automatically granted a four-month truce. Yet others interpreted this four-month period to apply only to those idolaters who had less than a four-month treaty or none at all, but would not reduce an already existing treaty that was being faithfully observed. And still others believed that this directive applied only to those who had no preexisting treaty at all, and that anyone else with a treaty in hand would be dealt with according to that treaty, regardless of its term (IJ, Q, Ṭ). For example, Ibn ʿAbbās notes that the Muslims had a treaty with Ḥayy ibn Kinānah that still had nine months left at the time of the *announcement,* and they continued to observe it (R). As for those who interpret this as the rescinding of a treaty with those who had a treaty before, this ruling was considered permissible under certain conditions as outlined in 8:58c, namely, when there is a reasonable expectation that the other side will not fulfill the treaty terms or in cases where they have already in fact violated the treaty (R, Ṭ).

reverent. (5) Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer and give the

There are also disagreements among commentators as to the precise timing of the *four months* mentioned in v. 2 and the end of the sacred months mentioned in v. 5. If the *announcement* of v. 3 was made on the *day of the greater ḥajj*—interpreted to be either the Day of Sacrifice or the Day of ʿArafah (Ṭ; see 2:196c)—it would leave fifty days until the ending of sacred months—that is, the remainder of the pilgrimage month of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah (the twelfth month of the calendar) followed by the entire month of Muḥarram (Ṭ). One view understands this passage to mean that v. 3 addresses the idolaters with whom the Prophet and his followers had no existing treaty, while the group with whom they did have a treaty was given the four months mentioned in vv. 1–2. According to another view, this *repudiation* and *announcement* were made to both groups at the same time, so that the treaty-holding idolaters had four months (until the middle of Rabīʿ al-Thānī, which comes four months after Dhu'l-Ḥijjah) while the nontreaty group had until the end of the sacred months (fifty days from the day of the *announcement*) as mentioned above.

According to still another opinion, this *sūrah* was revealed at the start of Shawwāl (the tenth month of the calendar), thus making the end of the four-month period mentioned in v. 2 coincide with the end of the sacred months as described in v. 5. Yet another opinion is that the period of *four months* refers to those with whom the Muslims had a treaty that was set to expire earlier than four months, and the verse commanded that they grant them four months, while *for its duration* refers to those treaties stipulating a period of more than four months, which the Muslims were thus instructed to observe in full. According to this last opinion, the Prophet was commanded to repudiate the treaties only with those idolaters who had broken it already and to maintain all others. Al-Ṭabarī makes it clear that this passage could not possibly mean that after the lapse of the sacred months the believers were free to kill any idolater; see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

It is important to remember that after the Muslims had conquered Makkah, there were still idolaters in the Arabian Peninsula, and other battles, such as Ḥunayn, remained to be fought (see v. 25). Some idolaters were still coming to the Kaʿbah to perform the pilgrimage rites according to pre-Islamic practices (even though there were no longer any idols to worship). It is reported that, for the first *ḥajj* after the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet sent Abū Bakr to lead the *ḥajj*, and with him sent ʿAlī to announce four matters to those who had assembled in Makkah: only a believing soul shall enter the Garden; no idolater shall approach the Kaʿbah after that year; no one will circumambulate the Kaʿbah naked ever again; and whosoever has a treaty will have that treaty observed according to its terms (Ṭ). Most commentators note that ʿAlī was chosen to make the announcement of the repudiation, because Arab custom demanded that a treaty be broken either by the contracting party—in this case the Prophet himself—or a near kinsman, and the Prophet wanted the message to be understood unambiguously (Q).

5 There is disagreement over whether the *sacred months* in this verse were those four traditionally considered to be sacred by the Arabs (the seventh, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth) mentioned in v. 36, or whether the word translated here as *sacred, ḥurum* (lit. "forbidden"), refers to the fact that the idolaters were given four months of free travel and the believers were forbidden from fighting them (IK).

This passage is significant for debates concerning the use of force. For some, v. 5 of this *sūrah* abrogates all previous treaties and obligations in relation to the idolaters. Other commentators and jurists interpret this to mean that the idolaters are fought by reason of their idolatry and polytheism (Q, R). However, since this passage itself explicitly affirms the validity and propriety of keeping treaties with those idolaters who uphold their side of the treaty in good faith, a more plausible reading of this passage would not see the very fact that certain persons were idolaters as a reason to fight them; on this question see also 2:256c.

alms, then let them go their way. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (6) And if any of the idolaters seek asylum with thee, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of God. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who know not. (7) How can the idolaters have a treaty with God and with His Messenger, save for those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? If they remain true to you, remain true to them. Truly God loves the

From the perspective of the Muslim community, the years of conflict preceding this announcement created a political environment where the idolaters of Arabia could not be left in a position of power and political strength to menace the Muslim community in the future; treaties were indeed often made, but they were just as often broken by the idolaters and their allies. This concern regarding treaties is made explicit in v. 8, which states that if the idolaters were to come into a position of power over the believers, they would not observe *kinship or treaty*. Rather, the idolaters in Arabia would have continued to form a persistent political alliance against the Prophet and the believers. According to this understanding of the political context, the idolaters' conversion to Islam would not have been the purpose of fighting them, though this conversion (based on the plain sense of v. 5) would be the only way for them to ensure their physical security; that is, they could avoid a state of war by renouncing idolatry and disavowing their previous actions and alliances, but being non-Muslim was not their original crime. See also the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

Moreover, v. 13 seems to provide the underlying rationale for why the idolaters were to be treated as hostile: *Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths, and intended to expel the Messenger, and opened [hostility] against you first?* The command of 8:58, establishing the conditions for rescinding a treaty, is some indication of how precarious such treaties could turn out to be, and most famously the Quraysh and their allied tribe of Banū Bakr violated the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (mentioned in 9:1–4c), an act that eventually led to the conquest of Makkah by the Prophet and his followers.

6 This verse says that idolaters could come and hear the Quran and the teachings of Islam and then be taken to a place of safety (Q) until they reached their own home (Ṭ). Commentators record some disagreement as to whether this verse was abrogated by other verses, such as 47:4, *Free them graciously or hold them for ransom, till war lays down its burdens,* which explicitly mentions the option of freeing or ransoming prisoners. The dominant opinion, however, is that neither 9:6 nor 47:4 was abrogated, and that the Prophet and the believers were given the authority to slay the enemy, take them prisoner, or release them from the very beginning of the years of war, beginning with the Battle of Badr in 2/624 (Q, Ṭ). There is some disagreement as to how much of the Quran this verse requires that such a person be made to hear, some saying it should be the entire Quran, others restricting it to this *sūrah,* since it contains the essence of what idolaters need to hear about their situation (R).

7 According to some *those with whom you made a treaty* refers to certain members of Banū Bakr (who had been in alliance with the Quraysh according to the terms of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah) who never violated their treaty with the Prophet even when others did so (R, Q, Ṭ, Th); see 9:1–4c. Other commentators believe that this verse refers to the Banū Khuzāʿah, who were allied with the Prophet, or even to the Quraysh (Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī believes that this verse could refer only to those members of Banū Bakr who did not violate the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, arguing that at the time these verses were revealed (after the conquest of Makkah) there were no remaining non-Muslim members of Khuzāʿah, and the Quraysh held no treaty, because they had violated it and rendered it null and void. Al-Thaʿlabī records an account that it also refers to certain members of the Quraysh who were given that period of four months to either become Muslims or accept exile in a land of their choosing. Before the period of four months expired, they became Muslims. Al-Thaʿlabī also

reverent. (8) How, since if they prevail over you, they will not observe any kinship or treaty with you? They please you with their mouths, while their hearts refuse. And most of them are iniquitous. (9) They have sold the signs of God for a paltry price, and have turned from His way. Evil indeed is that which they used to do, (10) observing neither kinship nor treaty with any believer. And it is they who are the transgressors. (11) But if they repent, and perform the prayer and give the alms, then they are your brethren in religion. And We expound the signs for a people who know. (12) But if they renege on their oaths after having made their treaty, and vilify your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief—

accepts the opinion that this verse refers to certain members of Banū Bakr, using reasoning similar to that of al-Ṭabarī.

8 *Kinship* renders *ill,* which can also mean a pact or sworn alliance (*ḥilf;* Ṭ). *Treaty* renders *dhimmah,* referring generally to "that which sets up an obligation" (R), and in this sense *ahl al-dhimmah* can be rendered "treaty peoples" (Q) or "those to whom one has an obligation." On the concept of *dhimmah,* also see 9:29c. *Prevail* signifies that the disbelievers would come to a position of strength over the Muslims (Q, R, Ṭ).

*They please you with their mouths*—namely, by speaking sweet words—while their hearts contain the opposite (R). Since all disbelievers are considered to be "iniquitous" (Q, R), *most of them are iniquitous* is understood to mean that many (though not all) of the disbelievers lie and will fail to uphold their agreements (Q), are faithless even to their own religion (R), and are thus *iniquitous* in both a general and a specific sense.

9 The "sale" of God's signs *for a paltry price* is an object of rebuke in several verses of the Quran, as in 2:174; 3:187; 16:95. In other places, the language of buying and selling is used in a positive manner, as when God asks believers, *Who is it that will lend unto God a goodly loan? He will multiply it for him, and his shall be a generous reward* (57:11; cf. 2:245; 5:12; 57:18; 64:17; 73:20); and 61:10, which speaks of *a commerce that will save you. Turned from His way* can mean, here and in other instances of this verb phrase, both that they turn away from the way of God themselves and that they hinder others from following it.

10 See v. 8. "Transgression" has the general meaning of going beyond limits and is also used in relation to the use of force, as in 2:194: *So whosoever transgresses against you, transgress against him in like manner as he transgressed against you.*

11 *If they repent* means if they abandon idolatry (IK). Many commentators point out that *then they are your brethren in religion* "makes sacrosanct the blood of the people of the *qiblah* [those who face Makkah to pray]," referring to those who worship as Muslims (Q, Ṭ); in other words, Muslims do not need a separate treaty to establish peaceful relations with one another, although in later history when multiple Islamic political entities emerged, these entities would make treaties with one another.

12 Some say that the *leaders of disbelief* are mentioned specifically, because they are decisive in generating hostility against the believers (R), though al-Rāzī believes that it is implied that one should fight all of the disbelievers as well; in Quranic accounts it is often the "notables" or leading members of a group that voice and drive a people's rejection of their prophet (see, e.g., 7:60, 66, 75, 88). Others say that it refers to those who led the way in violating the treaty and opening hostilities (Q). Although it can be seen as referring to specific people such as Abū Jahl, one of the central leaders of the Makkans who were against the Prophet, it is thought to apply universally to all such treaty violators (IK). *They have no oaths* means that, since they break their oaths, it is as though the oaths did not exist.

For some this also means that treaty peoples (*ahl al-dhimmah,* see 9:29c) must not revile Islam, the latter being a condition of the treaty (R). Al-Qurṭubī points out there are differences of

truly they have no oaths—that they might desist. (13) Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths, and intended to expel the Messenger, and opened [hostility] against you first? Do you fear them? For God is worthier of being feared by you, if you are believers. (14) Fight them and God will punish them by means of your hands and disgrace them, and He will grant you victory over them and heal the breasts of a believing people, (15) and will dispel the rage within their

opinion on the matter of vilification of religion and the Prophet. For him, a severe calumny of the Prophet would merit capital punishment if spoken by a Muslim, amounting to *zandaqah,* a term referring to deviance in religion of a pernicious kind.

Al-Qurṭubī notes further that most jurists believed that those treaty peoples (see 9:29c) who revile the Prophet should be executed, but Abū Ḥanīfah did not, reasoning that their beliefs were already worse than any insult, and moreover the Quran set two conditions on such use of force: that they should violate the treaty and then *vilify your religion.* Al-Qurṭubī also records that Abū Bakr was outraged by something a man had said in his presence against the Prophet and Islam; someone asked him if he wanted that man executed, and Abū Bakr said, "No one has that right after the Messenger of God."

Al-Rāzī points out that the breaking of the treaty can also refer to those who become non-Muslim after having become Muslim, thus framing membership in the Muslim community as a form of social and legal contract. According to this reading, if a believer violates that "treaty" by leaving Islam and then vilifying the religion, then other believers are authorized to *fight the leaders of disbelief.* This is part of the reason why many jurists did not demand death for those who left Islam, but only for those who, after leaving it, also subsequently engaged in the kind of verbal hostility mentioned here. Such vilification was often a precursor to violence and hence could be interpreted as a threat or potential incitement to violence.

The legality of executing people for insulting the Prophet is thus seen in terms of treaties and political loyalties and not only personally and is based upon the implicit threat of actual violence that such insults might entail—as demonstrated by the case of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, who went far beyond insults to generate hostility against the Prophet—rather than on the offense of the insult itself. It is worth considering that the Prophet was subjected on countless occasions to the insults recorded in the Quran, such as the accusations that the Quran consisted of "fables of those of old" and that he was mad. He also lived peacefully with those who did not embrace his religion and thus, by implication if not declaration, did not believe him. This is partly why the Ḥanafī school of law has reasoned that treaty holders (*dhimmīs*) are not to be executed for an insult, since their beliefs (an implicit denial of the Prophet) are already a greater offense (Q); that is, the difference between a state of mind and open vilification was a matter of real or potential violence against the Muslim community in the form of incitement or political destabilization, not merely a matter of individual ignorance, honor, or pride.

13 This verse continues to speak of the fighting that was commanded in v. 5. *First* refers to the fact that the idolaters initiated the conflict by attacking allies of the Prophet (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī observes that there are three reasons, any one of which is sufficient to call for the use of force: breaking a treaty, and most think this refers to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah; intending to *expel the Messenger,* which is thought by most to refer to his migration from Makkah to Madinah, but which some interpret as a reference to the attempt to dislodge him from his position of strength in Madinah, as for example at the Battle of Uḥud; and being the first to attack, referring to the attack on Banū Khuzāʿah, which violated the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (see 9:1–4c). Other instances where human beings are commanded to fear God and not human beings include 2:150; 3:175; 5:3.

14–15 God punishing the disbelievers "by the hands" of the believers is also mentioned in v. 52: *God will afflict you with a punishment from Him, or by our hands.* The *believing people* in need of

hearts. God relents unto whomsoever He will, and God is Knowing, Wise. (16) Or did you suppose that you would be left alone, while God had yet to know who among you strove and took no friend apart from God, His Messenger, and the believers? And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (17) It is not for the idolaters to maintain the mosques of God, bearing witness of disbelief against themselves. They are those whose deeds have come to naught, and in the Fire shall they abide. (18) Only they shall maintain the mosques of God who believe in God and the Last Day, perform the prayer and give the alms, and fear none but God. Such as these may be among the rightly guided. (19) Or do you consider giving drink to the pilgrims and maintaining the Sacred Mosque to be like those who believe in God and the Last Day and strive in God's way? They are not equal in the Eyes of God. And God guides not wrongdoing people. (20) Those who believe and emigrate and strive in the way of God with their wealth and their selves are greater in rank in the Eyes of God. And it is they who are the triumphant. (21) Their Lord gives them glad tidings of Mercy from Him,

healing are the Khuzāᶜah, who were attacked by Banū Bakr, which broke the treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (Ṭ; see 9:1–4c). That God *relents* means that He can still accept the repentance of the disbelievers (Ṭ). "Repent" and "relent" render the same verb, *tāba/yatūbu,* differing only with the addition of a preposition. The noun derived from this verb, *tawbah,* usually rendered "repentance," means literally a "turning" or a "return"; that is, human beings turn or return to God in repentance, and He turns or returns toward them.

16 Cf. 29:2–3. *Friend* renders here the word *walījah,* a word that conveys the sense of being a confidant and intimate (Q). On the question of the meaning of God doing something "in order to know," see 2:143c.

17–20 According to one account, ᶜAbbās (the Prophet's uncle) was speaking to ᶜAlī and proclaiming his own merit for being responsible for giving drink to the pilgrims, which was considered an honor and privilege; he was rebuked by ᶜAlī, who noted that he himself had fought for Islam since the beginning and that ᶜAbbās had only lately begun to perform the canonical prayer (IK). In another account, some Muslims were discussing among themselves what actions were best. Some mentioned giving drink to the pilgrims; others, the maintenance of the Kaᶜbah; and others, struggling physically in the way of God. They were chastised by ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb for raising their voices near the Prophet's pulpit, and soon after this verse is said to have been revealed (IK, Q, Ṭ). Al-Qurṭubī notes that it is plausible that the latter account was an instance where a previously revealed verse was mentioned as a response to some incident, not that it was revealed in response.

That the idolaters are *bearing witness of disbelief against themselves* means they provide evidence against themselves through their disbelief. The possibility that the deeds of disbelievers may, in the Hereafter, *come to naught* is mentioned throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:217; 3:22; 5:5, 53; 6:88; 7:147; 11:16; 18:105; 33:19; 39:65; 47:9, 28, 32; 49:2). *May be* (v. 18) renders *ᶜasā,* which is interpreted to mean, when it appears in the Quran, it will necessarily be so (Ṭ). Striving in the way of God with one's wealth and one's self is also mentioned in vv. 44, 81 of this *sūrah.*

21–22 *Contentment* (*riḍwān*) from God is considered to be the pinnacle of the paradisal

and Contentment, and Gardens wherein they shall have lasting bliss, (22) abiding therein forever. Truly with God is a great reward. (23) O you who believe! Take not your fathers and your brothers as protectors if they prefer disbelief to belief. As for those among you who take them as protectors, it is they who are the wrongdoers. (24) Say, "If your fathers, your children, your brothers, your spouses, your tribe, the wealth you have acquired, commerce whose stagnation you fear, and dwellings you find pleasing are more beloved to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His way, then wait till God comes with His Command." And God guides not iniquitous people. (25) God indeed granted you victory on many a field, and on the Day of Ḥunayn when you were impressed at how numerous you were. But it availed you naught, and the earth, despite its

state; for a discussion of *riḍwān,* see 3:15c. *Bliss* renders *naʿīm,* a word that evokes tranquility, ease, and blessing. Other verses speak of *Gardens of bliss* (5:65; 10:9; 22:65; 31:8; 37:43; 56:12; 68:34); see 56:11–12c; 56:88–89c.

23–24 It is thought by some commentators that these verses refer to those Muslims who remained in Makkah after the migration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet and before the conquest of Makkah, but others prefer to see these verses as a general command applicable to all believers (Q). It is reported that, when the Command to migrate came, some of the believers were persuaded by their families to remain in Makkah (Q). That v. 25 mentions the Battle of Ḥunayn, which took place after the conquest of Makkah, may suggest that these verses were not in fact revealed in relation to those who were in Makkah before the conquest, but constitute a general moral injunction. *Till God comes with His Command* is understood by some to refer to the eventual conquest of Makkah by the believers (Ṭ), though the fact that v. 25 addresses the Battle of Ḥunayn (which took place after the conquest of Makkah) in the past tense makes it implausible that v. 24 could be referring to a time before the conquest of Makkah. The idea of God coming with *His Command* also appears in 2:109.

25 The Battle of Ḥunayn took place soon after the conquest of Makkah (see 9:1–4c). The tribes of Hawāzin and Thaqīf, centered around the town of Ṭāʾif to the southeast of Makkah, had gathered their own forces in response to the Prophet's march from Madinah in fear that they were the true target of his army, rather than the Quraysh. It was indeed reported that Abū Sufyān, in a vain attempt to persuade the Prophet not to march on Makkah after the breach of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, suggested that he march against the Hawāzin instead, arguing that they were further in kinship and more hostile. The Prophet, for his part, intentionally created ambiguity as to his actual target.

Following the conquest of Makkah by the Prophet, the Hawāzin decided not to wait for a potential attack and set out to strike at Makkah. In response, the Prophet marched northeast from Makkah toward the valley of Awṭās, where the Hawāzin had mustered their large army of some twenty thousand men. The army of the Prophet consisted of the Madinan and Makkan Muslims and also some Quraysh who had not yet embraced Islam but nevertheless did not wish their city to fall to the Hawāzin. The battle was joined in the valley of Ḥunayn, which was on the road between Makkah and Ṭāʾif. The early stages of the battle went in the Hawāzin's favor and segments of the Makkan army fled from the powerful initial onslaught, but ultimately the Prophet and his commanders rallied and regrouped and dealt the Hawāzin a decisive defeat. Some of them scattered, while others retreated within the walls of

breadth, closed in upon you. Then you turned your backs. (26) Then God sent down His Tranquility upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts whom you saw not, and punished those who disbelieved. And that is the recompense of the disbelievers. (27) Then thereafter God will relent unto whomsoever He will. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (28) O you who believe! The idolaters are surely unclean; so let them not come near the Sacred Mosque after this year of theirs. If you fear poverty, God will enrich you from His

Ṭā'if; the Prophet's army laid siege to the town for nearly three weeks until they surrendered and agreed to embrace Islam.

Regarding *impressed at how numerous you were,* it is noted that most estimates placed the Prophet's army between twelve and sixteen thousand. Some in the army said, "We shall never be defeated!" (R, Ṭ). *The earth, despite its breadth, closed in upon you* refers to the fact that when the enemy made its first charge against them, they were forced to retreat back up a slope that was too narrow in places to accommodate them, thus restricting their movement.

26–27 It is recorded that at the point in the battle when some of the army was retreating from the initial onslaught of the Hawāzin, the Prophet called to them, but his voice was drowned out by the din of the battle. Among the people at his side were his uncle ʿAbbās, who had a powerful voice, and they called out to the Emigrants and Helpers. They rallied to the Prophet, who it is said then picked up a handful of dust or pebbles—in an account similar to the one usually given in connection with the Battle of Badr (see 8:17c)—and threw it at the enemy, after which the tide of the battle turned and the Hawāzin and Thaqīf were put to rout.

On *His Tranquility,* see 48:4c. *Hosts whom you saw not* is understood to refer to angels. The commentators record accounts of members of the enemy army, long after the battle, saying that before and during the battle they encountered men with white faces that struck terror into their hearts (R). As discussed in 3:124–26c, it is traditionally believed that the angels, if they participated in fighting at all, did so only at the Battle of Badr; one interpretation of the help they would give is to strengthen the hearts and resolve of the believers, or in the words of al-Rāzī, "To cast beautiful inspirations into their hearts."

28 *Unclean* renders *najas,* a term usually understood in Islamic Law to refer to ritual impurity that would prevent one, for example, from touching a physical copy of the Quran or performing the prayer. *The idolaters are surely unclean* is literally "The idolaters are an uncleanliness," which the commentators understand to mean "characterized by uncleanliness" (R). For some this means that, since the idolaters do not purify themselves through ablutions as the believers do, they were unclean. Others interpret it to mean that they were to be shunned as unclean things are shunned, in the sense that their false belief is, at the spiritual level, a kind of filth (R). Jurists offer different opinions regarding the restrictions against the idolaters: some limit the scope of this verse to preventing the idolaters from visiting the Kaʿbah and its environs (the *ḥaram*), while others would prohibit any non-Muslim from entering any mosque at all, although this is a minority opinion (Q, R).

Some commentators believe that this verse was revealed in the ninth year of the *hijrah,* after the conquest of Makkah and the same year when it is reported that the Prophet sent ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to announce to the idolaters that they were no longer to return to perform the pilgrimage in Makkah (Q, R; see 9:1–4c). Others say that rather the time of the revelation was the tenth year (Q).

*If you fear poverty* is understood to mean that some Muslims expressed concern over the loss of trade and gifts from those who came from outside Makkah for the pilgrimage (Q, R, Ṭ). According to some commentators, the imposition of the indemnity (*jizyah*) on non-Muslim treaty holders (see v. 29) was a kind of compensation for the loss of this income (Q).

Bounty if He will. Truly God is Knowing, Wise. (29) Fight those who believe not in God and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and who follow not the Religion of Truth among those who were given the Book, till they pay the *jizyah* with a willing hand, being

29 Some commentators connect this verse with the Tabūk expedition. The period after the Battle of Ḥunayn corresponded with the final defeat of the Persians by the Byzantines. The former retreated from Syria and Egypt, and the Byzantine emperor Heraclius returned the True Cross to Jerusalem. Word began to reach the Prophet that the Byzantines were planning a major offensive against the now increasingly powerful Islamic polity and had enlisted the Arab tribes of Ghassān, Lakhm, Judham, and ʿĀmilah, who occupied the buffer zone in the Levant between the Arabian Peninsula and the Byzantine and Persian empires. The Prophet mustered the largest army that had yet taken the field and marched north on the Syrian campaign. The army remained in Tabūk, on the road to Syria and situated to the east of the Gulf of ʿAqabah, for twenty days, but the rumors of the Byzantine force gathered against the Muslims were unfounded, or they decided not to take the field after having heard of the size of the Prophet's army.

Al-Rāzī, among the major commentators, devotes the most attention to this verse's description of the People of the Book, especially as being *those who do not believe in God and in the Last Day,* noting that both Jews and Christians claim to affirm belief in both God and the Hereafter. The Quran itself states in 3:113–14: *Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate. They believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and hasten unto good deeds.* Also, with regard to the Christians, the Quran states in 5:82: *That is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant.*

Al-Rāzī mentions that Muslim theologians themselves occupy a range of positions regarding fundamental matters of belief, such as the ontological status of the Attributes of God and the scope of human free will. By doing so, he also acknowledges that the criticisms directed at Jews and Christians for certain aspects of their belief can be equally directed at certain theological positions within the Islamic spectrum. This is significant because, according to the Quran's own attestation and the claims of these communities themselves, they (or at least some of them) believe in God and in the Day of Judgment. However, in al-Rāzī's view those People of the Book who can truthfully be said to believe in God and in the Last Day still fall under the legal status (*ḥukm*) set out by this verse—namely, being fought until they enter into a treaty and pay an indemnity; he sees no legal reason to distinguish between them, noting, "These [who believe in God] do not fall under [the description of] this verse, but the requirement of the indemnity holds for them since it is said that, when an indemnity is required for some of them one says the same for all of them, since no one [that is, no jurist] holds the view that there is a separation." That is to say, he relies on the absence of any legal opinion to the contrary, while acknowledging that some People of the Book are not those defined by this verse. This interpretation characterizes much of the mainstream of Islamic legal opinion on the matter.

Though this verse speaks of people *among those who were given the Book,* the Quran also mentions "those who were given the Book" both to praise certain Jews and Christians (e.g., 6:20, 114; 13:36; 29:47) and to criticize some of them (e.g., 2:101; 145; 3:100, 186). Thus the mere fact of their identity as People of the Book cannot be the single decisive reason why they should be fought.

Al-Samarqandī glosses *do not forbid* by saying, "what is [forbidden] in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran," while al-Zamakhsharī quotes an opinion that interprets *do not forbid* to mean, "They do not act in accordance with what is in the Torah and Gospel." However, many commentators read this verse as saying that they are not Muslims and that they reject the Prophet (IK).

*Jizyah* means the rendering of a thing owed (Ṭ) and as a legal matter amounts to an indemnity or

humbled. (30) The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God. Those are words from their mouths. They resemble the words of those who disbelieved before. God curse them! How they

tribute from non-Muslim communities residing within the Islamic state with whom Muslims have a treaty. Such treaty holders paid this indemnity, but were exempt from paying the alms (*zakāh*) or contributing to military defense, as Muslims were obliged to do; jurists disagreed as to the precise amount of the indemnity and the method of payment. Here *with a willing hand* renders *ʿan yad* (lit. "from/for/at hand"), which some interpret to mean that they should pay directly, without intermediary and without delay (R). Others say that it refers to its reception by Muslims and means "generously" as in "with an open hand," since the taking of the *jizyah* is a form of munificence that averted a state of conflict (Q, R, Z).

Some interpret *being humbled* (*wa hum ṣāghirūn*) to mean that the treaty holders should render the indemnity in a state of humility, but some say that the very fact of paying the indemnity is tantamount to this "being humbled" or "being the minor party" (R). Though the practice of forcing the treaty holders to pay the indemnity in a humbled manner was not unknown in Islamic history, many jurists, such as al-Nawawī, pointed out that the Prophet and Caliphs never did so and said that the treaty people's indemnity should be received with gentleness, as one would receive payment of a debt. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reportedly agreed to call the indemnity "charity" (*ṣadaqah*) when asked to change its name from *jizyah*.

"Those from whom an indemnity is acceptable" is a phrase often used to describe those peoples who are also known as *ahl al-dhimmah*, or "treaty peoples." As noted in 9:8c, *dhimmah* lexically means "treaty" or "pact" (*ʿahd*), and Jews and Christians are often referred to as having the status of "covenant holder" (*muʿāhid*), which is synonymous with *dhimmī*. In general there have been two primary ways in which non-Muslim communities have been considered treaty holders. Some non-Muslim groups lived in territory directly under the rule of Muslims, paying the indemnity, but retaining considerable autonomy as to their own affairs; this was the case for Jews and Christians in Jerusalem under ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and indeed throughout history well into the modern period in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere. In the other main type of arrangement, treaty holders governed their own territory, but, according to treaty stipulations, paid the *jizyah* and provided no help to any enemy of the Muslims; in return, the Muslim community offered protection to the treaty holders. Examples of this include the Prophet's arrangement with the people of Bahrain, who were Zoroastrians, and with the Christians of Najrān. In neither arrangement were the treaty holders required to provide military support to the Muslim polity, but pay only the indemnity (*jizyah*).

Jews and Christians are universally accepted to be "those from whom the *jizyah* is acceptable," and to this group most add Zoroastrians. Some jurists, such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, Abū Ḥanīfah, and Mālik (Q), are of the opinion that an indemnity can be accepted from any member of any religious community whatsoever; the only exception in this case are those who had apostatized or seceded from the Islamic polity (Q). Also, many make an exception for the idolatrous Arabs, for whom the paying of the indemnity and existence as a treaty people was not an option (Q); of course, after the time of the Prophet this question became moot. See also the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

30 It is said that *Ezra is the son of God* was the opinion of one Jew, a certain Finḥāṣ ibn ʿĀzūrāʾ, or that it was the belief of some Jews at one time, but that this belief eventually disappeared (R, Ṭ). Some mention an opinion that the Jews elevated the status of Ezra because of his role in restoring adherence to the Torah (Q, R). As to why the Christians considered Jesus the *son of God*, al-Rāzī, for example, speculates that they may have called him "son" by way of honor, the way Abraham is called God's "friend" (*khalīl;* see 4:125), and that because of various sectarian conflicts they may have taken this idea to an extreme; on the question of Jesus as *son of God*, see 4:171; 5:17; 19:35. *Words from their mouths* is taken to mean

are perverted! (31) They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God. There is no god but He! Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe. (32) They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths. But God refuses to do aught but complete His Light, though the disbelievers be averse. (33) He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion, though the idolaters be

that they are simply sounds with no meaning and therefore different from those that are supported by evidence and demonstration (Q). *God curse them!* renders a kind of interjection that, though it literally reads "God fight them!" acquired in Arabic the sense of an expression of amazement (Q, R, Z).

31 According to one well-known *ḥadīth,* a Companion who was once Christian, upon hearing this verse, told the Prophet that Christians did not worship their religious authorities. The Prophet replied, "Did they not forbid what God permitted, whereupon you considered it forbidden, and did they not permit what God forbade, whereupon you considered it permissible?" He responded, "Yes." The Prophet then said, "That is the worship offered to them." This verse is noteworthy in seeing a possible conflict between excessive obedience to certain religious authorities and the sincere worship of the One God. For a discussion of the tension between obeying legitimate authority and obeying God, see 4:59c.

32–33 These verses are similar to 61:8–9. Some understand *Light of God* to mean the remembrance of God (M), or the Quran (M, R), or knowledge of God and His Guidance; that is, the Prophet and the Quran were bringing the doctrine of God's Oneness and the remembrance of Him, and the idolaters, because of their devotion to false gods, desired to extinguish that Light (M). Light is spoken of in many ways in the Quran, in connection with revelation (e.g., 5:15, 44; 7:157), guidance (e.g., 39:22; 42:52), knowledge (e.g., 13:16), the Prophet (33:48), and others; see especially 24:35, the famous Light Verse, in which God himself is described in terms of light.

*Prevail over* renders *ẓahara ʿalā,* which can also mean to manifest, show, or make something known (R). Moreover, *all religion* can also be understood as "all religions" or "[the peoples] of all religions" (M). The beginning of v. 33 could thus be rendered, "He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it known to all religions." This would complement the notion that the community of Islam was put on earth to be *witnesses for mankind* (2:143; 22:78), meaning that their justice and faith would be witnessed by humanity as evidence of the truth of religion (see 2:143c; 22:78c). Some interpret this to mean that no part of *the Religion of Truth* will remain hidden (Q). That is, since there are those who desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths and thus make His religion hidden, God will instead cause His religion to appear and be made manifest through the proofs and evidences that show Islam and the Prophet to be true, such as the miracles of the Prophet and the inimitability of the Quran despite the fact that the Prophet was unlettered (R).

Some say that *prevail* refers to victory and conquest, but is restricted to the Arabian Peninsula (M, Q, Th). This seems to be in part because the commentators saw that they in fact had not achieved victory over the whole world. Al-Rāzī raises the theological problem that if this verse is read as a prediction, then it is one that has not been fulfilled, and this could not be, since it is the Word of God that predicted it. For others, it can be said to refer to the preeminence of the Religion of Truth on the Day of Judgment (M).

Some opinions mention that this verse refers to the end of time when the Mahdī will return, or when Jesus will return (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Another interpretation is that the pronoun *it* refers in fact to the Prophet, so that the phrase would be rendered "He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make all religion

averse. (34) O you who believe! Verily many of the rabbis and monks consume the wealth of people falsely, and turn from the way of God. [As for] those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, give them glad tidings of a painful punishment, (35) on the Day when it will be heated in the Fire of Hell, and their foreheads, their sides, and their backs will be branded with it. "This is what you hoarded up for yourselves; so taste that which you hoarded." (36) Truly the number of months in the Eyes of God is twelve months, [laid down] in the Book of God, the day He created the heavens and the earth. Of them four are sacred. That is the upright religion. So wrong not yourselves during them. And fight the idolaters all together, just as they fight you all together. And know that God is with the reverent. (37) Truly the *nasīʾ* is but an increase in disbelief, whereby the disbelievers go astray. They make it lawful one year and forbid it another, in order to reconcile it with the number made sacred by God, thus making lawful that which God has forbidden. The evil of their deeds is made to seem fair unto them, but God guides not the disbelieving people.

known to him," meaning to make known all the laws and teachings of religion to the Prophet (Q, Z). It can also be read, "to make him [the Prophet] known to [the peoples] of all religions through proof and evidence" (M, Q).

34 See v. 31. This verse is understood to mean that the religious leaders collect money from people in the name of religion, but use it for worldly purposes (Q) or that they engage in acts of bribery and corruption (R). *Turn from the way of God* can mean both that they hinder others and that they themselves turn away. Al-Rāzī notes that *many of the rabbis and monks* are reproached here, but not all.

35 *It will be heated* refers to the gold and silver mentioned in the previous verse. "Tasting" denotes the direct experience of something and is used elsewhere in the Quran in connection with those who will experience directly the pains of the Hereafter (e.g., 10:52; 22:9; 29:55). Being punished by the wealth one hoarded in life is also mentioned in 3:180: *On the Day of Resurrection they will be collared by that with which they were miserly.* It is said that, hearing gold and silver described this way, some of the Companions asked which type of wealth they should prefer to own, to which the Prophet responded, "A tongue that remembers, a heart that is thankful, and a believing spouse that will help you in your religion."

36–37 The sacred months are Dhu'l-Qaʿdah, Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, Muḥarram, and Rajab, which are the eleventh, twelfth, first, and seventh months of the lunar calendar. A *ḥadīth* often cited in this context states, "O people! Truly time has come round to its state when God created the heavens and the earth. The year is twelve months, and of them four are sacred, three of which are consecutive, Dhu'l-Qaʿdah, Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, Muḥarram, and Rajab, which is between Jumādā and Shaʿbān." *During them,* in *wrong not yourselves during them,* is interpreted by some to mean during those four months and by others to mean during all the months (Ṭ). Others read the preposition differently: "Wrong not yourselves concerning them" is understood to refer to the manipulation of the months, which is condemned in v. 37.

*Fight the idolaters all together* is understood to mean that the believers should be united when fighting them (R). According to some, this injunction constitutes permission to fight them

(38) O you who believe! What ails you, that when it is said unto you, "Go forth in the way of God," you sink down heavily to the earth? Are you content with the life of this world over the Hereafter? Yet the enjoyment of the life of this

during all twelve months, but others say that such a reading goes against the import of this verse; see commentary on 2:217, *They ask thee about the sacred month—about fighting therein.*

*Nasīʾ* literally means "postponement," but can also mean "addition" (R). There is no unanimity regarding what this condemned practice was. In most accounts, however, it refers to the practice of intercalation, where an extra lunar month was inserted into the calendar so that certain months (especially the month of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, when the pilgrimage took place) would fall in the same season by fixing the lunar year within the solar year, making the calendar more conducive to trade and travel (R). This seemed necessary because the twelve-month lunar calendar is approximately eleven days shorter than the solar year. The intercalated month allowed the lunar month to keep pace with the solar year, rather than allowing the lunar months to move through the seasons by ten or eleven days per solar year. Muslims consider the prohibition of intercalation to preserve fairness among the followers of a worldwide religion where different geographic locations have longer or shorter days depending on the time of the solar year and results in rites such as the fast of Ramadan occurring throughout the solar year (i.e., shorter and longer days) over the course of one's lifetime and making the journey of the *ḥajj* easier for some and more difficult for others. By following intercalation, Islam preserved justice among believers in the degree of ease in the performance of the various rites of the religion.

In other accounts, the "postponement" is considered to pertain to the status of the sacred months insofar as they were those months in which fighting was forbidden. In one account, the status of Muḥarram (the first lunar month) as sacred or "forbidden" would be postponed, and Ṣafar (the second month) would be made "forbidden" instead (Ṭ). According to another account, this status of being forbidden would cycle through a different month each year (Q). It is reported that when Abū Bakr led the first pilgrimage after the conquest of Makkah, the manipulation of the months had brought them back to their proper places, and this is what was meant when the Prophet stated, "O people! Truly time has come round to its state when God created the heavens and the earth" (Q, Ṭ). *They make it lawful one year and forbid it another* would thus refer to the manipulation of the legal status of the months from year to year, which always tried to keep the number of sacred or forbidden months at four in order to *reconcile it with the number made sacred by God.*

In another account, it is said that the idolaters would make pilgrimage for two years in each of the months of the year, and that at the pilgrimage of Abū Bakr it had cycled back to its rightful place (Q). This would seem to be a version of intercalation, since two years in every lunar month would roughly correspond to keeping the pilgrimage in the same season. Al-Qurṭubī prefers an account that describes an explicit insertion of days into the calendar beyond the twelve months, and he believes this is why the verse emphasizes that the number of months is twelve, not twelve plus a number of extra days.

*Whereby the disbelievers go astray* can also be read, "And the disbelievers misguide [others] thereby" (R).

38 It is said that this verse and the following verse relate to those people who stayed behind when the Prophet led the Companions on the expedition to Tabūk in 9/631 after the conquest of Makkah; see 9:29c. According to some commentators, some of the tribes did not wish to participate in the campaign with the Prophet, owing to the heat, the distance, the expense required for the preparations for such a distance, and fear of the Byzantine army (R). *Sink down heavily* renders a verb whose root means literally to be heavy or sluggish, but that can also evoke the sense of being lazy or finding something too troubling to attempt. Reproach for those who prefer this world to the Hereafter is also mentioned in 14:3 and 16:107, while the comparative good of the Hereafter over this world is affirmed throughout the Quran, as in 13:26: *Yet compared to the Hereafter, the life of the world is but [fleeting] enjoyment.* On

world, compared with the Hereafter, is but a little. (39) If you go not forth, He will punish you with a painful punishment, and will place another people in your stead, and you will not harm Him in the least. And God is Powerful over all things. (40) If you help him not, yet God has already helped him. Remember when those who disbelieved expelled him, the second of the two. Yea, the two were in the cave, when he said to his companion, "Grieve not; truly God is with us." Then God sent down His Tranquility upon him, and supported him with hosts you saw not. And He made the word of those who disbelieve to be the lowliest, and the Word of God is the highest. And God is Mighty, Wise. (41) Go forth in the way of God, lightly or heavily, and strive with your wealth and

this subject, see 87:16–17c. As a spiritual allegory, this verse addresses the soul that through inertia shrinks from the demands of the spiritual life and the struggles it entails and prefers the life of this world to the life of the Hereafter (Aj).

39 The punishment was that God would withhold rain from them (Q), though others say this verse refers to an unknown punishment to come in the Hereafter (R). The replacement of one people with another is also mentioned in 5:54; 21:11; 36:81–82; 44:28; 46:33; 47:38; 55:60–61. Here it is thought to refer to God's ability to support the Prophet with other people who would not stay at home when he left on a campaign (IK, Ṭ).

40 According to some commentators this was the first verse of this *sūrah* in the chronological order of revelation (Q). It refers to an incident during the *hijrah,* when the Prophet and Abū Bakr were making their way from Makkah to Madinah with the hostile Makkans giving chase. The Makkans had resolved to assassinate the Prophet as a group, thus sharing responsibility and forcing the Prophet's clan to accept blood money rather than retaliate (on blood money and retaliation, see 2:178c). They waited outside the Prophet's house in ambush, but did not notice that he had left, leaving ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's young cousin, sleeping in the Prophet's bed. Having slipped away unnoticed, the Prophet joined Abū Bakr and headed south rather than northward toward Madinah. They entered a cave, having arranged for news to be brought to them and for their tracks to be hidden by a local shepherd. At one point they were nearly discovered, but according to traditional accounts they were protected by God for, when the searchers inspected the track leading to the cave, they noticed a spider's web covering the entrance as well as two doves that had come and laid eggs in a nest at the mouth of the cave. Taking these facts as an indication that no one had entered the cave for some time, they moved on without looking inside. According to another account, Abū Bakr said, "O Messenger of God, if one of them were to look beneath his feet, he would see us!" The entrance to the cave (which is still extant) is very low, and one has to stoop to enter it. According to another *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "O Abū Bakr, what dost thou think of two whose third is God?"

On *His Tranquility* (*sakīnah*), see 48:4c. According to one reading, *upon him* refers to Abū Bakr, because he was anxious about the fate of the Prophet (R), while the *him* in *supported him* refers to the Prophet; or both pronouns refer to the Prophet (Q). *Hosts you saw not* is thought to be a reference to the angels of Badr (see 3:124–26c; 8:9–10c; 8:12c). Some read *And He made the word . . . is the highest* as "And He made the word of those who disbelieve to be the lowliest and the Word of God to be the most sublime" (Q). *The word of those who disbelieve* is understood to mean the ascription of partners to God, while the Word of God is the testimony of faith, "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha illa'Llāh;* Q, Ṭ).

41 *Lightly or heavily* can mean being either reluctant or eager, or lightly or heavily armed, or

yourselves in the way of God. That is better for you, if you but knew. (42) Were it something ephemeral nearby or an easy journey, they would have followed thee. But the trek was too great for them. And they will swear by God, "If we had been able, we would have gone out with you." They destroy themselves, and God knows that they are liars. (43) God pardon thee! Why didst thou grant them leave before it became clear to thee who spoke the truth and who the liars were? (44) Those who believe in God and the Last Day ask of thee no leave from striving with their wealth and their selves. And God knows the reverent. (45) Only they ask leave of thee who believe not in God and the Last Day, whose hearts are in doubt, and so they waver in their doubt. (46) And had they desired to go forth, they would have made some preparations for it. But God was averse to their being sent forth; so He held them back, and it was said unto them, "Stay back with those who stay back." (47) And had they gone forth with thee, it would have increased thee in naught but troubles. And they would

young or old (Ṭ), or poorly or well equipped, or rich or poor (Q, Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī says that it means whether it is easy or difficult.

42 *Something ephemeral* (*ʿaraḍ*) means here a fleeting, worldly good (R). It is said that *If we had been able, we would have gone out with you* was spoken by hypocrites after the expedition to Tabūk (R), resembling those hypocrites described in 3:167 in connection with the Battle of Uḥud: *Had we known there would be fighting, we would have followed you;* and also in 24:53: *And they swear by God with their most solemn oaths, that wert thou to command them, they would surely go forth.* Such disingenuous oaths are also mentioned in vv. 42, 62, 74, 95, 107. Like other verses dealing with combat, this verse also possesses meaning as a spiritual allegory for those who are lax in their spiritual life and do not journey in search of knowledge and understanding (Aj).

43 *Grant them leave* means gave them permission to remain behind from the expedition to Tabūk (Ṭ). Many believe that this verse was abrogated by 24:62: *So when they ask thy leave in some matter of theirs, give thou leave unto whomsoever thou wilt.* Others, however, argue that the permission that was given was for them to participate, but that there would have been no good in their participation, as described in v. 47, *had they gone forth with thee, it would have increased thee in naught but troubles* (R). Another interpretation is that the Prophet gave them leave to stay behind, but this allowed their hypocrisy to remain hidden rather than becoming *clear* through their conduct later.

44–45 These two verses provide a contrast between the response of sincere believers and that of hypocrites; the former seek no excuses to stay behind and the latter ask leave to remain behind, as described in vv. 42–43 (Q). *Whose hearts are in doubt* is interpreted to refer to the hypocrites whose faith was not true (Ṭ).

46 If the hypocrites had truly desired to go out to fight, they would have been ready and not offered the excuses mentioned in v. 42 (Q). *Those who stay back* (*qāʿid*) is literally "those who sit [out]," referring to women, children, and the infirm, who were not required to fight (Q, Ṭ). God *held them back* through their own cowardice (Q). *Stay back with those who stay back* is understood to have been spoken by either the Prophet, God, or even *those who stay back* to each other (Q, R).

47 *Troubles* renders *khabāl,* which can also be interpreted to mean confusion, disquiet, and disunity. *Some who hearken to them* is read by some

have hurried about in your midst, seeking to incite discord among you. And among you are some who hearken to them. And God knows the wrongdoers. (48) And indeed they sought to incite trials earlier, and turned thee over in their minds, until the truth came and the Command of God was manifest, though they were averse. (49) And among them some say, "Grant me leave, and tempt me not." Nay, they have fallen into temptation. And truly Hell encompasses the disbelievers. (50) If some good befalls thee, it troubles them. But if some affliction befalls thee, they say, "We already took precautions beforehand," and they turn away, exulting. (51) Say, "Naught befalls us, save that which God has decreed for us. He is our Master, and in God let the believers trust." (52) Say, "Do you anticipate that aught will befall us save one of the two best things? But we anticipate for you that God will afflict you with a punishment from Him, or by our hands. So wait! Truly we are waiting along with you." (53) Say, "Spend

to mean, "those who convey them news," literally, "those who cause them to hear," meaning that among the Muslims there were those who brought news of the Prophet to the hypocrites (Q, R).

48 *They sought to incite trials earlier,* that is, before their true state became apparent (Q) or before the Tabūk expedition (R). They *turned thee over in their minds* means that they plotted against the Prophet (Q), an idiom that refers to pondering or brooding over someone's situation.

49 *Tempt me not* is interpreted to mean that the hypocrites did not wish to be subject to the difficulties of the expedition or that they feared what would happen to their property while they were away (R). *They have fallen into temptation* means that they are already in a state of disobedience and sin (Q).

50 *Some good* (cf. 3:120) is usually interpreted to mean victories or spoils, and *some affliction,* defeat on the battlefield (Q, R). *We already took precautions* means that they consider any misfortune that befalls the Prophet to be evidence of their own wisdom in failing to support him (R); on this issue see 4:71–73c.

51 *That which God has decreed* is what God has "prescribed" or "written" (*kataba;* cf. 2:187; 5:21; 6:12, 54; 58:21; 59:3). This is understood by some to mean that it is inscribed in the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) and that this "writing" refers to one's fate or destiny as determined by God beyond time; see 54:49c and the essay "The Quran and Schools of Theology and Philosophy."

52 The *two best things* are understood to be either victory in this world or defeat and death in this world, which nevertheless lead to felicity in the Hereafter when one dies in the way of God; the *two* are two triumphs, one in this world and one in the next (R, Ṭ). Moreover, argues al-Rāzī, those who act with courage live with dignity and self-respect, while the hypocrites have to suffer from their own cowardice. *A punishment from Him* can be in either this world or the Hereafter; *by our hands* means punishment in this world, but as a result of their own evil actions (R). The message that the believers will wait along with their opponents is also mentioned in 6:158; 7:71; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 20:135; 32:30.

53 This verse can mean either that the Prophet will not accept from them what they spend or that what they spend will not be considered worthy of acceptance in the Eyes of God (R). According to some, this verse refers to those who wished to stay behind, but told the Prophet they would give money to support him (R). Elsewhere *willingly or unwillingly* appears in connection with the worship of God by all of creation; some worship on

willingly or unwillingly; it shall never be accepted from you. Truly you are an iniquitous people." (54) And naught prevented their spending from being accepted from them, save that they disbelieved in God and in His Messenger, and only come to the prayer lazily, and only spend reluctantly. (55) And let not their wealth or their children impress thee. God desires but to punish them thereby in the life of this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers. (56) And they swear by God that truly they are of you, but they are not of you. Rather, they are a fearful people. (57) Were they to find a refuge, or caves, or

the basis of the exercise of free will and most of the rest of creation worships through its very being, without having a choice (see 3:83c; 13:15c; 41:11c). The phrase can also refer only to human beings and mean "obediently or grudgingly."

54 Performing the prayer *lazily* is also an attribute of the hypocrites as described in 4:142. Some commentators see in this verse proof that the apparent good deeds of disbelievers, such as maintaining family relations and feeding the poor, would be by themselves of no avail to them in the Hereafter (Q, R). When ʿĀʾishah asked the Prophet whether the filial piety and charity of a certain man would benefit him, the Prophet responded, "It will not benefit him. Not on a single day did he say, 'My Lord, forgive me my sins on the Day of Judgment.'" Al-Qurṭubī, however, argues that God does reward people without faith in this world, citing 17:18: *Whosoever would desire the ephemeral, We hasten for him therein whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire.*

55 Wealth and children (cf. v. 70) are often mentioned as desirable in this world (18:46), and those who possess them often feel superior to those who do not (34:35; 68:14), but they will not avail anyone with God (3:10; 58:17). *To punish them thereby* is understood by some to mean that they will be forced to part with some of their wealth through being forced to give alms (Q, Ṭ). Others read the verse to mean, "And let not their wealth or their children impress thee—God desires to punish them thereby—in the life of this world," by which they understand that the punishment would come in the Hereafter, and *in the life of this world* refers to the domain in which they possess wealth and children (Q). This latter opinion, however, would seem to contradict the plain sense of the verse, especially since it concludes with an allusion to souls departing.

It is also possible, however, to read this verse in light of 8:28 and 64:15: *Your property and your children are only a trial for you;* and also 63:9: *Let neither your property nor your children divert you from the remembrance of God;* that is, wealth and children only cause some people to drift farther away from God, thus leading to their disbelief and eventual punishment. Furthermore, seen on a more spiritual level, attachment to the things of this world is itself a form of suffering, and those who possess such things in abundance without acknowledging that they come from God also live with a desperate fear of losing them, having struggled so hard to attain them (R). This verse is also interpreted by some as part of God's "plot" concerning the hypocrites and disbelievers (see 8:30c), allowing them to clear the path, as it were, for their own suffering and punishment (IK, Qu).

56 On empty oaths of allegiance, see 9:42c; 24:53; 35:42. That the hypocrites are fearful means, according to some, "They are fearful of you" (Ṭ), namely, of the believers and their political strength, though others say it simply means they are fearful of fighting alongside the Prophet (R).

57 The hypocrites would turn toward some places of hiding to escape if they could, because they are only reluctantly loyal to the Prophet (IK, Q). Some interpret *refuge* to mean a place like a mountaintop (Z) and note that *caves* renders a word whose root has the basic meaning of slipping or hiding away (Z). *A place to enter* is understood by some to mean an underground cave or well (IK, R). *Defiantly* here renders a word that is associated

a place to enter, they would turn toward it defiantly. (58) And among them some reproach thee over the charitable offerings; if they are given thereof, they are content, but if they are not given thereof, behold, they are angry. (59) If only they had been content with what God and His Messenger gave them, and said, "God suffices us. God will give unto us from His Bounty, as will the Messenger. Truly our desire is for God." (60) The charitable offerings are only for the poor, and the indigent, and those working with them, and those whose hearts are [to be]

with a horse that breaks free from its rider and runs away at random, heedlessly, or a ship that is ungovernable by its crew.

58 It is reported that this verse was revealed after a man came to the Prophet while he was distributing some property and said, "Be just, O Messenger of God." The Prophet said, "Woe unto you! Who shall be just if I am not just?" (Q). Other accounts describe similar accusations against the Prophet for being unjust in his apportioning (Ṭ). The fact that people are content when they receive wealth, but are angered when denied it shows that they are selfish in their concern and not driven by a sense of justice (R). On a spiritual level, this verse is interpreted to mean that truly sincere individuals should find contentment in God regardless of what they receive, as there is no difference between hypocrites and those whose happiness depends on being given what they want (Aj).

59 This verse describes the attitude that should be taken by the Prophet's sincere Companions (R). For al-Rāzī, it describes the proper attitude of desiring the bounty of the world insofar as it leads to God, not for its own sake. That *God suffices us* is also mentioned in 3:173; 8:62; 8:64; 9:129; on the "sufficiency" provided by God, see 2:137c; 3:173c. That one's "desire" be for God is also found in 94:8: *And let thy desire be for thy Lord.*

60 *Charitable offerings* renders *ṣadaqāt* (sing. *ṣadaqah*), which is understood by some to refer to the mandatory alms (R). Al-Rāzī reasons this is so because the verse limits it to certain categories, whereas voluntary charity can be given for many other purposes, such as building mosques and schools. Moreover, since the administrators of the charitable offerings are entitled to a share (see below), it is not interpreted as being voluntary charity. Al-Rāzī discusses this question because, as a matter of terminology, the mandatory alms are usually called *zakāh,* while voluntary charity is called *ṣadaqah,* but this verse and others, such as 9:103, *Take thou a charitable offering from their wealth,* suggest that the two terms are not mutually exclusive in the Quran, though as Islamic Law developed, *zakāh* and *ṣadaqah* came to have distinct meanings.

There are disagreements over the difference between the poor (*faqīr*) and the indigent (*miskīn*). According to some, the former refers to those who stand in some partial need, while the latter refers to those who have nothing, although some hold the reverse opinion (Q). Others have said that the former refers to needy Muslims, while the latter refers to the needy People of the Book (Q). Al-Qurṭubī quotes a *ḥadīth* that states that when the Prophet sent Muʿādh to Yemen, he told him, "Teach them that God has prescribed charity for them as it concerns their property, to be taken from the rich among them and given to the poor among them."

*Those working with them* refers to those who administer and distribute the charity (Q). *Those whose hearts are [to be] reconciled* refers to new Muslims who, for various reasons, were not necessarily financially needy, but who nevertheless were given certain payments (Q). According to some they were a class of disbelievers who were given money, so that they would be "joined to" or reconciled with Islam; others say they were a group who had become Muslim outwardly (see 49:14), but who had not yet reached a level of certainty in their hearts. Another opinion holds that they were followers of the leading idolaters, but followers who might be swayed to join or be reconciled with Islam. Some believe it refers to Christians or

reconciled, and for [ransoming] slaves and for debtors, and in the way of God, and for the traveler: a duty from God. And God is Knowing, Wise. (61) And among them are those who torment the Prophet, and say, "He is an ear." Say, "An ear that is good for you. He believes in God and he has faith in the believers, and he is a mercy to those among you who believe." And [as for] those who torment the Messenger of God, theirs shall be a painful punishment. (62) They swear by God to you, to please you. But God and His Messenger are worthier of being pleased by them, if they are believers. (63) Do they know not that whosoever opposes God and His Messenger, surely for him shall be the Fire of Hell, to

Jews who become Muslim (Ṭ). For yet others it refers to the notables of certain tribes whose loyalty needed to be cemented after the Battle of Ḥunayn (R). According to al-Qurṭubī, these groups are similar in that they are all groups in which Islam was not firmly established unless their members received some kind of payment. According to some jurists after the early period, when Islam became strong, there was no longer a need for payment to those whose hearts needed to be "reconciled," but others deemed that this practice could resume as circumstances demanded (Q, R, Ṭ).

*[Ransoming] slaves* refers to purchasing slaves, using funds from the alms for the purposes of manumission (Q). *Debtors* refers to those people who are so indebted as to be unable to fulfill their obligations, for example, because their home or source of income was destroyed by natural disaster (Ṭ). Al-Qurṭubī notes a *ḥadīth* concerning a man who was buried under debt, and the Prophet said, "Give him charity." So people donated money to him, but it was not sufficient to cover his obligations. The Prophet then said to his creditors, "Take what you have found, for you shall have no more than that." In the Quran *in the way of God* is used in connection with actions or efforts taken for the sake of God or for one's religion. *Traveler* refers to a person cut off from any source of income because of being far away from home; such persons are to be helped even if they are wealthy in their home country (Q, Ṭ).

As a spiritual allegory this verse is interpreted to refer to the bestowal of spiritual blessings and illumination on the *poor* and *indigent* in spirit, *those working* for spiritual purposes, *whose hearts are [to be] reconciled* with their Beloved, who are *debtors* in giving all they have, who strive *in the way of God* against their souls, and who travel in search of knowledge (Aj).

61 *He is an ear* is an idiomatic expression used as an insult to imply that the Prophet was easily swayed by what he heard and had no resolve (R); being called an "ear," al-Rāzī explains, is like calling a spy an "eye." The accusation was that the Prophet was gullible, accepting whatever he heard (Q). According to some, there were those around the Prophet who said, "We say what we wish; then we swear to him and he believes us" (Ṭ). *An ear that is good* is understood to mean that he hears what is good, not what is evil (R, Z). *Has faith in* uses the same verb as *believes,* but with a different preposition. *He has faith in the believers* could also be rendered "He believes the believers"; that is, when the believers say something, he believes them (R, Ṭ), but he does not believe the hypocrites (Ṭ).

62 *They swear . . . to you,* the believers, *to please you;* the second-person plural here denotes that it is the believers as a whole, not only the Prophet, to whom they swear. See also commentary on 2:14: *And when they meet those who believe they say, "We believe."* For the repeated oaths sworn by the hypocrites mentioned in this *sūrah* (vv. 42, 74, 95, 107), see 9:42c.

63 Hell as a *disgrace* represents the spiritual aspect of the punishment, while the *Fire* represents the physical aspect; on this topic, see 3:192c; 3:194c.

abide therein? That is the great disgrace. (64) The hypocrites dread lest a *sūrah* be sent down against them, informing them of that which is in their hearts. Say, "Go on mocking. Truly God will bring forth what you dread." (65) And if thou askest them, they will surely say, "We were only engaging [in vain talk] and playing." Say, "Is it God, His signs, and His Messenger you were mocking?" (66) Make no excuses. You disbelieved after having believed. If We pardon a group of you, We shall punish another group for having been guilty. (67) The hypocrites, men and women, are like unto one another, enjoining wrong, forbidding right, clutching their hands shut. They forgot God; so He forgot them. Truly the hypocrites are iniquitous. (68) Verily God has promised the hypocrites, men and women, and the disbelievers the Fire of Hell, to abide therein. It shall

64 Some interpret this verse to mean that, although the hypocrites did not believe that the Prophet was truthful, they nevertheless had previously experienced his ability to know their secret thoughts and their mockery of him and thus feared that this would occur again (R). Or it means that they did have a certain level of faith, but they were too overcome by jealousy and obduracy to commit themselves fully to that faith. Al-Rāzī observes that envy can make one blind to even sensible objects. Mockery by the hypocrites is mentioned frequently in the Quran (e.g., 2:14–15; 4:140; 5:57–58; 6:5; 31:6; 45:9, 35).

65 In one account a hypocrite spoke disparagingly about the Prophet and the Quran, saying, "I have seen no people with more fearful hearts, falser tongues, or more cowardice in the field," referring to the Prophet and the believers (R). A Companion went to tell the Prophet about this matter, but found that the Prophet already knew. Then the person who had mocked the Prophet came to him while he was riding and pleaded with him, saying that he and his friends were only passing the time and speaking idly. The Prophet then recited the verse that had recently been revealed, *Is it God, His signs, and His Messenger you were mocking?* and said and did no more (R, Ṭ).

66 Some commentators interpret this verse to mean that mockery of the Prophet is tantamount to disbelief (*kufr;* R). Although some interpret these two groups to be those who initiated the mockery and those who passively listened and laughed along with it (R), others interpret it to mean that one group would sincerely repent and the other would not (Ṭ).

67 *The hypocrites . . . are like unto one another* means "they are of their own kind"; that is, they are not to be counted among the believers (Ṭ, Z). *Clutching their hands shut* refers to their reluctance to take part in fighting (Q), or to their reluctance to spend and give in the way of God (Ṭ), or both. *They forgot God* by abandoning devotion to Him (Ṭ), *so He forgot them* by abandoning them and leaving them without guidance and compassion (Ṭ); or they forgot the remembrance of God, and God acted toward them like one who forgot them (IK). See also 45:34: *And it will be said, "Today We forget you just as you forgot the meeting with this your Day." Enjoining wrong, forbidding right* is an inversion of the usual command in the Quran to enjoin right and forbid wrong (3:104, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112; 22:41; 31:17); on this important concept in Islamic ethics, see 3:104c.

68 Cf. 4:55: *And Hell suffices as a blazing flame!;* and 58:8: *Hell suffices them, burning therein. What an evil journey's end!* Commentators often note that in the Quran the curse of God upon persons refers to their being distanced from God; see 2:161c.

suffice them. God curses them, and theirs shall be a lasting punishment. (69) [Remember] those who were before you. They were mightier than you in power, and greater in wealth and children. So they enjoyed their share, and you enjoyed your share, just as those before you enjoyed their share. And you have engaged [in vain talk] as they engaged [in vain talk]. It is they whose deeds came to naught in this world and in the Hereafter, and it is they who are the losers. (70) Has not the account come to them of those who were before them, the people of Noah, ᶜĀd, and Thamūd, and the people of Abraham, the inhabitants of Midian, and the overthrown cities? Their messengers brought them clear proofs. God wronged them not, but themselves did they wrong. (71) But the believing men and believing women are protectors of one another, enjoining right and forbidding wrong, performing the prayer, giving the alms, and obeying God and His Messenger. They are those upon whom God will have Mercy. Truly God is Mighty, Wise. (72) God has promised the believing men and the believing women Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein, and

69 On the subject of Muslims imitating the practices of the religious communities of the past, some commentators (IK, Q, Ṭ) mention a well-known *ḥadīth* that states, "By Him in Whose Hand lies my soul, you will follow the wonts of those who went before you, span by span, cubit by cubit, until, were one of them to enter the hole of a lizard, you would enter it also." *Their share* is interpreted to mean their share in religion (IK, Q) or their share of the good of this world in general (R). The greater strength or wealth of previous generations are often mentioned in the Quran to demonstrate that such worldly superiority was ultimately of no benefit to them, as in 43:7–8: *Yet never did a prophet come unto them, but that they mocked him. So We destroyed those greater than them in prowess, and the example of those of old has passed;* and other verses such as 28:78; 30:9; 35:44; 40:21; 47:13; 50:36.

70 *Overthrown cities* (cf. 53:53; 69:9) is generally thought to refer to cities that were destroyed, literally "turned upside down," although some interpret *overthrown* to mean their change in state from good to evil (R). Though many commentators believe that this verse refers to the people of Lot, others say that it can refer to any people who were destroyed (Q). The ᶜĀd were the people to whom the pre-Islamic Arabian prophet Hūd was sent, while the Thamūd were the people to whom God sent the prophet Ṣāliḥ. *The inhabitants of Midian* refers to the people of the prophet Shuᶜayb. See 7:59–102 and *Sūrah* 11 for the stories of these prophets.

71 This verse in a sense mirrors the description of the hypocrites in v. 67. On *enjoining right and forbidding wrong,* see 3:104c. *Protectors of one another* also means friends or allies of one another (cf. 5:51; 8:72; 45:19). This verse is significant with regard to the spiritual and social standing of women (cf. 33:35), because it places upon them the same spiritual and social obligations placed on men, including moral authority and protection.

72 On *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c. *Gardens of Eden* (*ᶜadn;* cf. 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50; 40:8) is understood by commentators to refer to an especially exalted or blessed place in the Garden, variously

goodly dwellings in the Gardens of Eden. But Contentment from God is greater; that is the great triumph! (73) O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh with them. Their refuge is Hell. What an evil journey's end! (74) They swear by God that they said it not, but indeed they spoke the word of disbelief, and disbelieved after having submitted [to God]. And they had ambitions that they did not achieve, and they were vengeful only because God and His Messenger enriched them from His Bounty. If they repent, it would be better for them. But if they turn away, God will punish them with a painful punishment in this world and in the Hereafter, and on earth they shall have neither protector nor helper. (75) And among them are those who make a pact with God [saying], "If He gives unto us from His Bounty, we will surely spend in charity, and we will surely be among the righteous." (76) But

described as the center of the Garden, the highest level of the Garden, a city whose palace is the Divine Throne, and a palace of gold in which only prophets, martyrs, and just rulers will reside (R, Q, Ṭ). Others see *ʿadn* not as the name of a place, but as an adjective modifying *Gardens,* meaning something like "Gardens in which to dwell" (Q, R). See also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

*But Contentment (riḍwān) from God is greater* places the spiritual reward of the Garden above its bodily dimension, because the life of the spirit is greater than the life of the body and striving to please God is superior to striving for a reward from Him, since all strive in some way for what benefits them (M). Many, however, consider *riḍwān* itself to be a name of the highest Paradise and not only a state. On the significance of God's Contentment, see 3:15c; 5:119c.

73 This verse is interpreted by some to mean that the Prophet should use force against the disbelievers and persuasion against the hypocrites (Ṭ). Others, such as al-Rāzī, note that there is nothing in the word *strive* that limits it to either the use of force or any other type of "striving," meaning that depending on circumstances one can employ either the use of force or the power of persuasion (Q, R). Other verses that counsel harshness or sternness toward the disbelievers include 5:54; 9:123; 48:29; 66:9.

74 It is thought that *they said it not* refers to an insult made against the Prophet or believers by the hypocrites; in one version they are reported to have said, "If Muhammad is truthful, then we are worse than the donkeys we ride" (Q, Ṭ). *They had ambitions* refers, according to some, to an incident where ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy said to the *Anṣār* (i.e., the native Madinans), "Our situation with Muhammad is as in the saying, 'Fatten your dog, and he will eat you.' If we return to Madinah [after the battle of Uḥud], the mighty will expel the lowly therefrom!" meaning that they should try to be rid of Muhammad and the outsiders he brought with him (Q, Ṭ). When word of this statement reached the Prophet, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy swore he did not say it. Others say that the description here applies to all hypocrites, not only to a particular case, and describes their general attitude toward the Prophet (Q). According to another account, it refers to an outright plan to assassinate the Prophet (R, Ṭ).

In connection with *they were vengeful only because God and His Messenger enriched them* some commentators mention the proverb, "Beware of the evil of one to whom you have done good" (Q). *Enriched them* refers, in one account, to the payment of blood money by the Prophet on behalf of one of the hypocrites (Ṭ).

75–76 As with other descriptions of the hypocrites in this *sūrah,* these verses are understood

when He gave unto them from His Bounty, they were miserly with it, and turned away in rejection. (77) So He requited them with hypocrisy in their hearts, till the Day they will meet Him, for having failed in that which they promised Him and for having lied. (78) Know they not that God knows their secret and their private discourse, and that God is Knower of things unseen? (79) As for they who reproach those believers who give freely and those who have naught but their keep [to give], and ridicule them—God ridicules them, and theirs shall be a painful punishment. (80) Seek forgiveness for them, or seek not forgiveness for them. If thou seekest forgiveness for them seventy times, God

in a general sense, but some commentators also connect them with a certain Thaʿlabah ibn Ḥāṭib, who insisted that he would give charity if he had the means to do so. The Prophet gave him some wealth from the spoils of war; he prospered and his wealth grew, until he eventually left Madinah and settled in a nearby valley. He then began to attend only some of the prayers in congregation, and then only the Friday prayer, and finally he stopped attending altogether, all the while growing wealthier. When the giving of alms (*zakāh*) was instituted, functionaries were sent to collect it from him. He refused on the grounds that it was not charity, and that it was nothing but a kind of indemnity (*jizyah*). He refused again and again. Finally he met the Prophet, who said to him, "Woe unto you, Thaʿlabah!" (R, Ṭ).

77 Many commentators believe that the subject of the verb *requited* is God (R), though others understand the beginning of the verse to mean, "And it (the miserliness) caused the result in them of having hypocrisy in their hearts" (Q). Some commentators use this verse as an occasion to quote the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet describes the four signs of the hypocrite: "When he is trusted, he betrays. When he speaks, he lies. When he promises, he reneges. And when he argues, he wrongs."

78 *Secret* (*sirr*) can mean both the thing kept secret as well as the aspect of a thing that is hidden or mysterious. *Private discourse* (cf. 4:114; 17:47; 20:62; 21:3; 43:80; 58:7; 58:8, 10, 12, 13) renders *najwā*, referring to conversations held between confidants, in this case referring to the insults the hypocrites exchange with one another about the Prophet and the believers (Ṭ); see commentary on 58:7–8. *Unseen* in the Quran refers to things that are real but absent from sensory perception in the present moment or absent because they will occur or have occurred at a different moment in time or state of being; see 2:3c. Some commentators point out that virtuous and spiritual persons are the reverse of hypocrites; they are satisfied with what God gives them and worship and remember God when no one can see; their *private discourse* is worship, not mockery (Aj).

79 Some commentators relate that this verse was revealed in connection with an incident when the Prophet encouraged the believers to give in charity, and several of the more affluent Companions gave large donations. A man of modest means came and gave half the dates he had earned the previous evening, keeping the other half for his family. Some of those who were present derided him for this, saying that God had no need of such a meager contribution and further claiming that he was doing it for show or to be counted in the company of the larger donors. About those who mocked the man of modest means, however, the Quran states *God ridicules them* (R, Ṭ). *Keep* renders *juhd*, which is understood to mean the way a person of modest means makes a living, or it can mean what a person strives to earn (Q, R). God's rebuke of those who ridicule is also mentioned in 2:15: *God mocks them, and leaves them to wander confused in their rebellion.*

80 It is reported that after this verse was revealed, the Prophet said he would then ask forgiveness for them in excess of seventy times (IK,

will not forgive them. That is because they disbelieve in God and His Messenger. And God guides not iniquitous people. (81) Those who were left behind exulted in staying back, opposing the Messenger of God, and were averse to striving with their wealth and with their selves in the way of God. And they said, "Go not forth in the heat." Say, "The Fire of Hell is of a heat more intense," if they but understood. (82) So let them laugh little and weep much, as a recompense for that which they used to earn. (83) And if God returns thee to a group of them, and they seek leave of thee to go forth, say, "You shall not go forth with me ever; nor shall you fight with me against any enemy. You were content to stay back the first time; so stay back with those who remain behind." (84) And never pray over one of them who dies, nor stand by his grave. Truly they disbelieved in God and His Messenger and died iniquitous. (85) And let not their wealth or

Ṭ), at which point 63:6 was revealed: *It is the same for them whether thou asketh forgiveness for them or thou asketh forgiveness for them not; God will never forgive them. Truly God guides not iniquitous people.* This is also similar to 2:6: *Truly it is the same for the disbelievers whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe.* The number seventy is often used to symbolize a very large number and does not always mean the exact number seventy (Q).

81 This verse refers to those who chose to stay behind when the Prophet went on the campaign to Tabūk (IK, Ṭ; see vv. 38–39). *They said, "Go not forth"* among themselves (Q), citing heat in addition to other reasons mentioned in 9:38c.

82 Those who stayed behind will be forced to *laugh little and weep much* as a result of their experience of the Hereafter (Q, R), unlike the believers who weep from belief in God (in hope and fear) in this life (Q). Cf. 53:60: *And do you laugh and not weep?* In this context, some commentators (Q) mention the *ḥadīth*, "If you knew what I knew, you would laugh little and weep much." In another *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "Weep, and if you cannot weep, try to weep."

83 *If God returns thee* from battle *to a group of them,* since not all who remained behind were hypocrites, *they will seek leave* to participate in upcoming battles (Q). But this verse prohibits them from taking part in future battles because the potential harm they would cause—perhaps through disruption or sabotage—would be too great (R), and they were to *remain behind* in Madinah, having been content to stay back the first time, mentioned in v. 38 (R).

84 *Pray over . . . them* refers to the funeral rites, which consist of a modified form of the canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*) in which one stands for two units of prayer, but does not bow or prostrate, in the presence of the body prior to burial, which is positioned so that the face of the deceased faces Makkah. According to one account, the son of one of the leading hypocrites, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, asked the Prophet if he would pray over his father and if his father could be buried using the Prophet's garment as a shroud. The Prophet agreed to do both, but accounts differ over whether this verse was revealed before the prayer, preventing him from performing it, or after he had already done so (Q, Ṭ). Ibn ʿAjībah observes that when a sincere servant of God dies, all beings including angels, jinn, and the creatures of the earth pray for that person, but when a person is distant from God, that body and spirit are spurned by all. This question is further discussed in vv. 113–15.

85 See commentary on the identical verse, v. 55. Al-Rāzī reasons that this verse is repeated for emphasis, because the attraction of property and children are among the strongest in the life of this

their children impress thee. God desires only to punish them thereby in this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers. (86) And when a *sūrah* is sent down [saying], "Believe in God and strive with His Messenger," the affluent among them ask thee for leave, and say, "Let us be among those who stay back." (87) They are content to be among those who remain behind, and a seal is set upon their hearts. And so they understand not. (88) But the Messenger and those who believe with him strive with their wealth and with their selves. And it is they who shall have good things, and it is they who shall prosper. (89) God has prepared for them Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein. That is the great triumph. (90) Those seeking to be excused among the Bedouin came in order to be granted leave, while those who lied to God and His Messenger stayed back. A painful punishment shall befall those among

world; he also believes that v. 55 referred to those hypocrites present when v. 55 was revealed, while this one refers to others.

86 This passage returns to the theme of a group desiring to stay back while the Prophet led the believers on the Tabūk campaign (vv. 38–39). Here *strive with His Messenger* is understood to refer to going out to battle (Ṭ), and *a sūrah* is understood to refer to the present *sūrah* (R). The *affluent* refers to those among them who were rich, but others understand it to mean the leadership and those of influence among them (R). This verse constitutes a reproach because only those who had financial means and were physically able would have to ask to stay back if they did not want to join the campaign, since those lacking either one would necessarily be excused (R); see commentary on 9:91–92.

87 That they prefer *to be among those who remain behind* refers to their willingness to remain with the women, the children, and the sick (Ṭ), who were not required to fight (although some women did actually participate in battles with the Prophet). See also vv. 91–92 for those who are legitimately excused from battle. *A seal is set upon their hearts* (cf. 7:100; 10:74; 63:3) resembles other passages of the Quran in which the sealing or covering of the heart or the sight and hearing of disbelievers and hypocrites is frequently mentioned; see 2:7c; 2:88c.

88 *Good things* renders *khayrāt,* understood to refer to the good things of both this world and the Hereafter (Q, R); the former are renown, a good reputation, and having others follow in one's footsteps, and one of the latter is the reward for one's good deeds (M). Elsewhere in the Quran (except in 55:70) the word *khayrāt* in its plural form refers to good deeds, so this could also refer to the fact that the believers will have good deeds, that is, the reward of good deeds. Some interpret it as a reference to the best women of Heaven mentioned in 55:70: *Therein are good and beautiful ones* (M, Q, R).

89 On *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c. *A great triumph* is often used to describe the attainment of felicity in the Hereafter (e.g., 4:13, 73; 5:119; 9:72; 33:71; 37:60; 40:9; 44:57; 48:5; 57:12; 61:12; 64:9; 85:11).

90 There is disagreement over whether the word rendered by *seeking to be excused* is read so that it would mean "making excuses," implying that they had no legitimate reason to be excluded from the fighting, or "with an excuse," meaning that they had good reason to stay behind (Q, R, Ṭ). The former reading is supported by a statement attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās that God curses *those seeking to be excused* in this verse (Q, R), thus grouping together some Bedouin with the Madinan hypocrites. According to the latter reading, the verse makes a distinction between

them who disbelieve. (91) No blame is there upon the weak, nor upon the sick, nor those who find nothing to spend, if they are sincere toward God and His Messenger. There is no argument against the virtuous—and God is Forgiving, Merciful— (92) nor upon those who, when they came to thee to give them a mount, and thou didst say to them, "I find nothing upon which to mount you," turned back, their eyes flowing with tears, grieving that they found nothing to spend. (93) The argument falls only upon those who seek leave of thee though they are wealthy. They are content to be among those who remain behind, and God has set a seal upon their hearts. And so they know not. (94) They will offer excuses to you when you return to them. Say, "Offer no excuses! We

those with a valid excuse and those who were simply lying (R).

91 *The weak* includes old men or those with a physical impairment, and *the sick* includes those who suffer from blindness, lameness, or a chronic illness (R). *Nothing to spend* refers to those who cannot afford, either on their own or through another's support, the minimum equipment required to participate in a campaign (R). Al-Rāzī notes that this verse does not prohibit persons without means from offering whatever support they can, only that they cannot be blamed for not doing so.

To be *sincere* renders the verb form of *naṣīḥah,* which means both giving counsel and acting sincerely toward someone with the particular connotation of giving sincere counsel or advice. It is a word also used in connection with "repentance" (*tawbah*) to describe a true and faithful attitude of contrition. In this regard, al-Qurṭubī mentions a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said thrice, "Religion is *naṣīḥah.*" It was asked of him, "Unto whom?" He replied, "Unto God, His Book, His Messenger, and the leaders and society of Muslims." It is a concept that encompasses being devoted to God and His Book and Messenger as well as giving good counsel to other human beings and desiring their well-being (Q).

*There is no argument against* renders an idiomatic phrase that literally translates, "There is no way/path against them," meaning that they are not subject to blame for their inability to contribute (R).

92 A group of Companions came to the Prophet hoping that he would have mounts to give them that would enable them to participate in the campaign with him, but he had none left to provide, and in their disappointment they walked away weeping profusely; differing accounts are recorded as to the identity of "the weepers" (Q, R, Ṭ). It is reported that, because of the distance and harsh conditions of the Tabūk expedition, each participant needed at least two mounts, one to ride and one for supplies (Q, R).

93 The latter part of this verse closely resembles v. 87. *God has set a seal* is interpreted by some to be the very reason why those who chose to remain behind did not see the good in expending their wealth and energy in the way of God (R), though the plain sense would indicate that the seal was set upon their hearts as a punishment for their actions, and that as a result they were reduced or even barred in their capacity for faith and understanding. For the idea of the sealing of hearts as a punishment see 2:7c (cf. 2:17; 4:155; 7:100–101; 10:74; 16:108; 30:59; 40:35; 42:24; 45:23).

94 *We shall not believe you* could also be rendered "We shall not have faith in you" (see 9:61c for the use of this verb in relation to God and human beings). That is to say, they will never consider the hypocrites to be truthful (Q). The *news of* them that they were given by God refers to their intentions, which they thought had been kept secret (Q).

*Brought back* refers to being brought back for judgment in the Hereafter. That *He will inform*

shall not believe you. God has already given us news of you. God and His Messenger will see your deeds. Then you will be brought back to the Knower of the Unseen and the seen, and He will inform you of that which you used to do." (95) They will swear by God to you, when you return to them, that you may turn away from them. So turn away from them. Truly, they are a defilement, and their refuge is Hell, a recompense for that which they used to earn. (96) They swear to you, that you might be content with them. But though you may be content with them, God is not content with iniquitous people. (97) The Bedouin are more severe in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more liable not to know the limits [ordained] in what God has sent down unto His Messenger. And God is Knowing, Wise. (98) And among the Bedouin are those who regard that which they spend as a loss, and they await a change in fortune for you. Upon them

*you of that which you used to do* is a central part of the experience of the Hereafter and is mentioned in other verses (cf. 10:23; 29:8; 31:15). *Unseen* renders *ghayb,* referring to all that is not present to ordinary human sense perception at the present moment, either because it is far removed from us (in either space or time, i.e., is past or will happen in the future) or because it is intrinsically beyond physical perception, belonging to the metaphysical realm, which exists at a higher level of reality or state of being. *The seen* renders *shahādah,* literally, "witnessed" or "witnessing," referring to what is present to sense perception. *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* could thus also be rendered "Knower of what is absent and what is present." This phrase is also used of God in 6:73; 9:105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18. These two terms are usually used together in the Quran and appear throughout Islamic literature.

95 What *they will swear by God to you* is implicit, understood to mean they will swear that they were unable to accompany the Prophet (Q). *That you may turn away from them* refers to the hypocrites' desire that they not be openly blamed (Q) or have their inner thoughts exposed (Ṭ). They wanted the Prophet and the believers to *turn away from them* by way of pardon as reflected *that you might be content with them* in v. 96, but instead the Prophet and believers turned away from the hypocrites with severity (R). *So turn away* is a Command to the believers, and upon returning to Madinah from Tabūk the Prophet told the believers not to speak or keep company with those who had remained behind without a valid excuse (Q, R). That they are *defilement* may mean that their actions are filthy (Q) or that they themselves represent a kind of spiritual defilement due to their inner state (R); on *rijs* ("filth" or "defilement"), see 7:71c.

96 This verse indicates that even if the believers are satisfied with the promises of the hypocrites, God is not (R). On the theme of God's Contentment, see 3:15c; 89:28c.

97 *Bedouin* translates *aʿrāb,* referring to nomadic Arabs as opposed to sedentary residents of the towns, and here it refers specifically to the hypocrites among the former (R); see also v. 101. *Limits [ordained] in what God has sent down* refers to the obligations and prohibitions of Divine Law (Q) or to the proper arguments and proofs for correct doctrines regarding God, the Messenger, and the Hereafter (Q, R). On the "limits set by God," see also 2:187, 229, 231; 4:13–14; 9:112; 58:4; 65:1.

98 *That which they spend* refers to what some Bedouin expend in the way of God, whether in charity or in battle; they consider it to be given without hope of reward or recompense, hence *as a loss* or punitive obligation (Q) or as a means of boasting (R). *Change in fortune* renders *dawāʾir*

shall be an evil change of fortune. And God is Hearing, Knowing. (99) And among the Bedouin are those who believe in God and the Last Day, and regard that which they spend as [a means to attain] nearness unto God and the blessings of the Messenger. Behold! It shall surely be nearness for them. God will cause them to enter His Mercy. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (100) [As for] the foremost, the first among the Emigrants and the Helpers, and those who followed them with virtue, God is content with them, and they are content with Him. And He has prepared for them Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein forever. That is the great triumph. (101) Among the Bedouin around

(sing. *dā'irah*), whose lexical root evokes the sense of a circle or circuit; that is, they wait hoping that the good fortune of the believers will circle around and become bad again (Ṭ). *Evil,* here as elsewhere, refers not only to what is morally evil, but also to anything that is harmful or causes suffering.

99 In contrast to the description in the previous verse, this verse mentions some Bedouin who discern the spiritual reasons for their physical expenditures. *Blessings* renders *ṣalawāt* (sing. *ṣalāh*), which can also mean "prayers" or "supplications," here understood to include, for example, the Prophet's prayers on their behalf for forgiveness, blessings, and other good things (R). In such contexts, *ṣalāh* is translated "blessing" rather than "prayer" (usually referring to the canonical obligatory prayers in Islam) because, depending on the preposition that accompanies it, it can also be used when God is the agent and human beings are the recipient, as in 33:56: *Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet* (see also 2:3c). Those who are caused to *enter His Mercy* are also mentioned in 45:30 in the context of the judgment of the Hereafter.

This verse describes spending in the way of God as a means of attaining *nearness* unto God, while other verses deny the efficacy of less sincere attempts at attaining nearness unto Him, as in 34:37: *It is not your wealth or your children that bring you nigh in nearness unto Us;* and 39:3, where the idolaters say of their idols, *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God.*

100 The *foremost* (*sābiqūn*) has a special meaning in 56:10, where it describes those of the highest virtue and spiritual attainment who have a special place in the Hereafter. Those commentators who specify the group to which the present verse refers understand it, however, to mean those who pledged allegiance to the Prophet after the signing of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48); or those who prayed in both directions of prayer (meaning very early Muslims who prayed facing Jerusalem before the *qiblah* was changed to Makkah; see 2:115c; Ṭ); or those who participated in the Battle of Badr (Q). In all such cases it refers to those who were with the Prophet when it brought no foreseeable material benefit. The *sābiqūn* is also a term used by Sufis to mean those who follow the spiritual path to God and who are contrasted with both ordinary believers and disbelievers.

*Those who followed them* is sometimes thought to refer to the generation after the Companions, known as the Followers (*tābi'ūn*) (Q), while others say it can refer to anyone who follows them with virtue until the Day of Judgment (R). On the reciprocity expressed in *God is content with them, and they are content with Him,* see 5:119c; 58:22c; 89:28c.

101 Depending on how one pauses in the Arabic, the beginning of this verse could also be read, "Among the Bedouin around you there are hypocrites, and among the people of Madinah [are those who] are headstrong in hypocrisy." They are *headstrong* in that they are persistent and unrepentant (R, Ṭ). *Punished them twice* refers to the punishment they will have in this world and then in the Hereafter; for example, the illness of a believer is considered an expiation for sin, while that of the disbeliever is a punishment meted out

you there are hypocrites, and among the people of Madinah, who are headstrong in hypocrisy. Thou knowest them not; We know them and We shall punish them twice. Then they shall be relegated to a great punishment. (102) And [there are] others who admit their sins; they mixed righteous deeds with others that are evil. It may be that God will relent unto them. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (103) Take thou a charitable offering from their wealth, cleansing them and purifying them thereby, and bless them. Truly thy

in this life, although the disbeliever will also be punished in the Hereafter (Q). Some interpret this phrase to mean that they will be punished twice—first in this life, then while in the grave (on the punishment of the grave, see 3:169–71c), and then they will be *relegated to a great punishment* in the Hereafter (R). It is said that among those conditions by which they are punished in the world are hunger, death, and the rage they feel at the success of God's religion (Ṭ).

102 According to the most common account, this verse was revealed in connection with several men who had remained behind from the Tabūk campaign, but repented and tied themselves to the walls of the mosque, vowing not to eat or drink until God pardoned them (Q, Ṭ). *They mixed righteous deeds with others* could refer to the fact that some of these men had previously participated in battles with the Prophet (Q). Some consider that, coming from God, *it may be* implies a necessity (R, Ṭ).

103 It is said that this verse was revealed in connection with the repentant men of v. 102. The men offered to give their wealth, but the Prophet said he had not been commanded to accept their offerings. Then this verse was revealed, and the Prophet commanded them to give one-third of their wealth as an expiation (Q). This reading of the verse was later used, after the Prophet's death, as justification by those Arabian tribes who believed that alms were only owed to the Prophet personally for him to distribute (IK); therefore, some of these tribes refused to give alms to Abū Bakr (Q). According to this interpretation, the *charitable offering* refers to the charity of expiation (R). The other main opinion is that this verse refers to the institutional alms (usually referred to as *zakāh*) that are obligatory (Q, R, Ṭ). This verse could not, it is argued, be the basis for restricting obligatory alms to those given directly to the Prophet, since other verses explicitly name other recommended recipients; see 9:60: *The charitable offerings are only for the poor, and the indigent;* and 51:19: *And in their wealth was a due for the beggar and the deprived.*

The purification of a people by a messenger is also mentioned in 2:129; 2:151; 3:164; 62:2, often mentioned together with the teaching of the Book and the imparting of knowledge. The giving of charity purifies one from the defilement of sin and disobedience to God (R).

On the meaning of the *blessings* (*ṣalāh*), see 2:3c; 9:99c; 33:56c. It is said that when someone brought charity to the Prophet for distribution to the community, he would pray, "O God, bless them (*ṣalli ʿalayhim*)!" (IK, Q). The Prophet's blessings are a *comfort* (*sakan*) in that when people heard the Prophet's prayers, they became glad and, as a result of God's Response to his prayers, found peace in their hearts (Q); his blessings were a mercy for them (IK, Ṭ).

Many say that the act of blessing in this particular way is reserved only for the Prophet, meaning that Muslims should invoke blessings only upon him and no other person, and that he was the only person who could do so for other people (Q, R). Al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī, however, are of the opinion that there is no reason why this particular form of invoking blessings should be restricted to the Prophet, as he is a model and exemplar for all actions. Muslims invoke blessings and peace upon the Prophet Muhammad in prayers and also when his name is mentioned, while only peace is invoked in the case of other prophets.

blessings are a comfort for them. And God is Hearing, Knowing. (104) Know they not that God accepts repentance from His servants, and receives the charitable offerings, and that God is the Relenting, the Merciful? (105) Say, "Perform your deeds. God will see your deeds, as will the Messenger and the believers, and you will be brought back to the Knower of the Unseen and the seen, and He will inform you of that which you used to do." (106) And others are made to await the Command of God. Either He will punish them, or He will relent unto them. And God is Knowing, Wise. (107) And as for those who established a

104 On the matter of repentance, see 2:37c; 4:17–18c; 66:8c; 92:10c; 110:3c. In connection with *receives the charitable offerings* some mention a saying of the Companion ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, who said, "No servant gives charity but that it lands in the Hand of God before the hand of the petitioner, and it is He who places it in the hand of the petitioner" (IK, Ṭ). Al-Rāzī likens this verse to others such as 48:10: *Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God;* and 33:57: *those who affront God and His Messenger,* in which the Prophet "stands in the place" of God.

105 Some interpret this verse to be addressing those *who acknowledge their sins* in v. 102 (Ṭ). It is understood to be a source of encouragement and also a warning, both because one desires praise and fears scorn and because it mentions the judgment of the Hereafter (R). The language of this verse mirrors the second half of v. 94. That the believers *will see your deeds* is understood by some to mean that they will do so on the Day of Judgment (IK) or that they will be brought news of them even in this world (R).

106 *Others are made to await* refers most immediately to those who remained behind from the Tabūk campaign, but who were neither as ardently repentant as those described in vv. 102–3 nor as indifferent as the hypocrites mentioned in vv. 94–96 (R). They were made to wait for or anticipate the Judgment of God (Ṭ). It is thought to refer specifically to three Companions who stayed back from the Tabūk campaign, but did not immediately seek pardon when the Prophet returned; nor did they bind themselves to the mosque as some others had done. The community was commanded to shun them, neither keeping company with them nor speaking with them, and their wives were also commanded to return to their families until some decision came down in their regard (R). They were later pardoned upon the revelation of vv. 117–18; see commentary on those verses.

107 This verse describes a mosque built by a group led by a certain Abū ʿĀmir al-Rāhib ("the monk"), a notable and respected member of the Aws clan of Madinah who had, before the Prophet came to Madinah, converted to Christianity and was known to be learned in the Christian scriptures. After the defeat of the Makkans at Badr, Abū ʿĀmir was angered at the apparent resilience of the Prophet and his followers and lent his support to the Quraysh, going so far as to dig ditches on the battlefield during the Battle of Uḥud, one of which injured the Prophet during the battle when he fell into it. After the Battle of Uḥud and a final encounter with the Prophet during which Abū ʿĀmir refused to accept Islam, he traveled to see the Byzantine emperor Heraclius to enlist his help against the Prophet. Having received promises of assistance from Heraclius, he sent word to his allies in Madinah to construct a mosque near the Qubāʾ mosque, just outside of Madinah, assuring them that the Byzantines would assist them in expelling the Prophet from his position of power in Madinah. After building the mosque, which they claimed was for the weak, the poor, and those who had difficulty traveling, they invited the Prophet to pray there in order to bless it and establish it as a place of prayer. The Prophet responded that he was about to set out on a journey and would do so, God willing, upon his return. When they were within a day's journey on their return from Tabūk, this verse was revealed,

mosque for harm and disbelief, and to divide the believers, and to be an outpost for those who made war on God and His Messenger before, they will surely swear, "We desire only what is best." But God bears witness that truly they are liars. (108) Never stand therein! Truly a mosque founded upon reverence from the first day is worthier of thy standing therein. Therein are men who love to purify themselves, and God loves those who purify themselves. (109) So is one who founded his building upon reverence for God and [His] Contentment better, or one who founded his building on the brink of a crumbling bank, which then crumbles with him into the Fire of Hell? And God guides not wrongdoing people. (110) The building they have built will cease not to be a disquiet in their

and the Prophet commanded that the mosque be burned down (IK).

They wanted to *divide the believers* by establishing another mosque near the already existing Qubāʾ mosque with the intention of defying and defeating the Prophet (Q). It would also serve as an *outpost* for the scheme of Abū ʿĀmir, who informed his confederates that the Byzantines would send assistance and that they should ready themselves for battle (Q). *We desire only what is best* is understood to refer to their claim that the mosque was built only for the ease and convenience of the believers (IK).

108 *Never stand therein!* is a command addressed to the Prophet in the second-person singular and refers to standing for prayer in the mosque built by Abū ʿĀmir (Q). *A mosque founded upon reverence* refers to the mosque of Qubāʾ (Q). During the emigration (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Madinah, the Prophet did not enter the center of Madinah immediately, but remained for some days in Qubāʾ with the Banū ʿAmr on the outskirts of the city, while waiting for the remaining Emigrants, including ʿAlī, to reach Madinah. This was the first place where the Prophet prayed after the *hijrah*, and later the residents of that area asked permission to build a mosque there (Ṭ). Some opinions interpret this as a reference to the Prophet's mosque, which was built later, but the reference to *from the first day* in v. 109 indicates that it is the Qubāʾ mosque (Q). *Men who love to purify themselves* means that their souls do not remain soiled by sin and rebellion (R), but this phrase is connected by some commentators to reports that the people of Qubāʾ were especially diligent in their personal hygiene and in maintaining bodily cleanliness for ritual purposes (Q, Ṭ).

109 Similar imagery also appears in 3:103: *You were on the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it;* and 22:11: *And among mankind some worship God upon a brink: if good befalls him, he is content thereby, but if a trial befalls him, he is turned over upon his face, losing this world and the Hereafter.* That is to say, it is better to found one's building on firm truth and reverence for God than upon the weak foundation of falsehood (R).

110 *The building they have built* refers to the aforementioned *mosque for harm and disbelief* of v. 107 (Q). It will *be a disquiet in their hearts* in that it will cause their hearts to be in a state of anguish and doubt (R). The *disquiet* can be interpreted to mean that the Prophet's act of destroying the mosque increased their hostility toward him and their doubts about his mission, or that it caused them to wonder whether that destruction would also be visited upon them personally, or that they wondered whether God would forgive them or not (R).

*Till their hearts are rent asunder* is read by some to mean "till Thou rend asunder their hearts" or "till it rends their hearts asunder." It is also read by some to mean "unless their hearts are rent asunder," meaning unless they repent so ardently as to rend their hearts (R). Others interpret *hearts are*

hearts, till their hearts are rent asunder. And God is Knowing, Wise. (111) Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs. They fight in the way of God, slaying and being slain. [It is] a promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is truer to His pact than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made. That indeed is the great triumph. (112) The penitent, and the worshippers, and the celebrants of praise, and the wayfarers, and those who bow, and

*rent asunder* as a reference to their deaths, meaning they will be in that state of falsehood so long as they live (Ṭ).

111 Similar language relating buying and selling to spiritual matters is also found in 2:16, 86, 175; 3:177; 16:95; 57:11; 61:10. Al-Rāzī notes that a subtlety of this verse is that in this profound transaction God is both the buyer and the seller, akin to the way an adult would transact the affairs of a helpless infant. He goes on to note that in the verse God affirms that the immortal substance of a human being "owns" both its ephemeral body and its worldly property, and that by giving both of these over for God's use this immortal substance purchases, as it were, the Garden. None of this verse, in al-Rāzī's view, changes the fact that God is beyond any need for such transactions, and that the wording of this verse is meant as a kindness, a gentleness, and an act of subtlety on the part of God. Ibn ʿAjībah expounds upon the commercial language of this verse and says essentially that the souls of the disbelievers cannot be purchased in exchange for the Garden, because those souls are "worthless," while the souls of the prophets and friends of God are "priceless" and do not enter into the realm of buying and selling. Between the two extremes are the believers' souls, which are "bought" or "sold" for the Garden.

It is reported by some that this verse refers to the "second pledge at ʿAqabah," a location outside of Makkah (not to be confused with the port town that is in Jordan today). The first pledge at ʿAqabah took place when a small group of people from Yathrib (not yet named Madinah) came on pilgrimage to Makkah in order to acknowledge the Prophet's mission and pledge allegiance to him. At the second pledge of ʿAqabah, under similar circumstances, the Companion ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah said, "Stipulate for thy Lord and for thyself what thou wilt." The Prophet said, "I stipulate for my Lord that you shall worship Him and ascribe to Him no partner, and I stipulate for myself that you shall keep me from that which you keep from your selves and your property." They said, "And if we do that, what shall we have?" He said, "The Garden." They said, "A profitable trade! We shall neither rescind nor seek to rescind it!" (Q, Ṭ)

*A promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran* is interpreted to mean that it is an immutable promise that such people will be rewarded thus, going all the way back to the Torah (R). The pact refers to the aforementioned purchase by God of the souls and wealth of the believers, as does *bargain you have made* (R).

112 *Penitent* refers to those who repent from idolatry, hypocrisy, and sin (R, Ṭ). *Celebrants of praise* (*ḥāmid*) are those who glorify God in good times and in bad (Ṭ), by day and by night (R). *Wayfarers* (*sāʾiḥ*) is interpreted by many commentators to mean "those who fast," citing *aḥādīth* such as "The wayfaring (*siyāḥah*) of this community is fasting," while others interpret it to mean fighting or emigrating in the way of God (Q). Some note that the link between fasting and wayfaring is the abstention from enjoyments such as food and drink (R), which must be understood here with consideration of the difficult conditions in which it was undertaken in times of old. Al-Rāzī notes that when people travel they close the doors to passions and are exposed to hardships, which leads to the opening of the doors of wisdom, and that those who fast are journeying in the spiritual world. Others say that wayfarers refers to those who travel to seek knowledge, and that when one goes on a journey, one witnesses

those who prostrate, and those who enjoin right, and those who forbid wrong, and those who maintain the limits set by God; and give glad tidings unto the believers. (113) It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to seek forgiveness for the idolaters, even if they be kin, after it has become clear to them that they shall be the inhabitants of Hellfire. (114) Abraham's plea for forgiveness of his father was only due to a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Truly Abraham was tenderhearted, clement. (115) It is not for God to lead a people astray after having guided them, till He makes clear unto them that whereof they should be

the world in its variety, gains insight into God's creation, and is edified thereby (R). On *those who bow, and those who prostrate,* see also 2:43, 125; 3:43; 22:26. On the central Islamic concepts of enjoining right and forbidding wrong, see 2:207c; 3:104c. The *limits set by God* refers to the obligations and prohibitions He sets down for both transactions and acts of worship (R, Ṭ). This verse is interpreted spiritually to mean that the wayfarers on the path of God fast from what is other than God, journey with their hearts in the spiritual world of the unseen, bow and prostrate in every direction, and maintain themselves within the limits of perfect servanthood (Aj).

113–14 According to one account this verse was revealed in relation to some believers who used to pray for their departed relatives who had died as idolaters, and when they were questioned about their actions, they responded that Abraham himself had prayed for his father even though the latter was an idolater (R, Ṭ). Abraham's plea for forgiveness is mentioned in his words to his father in 19:47: *Peace be upon you! I shall seek forgiveness for you from my Lord.*

*It is not for the Prophet* is interpreted usually as a prohibition, but it can also be understood to mean "It is not befitting the Prophet," by way of discouragement rather than proscription (R). Some interpret these verses to mean that while idolaters are alive and the question of having faith is open, one can pray for them, but after those persons have died and their state has been made clear, one should not do so (R). Others say that this prohibition refers not to prayer in general, but to funeral rites, in which case it would echo v. 84, *And never pray over one of them who dies, nor stand by his grave* (Q, R). Some commentators (R) seem to understand *become clear to them that they shall be the inhabitants of the Hellfire* to be a statement about idolaters in general, but *become clear to them* would indicate that this refers to specific knowledge about specific people in this world, since the perdition of idolaters in the Hereafter is not something that could be "made clear" as such to all human beings in this world. Others understand it to mean that it is clear if they die in a state of idolatry or disbelief, but that before death there is no way of knowing (Ṭ). *Tenderhearted* renders *awwāh* (cf. 11:75), which is understood to mean one who is kind and compassionate (*raḥīm*) or one who is humble or prays often (IK, Q, R).

115 This verse is interpreted in the context of the previous Command that believers should not pray for the forgiveness of idolaters after it has become clear that they would be *inhabitants of Hellfire* (v. 113). Some of the believers were anxious over having made such supplications for forgiveness (v. 114) in the past (R). Other commentators connect this injunction with the prohibition of the consumption of alcohol (see 2:219c; 5:90–91c), since some Companions were worried about other Companions who died before the prohibition was enacted (Q). Spiritually, it is understood to mean that God will not divert someone from the path to Him without it having first been made clear to him that he should be mindful of the virtues and possess proper spiritual courtesy, or *adab* (Aj).

mindful. Truly God is Knower of all things. (116) Truly unto God belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. He gives life and causes death. Apart from God you have neither protector nor helper. (117) God indeed has relented unto the Prophet, and the Emigrants and the Helpers who followed him in the difficult hour, after the hearts of a group of them nearly swerved. Then He relented unto them—truly He is Kind, Merciful unto them— (118) and unto the three who were left behind until the earth, despite its breadth, closed in upon them, and their own souls closed in upon them, and they deemed there to be no refuge from God, save with Him. Then He relented unto them, that they might repent. Truly God is Relenting, Merciful. (119) O you who believe! Reverence

116 Various elements of this verse appear throughout the Quran, namely, the Sovereignty of God (e.g., 3:189; 5:17, 18; 24:42; 45:27), God's giving of life and death (2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 40:68; 44:8; 53:44; 57:2; 67:2), and disbelievers' plight of having neither protector nor helper in the Hereafter (e.g., 2:107, 120; 9:74; 48:22).

117 *Relented* means that God responds to the repentance of human beings, since "to repent" and "to relent" (in accepting repentance) are the same verb in Arabic with a different particle, both of which have the sense of "turning toward" (see v. 14; 2:37, 128, 160). Some say that the matter concerning which God relents toward the Prophet is his having granted leave to some who wished to stay behind (see v. 43); and He relents toward the believers when their hearts may have inclined toward remaining behind or when they hesitated in their commitment (Q, R). The *difficult hour* refers to the Tabūk expedition, undertaken in such heat that they had to slaughter camels in order to deal with dwindling water and supplies (R, Ṭ), though it can also refer to all such difficult times, such as the Battle of the Trench in 5/627 (R).

118 This verse refers to the three men who stayed behind, but offered no excuses, either before the Prophet left for Tabūk or after he returned. According to some, *left behind* here refers not to being left behind from the expedition to Tabūk, but to being left in a state waiting for God's Judgment to come (Q, R). In the sources a lengthy account is given of one of *the three,* Kaʿb ibn Mālik, who found himself in a perpetual state of indecision during the days leading up to the Tabūk campaign and kept putting off making the necessary preparations. Finally, the day came when the soldiers had all left and he was left with the others in Madinah. When the Prophet returned, many of those who had remained behind made their excuses vociferously with the Prophet who, according to the account, accepted the plain sense of their words and pardoned them. However, Kaʿb ibn Mālik could not bring himself to fashion any excuses and instead stated openly that he had no excuse, because at no time in his life was he materially more prepared to set out for battle than on the day the Prophet set out for Tabūk (and he had indeed participated in many battles with the Prophet before). The Prophet told him and the other two to wait until God decided their case. Meanwhile, the community was commanded to shun them, and although Kaʿb had the fortitude to walk in the markets and pray in the mosques while no one spoke to him, the other two remained in their homes for the fifty days it took for the decision in this verse to be revealed. That *the earth, despite its breadth, closed in* is also mentioned in v. 25; in the present verse it refers to the sense of constriction and loneliness (Q, R).

119 *Be among the truthful* is thought to refer to the fact that, though they suffered isolation on account of it, the honesty of the three men who remained behind in not making false excuses kept them from the ranks of the hypocrites and made

your Lord, and be among the truthful. (120) It is not for the people of Madinah and the Bedouin who dwell around them to remain behind from the Messenger of God, or to prefer themselves to him. That is because no thirst, nor toil, nor hunger befalls them in the way of God, nor do they take any step enraging the disbelievers, nor do they endure aught at the hands of an enemy, but that a righteous deed is recorded for them on account of it. Truly God neglects not the reward of the virtuous. (121) Nor do they spend aught, be it small or large, nor traverse a valley, but that it is written down for them, that God may reward them for the best of that which they used to do. (122) But it is not for the believers all to go forth. And why should not a party from each group go forth to gain understanding in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them,

them recipients of God's Pardon (Q). From another perspective, it means to stand together with the Prophet and the other believers (Ṭ). *Truthful* renders *ṣādiq*, which, in addition to meaning telling the truth, can also mean "sincere" and "loyal," which come from the same root as "charity" (*ṣadaqah*), the verb meaning "to confirm" or "to verify" (*ṣaddaqa*), and the intensive participle *ṣiddīq*, meaning both "truthful" and "friend" (4:69; 5:75; 12:46; 24:61; 57:19).

120 *It is not for the people . . . to remain behind from the Messenger of God* indicates the necessity of following the Prophet into battle. It is thought by some that this ruling applied only to following the Prophet, since in later times in history one did not necessarily have to follow the political leader into battle (R, Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī interprets this verse as a statement about the failure of some Madinans and Bedouin to join the Prophet's expedition to Tabūk, meaning that although some may have been required to remain behind for some other purpose, none should, in principle, have simply refused to join him. Some think that this verse was abrogated by v. 122 (R, Ṭ), but the question of abrogation does not arise if this verse is interpreted as meaning that believers must be ready to respond to the Prophet, though they may not actually participate in battle. Some of those who base their interpretation on abrogation argue that v. 120 referred to a time when Islam was weak and Muslims few in number, but v. 122 referred to a time when they became stronger and more numerous (Ṭ).

121 *The best of that which they used to do* (cf. 16:96–97; 24:38; 29:7; 39:35; 46:16) here either refers to the fact that they would be rewarded for the good in their deeds, not the bad, or it is understood to mean "God will reward them with better than that which they did," meaning the reward will exceed the deed (R); see 29:7c. This latter interpretation echoes verses such as 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof.* The imagery of *written down for them* echoes other passages that speak of a person's actions in life being recorded, such as 36:12: *Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in a clear registry;* 43:19: *Their witnessing shall be recorded, and they will be questioned;* 43:80: *Yea, and Our envoys are present with them, recording;* and 78:29: *And everything have We recorded in a book.*

122 Some interpret this verse to mean that not all the Bedouin had to come into Madinah when a call to battle was made (Ṭ). Others say that it means that when the Prophet dispatched some group for battle or for a raid (IK), they were not all to go; some were to remain behind for various reasons including spiritual and religious instruction (Ṭ), especially since new revelations were being given while the Prophet was

that haply they will beware? (123) O you who believe! Fight those disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you. And know that God is with the reverent. (124) And whensoever a *sūrah* is sent down, some among them say, "Which of you has this increased in faith?" As for those who believe, it

with them and people needed to be there to learn from the Prophet and pass on their knowledge to others (R). The fighting group would represent the studying group in battle, and the latter would represent the former in studying the religious teachings of the Prophet (R).

For others, this verse does not refer to battle, but to religious instruction as such. In the final years of the Prophet's life, tribes would sometimes embrace Islam as a group. Some interpret this verse to be saying that when a tribe accepted Islam, its members should not all come at the same time to Madinah and overwhelm the accommodations of the city; rather, some should come to learn from the Prophet and then return to teach their fellow believers the doctrines and practices of the religion (IK, R, Ṭ). This is what Islamic Law would later call a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) as opposed to an individual obligation (*farḍ ʿayn*), since it only requires that there be some members of the community who seek knowledge in this way (Q). Al-Rāzī reflects on the fact that, in the time of the Prophet, journeying to find spiritual wisdom and religious knowledge was a nearly universal necessity, whereas in his own time, because the spiritual and intellectual tradition had become strong and well established, the necessity for such travel was diminished. Still, in his view acquiring true and fruitful religious understanding often required traveling to other lands and leaving one's home in pursuit of knowledge.

According to another interpretation, this verse was revealed as a rebuke to those hypocrites who tried to disparage those Companions who had been sent to the Bedouin to teach them and had not gone out to battle because of it (Ṭ) or to certain other Bedouin who had, for some reason, not gone out to battle (IK).

By "warning their people" they extend the function of the Prophet (and all prophets) as a "warner," a description of the Prophet mentioned in many verses throughout the Quran (see 4:165c). The warning should impel them to action (R), alerting them about the trials of the Fire, but also giving them news of the blessings of the Garden (IK).

123 This verse is understood by some as stating the general principle that a near enemy should be dealt with first, although others believe that it refers specifically to the Arabs before the command was given to fight the Byzantines (see v. 29), meaning that the enemy among the Arabs should be fought before turning to the Byzantines (Q). Other commentators, understanding the mention of the near enemy as assuming engagement with a distant enemy not mentioned in the verse, saw in this verse a kind of description of a strategy of gradual conquest beyond the "near enemy" (IK), though this reasoning seems to depart starkly from the text.

The Command to be harsh with the disbelievers (cf. 9:73; 48:29; 66:9) is understood as serving as a deterrence from evil deeds (R). The wording indicates that one should be measured in one's harshness, and that the Command is given to one in whom gentleness and kindness are predominant (R). Interpreted as a spiritual allegory, the Commands of this verse mean that one should attack one's own faults—the "disbeliever" in the soul—first, and only then may God place on one's shoulders the responsibility to rectify the faults within others (Aj).

124 The idea of being increased in faith or belief (*īmān*) also appears in 3:173, 8:2, and 48:4; similarly, one can also be "increased" in humility (17:109) and guidance (47:17). *Some among them* means among the hypocrites (IK). Their question was posed among themselves, with the intention of keeping one another in a state of defiance against faith or as a way of mocking the believers (R). *They rejoice* can also mean "they will rejoice," and commentators interpret this rejoicing to take place in either this life or the Hereafter, or both (R). The message that the same revelation would have a different effect on different people is also mentioned in 2:26, which says of the parables

increases them in faith, and they rejoice. (125) As for those in whose hearts is a disease, it adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are disbelievers. (126) See they not that they are tried each year, once or twice; yet they neither repent nor take heed? (127) And whensoever a *sūrah* is sent down, they look at each other [saying], "Does anyone see you?" Then they turn away. God has turned their hearts away because they are a people who understand not. (128) A Messenger has indeed come unto you from among your own. Troubled is he by what you suffer, solicitous of you, kind and merciful unto the believers. (129) But if they turn away, say, "God suffices me. There is no god but He. In Him do I trust, and He is the Lord of the mighty Throne."

of the Quran: *He misleads many by it, and He guides many by it, and He misleads none but the iniquitous.*

Within the Islamic spiritual tradition there is a commonly accepted idea that one understands and benefits from the Quran to the degree that one's heart is pure and one is humble before the Word of God. At the same time, the recitation of the Word of God and sincere meditation upon it have the effect of removing the hardened crust surrounding one's heart. For a fuller discussion of the relationship between one's spiritual state and one's reception of the Quran, see 3:7c.

125 The *defilement* (*rijs*) is understood as doubt, sin, and disbelief (Q) as well as vices such as greed, jealousy, and guile (R). The "disease of the heart" (cf. 2:10; 5:52; 8:49; 22:53; 33:12, 60; 47:20, 29; 74:31) consists precisely in such faults as well as false beliefs (R). Al-Rāzī notes that the hypocrites respond to this *sūrah* with jealousy and anger, which gives rise to further rejection of the truth, a process that is a kind of adding *defilement to their defilement*; that is, hearing this *sūrah* is not the cause of their fall into greater defilement; rather, the *sūrah* has this effect on a particular kind of soul. Moreover, they will die in such a state, which will lead to the Fire, unlike the believers who will *rejoice* (v. 124) in the Hereafter.

126 The trials are interpreted by some to be hunger or illness, or fighting and expeditions (IK, Q, R), while others interpret the yearly or twice yearly trials to refer to the Prophet's exposure of the disbelievers' secret thoughts and conversations (M); regarding the exposure of their *secret converse,* see commentary on 58:7–10c. In response to these trials, they neither *repent* of past deeds nor *take heed* of the future (IK).

127 *Does anyone see you?* refers to the astonishment that hypocrites would feel when their secret conversations or thoughts were exposed by the Prophet; they would wonder if someone was aware of what they were doing and had informed the Prophet (Q). It is also understood to mean that they glance at each other in a spirit of mockery (R). According to another interpretation, it means that, when some revelation exposes them, they wish to leave the gathering in the mosque in which they find themselves, but wish to do so undetected (R). *Then they turn away* from guidance, which some note is all the more noteworthy because such moments could have been starting points for reflecting upon the truth, rather than the rejection of it (Q), or *they turn away* from having to listen to any more of the Quran (R). Some read *God has turned their hearts away* as a kind of interjection, "God, turn their hearts away!" which the believers should themselves then say (Q).

128 It is thought by some that vv. 128–29 were the very last to be revealed to the Prophet before his death (IK, Q), though which passage was revealed last is a subject of considerable disagreement among commentators (see 4:176c and the introduction to *Sūrah* 110).

Some interpret *from among your own* (cf. 2:151; 3:164; 62:2) to be a reminder to the Arabs of the great blessing given to them—a prophet from

among their own, speaking their language; others understand *your own* to mean humanity as such (Q, R). This is also a place where some commentators (IK, Q) mention, as a commentary on *from among your own,* the significance of the lineage of the Prophet, in particular that he comes from a noble line going all the way back to Abraham (IK, Q, Ṭ). Others say that this verse is a sign that the Arabs were and still are elevated by the fact that the Prophet was one of them (R).

The description of the Prophet offered in this verse is interpreted to mean that he is anxious for them not to enter the Fire, to be guided and find the right way (M), and is hopeful that they should enter the Garden (Q). Many commentators note that the Prophet is honored here by qualities usually attributable to God in the Quran, as in 22:65: *Truly God is Kind and Merciful unto mankind.*

129 These words are spoken to the Prophet (Q) in the face of the rejection of the disbelievers. That *God suffices* the believers is also mentioned in 3:173; 8:62, 64; 9:59; see also 2:137c; 3:173c; and 39:36: *Does God not suffice His servant?* Regarding the virtue of trust in God (*tawakkul*), see 14:11–12c; see also 3:122, 160; 5:11; 9:51; 12:67; 39:38; 58:10; 64:13. On the Divine Throne, which is often conceived of as meaning the summit of the created order, see 2:255c.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 10

# Jonah

## *Yūnus*

*Yūnus* is the first in a series of six *sūrah*s whose opening verses include the letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'*, and which speak of *the Book.* With the possible exception of vv. 40, 94–96, which are said to have been revealed in Madinah (JJ), this *sūrah* in all likelihood belongs to the early Makkan period, as the context of some of the verses seems to suggest a date near to the beginning of the Prophet's mission (see 10:2c in particular). Some say it is to be dated sometime after the Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension (*al-isrā' wa'l-mi'rāj*); see 17:1c; introduction to *Sūrah* 53 (JJ).

One of this *sūrah*'s main arguments, in response to the Makkan idolaters' accusations, is that the Quran is of Divine Origin and the Prophet had no hand in composing it. Several verses decry the disbelievers' labeling the Prophet *a manifest sorcerer* (v. 2) and saying that *he has fabricated it* (v. 38). The *sūrah* also argues that the real fabricators are those who reject God, and for them there awaits a terrible reckoning in the next life (vv. 60, 69). Their lie against God is related to the fact that they deny their own true nature, which is to believe in and serve God. The *sūrah* describes how even disbelievers manifest this true belief in God when affliction befalls them and they are left with no one to turn to except God; however, when they are safe, they forget God, return to their old ways, and are again left to their own machinations (vv. 22–23).

Another key theme of this *sūrah* is its response to the challenges made by the Makkan idolaters that the Prophet should hasten to bring upon them the Punishment of God if he is truthful in his claims (v. 11), or that he should bring a different Quran that does not condemn their gods and is thus more congenial to their ways of worship (vv. 15–17).

A good deal of emphasis is placed in this *sūrah* on the teaching that the ultimate return of all creatures is to God, just as their creation originated with Him (v. 56). Although the meeting with God after death is considered to be inevitable, those who are given only to the life of this world and who serve their various false gods will be punished for their disbelief (vv. 7, 52). Likewise, *glad*

*tidings* (v. 2) are promised to the believers (see also vv. 4, 62–64, 103), who are encouraged to be patient with the hardships through which the disbelievers put them (v. 109). It is the believers who will be engulfed in *peace* (v. 10), which is confirmed in God's calling people to the *Abode of Peace* (v. 25).

Another key theme is the futility of *conjecture* (vv. 36, 60, 66). Thus, the *sūrah* condemns such things as the Makkans' belief in false gods as well as their anticipated intercession in the affairs of this world, when, in reality, intercession is only by God's Leave and false gods have no role in the spiritual economy of things (vv. 3, 18). This is why in the Hereafter the false gods will reject those who used to serve them (vv. 28–29), especially because these false gods have no ability to create or guide others (vv. 34–35). Rather, God is the only One Who can provide for His creatures (v. 31).

The *sūrah* also addresses the question of why guidance, which is considered to have a universal resonance, is received so differently. The answer is that disbelievers are opposed to the truth from the beginning and thus are not willing to listen (vv. 96–97, 101). Yet, like those who turn to God when affliction visits them but who revert to their old ways once they are safe, there are people, like Pharaoh in v. 90, who will eventually acknowledge the truth, but too late. Ultimately, guidance is dependent upon God, and none can guide those who are misguided (vv. 42–43, 99, 100).

The *sūrah* ends by recounting the stories of Noah (vv. 71–73) and Moses (vv. 75–93). Unlike the communities of Noah, Moses, and other previous prophets, the people of the prophet Jonah (from mention of whom in v. 98 the *sūrah* receives its name) heeded the warning of their prophet and thereby averted punishment. This serves to illustrate to the Makkans and, by extension, people in general that it is not too late to accept the truth, and that if they do so, they will benefit themselves and avert punishment.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Rā.* These are the signs of the Wise Book. (2) Is it a marvel for mankind that We have sent revelation unto a man from among themselves, [saying], "Warn mankind and give glad tidings to those who believe that they shall have a station of sincerity with their Lord"? The disbelievers say, "Surely this is a manifest sorcerer." (3) Truly your Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then mounted the Throne, directing the affair. There is no intercessor, save by His Leave. That is God, your Lord; so worship Him! Will you not remember? (4) Unto Him is your return all together; God's Promise is true. Verily He originates creation, then He brings it back, that He may recompense with justice those who believe and perform righteous deeds. As for the disbelievers, theirs shall be a drink of boiling liquid and a painful

1 For the detached letters, see 2:1c. Although some have taken the *Book* to be an allusion to this particular *sūrah* (Bḍ, Z), it is generally understood to refer to the Quran itself (Bḍ, JJ, Kl, Q, R; see 2:2c; 2:89c; 2:129c). *Wise* (*ḥakīm*) refers to the wisdom to be found in the *Book* (Kā, R), and can also denote its being clear (*mubīn;* see also 12:1) and unambiguous in meaning (*muḥkam;* IK, Kā; *muḥkam* is based on the same root as *ḥakīm;* see also 3:7c; 11:1c).

2 It is reported that the revelation of this verse was occasioned by the Quraysh's derisive astonishment when the Prophet came to them as God's Messenger. They said, "Could God not find anyone to send but the orphan [belonging to the household] of [his uncle] Abū Ṭālib?" (My, Q). As a warner, the Prophet's function was to remind them of the Resurrection and God's Judgment of their acts (N), as well as to instill fear in them of the impending punishment for evil acts (JJ); as a bearer of *glad tidings* he was instructed to inform the believers of God's Mercy (for this dual function, see 4:165c; 17:105c). *Station of sincerity* (*qadam ṣidq*) can refer to a kind of priority and high standing with God (Bḍ), Reward from Him (R), or the Prophet's intercession (see 2:48c) on the Last Day (IK, My, R). In response to the Prophet, the disbelievers among the Quraysh labeled him a sorcerer (see also 38:4; 40:24; 51:39, 52). Some commentaries read "sorcery" (*siḥr;* cf. v. 76) instead of *sorcerer* (*sāḥir*), in which case *this* in the last sentence of the verse would refer to the Quran, not to the Prophet (N, R, Z).

3 For the meaning of creation in *six days* followed by a reference to God's mounting the Throne, see 7:54c (see also 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4). When mounted upon the Throne, God is described as *directing the affair* (see also 10:31; 13:2; 32:5), which refers to His control over all affairs (Ṭ) as well as His Decree (M). The reference to intercession in this verse is identical in meaning to the one in 2:255 (see also 2:48c). *That is God, your Lord,* calls attention to God's Divinity (*ulūhiyyah*) and Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), which demand that His Unity be declared (JJ) and that worship be dedicated to Him alone (IK). Whenever *That is God, your Lord* appears in the Quran (see 6:102; 10:32; 35:13; 39:6; 40:62; 40:64; cf. 42:10), it precedes or is preceded by a reference to some palpable interaction of God with His creation. *Will you not remember?* is understood by some commentators to refer to the act of reflection (see 6:50), the least degree of which will turn one's attention to God's Divinity and Lordship (Bḍ, Kā).

4 Some say that since the preceding verse began with a mention of the Origin of creation,

punishment for having disbelieved. (5) He it is Who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time]. God did not create these, save in truth. He expounds the signs for a people who know. (6) Surely in the variation of the night and the day and whatsoever God has created in the heavens and on the earth are signs for a people who are reverent. (7) Truly those who anticipate not the meeting with Us, and who are content with the life of this world and feel secure therein, and who are heedless of Our signs, (8) it is they whose refuge

this verse begins by speaking of the return to God (R; see also 6:60), which here denotes the Resurrection (Aj, Bḍ). This is also reflected in *originates creation* and *brings it back* (see also 10:34; 27:64; 30:11, 27). The references here to God's originating creation and bringing it back form the basis of the complementary Islamic cosmogonic and eschatological terms known as the Origin (*mabdaʾ*) and the Return (*maʿād;* for the latter, see 28:85). In the Quran, the Resurrection marks the Return to God and hence to one's Origin (see 7:172c). Because returning to God entails receiving recompense for actions committed on earth (N, Q), while believers who acted righteously are promised *a recompense with justice* from God (cf. 30:45; 34:4), and the recompense of the disbelievers will be *a drink of boiling liquid* (see also, e.g., 6:70; 37:67; 56:42) as well as *a painful punishment,* and this because *judgment shall be rendered between them with justice, and they will not be wronged* (vv. 47, 54).

5 The sun, whose splendor is described here as *a radiance,* and the moon, which is called *a light* (see also 25:61) since it receives its luminosity from the sun (Bḍ), are said to have been created *in truth* (see also, e.g., 16:3; 29:44), which means that they possess reality and purpose and have not been created *in vain* (3:191; 38:27; see also 21:16; 44:38; JJ, R, Z). For the general function of the sun and the moon in regulating one's daily activities, see 2:189c; 36:40c. For the moon's *stations,* see 36:39c.

6 The people who are characterized here as *reverent* are those who are mindful of God and fearful of their final outcome in the Hereafter (Aj, JJ); on the concept of reverence, or *taqwā,* see 2:2c. This attitude leads them to reflect deeply upon the nature of things (R). The ebb and flow of *the night and the day* (see also 2:164; 3:190; 23:80; 45:5) indicate to them the impermanent and transient nature of this life, as do the innumerable beings that *God has created in the heavens and on the earth,* each of which is characterized by finitude (Aj, Bḍ, R). Thus, the *signs* contained in the fleeting phenomena that make up the "world" also remind the *reverent* of their eternal, unique, and everlasting Source (Aj, R, Ṭb). A famous couplet by the poet Abu'l-ʿAtāhiyah (d. 213/828) says, "In each thing there is a sign, being proof that He is One."

7–8 The *meeting* with God is a reference to the general Islamic belief in the encounter with Him on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭ, Ṭs). To *anticipate* the meeting with God refers to the desire to receive His Recompense and Mercy in the Hereafter (R), and to the supreme hope of attaining the beatific vision of God in Paradise (Q; see 75:22–23c). People who reject the idea of a Hereafter are therefore characterized as *those who anticipate not the meeting with Us* (Ṭ, Ṭs); see also 2:46; 10:11, 15; 18:110; 25:21. Rather, they are *content with the life of this world* and feel *secure therein* (cf. 11:15, 13:28), directing all of their aspirations toward this world and its transient trappings (Ṭ, Z) and acting as though they will remain in it forever (Kl, Ṭ, Z). They, therefore, become *heedless of* God's signs and their posthumous meeting with Him on account of *that which they used to earn* in the world by their fervent dedication to it (Bḍ). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "He who loves to meet God, God loves to meet him; he who disdains to meet God, God disdains to meet him."

shall be the Fire for that which they used to earn. (9) Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, their Lord guides them by their faith. They shall have rivers running below them in Gardens of bliss. (10) Their supplication therein shall be, "Glory be to Thee, O God!" And therein their greeting shall be, "Peace." And the conclusion of their supplication shall be, "Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!" (11) Were God to hasten evil for mankind, even as they would hasten the good, their appointed term would have been concluded. But We leave those who anticipate not the meeting with Us to wander confused in their rebellion. (12) And when harm afflicts man, he calls upon Us, [lying] on his side, or sitting, or standing. Then, when We remove his affliction from him, he carries on as if he had not called upon Us concerning the harm that had befallen him. Thus is that which they used to do made to seem fair unto the

9 *Guides them by their faith* (cf. 3:86; 48:4) means that God will increase them in guidance (Q), that He will grant them a light with which they will be guided on the Day of Resurrection (JJ; see also 66:8), or that He will guide them to Paradise as a reward for their faith and righteous deeds (R, Z). The *rivers running below* will flow before the inhabitants of Paradise *in Gardens of bliss* (see also, e.g., 22:56; 37:43), while they are seated upon *raised couches* (88:13; R; see also 2:25c; 4:57c).

10 Many commentators note that *supplication* in this context is understood to mean a form of magnification and praise (R, Sh, Ṭs, Z). *Peace,* which is the common greeting among Muslims in this world, is also the greeting among the people of Paradise and is what they will hear from God and the angels (Aj, Z; see, e.g., 14:23; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73). For Paradise as the *Abode of Peace,* see 10:25c (see also 19:62; 56:26).

11 It is said that this verse was revealed when the Makkans challenged God, saying, *Rain down stones upon us from the sky* (8:32; Q, Z). The verse makes clear the point that, were the evil that they were calling upon to come to them as quickly as God grants them the good things they seek, *their appointed term would have been concluded;* that is, they would have been destroyed (JJ, Z). Yet, God gives them respite out of His Divine Wisdom (Ṭb; see 68:45c; 71:4c; 86:17). For those who do not anticipate *the meeting with* God, see 10:7–8c (see also v. 15; 25:21). They are left to *wander confused* (see 2:15c), which is to say that they are left in a state of bewilderment (JJ, Q) *in their rebellion* (see also 2:15c; 6:110; 7:186; 10:11; 23:75), namely, in their condition of error and associating partners with God (N).

12 *When harm afflicts* (see also 17:67; 39:8) refers to the fact that when difficulties occur (Ṭ), such as sickness and poverty (JJ), people ask for God's Help to take away the afflictions (Bḍ). Then, when God removes the *affliction,* they forget their troubled state and God's Help in taking away the afflictions and go back to their old ways of being heedless of God and pursuing their own caprices (Ṭ, Ṭb). *The prodigal,* therefore, are those who have the ability to turn to God (which becomes apparent at the time of their affliction), but who choose to expend their energies in seeking worldly objects instead. Al-Rāzī explains it as follows: "A 'prodigal' person is one who expends much wealth for a lowly purpose. It is well known that the pleasures and delights of this world are very lowly in comparison to the felicities of the Abode of the next life. God has given man the senses, an intellect, understanding, and strength in order to acquire these majestic felicities. But whoever exhausts these noble tools in order to gain those [aforementioned] lowly, bodily delights has expended many majestic things in order to gain lowly and vile things. Such a person is

prodigal. (13) We have indeed destroyed generations before you when they did wrong, and their messengers brought them clear proofs, but they would not believe. Thus do We recompense the guilty people. (14) Then We made you vicegerents upon the earth after them, that We might observe how you behave. (15) And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, those who anticipate not the meeting with Us say, "Bring a Quran other than this, or alter it." Say, "It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I follow only that which is revealed unto me. Truly I fear, should I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous day." (16) Say, "Had God willed, I would not have recited it unto you; nor would He have made it known to you. Indeed, I tarried among you for

surely one of the prodigal." For the wider Quranic theme of people's actions being *made to seem fair* to them, see 3:14c; 6:42–44c.

13 Here *generations* means previous religious communities (JJ), such as the people of Noah and those of Hūd (IḤ). These communities were destroyed *when they did wrong* (see also 18:59), that is, when they ascribed partners to God (Bg, Kl) or denied the Truth (Bḍ). For the *clear proofs* brought by messengers to past nations, see 2:87c; 2:92c; and the introduction to *Sūrah* 98. Wording identical to *thus do We recompense guilty people* also appears in 46:25. Here *guilty people* refers to the disbelievers (see also 77:16–19c).

14 For the different Quranic senses of *vicegerent,* see 2:30c. *That We might observe how you behave* does not indicate any deficiency in knowledge on God's part that would result in His placing vicegerents upon the earth in order to see or come to know how His servants behave. Rather, *that We might observe* is understood to mean "in order for it to be made manifest in existence" (Kl); and *how* in the expression *how you behave* means, according to Arabic rhetoric, "how it is" (Āl; see also 3:140; 5:94; 57:25; 67:1). Thus, *that We might observe how you behave* means something like "in order for it to be manifest in existence how it is that you will behave" (see also 2:143c).

15 God's *signs* often refer to the Quran's verses, or *āyāt,* a term that also means more generally "signs" or "portents" in Arabic (see 3:7c; 41:53c; 45:3–9c). By *them* and *those who anticipate not the meeting with Us* (see also 10:7–8c) is meant the Makkan idolaters (Q) and, by implication, all others who turn against God. The Quran's condemnation of the Makkans' false deities was one of the main reasons they demanded that the Prophet bring a different scripture or at least alter the present one (My, Ṭū, W, Z). The Prophet is instructed to respond by saying, *It is not for me to alter it of my own accord.* Al-Rāzī points out that, on the surface, this reply only speaks to the request to alter the Quran. But the answer actually addresses both requests, since by denying the possibility of changing the Quran in its present form, it is, a fortiori, even more impossible to bring an entirely new scripture (R). The fact that the Prophet insisted that he could not change the Quran served as an argument to the Makkan idolaters that he had no rôle in its authorship (R), which is why he was instructed by God to say, *I follow only that which is revealed unto me* (see also 6:50; 53:3–4).

16 Continuing the previous verse, this verse reiterates that the Prophet is simply the conduit for the revelation of the Quran. *I tarried among you for a lifetime before it* refers to the fact that the Prophet was born and raised in Makkah, and by the time the Quran was revealed to him at the age of forty he was a well-known member of Makkan society (see 9:128), having earned a reputation among his people as an honest and truthful man (K, Z). Indeed, even before the coming of Islam, the Makkans used to refer to him as "the Trustworthy" (*al-Amīn*). As the Prophet's cousin Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib said to the Negus (for whom, see 2:115c; 5:82–83c), "God sent a messenger to us whose truthfulness, lineage,

a lifetime before it. Do you not understand?" (17) And who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies His signs? Surely the guilty will not prosper. (18) They worship apart from God that which neither harms them nor benefits them. And they say, "These are our intercessors with God." Say, "Would you inform God about something in the heavens or on the earth that He does not know? Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe!" (19) Mankind was but one community, then they differed. And if not for a Word that had preceded from thy Lord, judgment would have been made between them concerning that wherein they differed. (20) And they say, "Why has no sign been sent down unto him from his Lord?" Say, "Truly the Unseen belongs to God alone. So wait! Truly I am among those waiting along

and trustworthiness we [all] know" (IK). Hence the Prophet is instructed to ask the Makkan idolaters, *Do you not understand?;* that is, "Given the fact that you know that I am not a liar, why do you not ponder and reflect in order to realize that the Quran that has been revealed to me is from none other than God?" (Bḍ, JJ, My).

17 This verse accentuates the point that, were the Prophet to have fabricated a lie against God or denied His signs, none would have done a greater wrong against him than he would have done against himself (R; see also 6:93; 11:19; 61:7). Some commentators argue that since the Prophet is truthful and is simply communicating what is revealed to him from God, those who deny him are in fact the ones who have wronged themselves, which is why they are described as *the guilty* (R; see also v. 13; 6:21, 135; 12:23).

18 Some Makkans believed that the idols belonging to the pre-Islamic pantheon, such as al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt (see 4:117–19c; 22:52c; 53:19–20c), would intercede with God to rectify the affairs related to their livelihood in this world (Q; cf. 2:48c). But since these idols are lifeless objects crafted by human hands (see 37:95), they are rejected here as possessing neither harm nor benefit for those who worship them (Aj, Q; see also 5:76; 6:71; 21:66–67; 22:12; 25:55). Rather, the Quran insists that *unto God belongs intercession altogether* (39:44), which does not exclude the possibility that He will grant the power of intercession to others, such as the Prophet and some saints (see 2:48c; 2:255c). The claim that the idols would intercede with God is met with a rhetorical question, *Would you inform God about something in the heavens or on the earth that He does not know?* (see also 2:255; 58:7). For the expression *Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe* unto Him, which is a statement of God's utter transcendence and incomparability (IK), see also 16:1; 30:40; 39:67.

19 Although many commentators provide several interpretations of the Quranic reference to humanity as having been *one community,* what *they differed* over can generally be said to pertain to particular understandings of revelation (see 2:213c). Some commentators understand *a Word that had preceded from thy Lord* as alluding to God's putting off His Judgment between those who differ with each other until the Day of Resurrection (Aj, Bḍ, JJ).

20 Despite the fact that God's signs were being given to the Prophet by virtue of the continuous revelation of the Quran, the Makkan idolaters insisted that yet another sign be *sent down unto him,* namely, one that conformed to their requests made in v. 15 (Z); for similar requests, see 6:37, 109; 13:7, 27. The Prophet is once again told to reiterate his passive relationship to the revelation, noting that whatever he receives issues from *the Unseen,* which *belongs to God alone* (Z; see also 11:123). The injunction at the end

with you." (21) When We make men taste mercy after hardship has befallen them, behold, they have a plot regarding Our signs. Say, "God is swifter in plotting." Surely Our messengers record whatsoever you plot. (22) He it is Who carries you over land and sea, even when you are sailing in ships, till, when they sail with them upon a favorable wind, and rejoice therein, there comes upon them a violent gale, and the waves come at them from every side, and they think they shall be encompassed by them. They call upon God, devoting religion entirely to Him: "If Thou savest us from this, we shall surely be among the thankful!" (23) Then when He saves them, behold, they behave tyrannically upon the earth without right. O mankind! Your tyranny is only against yourselves—the enjoyment of the life of this world. Then unto Us shall be your return, whereupon

of the verse to *wait* serves a rhetorical function, meaning, "Wait, then, for the sign that you are seeking; I too *am among those waiting along with you* for God's Judgment between us in order for the one following the truth to triumph over the one following falsehood" (IJ, Ṭ).

21 Although this verse can be seen as applying to the human condition in general (see also 11:10; 30:36; 41:50; 42:48), many commentators say that it refers specifically to a severe seven-year drought that had afflicted the Makkans (Ṭ, Z). The Makkans approached the Prophet and asked him to pray to God to send them rain (Aj, Q). God sent abundant rain (JJ, Ṭ, Z), here described as *mercy,* but the Makkans then reverted to their old ways and "plotted" against God's signs; that is, they continued to reject and mock them (IK, Z). But *God is swifter in plotting,* since He is *the best of plotters* (3:54; 8:30). God's *plotting* is understood here to mean His Punishment (Bḍ), and more generally it refers to His control over the final outcome of things, as opposed to human "plotting," which by comparison is futile (see also 7:99; 13:42c; 14:46c; 27:50; 86:15–16). The *messengers* who *record whatsoever* they *plot* are identified by most commentators as the angels responsible for recording the deeds of human beings (JJ, Q, Ṭ, Z; see 80:15c; 82:10c).

22 Al-Rāzī observes that this verse serves as a clarification of v. 21, since that verse does not provide a specific example of how it is that people resort to *a plot regarding* God's *signs* after receiving His Mercy in the wake of some *hardship* that had *befallen them.* Thus, if v. 21 is understood to be of general import, the *hardship* that people experience is here described as *a violent gale,* with *waves* coming *at them from every side* to the point that they *think they shall be encompassed by them.* They *call upon God,* promising that if He saves them, they *shall surely be among the thankful* (see also 29:65; 31:32). *Devoting religion entirely to Him* (see also 29:65; 31:32) refers to their promise to God that they will not associate partners with Him (Z). Yet when they are delivered to safety, they forget the blessing of being saved and revert to their false beliefs and blameworthy character traits (R).

23 That such people *behave tyrannically upon the earth without right* means that they transgress God's Command, while also acting corruptly (Bg, Z). *O mankind! Your tyranny is only against yourselves—the enjoyment of the life of this world* (see also 30:41) is one possible reading of this part of v. 23. Read with slightly different vowel-ing, *the enjoyment of the life of this world* (see also 3:14; 9:38; 28:60; 42:36; 43:35; cf. 13:26) can be understood as the predicate of the sentence. The sentence would then be rendered: "Your tyranny against yourselves is only the enjoyment of the life of this world" (R, Ṭ, Z). For the meaning of God's informing His servants in the next life of *that which* they *used to do,* see 62:8c; see also 5:105c for additional references to this central Quranic eschatological teaching.

We shall inform you of that which you used to do. (24) The parable of the life of this world is that of water which We send down from the sky: the earth's vegetation, from which men and cattle eat, mingles with it till, when the earth takes on its luster and is adorned, and its inhabitants think they have gained mastery over it, Our Command comes upon it by night or by day, whereupon We make it a mown field, as if it had not flourished the day before! Thus do We expound the signs for a people who reflect. (25) And God calls unto the Abode of Peace, and guides whomsoever He will unto a straight path. (26) Unto those who are virtuous shall be that which is most beautiful and more besides. Neither darkness nor abasement shall come over their faces. It is they who are the inhabitants of the Garden; they shall abide therein. (27) And as for those who commit evil deeds, the recompense of an evil is one like it, and abasement shall overcome

24 After the mention of *the life of this world* in v. 23, v. 24 lays down a *parable* that draws attention to its evanescent nature (IJ, Kl; cf. 29:64); for a related parable, see 18:45. Al-Rāzī notes that this verse is aimed at those who are deluded by this world (see also 3:185) and have no concern for the Hereafter. When rain descends from the sky, the earth is rejuvenated and from it many different types of vegetation spring forth, which is referred to here as the process of the earth taking on its *luster* and becoming *adorned*. With its beautiful herbage and color, the earth's garden brings delight to its inhabitants because of the multifarious ways in which they can benefit from it (R). Yet, in this state of being enamored by the garden, just when they think they have *gained mastery over it*, God's *Command*, here understood to be a violent wind, torrent, or some kind of mighty blast (Kl, N, R, Z), comes *upon it by night or by day*—that is, at any moment (Th)—thereby obliterating its trees and vegetation (R), leaving the garden as *a mown field*. This verse prompts al-Rāzī to observe, "Such is the one who invests his heart in the pleasures of this world and its delights: when these things part from him, his sorrow becomes immense, and he grieves for them."

25 The opposite of the impermanent and illusory nature of *the life of this world* mentioned in vv. 23–24 is the *Abode of Peace*, to be found in the next life, which is the *Abode of Permanence* (40:39). Because "Peace" is one of God's Names (see 59:23c; 6:127c), the *Abode of Peace* is where God "is," namely, Paradise (Aj, IḤ), which is why those in Paradise are described as being constantly engulfed in peace (see 19:62; 56:26). Many commentators draw attention to the connection between the words "peace" (*salām*) and "safety" (*salāmah*), noting that the inhabitants in Paradise are in a state of peace because they are safe from perishing (IḤ, K, Qu, Th, Z).

God's Act of "calling" is understood to be the process by which human beings come into being and are thereby within the scope of attaining felicity in the Hereafter (Ṭb), since *the Abode of the Hereafter is life indeed* (29:64). As al-Zamakhsharī says, "He calls all people to the Abode of Peace, but only those who are guided enter it." Although God wishes for everyone to receive guidance, as *He is not pleased with disbelief for His servants* (39:7), His guiding *whomsoever He will* (cf. 2:142, 213; 24:46) is understood to mean that He grants guidance to those of His servants who He knows will benefit by it. In this sense God's "Will" is predicated upon His Wisdom (Āl, Z; see also 2:142, 213).

26–27 Many commentators understand *that which is most beautiful* to be a reference to Paradise (see also, e.g., 4:95; 13:18) and *more besides* to the vision of God in the Hereafter, alluded to in 75:23 and embraced by most Muslims as a possi-

them. There will be none to protect them from God. [It will be] as if their faces are covered with dark patches of night. It is they who are the inhabitants of the Fire; they shall abide therein. (28) On the Day when We shall gather them all together, then We shall say to those who ascribed partners unto God, "Stop there! You and your partners!" Then We shall separate them, and their partners will say, "It was not we whom you worshipped. (29) God suffices as a Witness between you and us. We were heedless of your worship." (30) There and then every soul shall experience that which it did in the past, and they shall be brought back unto God, their true Master, and that which they used to fabricate will forsake them.

bility for the righteous in the Hereafter (JJ, Q, Qm, Ṭ, Th; see 75:23c), and according to Sufis, also in this life for those who attain spiritual perfection. When the Prophet was asked about the words *Unto those who are virtuous shall be that which is most beautiful and more besides,* he said, "When the inhabitants of Paradise enter Paradise and the inhabitants of the Fire enter the Fire, a caller will call out, 'O inhabitants of Paradise! You have a promise from God that He wishes to fulfill for you.' They will reply, 'And what can that be? Has God not [already] made heavy our scales [of good deeds], whitened our faces, caused us to enter into Paradise, and saved us from the Fire?' Then, He will remove the veil, and they will look upon Him. By God, God will give them nothing more beloved to them, nor anything cooler to their eyes, than the vision of Him" (Q).

*Neither darkness nor abasement shall come over* the faces of *the inhabitants of the Garden* because their faces *shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord* (75:22–23). In contrast to this group are *the inhabitants of the Fire*—that is, the disbelievers (R)—whom *abasement shall overcome* (see 70:44c) on account of their *evil deeds,* for which they are recompensed in just proportion in accordance with God's Justice and Wisdom (R; see also 42:40; cf. 6:160). *There will be none to protect them from God* (see also 40:33) means that none will be able to save them from God's Wrath and Punishment (Z). For the phenomenon of faces being covered with darkness in the Hereafter, see 3:106–7c; 39:60; 80:40–42c.

28–29 *Them all together* may include both the inhabitants of Paradise and the inhabitants of the Fire (Aj; see vv. 26–27); or, it may be limited to the inhabitants of the Fire, which would include the disbelievers (see v. 27) and their gods (My, Qu); see also 6:22. For the sin of ascribing partners unto God, see 4:48c. As al-Maybudī observes, a "partner" is anything [or being] that can be worshipped other than God. Thus, the *partners* who are associated with God can be physical idols, human beings (N, R), or even one's own caprices, which are often taken as gods (see 25:43; 45:23). The famous Persian mystic ʿAyn al-Quḍāt (d. 525/1131) wrote concerning this matter, "O dear friend! If you want the beauty of the secret [of self-knowledge] displayed to you, then let go of habit-worship, for habit-worship is idol-worship" (*Tamhīdāt* [Tehran, 1994], 12).

Just as Satan will be unable to help those who listened to him and will absolve himself of any responsibility to those who heeded his call (see 14:22; 59:16), those partners whom people associate with God will also absolve themselves of any responsibility toward those who served them, saying, *We were heedless of your worship* (cf. 34:22; 35:13–14c; 46:5–6). Whereas idols and the like are unable to speak in this world (see, e.g., 21:63–65), on the Day of Judgment they will be given the ability to speak (Sh), in accordance with 41:20–21: *When they come upon it, their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do. And they will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will reply, "God, Who makes all things speak, made us speak." He created you the first time, and unto Him shall you be returned.*

30 This verse can be read as initially speaking of both the obedient and the disobedient, and

(31) Say, "Who provides for you from Heaven and earth? Who has power over hearing and sight? And who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and who directs the affair?" They will say, "God." So say, "Will you not, then, be reverent?" (32) That is God, your true Lord. What is there beyond truth but error? How, then, are you turned away? (33) Thus the Word of thy Lord came due for those who are iniquitous: truly they believe not. (34) Say, "Is there, among your partners, one who originates creation and then brings it back?" Say, "God originates creation, then brings it back. How, then, are you perverted?" (35) Say, "Is there any among your partners who guides unto Truth?" Say, "God guides unto Truth. Is one who guides unto Truth worthier to be followed, or one who cannot guide unless he be guided? What ails

then ending with a specific reference to those who used to ascribe partners unto God (Bq, Z). *There and then* refers to the very place in which each soul is gathered before God (K; see v. 28), where it *shall experience that which it did in the past,* that is, the deeds it performed (Bq). When those who have lost their souls are *brought back unto God,* they will find nothing but that they are distant from God and therefore rejected by Him (Qu). This is because they devoted their lives to "gods" other than God (Qu), who, in reality, is *their true Master.* At the same time, they will also be forsaken by *that which they used to fabricate* (see 10:28–29c).

31 *From the Heaven and earth* is understood to be a reference to rain and vegetation, respectively (Bg, Ṭs), while others note that such provision can be both bodily and spiritual (Q). *Who has power over hearing and sight?* means, "Who gives you hearing and sight?" (Bg, Ṭs), as in 46:26: *And We endowed them with hearing, sight, and hearts* (cf. 23:78; 32:9; 67:23). A response to the question, *Who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living?* can be seen in 30:19: *He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living* (cf. 6:95). In response to the questions posed in this verse, *they,* namely, the Makkans (R), *will say, "God"* (see also 29:61; 29:63; 31:25; 39:38; 43:87), because His Agency will immediately come to their minds when asked these questions (Aj, Kā), especially since a number of them had some form of belief in Allāh as the head of their pantheon of Arab gods (R; see 39:3; 10:18c). The question that the Prophet is told to ask, *Will you not, then, be reverent?* (see also, e.g., 7:65; 23:23, 32, 87; 26:11), addresses the Makkans' seeing idols as partners with God and is meant to alert them to their current state of error and the impending punishment as a result of their beliefs (Z). For God's directing *the affair,* see 10:3c.

32 *That is God* is an affirmation of the response provided in v. 31 (JJ, Z). *Your true Lord* (see also 6:95,102) is interpreted to mean that no one who has thought deeply about God can doubt His Lordship (Ṭ, Z).

33 *The Word of thy Lord came due* (see also 37:31; 41:25) relates to the actualization of the Divine Decree (Kl, Q), for which, see 54:49c. Because *the iniquitous* (see vv. 31–32) continued to ascribe partners unto God despite their knowledge of the true nature of God's Sovereignty (see v. 31), *the Word of thy Lord came due* for them; that is, His Decree that they shall be among the wretched in Hell descended upon them (IK, Kl); see also v. 96; 40:6.

34 For God's originating creation and bringing it back, see v. 4. For the various *partners* that people ascribe unto God, see v. 28. In every verse in which *How, then, are you perverted?* appears (6:95; 35:3; 40:62), the question is prompted by a direct reference to God's creative Power; see also 35:3c.

35 While v. 34 addresses the physical nature of people's origin and journey back to God, this verse addresses its spiritual nature (Bq), explaining that

you? How do you judge?" (36) And most of them follow naught but conjecture. Truly conjecture does not avail against the truth in the least. Truly God knows what they do. (37) This Quran could not have been fabricated [by anyone] apart from God; rather, it is a confirmation of that which came before it, and an elaboration of the Book in which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the worlds. (38) Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "Then bring a *sūrah* like it, and call upon whomsoever you can apart from God, if you are truthful." (39) Nay, but they deny that whose knowledge they cannot comprehend and whose interpretation has not yet come to them. Even so did those who were before them deny. So behold how the wrongdoers fared in the end. (40) Among them are those who

the guidance of the human soul *unto Truth*—that is, to God (Z), revelation (IḤ), and the correct path (Th)—is exclusively within God's purview. Whereas most commentators understand *one who guides unto Truth* as referring to God (Āl, JJ, Rb), the Shiite commentator al-Qummī sees it as an allusion to the guidance offered by the Prophet and the Imams. *One who cannot guide unless he be guided* refers to the futility of following those who cannot guide themselves, meaning that if they cannot even guide themselves, surely they cannot be expected to be able to guide others (Kl).

36 For the Quranic notion of *conjecture,* see 2:46c; 2:78c; 53:28c. *God knows what they do* (see also 2:283; 16:28; 35:8) is understood to be a threat against those who live their lives in *conjecture,* warning them that God is fully aware of their vile actions and their rejection of the Truth (Aj, Āl).

37 This verse continues the argument made in vv. 15–16, namely, that the Quran has not been authored by the Prophet, but is from *the Lord of the worlds* (for this phrase, see 1:2c). The Quran is described here as confirming *that which came before it* (cf. 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31; 46:30), that is, the previous revealed scriptures (JJ), such as the Torah and the Gospel (Ṭ, Ṭb, Th). It is also characterized as elaborating *the Book in which there is no doubt,* a phrase that is usually understood to be a reference to the Quran itself (see 2:2 and commentary), but is here understood to refer to the laws and beliefs that God has ordained for Muslims to follow (Aj, JJ, Ni, Ṭ).

38 What this verse is saying is, "If you claim that the Quran is imitable, then, apart from God, seek the help of *whomsoever you can,* and *if you are truthful* in your claim that it is fabricated by the Prophet (Bg, Z) and thus not from a Divine Source, then you will be able to produce *a* sūrah *like it.*" *A* sūrah *like it* is understood to mean a work that is similar to the entire Quran (Bg) or, more likely, as other commentators have asserted, one that is similar to another *sūrah* in eloquence, order, and beauty of meaning (Aj, R, Th, Z). For the Quran's "challenge verses" (those calling upon others to produce something like the Quran), see 2:23c; 11:13; 17:88; 52:43c.

39 According to this verse, as soon as the disbelievers hear the Quran, they are quick to deny it without first understanding its message or deeply reflecting upon its meanings (N). As ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "People are enemies of that of which they are ignorant" (Su, Ṭs). *So behold how the wrongdoers fared in the end* (see also 28:40) is meant to draw the attention of those who deny the truth that, like *those who were before them,* namely, previous human communities (IK), they too are heading toward destruction for rejecting God's Message (IK). Throughout the Quran, the injunction to observe how a group of people have *fared in the end* also applies, among others, to the guilty, the corrupt, the schemers, and those who denied the warnings sent to them; see 3:137; 7:84–86, 103; 10:73; 12:109; 16:36; 27:14, 51, 69; 29:20; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 37:73; 40:21, 82; 43:25; 47:10.

40 *Those who believe in it* refers to those in Makkah who rejected the Prophet's message, but

believe in it, and among them are those who do not believe in it, and thy Lord knows best the workers of corruption. (41) And if they deny thee, say, "Unto me, my deeds, and unto you, your deeds. You are quit of that which I do, and I am quit of that which you do." (42) And among them are those who listen to thee. But dost thou make the deaf to hear, though they understand not? (43) And among them are those who look at thee. But couldst thou guide the blind, though they see not? (44) Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves. (45) On the Day when He shall gather them, it will be as if they tarried but an hour of the day, acquainting themselves with one another. Lost indeed are those who denied the meeting with God, and they were not rightly guided. (46) Whether We show thee a part of that which We promise them, or We take thee, their return shall be unto Us. Then God is Witness over that which they do. (47) For every community

who God knows will come to believe in it later; *those who do not believe in it* are those who will never believe in it (Aj, Bd, JJ, Q, Ṭ). *In it* can also refer to the Prophet (Q), in which case it would be rendered "in him." For the status of *the workers of corruption* in God's Eyes, see 5:33c; 30:41c.

41 Al-Ṭabarī glosses this verse as follows: "O Muhammad, if these idolaters disbelieve in you and reject from you that which you have brought to them, then say, 'O people! Unto me are my religion and deeds and unto you are your religion and deeds. Your actions shall not harm me, nor shall mine harm you. All those who perform actions will only be recompensed for the acts that they have performed.'" See also 26:216; 6:19c.

42 For the context of this verse, see 6:25c. See also 43:40.

43 Although deniers of the Prophet look at him, they are spiritually "blind" to his message, for *it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* (22:46); see also 43:40.

44 For the manner in which *God does not wrong human beings,* see 4:40c. Since God is not unjust to human beings, He does not coerce them to perform wrong actions, and when they *wrong themselves,* they do so out of their free choice (R), and this is because the human being is *an ignorant wrongdoer* (33:72).

45 On how the disbelievers will deem their life in the world or the interval between their physical death and their resurrection as *but an hour of the day,* see 79:46c. For the loss the disbelievers will experience as a result of denying their *meeting with God,* see 6:31c.

46 God might show the Prophet the Makkan idolaters' punishment while he is still alive, as was the case at the Battle of Badr (Aj); or He might not show it to him during his lifetime. In the latter case, *their return shall be unto* God in the next world will be where God will show the Prophet their punishment (see also 40:77; Aj). For God as *Witness,* see 6:19c.

47 *For every community there is a messenger* is one of the clearest Quranic verses that affirm the universality of revelation as a source of guidance for humanity, this truth being one of the major themes in the Quran. After the coming of God's messenger, His Judgment is *rendered between* the people of the community to whom the messenger has been sent *with justice,* which is to say that people are not taken to task until a messenger from God has offered them the option to follow Divine Guidance (R, Ṭb). Therefore, 17:15 says, *And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger* (R). Since a messenger comes with a message from God in accordance with the particular

there is a messenger, and when their messenger comes, judgment shall be rendered between them with justice, and they will not be wronged. (48) And they say, "When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" (49) Say, "I have no power over what harm or benefit may come to me, save as God wills. For every community there is a term. When their term comes, they shall not delay it by a single hour, nor shall they advance it." (50) Say, "Have you considered: if His Punishment should come upon you by night or by day, what part thereof would the guilty seek to hasten?" (51) And then, when it comes to pass, will you believe in it? Now? While you once sought to hasten it? (52) Then it shall be said unto the wrongdoers, "Taste the punishment everlasting. Are you recompensed for aught save that which you used to earn?" (53) And they inquire of thee, "Is it

needs and times of each respective community to whom the messenger is sent, the specific doctrines and laws of each religion are different; see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions" as well as 16:36; 3:19c; 3:85c; 5:48c; 65:12c.

48 This verse cites what the disbelievers mockingly asked of the Prophet concerning the coming of the Hour and the Day of Resurrection, about which he warned them. They did so mockingly, since they expected a prophet to be able to foretell the future, but the Prophet did not have knowledge of when these events would take place (see 7:187); see also 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48c; 67:25.

49 The Prophet is told to say to the Makkan idolaters, upon their insistence that he should hasten God's Punishment (see v. 48; 10:11c), that he has *no power over what harm or benefit may come* to him, which is to say that neither he nor anyone else possesses the power to bring about God's Punishment (Q, Th, Z) or for that matter any benefit from Him (see also 7:188). *For every community there is a term*—that is, a specific life span known only to God—at the end of which that particular community will perish; alternately, it can be punished even before its earthly life comes to an end (Q); see also 7:34; 16:61; 71:4c.

50–51 The disbelievers' seeking to hasten God's Punishment is mentioned in a number of places throughout the Quran (see 17:90–93; 22:47; 26:204; 29:53; 37:176; 42:18; 51:14). When the punishment that the Makkan idolaters were inquiring about befalls them, they will certainly not *seek to hasten* any of it, since all of His Wrath is terrible (N). Since their challenge in hastening God's Punishment is itself evidence of their rejection of the truth (Z), if they "believe" *when it comes to pass,* it will be of no benefit to them (Q), as this would be like a deathbed repentance, much like that of Pharaoh, who, when his death was imminent, said, *I am among those who submit* (v. 90; see 4:17–18c; 10:90–92c).

52 On the Day of Judgment (IK), these words will be spoken by God or by the angels who guard Hell (see 32:14c) to all of the *wrongdoers,* who are typified in vv. 49–51 by the Makkan idolaters. *That which you used to earn* (see also 27:90; cf. 83:36) refers to their disobedience of God and disbelief in Him (Bḍ).

The jurist and theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), among others, argues that the root *kh-l-d* (from which derives the word *khuld,* translated here as *everlasting*) can refer to a long but ultimately finite measure of time (*Shifāʾ al-ʿalīl* [Jeddah, 1991], 2:228). Thus, he would likely understand *the punishment* mentioned here and in 32:14 as denoting a finite duration of chastisement. Such a reading would seem to be in keeping with the position that punishment in the Hereafter will not be "eternal" in an absolute sense; see 78:23c and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

53 The Makkan idolaters asked the Prophet if

true?" Say, "Yea, by my Lord it is true, and you cannot thwart [it]." (54) Were it so that each soul that had done wrong possessed all that is on the earth, he would surely seek to ransom himself thereby, and they will hide their remorse when they see the punishment. And judgment shall be rendered between them with justice, and they will not be wronged. (55) Truly unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. Verily God's Promise is true, but most of them know not. (56) He gives life and causes death, and unto Him shall you be returned. (57) O mankind! There has come unto you an exhortation from your Lord, and a cure for that which lies within breasts, and a guidance and a mercy for the believers. (58) Say, "In the Bounty of God and His Mercy—in that let them rejoice! It is better than that which they amass." (59) Say, "Have you seen that which God sent down unto you for provision? Then you made some of it forbidden and some lawful." Say, "Has God granted you leave, or do you fabricate against God?" (60) What will those who fabricate lies against God con-

the promise of God's Chastisement in the Hereafter is true (Ṭ). The Prophet is told to reply in the affirmative and to inform his interlocutors that they *cannot thwart [it],* which is to say that they will not be able to flee from or prevent God's promised Punishment (Ṭ; see also 72:12c).

54 *Had done wrong* refers to disbelief in God and the ascription of partners unto Him (Q). On the idea of seeking to ransom oneself in the Hereafter, see 3:91; 5:36; 13:18; 39:47; 70:11. Although those about to enter the Fire will *hide their remorse when they see the punishment* (see also 34:33), when they are punished in it, they will exclaim, *Our Lord! Our wretchedness overwhelmed us, and we were a people astray* (23:106; Q). They will be judged *with justice,* because *God wrongs not His servants* (3:182; 8:51; 22:10; cf. 41:46; 50:29); see also 4:40c.

55 Vv. 53–54 suggest that *God's Promise* mentioned here is in reference to His Punishment in the Hereafter (see also 46:17c). Because of their ignorance (Ṭs) and their heedlessness of God (Āl), *most of them know not.*

56 This verse says that life and death are entirely in God's Hands (see also 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116) and that we will all meet God when we die (see 10:7–8c). The Sufi commentator Rūzbihān al-Baqlī sees in this verse a reference to the manner in which God interacts with two spiritual types, namely, those who are given to knowing Him in a direct and experiential manner ("gnostics") and those who approach Him by detachment from the world and its delights ("ascetics"): "He enlivens the hearts of the gnostics through [their] knowing and witnessing Him, and slays the egos of the ascetics through the lights of [their] awe at and vigilance toward Him. The Return of the gnostics is to the witnessing of His Beauty and Majesty, whereas the Return of the ascetics is to His Bounty and Blessing."

57 *An exhortation* refers to the Quran (Aj, Kl, Ṭb). It is said to be *a cure for that which lies within breasts,* that is, for every kind of spiritual sickness that plagues the heart, such as ignorance, doubt, hypocrisy, and hatred (Aj, K, Kl); see also 17:82; 41:44.

58 Believers are to *rejoice* over God's *Bounty,* namely, the Quran, and His *Mercy,* namely, Islam (Mu, Q, Ṭ) or Muhammad, who was sent *as a mercy unto the worlds* (21:107; ST).

59–60 For the context of these two verses, which have to do with the Makkan idolaters' arbitrary ritualistic practices, see the commentary on 6:136–39. *Sent down* here is understood to convey

jecture on the Day of Resurrection? Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind, but most of them do not give thanks. (61) Thou art not upon any task, nor dost thou recite any part of the Quran, nor do you perform any deed, save that We are a Witness over you when you engage therein. Not a mote's weight evades thy Lord on earth or in Heaven, nor smaller than that nor larger, but that it is in a clear Book. (62) Behold! Truly the friends of God, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve— (63) those who believe and are reverent. (64) For them are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. There is no altering the Words of God. That is the great triumph. (65) And let not their speech grieve thee. Truly might belongs altogether to God; He is the Hearing,

the idea of being "created," as in 39:6, which says that God *sent down for you of cattle eight pairs* (Q). *Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind* (cf. 2:243; 12:38; 27:73; 40:61), that is, He gives them numerous blessings such as intelligence and sends them messengers who come with Divinely revealed books. *But most of them do not give thanks,* that is, most of them do not employ their intellects to ponder over God's signs, follow the call of God's messengers, or listen to and thereby benefit from His Divinely revealed books (Aj, Āl, IḤ, R).

61 For God as the supreme *Witness,* see 3:18c. *Any part of the Quran* refers to reading any portion from the Quran (Kl). In his commentary on the next part of this verse, al-Rāzī says that *a clear Book* refers to "a book that God 'has written' and upon which He has established the forms of knowable things"; see also 5:15c; 99:7–8c.

*Nor dost thou recite any part of the Quran* reflects a reading of the syntax that, more literally, might be rendered, "Nor dost thou recite therefrom (*minhu*) any of the Quran," understood to mean, "Nor dost thou recite any [of the Quran] from the Quran." This rendering of *minhu* as "therefrom" could also allow one to interpret the verse to mean that the recitation of the Quran is one of the many tasks of the Prophet; that is, "Nor dost thou [as one of those tasks] recite any of the Quran" (R).

62–64 *Friends* renders *awliyāʾ* (sing. *walī;* see 3:28c; 4:88–90c). Although God's *friends* here can generally denote those among the Muslims who *are reverent* (Aj, IK), it can also refer to a special group of individuals (Aj) who would correspond to "saints" in the Christian context. About them, the Prophet is reported to have said, "When they are seen, God is remembered" (IK, ST). The *friends of God* in this specific sense are thus a unique group of individuals who, because they have conquered their egos, are in perpetual proximity to God and totally consumed by Him. It is to this state that the poet Rūmī (d. 672/1273) alludes when summarizing the spiritual trajectory of his life: "The sum of my life is three sentences, no more: / I was raw, I was cooked, I was burned."

This special group of people, God's *friends,* shall therefore have *no fear,* because they constantly behold God's Beauty; and they do not *grieve,* because they are continually bathed in the splendor of His Majesty (Rb). The *glad tidings* they receive *in the life of this world* come by way of the sweet taste and ecstasy they experience as they contemplate their Lord (Aj). The *glad tidings* they are promised *in the Hereafter* will come in the form of their encounter with God and the attainment of His Contentment (*riḍā*) and of the supreme vision of Him (My). *There is no altering the Words of God* (see also 6:34c; 6:115; 18:27) means that none can change or act contrary to this Promise of God (IK), that is, His Promise in vv. 62, 64 concerning His *friends.*

65 For the type of *speech* in question, see 36:76c. *Might belongs altogether to God* means that all victory is with God (Aj; see also 4:139c). Since *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88; see also

the Knowing. (66) Behold! Truly unto God belongs whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth. And what is it that they follow, those who call upon partners apart from God? They follow naught but conjecture, and they do but surmise. (67) He it is Who made the night for you, that you might rest therein, and the day by which to see. Truly in that are signs for a people who hear. (68) They say, "God has taken a child." Glory be to Him! He is the Self-Sufficient. Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. You have no authority for this. Do you say about God that which you know not? (69) Say, "Surely those who fabricate a lie against God will not prosper." (70) An enjoyment in this world, then unto Us shall be their return, and We shall make them taste severe punishment for their having disbelieved. (71) And recite unto them the story of Noah, when he said to his people, "O my people! If my presence is grievous to you, and [so too] my reminding of the

55:26–27), nothing other than God can lay any claim to having true *might* or greatness (cf. 35:10). It is for this reason that the famous Egyptian Sufi Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) says, "If you seek greatness that does not perish, then seek not greatness that does perish" (*Ḥikam*, no. 86).

66 *They follow naught but conjecture, and they do but surmise* is also found in 6:116. For the manner in which false beliefs are *naught but conjecture*, see 6:116–17c. For additional references to discussions related to *conjecture*, see also 10:36c.

67 The first half of this verse is identical to a part of 40:61, and the second half to a part of 30:23. *The night . . . that you might rest therein* (cf. 40:61) refers to the respite from weariness after the work of the day, whereas *the day by which to see* relates to the pursuit of one's livelihood (IH). See also 36:37c. According to a Sufi understanding, *the night . . . that you might rest therein* refers to the mystics' engaging in spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) and intimate discourse with God (*munājāt*), whereas *the day by which to see* refers to their seeing the wonders of God's Power and Wisdom in the created order that surrounds them (Su). *A people who hear* (cf. 30:23) refers to those who "listen" by reflecting upon God's signs (Aj, Bg, Ṭs); see also 10:59–60c.

68–70 For extended discussions of the Islamic theological rejection of God's having a child and the manner in which this constitutes "disbelief," see 2:116c; 4:171c; 5:117–18c. The notion of *authority* is also invoked elsewhere in the Quran when discussing the ascription of partners to God; see 3:151; 6:81; 7:33, 71; 12:40; 30:35; 53:23. Often in the Quran, the religious innovations of previous religious communities are connected with the enormity of fabricating lies against God; see 3:24; 5:104; 6:21, 93, 137–40, 144; 7:37, 152; 16:56, 116.

71 For the story of Noah, in addition to vv. 71–73 here, see 7:59–64; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; *Sūrah* 71. *If my presence is grievous to you* is taken to mean "If my being among you causes you distress" (JJ, Ṭ), while *and [so too] my reminding of the signs of God* is understood to mean "and also my warning and admonishment to you" (JJ, Ṭ). *Then in God do I trust* signifies that "I care not what you will try to do to me, because I have consigned my affair to God on account of my firm reliance upon Him" (IJ, Ṭū). *So decide on your plan* means, in other words, "Resolve what you will try to do to me" (JJ), while *then let there be no doubt concerning your plan* is interpreted to mean "then do not conceal what you will try to do to me or act in a man-

signs of God, then in God do I trust. So decide on your plan, you and your partners; then let there be no doubt concerning your plan, but carry it out against me, and grant no respite! (72) And if you turn your backs, I have not asked of you any reward. My reward lies only with God, and I am commanded to be among those who submit." (73) Yet, they denied him. So We saved him and those with him in the Ark. And We made them vicegerents, and We drowned those who denied Our signs. So observe how those who were warned fared in the end. (74) Then, after him, We sent messengers unto their people, and they brought them clear proofs. But it was not for them to believe in that which they had denied beforehand. Thus do We set a seal upon the hearts of the transgressors. (75) Then, after them, We sent Moses and Aaron with Our signs to Pharaoh and his notables. But they waxed arrogant, and they were a guilty people. (76) So when the Truth came unto them from Us, they said, "Surely this is manifest sorcery!" (77) Moses said, "Do you say [this] about the truth when it comes unto you? Is this sorcery? The sorcerers will not prosper." (78) They said, "Have you

ner that is dubious, unclear, or equivocal" (Bḍ, Bg, IJ, JJ, Kā, Ṭ, Z).

72 One of the marks of prophecy is that prophets do not seek recompense from the people to whom they have been sent. See the commentary on 36:21: *Follow those who ask not of you any reward and who are guided.*

73 Parts of this verse echo 7:64: *Yet, they denied him. So We saved him and those who were with him in the Ark, and We drowned those who denied Our signs;* and 7:69: *Remember when He made you vicegerents after the people of Noah, and increased you amply in stature.* For the different Quranic senses of the term "vicegerent," see 2:30c; 6:165c.

74 Here the *messengers* refers to the pre-Islamic Arabian prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb as well as the Biblical figures Abraham and Lot, among others (Kl, Q). *Denied beforehand* refers to the fact that those people who rejected their respective messengers were already habituated to denying the truth, thereby closing themselves off to the possibility of accepting Divine Guidance when it was brought to them (Bḍ). For the sealing of *hearts,* see 2:7c.

75 For the story of Moses, see also, for example, 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 28:3–46; 79:15–25. The *signs,* also referred to as *clear proofs* (see 29:39), include Moses' hand and staff (Mu). The *notables* in Pharaoh's entourage were a group of dignitaries who had the highest social standing in Egyptian society (IṬ, Qm, Th). *But they waxed arrogant* (cf. 7:133; 23:46; 28:39; 29:39), meaning they were too proud to believe (Mu, My). Cf. 40:60: *Truly those who are too arrogant to worship Me shall enter Hell debased.*

76 For references to similar accusations of sorcery made against Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and other Divine messengers, see 5:110c.

77 *The sorcerers will not prosper* on account of the futility of their craft, which is based on deception and falsehood (R); see also 20:69.

78 See also 5:104, which mentions the Makkan idolaters' response when they were called to the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet: *Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing.* This statement is then countered with a rhetorical question, *What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided?* See also 31:21.

come unto us to turn us away from that which we found our fathers following, so that grandeur in the land might belong to you two? We will not believe in the two of you!" (79) Pharaoh said, "Bring me every knowing sorcerer." (80) And when the sorcerers came, Moses said to them, "Cast what you would cast." (81) And when they cast, Moses said, "That which you have produced is sorcery; God will soon bring it to naught. Surely God does not allow the deeds of those who work corruption to flourish. (82) God verifies the truth through His Words, though the guilty be averse." (83) But none believed in Moses, save some progeny from among his people, for fear of Pharaoh and his notables, that he would oppress them; for truly Pharaoh was exalted in the land, and he was indeed among the prodigal. (84) And Moses said, "O my people! If you believe in God, then trust in Him, if you are submitters." (85) And they said, "In God do we trust. Our Lord! Make us not a temptation for the wrongdoing people. (86) And save us through Thy Mercy from disbelieving people." (87) And We revealed unto Moses and his brother, "Appoint for thy people houses in Egypt, and make your houses places of worship and perform the

79–82 *Every knowing sorcerer* means the people most advanced in sorcery (Bq). *Moses said to them, "Cast what you would cast,"* not because he was affirming their sorcery, but rather to show the onlookers the falsehood of the sorcerers' craft (R), which would soon be brought *to naught. God verifies the truth through His Words* means that the promises God made to Moses (for which, see 28:35) will soon come to pass and the truth will then become apparent (R).

83 The *his* in *save some progeny from among his people* can refer to either Moses or, less likely, Pharaoh (Kl). If the former, then *some progeny* can refer to a few young Israelite males. If the latter, then it can refer to several people connected to Pharaoh's court, not least of whom was his wife (for her belief in Moses, see 66:11c; Kl). *Pharaoh was exalted in the land* to the point that he even claimed to be a god, as he said, *I am your lord most high* (79:24). For *the prodigal,* see 10:12c.

84 Al-Maybudī glosses this verse as follows: "Moses said to his people, 'If you want to submit to God, then have trust—bring the hand of submission out from the sleeve of contentment and withdraw from facing others. Know that, in reality, people possess nothing—in deception, there is no gain. Bestowal and withholding are only by virtue of the wisdom of the Wise One—the Apportioner is kind, not unaware.'"

85–86 For the manner in which believers can be *a temptation* for those who reject the truth, see 60:5c.

87 Since Pharaoh destroyed the Israelites' places of worship, God revealed to Moses and Aaron that they should select dwellings that would function as temples (*masājid*) so that they could reestablish their devotional duties (Th). Another plausible interpretation of this verse, which does not necessarily preclude the first explanation, is that the Israelites, out of fear of persecution by Pharaoh, were granted permission by God to establish prayer spaces (*muṣallā*) or temples in their homes (JJ, T, Th).

prayer, and give glad tidings unto the believers." (88) Moses said, "Our Lord! Truly Thou hast given Pharaoh and his notables ornament and wealth in the life of this world, our Lord, so that they may lead astray from Thy way. Our Lord! Blot out their wealth and harden their hearts, so that they will not believe till they see the painful punishment." (89) He said, "Your supplication has been answered. So stand firm, and follow not the way of those who know not." (90) We carried the Children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh and his hosts pursued them out of envy and enmity till, when drowning overtook them, he said, "I believe that there is no god but the One in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am among those who submit." (91) Now, though previously you disobeyed and were among the workers of corruption? (92) Today We shall save you in your body that you might be a sign unto those who come after you. Yet many among mankind are heedless of Our signs. (93) Certainly We settled the Children of Israel in a sure settlement, and We provided them with good things. They differed not till knowledge came unto them. Thy Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed. (94) So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask those who recite the Book before thee. The truth has certainly come unto thee from thy Lord. So be thou not among the doubters. (95) And be not thou among those

88–89 Al-Rāzī observes that the Arabic for *so that they may* in Moses' statement *so that they may lead astray from Thy way* can also be read "lest they should." The latter reading would render Moses' words an assessment of the general situation, namely, that God has given Pharaoh and his notables an abundance of wealth so that they do not lead others astray from God's *way*. For the phenomenon of God's hardening some people's hearts, see 5:13c.

90–92 See 2:50c. Pharaoh's "repentance" is met with a rhetorical question, which is understood to mean, "You want to repent now that you have no other alternative? This shall never be accepted from you!" (Kl). See also 10:50–51c; 4:17–18c. *We shall save you in your body* means that Pharaoh's dead body will not sink to the depths of the sea, as will be the case with the bodies of the *hosts*. Rather, it will be preserved upon a raised surface of earth so that it will *be a sign unto those who come after* (Aj, Kl).

93 *A sure settlement* refers to a comely dwelling in Palestine or Syria (Bḍ, Ṭs). By *good things* is meant the good and pure foods that were made lawful for them (IJ). *They differed* over matters of religion, but only after *knowledge* of the Torah *came unto them* (Bḍ); see also 3:19; 45:17.

94–95 Although these verses are directly addressed to the Prophet, it is the disbelievers (Kl, Q) or possibly people in general (IṬ, Ṭs) who are the intended audience. *Those who recite the Book before thee* are the Jews and Christians, who recite the Torah and the Gospel, respectively (Kl); see also 2:146 and 6:20, where the People of the Book are said to recognize the truth of the Quran.

who deny the signs of God, lest thou shouldst be among the losers. (96) Truly those for whom the Word of thy Lord has come due will not believe, (97) though every sign should come unto them, till they see the painful punishment. (98) Why has not a single town believed and benefitted from its belief, other than the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We granted them enjoyment for a while. (99) And had thy Lord willed, all those who are on the earth would have believed all together. Wouldst thou compel men till they become believers? (100) It is not for a soul to believe, save by God's Leave. And He lays defilement upon those who understand not. (101) Say, "Observe that which is in the heavens and on the earth." But neither signs nor warnings avail a people who believe not. (102) Do they wait for aught save the like of the days of those who passed away before them? Say, "So wait! Truly I am waiting along with you." (103) Then We save Our messengers and those who believe. Thus is it incumbent upon Us to save the believers. (104) Say, "O

96–97 On the manner in which God's *Word* comes due for people, see 10:33c. See also 10:74c; 2:7c. That they *will not believe . . . till they see the painful punishment* suggests that their belief arises out of a state of despair as they are faced with their impending doom (N), as was the case with Pharaoh in v. 91; or it can refer to their believing only at the time of their punishment in the Hereafter, a time when everyone will "believe" (see 102:6–7c).

98 The people of Jonah, after seeing some signs of the imminent punishment about which they had been warned by their prophet on account of their disbelief, accepted his message and were spared destruction (Bg, JJ, Kl). For the Quranic account of Jonah, see 37:139–48. See also 68:48–50c.

99 Many Muslim theologians argue that if God wanted to compel all people to believe, then He would have done so. But He has willed instead that they come to believe in Him by their own free choice (N). Thus, human beings must either accept God or deny Him, which is why the Quran says, *So let him who will, take a way unto his Lord* (73:19; 76:29). See also the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy."

100 Despite the fact that people have been given the choice to believe or not believe in God, the blessing of belief itself is contingent on God's allowing His servants to know Him. As the early Sufi figure Dhu'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859 or 248/861) is reported to have said, "I came to know my Lord through my Lord. Had it not been for my Lord, I would not have known my Lord" (*al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* [Damascus, 2000], 475). The *defilement* that God *lays upon those who understand not* is either His Wrath or His Punishment (Bg, JJ, N).

101 For the reason why *neither signs nor warnings avail a people who believe not,* see 10:74c.

102 This verse asks if the Makkan idolaters wait for the kind of punishment that afflicted previous nations for rejecting their prophets (IK). For the challenge to *wait,* see 10:20c.

103 *Then We save Our messengers* is in the present tense, but refers back to the messengers belonging to the *days of those who passed away before* (v. 102) and thus means, "Then we saved Our messengers" (Bg, IK, JJ, Kl, Ṭ, Z). *It is incumbent upon Us to save the believers* means that God will deliver Muhammad and his followers from the persecution of the Makkans (Bg, JJ, Kl, Ṭ, Z), just as He delivered previous messengers and their followers from their persecutors (Ṭ).

104 For an exposition of the points raised in this verse, see the commentary on 109:1–6. *I*

mankind! If you are in doubt concerning my religion, then [know that] I worship not those whom you worship apart from God; rather, I worship God, Who shall take you [unto Himself]. And I am commanded to be among the believers, (105) and 'Set thy face toward the religion as a *ḥanīf,* and be thou not among the idolaters. (106) And call not, apart from God, upon that which neither benefits thee, nor harms thee. For if thou dost so, thou shalt surely be among the wrongdoers.'" (107) And if God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He; and if He desires some good for thee, none can hold back His Bounty. He causes it to fall upon whomsoever He will among His servants. And He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (108) Say, "O mankind! The Truth has come unto you from your Lord. Whosoever is rightly guided is only rightly guided for the sake of his own soul, and whosoever is astray is only astray to its detriment. And I am not a guardian over you." (109) And follow that which has been revealed unto thee, and be patient till God renders judgment, and He is the best of judges.

*worship God* is qualified by *Who shall take you [unto Himself]* in order to demonstrate the stark contrast between the God the Prophet worships and the gods that the Makkan idolaters serve. The God of the Prophet is *their true Master* (6:62), the One Whom people will meet after they die and Who *shall inform* them *of what* they *used to do* (5:105), whereas the Makkans' gods do not have any role to play beyond this worldly life.

105 To set one's *face toward the religion as a* ḥanīf refers to the complete sincerity that one should have in serving God and turning away from what is other than Him (R); see also 2:112; 3:20; 6:79c; 7:29; 31:22; 30:43. For the concept of *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c; 30:30c.

106–7 For the notion that nothing other than God can bring about *benefit* or *harm,* see 6:17c. That God *causes it,* namely, *some good* (Ṭs) or *His Bounty* (IḤ), to *fall upon whomsoever He will* is akin to 2:212, which says that *God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning;* see 2:212c.

108 According to this verse, now that *the truth,* understood here as the Quran (Bḍ, IḤ, Q) or the Prophet (Bḍ, Q), has come to people, they have no excuse for rejecting it (Bḍ). If they believe in *the Truth* and follow it, that will be to their benefit (Āl, Bḍ), but if they disbelieve in it, it will be to their detriment (Q). Although being *rightly guided* and going *astray* are based on one's efforts from one perspective, the matter is ultimately in God's Hands, as in 7:178: *Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided;* and 7:186: *Whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he;* see also 17:97; 18:17; 32:24; 39:36–37; 74:31. Elsewhere the Quran states that guidance is entirely dependent upon God (2:120; 3:73; 6:71; 14:4; 16:93).

The Prophet is told to say, *I am not a guardian over you* (cf. 6:104; 11:86), since he is *not a warder over* his people (88:22), but is only *a bearer of glad tidings* and *a warner* (17:105); these two functions, to bring good tidings and to warn, characterize the mission of all prophets, for which, see 4:165c.

109 *Be patient till God renders judgment* is seen as a promise by God to Muhammad that He would help him overcome his enemies and that he would be victorious over them (Bg, Kl, Th); see also 52:48c. Some commentators maintain that this verse was later abrogated by 9:5 (Q, Ṭ, Th); see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 11

# Hūd

## *Hūd*

*Hūd* is the second in a series of six *sūrah*s whose opening verses include the letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'*, and which speak of *the Book*. As is clear from its content and message, this *sūrah* was revealed after *Sūrah* 10 and thus belongs to the earlier Makkan period (JJ), with the possible exception of vv. 12, 17, and 114, which are said by many commentators to have been revealed in Madinah (JJ). However, the context of v. 12 clearly situates it in the Makkan period, at the height of the Makkan idolaters' opposition to the Prophet's mission.

Concerning this *sūrah* and several others (i.e., *Sūrah*s 56, 77, 78, and 81), the Prophet is reported to have said, "Hūd and her sisters have turned my hair gray." The *sūrah* begins with the Prophet's call to the Makkan idolaters to worship the one true God (v. 2), promising them punishment if they turn away from this call (v. 3). It also seeks to address certain difficulties the Prophet encountered with the Makkans during the earlier phases of his prophetic mission, such as their concealed animosity toward him (v. 5), their rejection of the Resurrection (v. 7), their outrageous demands that he demonstrate the veracity of his message (v. 12), and their accusations that the Quran was fabricated (v. 13).

The *sūrah* then transitions to a long section (vv. 25–99) that recounts the stories of the prophets Noah (vv. 25–48), Hūd (vv. 50–60, from which the *sūrah* derives its title), Ṣāliḥ (vv. 61–68), Abraham (vv. 69–76), Lot (vv. 77–83), Shu'ayb (vv. 84–95), and Moses (vv. 96–99). This section has many parallels with 7:59–136, serving here to console the Prophet in the environment of the Makkan idolaters' growing hostility toward him and the believers. It demonstrates to the Prophet the manner in which the previous prophets also faced great trials in delivering their message to their people and describes how, in the end, they overcame their opponents with the Help of God. Thus at the end of the *sūrah*, the Prophet is told that these stories have been related to make his heart firm (v. 120), pointing to one of the main effects of the sacred history recounted in

the Quran. The remaining verses in the *sūrah* encourage the Prophet and the believers, among other matters, to persist in the prescribed prayers (v. 114), be patient (v. 115), and trust in God (v. 123).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Rā.* A Book whose signs have been determined, then expounded, from the Presence of One Wise, Aware. (2) "Worship none but God. Truly I am a warner from Him, and a bearer of glad tidings. (3) And seek forgiveness from your Lord; then turn unto Him in repentance. He will grant you goodly enjoyment for a term appointed and give His Bounty unto everyone possessed of merit. But if you turn away, then truly I fear for you the punishment of a

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'* (which also appear in 10:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1; 15:1) are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭa'āt*) found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs*, whose ultimate meaning, most commentators attest, is known only to God; see 2:1c. That the Quran's *signs* are *determined* signifies that the Quran is clear and unambiguous in meaning (Q); see also 3:7c for a fuller discussion of this concept. *Determined* can also convey the idea that there are no contradictions in the Quran (Bḍ, Q); see also 4:82. For God's expounding the *signs*, see 6:55c; 7:174c; 41:3c.

2 The Quran's verses are *determined* and *expounded,* so that God may command people to worship only Him (R). This is one of several passages that refer to the Prophet as *a bearer of glad tidings* and *a warner* (5:19; 7:188; 10:2; 17:105; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 35:24; 48:8). In other verses these functions are attributed to all prophets (2:213; 4:165c; 6:48; 17:105c; 18:56).

3 The shunning of idols is a form of seeking *forgiveness* from God for the sin of ascribing partners to Him, whereas the act of devoting oneself exclusively to Him implies a form of *repentance* (Bḍ, JJ, Z). This verse is usually interpreted to mean that there can be no forgiveness from God unless the servant actually repents unto Him (R). For the notion of repentance in the Quran, see 110:3c. For the conditions for valid repentance, see 66:8c.

By *goodly enjoyment* is meant sustenance and blessings in this world (JJ, Kl); alternately, it can refer to the life of faith, in which believers place their hope in God and are content with His Decree, whereas disbelievers can only take joy in the good things of this world (Kl); see also 4:104: *If you are suffering, verily they suffer even as you suffer, while you hope from God that for which they cannot hope. A term appointed* refers to death (JJ, Kl), and the receiving of God's Bounty by *everyone possessed of merit* refers to the bestowal of rewards in the Hereafter upon those who acted righteously in this world (JJ, Kl), the bounties they receive in the Garden being commensurate with the merit of their acts of obedience (Z); see also 8:4: *For them are ranks in the sight of their Lord, and forgiveness and a generous provision.* The *punishment of a great Day* refers to the chastisement of the Day of Resurrection (Z), but, applied to the Makkans in particular, it refers also to days on which they met with great defeat, such as the day of the Battle of Badr (Kl).

4 For verses that speak of the return to God

great Day. (4) Unto God is your return, and He is Powerful over all things." (5) Behold! They fold up their breasts to hide from Him. Behold! When they cover themselves with their garments, He knows that which they hide and that which they disclose. Truly He knows what lies within breasts. (6) There is no creature that crawls upon the earth but that its provision lies with God. And He knows its dwelling place and its repository. All is in a clear Book. (7) He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, while His Throne was upon the water, that He may try you as to which of you is most virtuous in deed.

in similar fashion, see 3:55; 5:48, 105; 6:60, 164; 10:4, 23; 29:8; 31:15; 39:7.

5 This verse is said to have been revealed about a certain al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq, who was very eloquent and spoke in a manner that appealed to the Prophet, but who inwardly harbored feelings of hatred and animosity toward him (Q, W). Some say that this verse pertains more generally to the Makkan idolaters' attitude toward the Prophet and the believers (Q), while others see it only as a reference to their particular concealed hatred and enmity toward him (Kl). *They cover themselves with their garments* denotes their aversion to hearing the Quran; that is, they put their "garments" over their heads so that they do not have to "hear" the Quran's recitation (Kl, Z); see also 71:7: *Truly whenever I call them, that Thou mayest forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, cover themselves with their garments, persist, and wax most arrogant.* For God as encompassing and being aware of even the most inward dimensions of human beings, see 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13.

6 *Lies with God* can also be read as "is an obligation upon God," which causes some commentators to note that, although God is the source of all provision for created beings, He is not "obligated" to provide for them, for such "necessity" or "obligation" would be interpreted as contradicting the supremacy of His Will and Power (Q). *Its dwelling place* is understood as a reference to the father's loins, and *its repository* to the mother's womb (Kl). Alternately, the former can refer to the mother's womb and the latter to where one eventually finds oneself in this world (Su); see also 6:98c.

That all realities are *in a clear Book* is also stated elsewhere in the Quran (cf. 6:59; 10:61; 27:74–75; 34:3). *A clear book* is understood here to be a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c; JJ, N, R) or to God's Knowledge (R); cf. 5:15; 12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 43:2; 44.

7 For the creation of *the heavens and the earth in six days*, see 7:54c. Quranic references to the six days of creation (cf. 7:54; 10:3; 25:59; 32:4; 50:38; 57:4) are often followed by the statement that God *then mounted the Throne* (10:3; 25:59; 32:4). Since the verse implies that God's *Throne was upon the water* (cf. Genesis 1:2) while the creation of *the heavens and the earth* was taking place, al-Rāzī notes that *upon* here does not indicate physical space, since God's Throne could not be physically on the water if the heavens and the earth had not yet come into being. Thus, one possible meaning of *His Throne was upon the water* could be to indicate the manner in which the heavens came about without any physical support below them (R), similar to what is expressed in 13:2: *God it is Who raised the heavens without pillars that you see, then mounted the Throne.*

On people being tried in this life in order to make manifest who among them *is most virtuous in deed*, see 18:7. See also 67:2, which states that God *created death and life that He may try you as to which of you is most virtuous in deed*, suggesting that trials are an inherent part of the human condition. The trials one encounters in life are not unjust, for *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity* (2:286; see also 2:234; 6:52; 7:42; 23:26), but rather are a necessary part of one's journey in this life; when met with the correct response, they can only help

Yet if thou sayest, "Truly you shall be resurrected after death," the disbelievers will surely say, "This is naught but manifest sorcery!" (8) And if We grant them reprieve from the punishment for a limited time, they will surely say, "What holds it back?" Behold! On the day when it comes upon them, it shall not be turned away from them, and that which they used to mock will beset them. (9) And if We cause man to taste Mercy from Us, and then withdraw it from him, verily he is despondent, ungrateful. (10) And if We cause him to taste some favor after adversity has befallen him, he will surely say, "The evils have gone from me." Verily he is exultant, boastful, (11) save those who are patient and

strengthen one spiritually, improve one's character, and increase one's love for God and trust in Him. From this perspective, trials are a Blessing and a Mercy from God. For the meaning of *which of you is most virtuous in deed,* see 67:2c.

In many places throughout the Quran the disbelievers reject God's signs and the message brought to them by the prophets as *manifest sorcery,* as in 34:43: *Those who disbelieve say to the Truth when it comes to them, "This is naught but manifest sorcery";* see also 5:110; 6:7; 10:2, 76; 20:57; 21:3; 27:13; 28:36; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 46:7; 54:2; 61:6; 74:24. For the common objection by the disbelievers to the Quranic doctrine of bodily resurrection, see also 13:5; 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82–83; 27:67; 36:78; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 56:47–48; 79:11.

8 Concerning the punishment promised to the Makkan idolaters in this world or in the Hereafter (Aj), they asked the question *What holds it back?* out of derision (Aj) and as an attempt to demonstrate its falsehood (Ṭ). In the end, what *they used to mock will beset them,* which is to say that the punishment they were seeking to hasten through their derisive comments (Sh, Z) will become a reality and descend upon them (Ṭ). The notion that people's mockery of the truth will eventually rebound upon them is found throughout the Quran; see 6:10; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26.

9–10 When the blessings God has conferred upon people are taken away from them by God, they despair, thereby engendering ingratitude for God's Blessings. This is because they do not have a sufficient amount of hope in God, lack reliance upon Him, and are impatient (Aj). Cf. 22:11: *And among mankind some worship God upon a brink: if good befalls him, he is content thereby, but if a trial befalls him, he is turned over upon his face;* see also 89:15–16; cf. 17:83; 41:49. Al-Rāzī says that believers should know that these blessings have come to them from God's Bounty, so their disappearance should not cause them to despair (R). Some commentaries mention a *ḥadīth qudsī* in conjunction with this verse that states, "I am as My servant thinks of Me. So let him think well of Me." This *ḥadīth* means that believers must harbor a positive view of God's Acts, or, as al-Rāzī puts it, in such circumstances they should say to themselves, "After this, perhaps God will return these blessings to me [and they will be] more perfect, beautiful, and excellent than they were [before]."

When people are then restored to *some favor* from God, they say, *the evils,* namely, the afflictions (JJ), *have gone from me,* which is to say they will not thank God for removing the difficulties and will not consider the possibility that these new blessings can also be taken away from them (JJ). Such people are thus *exultant, boastful,* but deluded (Bḍ), rejoicing over these blessings while forgetting to be grateful to God for them (Q). See also 39:49: *And when harm befalls man, he calls upon Us. Then, when We confer upon him a Blessing from Us, he says, "I was only given it because of knowledge." Nay, it is a trial, but most of them know not;* cf. 10:12; 30:33; 39:8c; see also 39:49c.

11 *Save those who are patient* refers to times of hardship, and *perform righteous deeds* to times when blessings are received (JJ). In a report at-

perform righteous deeds; it is they for whom there shall be forgiveness and a great reward. (12) Perchance thou mightest omit some of that which We have revealed unto thee, and thy breast might be constrained because they say, "Why has no treasure been sent down upon him, or an angel not come with him?" Thou art only a warner, and God is Guardian over all things. (13) Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "Then bring ten *sūrah*s like it, fabricated, and call upon whomsoever you can apart from God, if you are truthful." (14) But if they answer thee not, then know that it has been sent down with God's Knowledge and that there is no god but He. So are you submitters? (15) Whosoever desires the life of this world and its adornment, We shall pay them in full for their deeds therein, and therein they will not be deprived. (16) They are those for

tributed by some to the Prophet and others to Ibn Masʿūd (d. 31/652), it is said that faith is composed of two parts: patience accounts for one half, and gratitude for the other (al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* [Beirut, 1997], 4:316). With respect to the virtue of patience in particular, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī is reported to have said, "Patience is the key to success." In this world, *a great reward* for patience can also be understood to be that God will be with those who are patient, as 2:153 asserts, *Truly God is with the patient.*

12 According to 10:15, the Makkan idolaters asked the Prophet to alter the Quran in certain respects so that it would be more acceptable to them; more specifically, they requested that the Quran not include any kind of condemnation of their gods (R). The Prophet insisted, however, that he did not have a role in its authorship; see 10:15c. They also asked him to turn the mountain in Makkah into gold to prove that he was a messenger or to bring forth angels to bear witness to the truth of his prophethood (R). As he was unable to meet such demands, the Makkans called him a liar and mocked him, which grieved him. In reciting the Quran to them, his *breast* was thus *constrained* (Z).

*Perchance thou mightest omit some of that which We have revealed unto thee* speaks to this situation and indicates that the Prophet would either continue to bring the Quran that was being revealed to him and face their curses and insults or *omit some of* it; the latter, however, is considered impossible for a prophet, since in Islamic belief one of the mandatory aspects of prophethood is conveying the message exactly as it was revealed (R). Thus, *perchance,* which translates *laʿalla,* functions as a rhetorical device intended not to express true uncertainty that the Prophet might *omit some of* the Quran in order to appease the Makkan idolaters or to avoid their curses, but to emphasize the importance of his faithfully conveying all that was revealed to him (R); on *laʿalla,* see also 2:21c.

The Prophet is also reminded here again that he is *only a warner* (see also 13:7; 27:92; 34:46; 35:23; 38:65–66; 79:45) and that *God is Guardian over all things* (cf. 6:102; 39:62), meaning that guidance or misguidance is not in the hands of the Messenger, but ultimately in the Hands of God alone (Kl).

13–14 For the Makkan idolaters' claim that the Prophet fabricated the Quran, see 10:38c; 32:2; 46:8. The challenge to them to produce *ten* sūrah*s like it* if they *are truthful* is to say that if they do not believe in the Quran's inimitability and believe that they can produce the equivalent, either the whole of it or in part, then they should attempt to do so, for if their claim that the Prophet has fabricated the Quran is true—that is, if the Quran is not from God—then it would be possible for it to be reproducible by human beings. If, however, they cannot do so, then this would prove that it is from God; for similar challenges to produce something like the Quran, see 2:23; 10:38; 17:88.

15–16 Desiring *the life of this world and its adornment* can in a sense apply to both believers

whom there shall be naught in the Hereafter but the Fire. Whatsoever they had wrought therein shall come to naught, and vain was that which they used to do. (17) So what of the one who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord, and for whom it is recited by a witness from Him? And before it there was the Book of Moses, a guide and a mercy. It is they who believe in it. And whosoever disbelieves in it from among the parties, the Fire is their tryst. So be not in doubt concerning it. Verily it is the truth from thy Lord, but most of mankind believe not. (18) And who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God? It is they who will be brought before their Lord, and the witnesses will say, "These are the ones who lied against their Lord." Behold! The curse of God is upon the wrongdoers, (19) those who turn from the way of God and seek to make it crooked, and who disbelieve in the Hereafter.

and disbelievers alike, since there are lawful means of enjoying worldly life, but it is understood here to refer to those who desire this life only and deny the reality of the Hereafter (R); this interpretation resembles the message of 42:20: *Whosoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We shall increase for him his harvest. And whosoever desires the harvest of this world, We shall give him some thereof, but he will have no share in the Hereafter.* Some understand *We shall pay them in full for their deeds therein* to mean that God will bestow upon believers the reward for their actions directed toward righteous ends even in this world, in the sense that God would "hasten" their reward in this world without decreasing it in the Hereafter (Q). One interpretation given by some commentators is that v. 15 was revealed about certain believers during the time of the Prophet who were given to religious ostentation in their actions (see also 107:6; Aj). For the manner in which actions with the wrong intentions are rendered null in the Hereafter, see 3:22c. Some mention in this connection the famous *ḥadīth,* "Verily actions are [judged] according to [their] intentions" (Q).

17 *One who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord* is a reference to the Prophet, and *they who believe in it* to the believers (Kl). *A witness from Him* refers to either the Quran, Gabriel, or another angel. According to some commentators, it refers to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who is reported to have said that different verses were revealed in connection with different members of the Quraysh, and this verse was revealed with regard to him (Q). The *witness* is sometimes described as "the tongue of the Messenger of God" (Q). For the *Book of Moses,* namely, the Torah, see 11:110–11c. That *most of mankind believe not* is repeated in 13:1 and 40:59; here, however, some interpret *most of mankind* to refer specifically to the majority of the people of Makkah at the time of the Prophet (JJ).

18–19 By those who fabricate *a lie against God* is meant those who disbelieve in God and His message (Ṭ); cf. 3:94; 6:21, 93, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 18:15; 29:68. That they *will be brought before their Lord* refers to their being called to account for their actions on the Day of Judgment (Q). *The witnesses* is a reference to the angels responsible for recording the deeds of human beings (Q; see 43:80c; 50:17–18; 80:15–16; 82:10; 86:4), and to the prophets (Kl). That *the curse of God is upon the wrongdoers* means they are distanced or exiled from His Mercy (see also 7:44c). In seeking to make *the way* leading to God *crooked,* they attempt to distort or alter the way in such a manner that it is no longer the *straight path* (see 1:6 and commentary), which God has established and enjoined human beings to follow; see also the commentary on 7:45, an almost identical verse.

(20) Such as these cannot thwart [aught] on earth, and they have no protector apart from God. For them the punishment will be multiplied. They were not able to hear; neither did they see. (21) They are those who have lost their souls, and that which they used to fabricate has forsaken them. (22) There is no doubt that in the Hereafter they shall be the greatest losers. (23) Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds and are humble before their Lord, it is they who are the inhabitants of the Garden; they shall abide therein. (24) The parable of these two groups is that of one blind and deaf, and one hearing and seeing. Are they equal when compared? Will you not remember? (25) Indeed, We sent Noah unto his people, "Truly I am unto you a clear warner, (26) that you might worship none but God. Truly I fear for you the punishment of a painful day."

20–22 *These cannot thwart [aught] on earth* means that the disbelievers will not be able to prevent God's punishing them in this life if He wishes to do so (Z); cf. 8:59; 9:2–3; 24:57; 29:22; 35:44; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12. That God is the only Protector for human beings is a common Quranic refrain (cf. 2:107, 120; 4:123, 173; 9:74, 116; 29:22; 33:18, 65; 42:31; 48:22). *The punishment will be multiplied* refers to the fact that they will be punished for their own misguided ways and also for misguiding others (JJ); see 7:38–39c; 17:75; 29:12–13; 33:66–68. Commenting on *They were not able to hear; neither did they see,* al-Rāzī notes that these words refer to a "deafness of heart and blindness of soul," which is consistent with the Quran's characterization of those who are spiritually insensible to the prophetic messages as "blind" and "deaf" (see, e.g., 2:171, 5:71; 6:104; 7:64; 10:43; 11:28; 13:19; 27:4, 66, 81; 30:53; 41:17, 44; 43:36–37, 40). Regarding the Quranic notion that one will ultimately be forsaken by what one has fabricated, including false idols, ideas, and religious beliefs, see 6:24, 54; 10:30; 16:87; 28:75c.

23 *Humble* here means penitent and fearful (Bg), and can also describe those who are in a state of peace in the remembrance of God (Ṭs), as in 13:28: *Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?*

24 *These two groups* refers to those who fabricate lies against God (see vv. 18–22)—that is, the disbelievers—and those who believe in God and act righteously (see v. 23). The former are spiritually *blind and deaf* (R), since they cannot see God's signs or hear His Word (Aj), whereas the latter are *hearing and seeing,* because they can see God's signs and hear His Word (Aj). The question *Are they equal when compared?* is similar to the one posed in 39:9: *Are those who know and those who do not know equal?*

25 For the story of Noah, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; *Sūrah* 71. The story of Noah here serves as an introduction to the stories of the punished and destroyed peoples that follow in the remainder of the *sūrah.* The general function of the prophets is to act as both warners and bearers of glad tidings; see 2:213: *Mankind was one community; then God sent the prophets as bearers of glad tidings and as warners;* cf. 4:165; 6:48; 18:56. Noah describes himself to his people as *a clear warner* (see also 71:2), which is to say that he was warning them of the impending punishment (see 11:26c) that would befall them as well as the way in which they could avoid it (Bḍ). For other verses in which the Prophet is described as only being a *warner,* see 13:7; 22:49; 27:92; 29:50; 35:23; 38:70; 46:9; 67:26; and 79:45.

26 In saying *worship none but God,* which is the same call made by other prophets in the Quran (see 41:14; 46:21; cf. 2:83; 3:64; 11:2), Noah was calling his people to cast aside their idols, to cease worshipping them, and to obey only God

27 But the notables among his people who disbelieved said, "We see you as naught but a human being like us, and we see none who follow you, save the lowliest among us, as is clear to see. Nor do we see that you have any merit over us; nay, we think that you are liars." 28 He said, "O my people! What think you: if I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, and He has granted me Mercy from Himself, and you are blind to it. Shall we force it upon you, though you are unwilling? 29 O my people! I ask not of you any wealth in return for it; my reward lies only with God. And I shall not drive away those who believe; truly they shall meet their Lord. But I see that you are an ignorant people. 30 O my people! Who would help me against God, were I to drive them away? Will you not remember? 31 I say not unto you that with me are the treasuries of God;

(Q; cf., e.g., 7:59; 23:23; 71:3). *The punishment of a painful day* refers to the chastisement that Noah's people would receive in this world as well as their punishment in the Hereafter (JJ); cf. 7:59; 71:1.

27 *The notables* refers to the leaders of Noah's society (Q); see also 7:60, 66. The answer of Noah's people (see also 23:24) is the same as that given to all of God's messengers as mentioned in 14:10: *You are but human beings like us* (see also 26:154 in the context of the story of the prophet Ṣāliḥ). Noah's followers are described by his opponents as *the lowliest among us;* they were looked down upon because they were poor and employed in what were considered trades or occupations of low social standing (Q); see also 26:111c. Elsewhere Noah's people refuse to believe in him precisely because the *lowliest* members of their society follow him: *Shall we believe you, when the lowliest follow you?* (26:111). *Nor do we see that you have any merit over us* is directed by *the notables* to both Noah and his followers (Kl), who were considered unworthy of being followed because they did not have any special kind of distinction in their society, by way of either dress, wealth, or high social status (Kl).

28 Noah's standing *upon a clear proof from my Lord* refers to the clarity and truth of his message (see also 6:57–58c) and is also repeated by the prophets Ṣāliḥ and Shuᶜayb to their people later in this *sūrah* (see vv. 63, 88, respectively; cf. v. 11). In 6:57, the Prophet Muhammad is also instructed to tell his people, *Truly I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord.* The *Mercy from Himself* that was given to Noah is God's conferral of prophethood upon him (Kl) or the guidance and knowledge that God gave him (Bg). Noah's question to his people is rhetorical and accords with the principle enunciated in 2:256: *There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error.*

29 The *it* in *in return for it* refers to what Noah was calling his people to, namely, faith in and sincere worship of the One God (Ṭ). It is said that the notables to whom Noah brought the message told Noah that if he wanted them to believe in him, then he should shun those who were currently following him (see v. 27), because they were unworthy of being on equal footing with the notables (Ṭ, Ṭs). The Quraysh also had the same issue with the Prophet's followers; see 6:52c. Noah's statement *But I see that you are an ignorant people* is in reference to the leaders' request that he should shun those who believed in God (Ṭ); see also 46:23 for an identical phrase used by the prophet Hūd when addressing his people.

30 Noah's question can be taken to mean, "Who would prevent God's Punishment against me, were I to shun those who believe and who on the Day of Judgment will make a case against me before God?" (Ṭs).

31 Al-Rāzī explains that Noah's statement that he did not have *the treasuries of God* (for other references to *treasuries* in the Quran, see

nor do I know the Unseen. And I say not that I am an angel; nor do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes, 'God will not give them any good'—God knows best what is in their souls—for then I would indeed be among the wrongdoers." (32) They said, "O Noah! You have disputed with us, and have prolonged the disputation; so bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are among the truthful." (33) He said, "God alone shall bring it to you, if He will, and you cannot thwart [it]. (34) And my sincere advice will not benefit you, much as I desire to advise you, if God desires to cause you to err. He is your Lord, and unto Him shall you be returned." (35) Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "If I fabricated it, then my guilt is upon me; but I am quit of that which you commit." (36) And it was revealed unto Noah, "None of thy people shall believe, save those who had already believed. So be not distressed by that which they used to do. (37) Build the Ark before Our Eyes and by Our Revelation. And address Me not concerning those who did

6:50; 15:21; 17:100; 38:9; 52:37; 63:7), did not *know the Unseen,* and was not *an angel* highlights his humility and lowliness before God, an attitude that allowed him to embrace those who were deemed to be lowly by their own people, while preventing him from being seduced by the company of the notables and leaders of his society. The same assertions are made by the Prophet in response to the criticisms of the Quraysh; see 6:50 and commentary.

32–33 *So bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us,* which is a typical reaction by disbelievers to the teachings of the prophets (see also 7:70, 77; 46:22), refers to the impending punishment (Kl) about which Noah had informed them (see v. 26); *and you cannot thwart [it]* (cf. 6:135; 10:53) refers to their inability to escape it (JJ).

34 God's causing people *to err* is tantamount to the more common Quranic notion that He causes some people to stray from the truth (see, e.g., 17:97; 18:17; 74:31), for which, see 4:88–90c; 4:143c; 6:39c. On related issues, see 3:108–9c and the essay "The Qur'an and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy."

35 This verse pertains to the Makkan idolaters and their accusation that the Prophet had fabricated the Quran (JJ; see v. 13; 10:38c; 32:2; 46:8). *Then my guilt is upon me* implies punishment (JJ) and is thus equivalent to saying, "Then I shall be punished for my sin."

36 It is said that Noah had been calling his people to God for some 950 years (Aj); see 29:14, which states: *And he remained among them a thousand years, less fifty.* Thus, *those who had already believed* refers to those who had, up to that point, believed in Noah's message (Aj). God's counsel to Noah that he should not be *distressed*—that is, saddened or despairing (Ṭ)—over the actions of his people relates to the wider Quranic theme of God's addressing the prophets' human reactions to the trials that they would inevitably encounter; see 2:214; 15:97–99; 21:83–84; 26:3.

37 *Before Our Eyes* is a figurative manner of saying that God will watch over and protect Noah's building of the Ark (Kl); *by Our Revelation* means that God instructed Noah how to build the Ark (Bḍ). God's telling Noah not to address Him *concerning those who did wrong* means that Noah was not to attempt to intercede with God on their behalf (Kl) and that he should not pray to God to withhold the impending punishment from them (Bḍ).

wrong; surely they shall be drowned." (38) And he was building the Ark, and whenever notables among his people passed by him, they would scoff at him. He said, "If you scoff at us, surely we shall scoff at you, just as you scoff. (39) For soon you shall know upon whom there comes a punishment that disgraces him and upon whom there falls a punishment enduring." (40) Till when Our Command came, and the oven gushed forth, We said, "Carry on board two of every kind, and thy family—save the one against whom the Word has already gone forth—and those who believe." And none believed along with him, save a few. (41) He said, "Embark upon it. In the Name of God be its coursing and its mooring. Truly my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful." (42) And it sailed with them upon waves like mountains. And Noah called out to his son, who remained aloof, "O my son! Embark with us, and be not with the disbelievers." (43) He said, "I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the water." He said, "There is no protector on this day from the Command of God, save for the one upon whom He has Mercy." And the waves came between them, and he was among the drowned. (44) And it was said, "O earth! Swallow your water! And O sky! Hold

38–39 Noah's words *If you scoff at us, surely we shall scoff at you, just as you scoff* have in view the final state of affairs, when the believers will laugh at the disbelievers, just as the disbelievers used to laugh at them during the life of this world (see 83:29–36). This verse relates to the broader Quranic notion that people's evil actions will ultimately rebound upon them (see, e.g., 2:9, 57; 10:23; 35:43; 47:38). *A punishment that disgraces* (cf. 11:93; 39:40) refers to the flood, which was going to humiliate, in this world, the people who rejected Noah (IK), while *a punishment enduring* (cf. 5:37; 9:68; 39:40) refers to their state of punishment in the Hereafter (Ṭ).

40–41 *Till when Our Command came, and the oven gushed forth* indicates the beginning of the flood, which God sent to destroy the people of Noah. *The oven* here refers to the earth (Bg, Q) in general or a particular region, such as Syria or Iraq (Bg); for more on the *oven gushed forth,* see 23:27–28c. According to one account, God first gathered all manner of birds and animals before Noah, who then chose one male and one female from each species and took the pairs onto the ship (JJ). It is said that *save the one against whom the Word has already gone forth* characterizes both Noah's wife (see 66:10c) and his son (JJ; see vv. 42–43, 45).

42 *Waves like mountains* refers to the size of the waves from the flood (Z), which were formed on account of the intensity of the wind (Q).

43 The son of Noah *who remained aloof* in v. 42 is said to have been named Yām (IK, Z) or Kanʿān (Z). From a spiritual point of view, his statement that he would *take refuge on a mountain* can be understood to refer to the false sense of security, stability, and permanence (symbolized by *a mountain*) that the disbelievers, in their state of denial of God, assign to the world.

44 God's Commands to the earth and sky denote the end of the flood. It is said in some traditional sources that *[Mount] Jūdī,* where the Ark settled, is a mountain near Mosul (JJ, Kl), while other sources associate it with Mt. Ararat in the eastern region of present-day Turkey. It is believed that *Away with the wrongdoing people!* was spoken by God (R); see also 23:41 for the identical phrase.

back!" And the water was made to recede, and the command was carried out, and it settled on [Mount] Jūdī. And it was said, "Away with the wrongdoing people!" (45) And Noah called out to his Lord and said, "O my Lord! Truly my son is from my family. Thy Promise is indeed true, and Thou art the most just of judges." (46) He said, "O Noah! Truly he is not from thy family; surely such conduct was not righteous. So question Me not concerning that whereof thou hast no knowledge; truly I exhort thee, lest thou be among the ignorant." (47) He said, "My Lord! Truly I seek refuge in Thee from questioning Thee concerning that whereof I have no knowledge. If thou dost not forgive me and have Mercy upon me, I shall be among the losers." (48) It was said, "O Noah! Disembark with peace from Us, and blessings upon thee and upon the communities that [will arise] from those with thee, and communities for whom We shall grant enjoyment. Then a painful punishment from Us shall befall them." (49) These are among the

45–47 It is said that Noah pleaded with God to save his son because God had promised Noah that He would save his family (IJ, Ṭ; cf. v. 40), which is the promise to which Noah was referring when he said, *Thy Promise is indeed true* (IJ). For God as *the most just of judges,* see 95:8c (cf. 7:87; 10:109; 12:80). From one perspective, God's Words to Noah *Truly he is not from thy family* mean that Noah's son did not belong to those members of Noah's family whom God had promised to save (Q, R); cf. the wording in v. 40: *Carry on board... thy family—save the one against whom the Word has already gone forth* (see also 11:40–41c). From another perspective, Noah's son can be described as not being *from* Noah's *family* in a spiritual sense, as he rejected the message with which his father had come. See also 6:74, where Abraham's dissociation from his father is mentioned.

The son's unrighteous *conduct* was denying God and disbelieving in Him. Some read *such conduct was not righteous* to mean, "He was [a doer of] unrighteous conduct," with the subject being implicit (R). *Ignorant* in *lest thou be among the ignorant* refers more specifically to sinfulness (Q, R); God exhorts Noah not to question Him concerning his son's fate (see v. 45) lest he be "among the sinners." Noah's words of repentance are identical to those uttered by Adam and his wife in 7:23 after Satan's trickery against them had become clear to them.

48 God tells Noah that he and those with him can come out of the Ark and live on land without fear of perishing (Bq, Ṭ). An elision in *blessings upon thee and upon the communities that [will arise] from those with thee, and communities for whom We shall grant enjoyment* causes it to mean, "blessings upon thee and upon the communities that [will arise] from those with thee; and [from those with thee] are communities for whom We shall grant enjoyment" (Z). This statement is understood to mean that the communities of believers that will arise from Noah's family will be blessed, or that the communities of both disbelievers and believers that will arise from Noah's family will receive provision from God (Z), but the disbelieving communities are promised *a painful punishment* from God. It is said that this phrase refers to the destroyed nations that came after Noah, such as the ᶜĀd, the Thamūd, the Sodomites, and the Midianites (Z), all of whom were descendants of Noah; see vv. 50–60, 61–68, 77–83, 84–95, respectively.

49 *Thou knewest not of them, neither thou nor thy people, beforehand* is understood to mean that the Prophet did not know such accounts as the story of Noah before the revelation came to

accounts of the Unseen that We reveal unto thee. Thou knewest not of them, neither thou nor thy people, beforehand. So be patient. Truly the end belongs to the reverent. (50) And unto ᶜĀd, their brother Hūd. He said, "O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. You are naught but fabricators. (51) O my people! I ask not of you any reward for it. My reward lies only with the One Who originated me. Do you not understand? (52) O my people! Seek forgiveness from your Lord; then turn unto Him in repentance. He will send the sky upon you with abundant rain, and add strength to your strength.

him (Kl, Z), nor were they known to the people of Makkah at that time, since they were not "People of the Book" (Ṭs). However, given the presence of Christians and Jews in Makkah during the lifetime of the Prophet, it is more likely that this verse refers to a lack of knowledge about the details and spiritual meaning of such stories rather than a lack of general knowledge of them.

God's counsel to the Prophet to *be patient* is aimed at both the task of conveying the message given to him and the hardships he was enduring from the Makkan idolaters, implying that the Prophet should be as patient as Noah was (JJ). *The end belongs to the reverent* is also found in 7:128; 28:83; cf. 20:132.

50–51 For the story of the prophet Hūd, see also 7:65–72; 26:123–39; 46:21–25; 54:18–21. Hūd was an Arabian prophet, not mentioned in the Bible, who is said to have been a descendant of the prophet Noah; see 7:65c. ᶜĀd, the people to whom Hūd was sent, are believed to have come from the southern part of Arabia, from between the valley of Ḥaḍramawt and Oman. They were a tribal people who worshipped idols; their name derives from that of a man to whom they traced their common ancestry (Q). It is said that there were two peoples with the name ᶜĀd: *ᶜĀd the Former* (53:50), who are also known as Iram (see 89:7–8c); and ᶜĀd the Latter, who are simply referred to as ᶜĀd; see also 53:50–51c. The people to whom Hūd was sent were ᶜĀd the Former (Q).

Hūd was the *brother* of the ᶜĀd people since he was one of them (Q). Like the other prophets, Hūd called his people to worship God alone and to relinquish their idols. *You are naught but fabricators* means, "In your associating idols with God, you are nothing but a lying people, creating falsehood, for there is no God other than He" (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī notes that Hūd's assurance to his people that he does not ask of them *any reward for it* (see also 26:127) and that his reward lies only with God is identical in meaning to Noah's statement to his people in v. 29: *O my people! I ask not of you any wealth in return for it; my reward lies only with God,* and is similar to those made by other prophets throughout the Quran (see also, e.g., 6:90; 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180; 36:22; 38:86; 42:23).

52 For the connection between the order of the call to *seek forgiveness* from God and the call to *then turn unto Him in repentance* with reference to the Makkan idolaters, which also pertains to ᶜĀd, see 11:3c (see also v. 90). Hūd's words *He will send the sky upon you with abundant rain,* which addressed the problem of the drought that ᶜĀd had been experiencing (JJ), were also uttered by Noah to his people (71:11); see also 7:72c. *Guilty,* in the sense of being culpable of wrongdoing, refers here to "people who ascribe partners unto God" (JJ). It is said that the drought they experienced lasted three years (Kl). According to traditional Islamic teachings, seeking God's Forgiveness and repenting to Him are means by which a sinful people can beseech God to send rain to their lands (Kl). On the basis of this belief, there are special prayers performed by Muslims at the time of the drought as well as on the occasion of other national calamities.

And turn not away, guilty." (53) They said, "O Hūd! You have not brought us a clear proof, and we shall not forsake our gods on your word, for we are not believers in you. (54) We say only that one of our gods has smitten you with evil." He said, "I call God as witness—and you be witness—that I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners (55) apart from Him. So scheme against me then, all together, and grant me no respite. (56) Truly I trust in God, my Lord and your Lord. There is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock. Truly my Lord is upon a straight path. (57) But if you turn away, [know that] I have delivered unto you the message wherewith I have been sent by Him. My Lord will cause you to be succeeded by a people other than yourselves, and you harm Him not in the least. Truly my Lord is Watcher over all things." (58) And when

53–54 Hūd's people tell him that he has not brought them *a clear proof,* by which they mean clear evidence that testifies to the truthfulness of his claim to being a prophet sent by God (Bḍ). It is said that they were unable to see the clear proofs brought by Hūd because of their obstinacy in rejecting his message (Bḍ). The claim that one of their gods has smitten Hūd with evil manifests their belief that he was a madman who had been put under a spell by one of their idols, because he had cursed it and had called his people to cease worshipping idols (Kl); cf. 7:66. The Makkan idolaters, likewise, had accused the Prophet Muhammad of being mad or possessed; see 15:6; 23:70; 34:8; 37:36; 44:14; 68:51; 81:22.

55–56 For similar statements made by prophets concerning the beliefs of the people to whom they had been sent, see also 6:19; 6:78. Hūd's challenge, which is addressed to his people and their gods (N), to *scheme* and grant him *no respite* means, "Neither you nor your gods will be able to do anything!" (Kl). Hūd then provides them with the reason for his confidence in their inability to scheme against him, namely, his firm and unshakeable reliance upon God (Kl).

*There is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock* is a metaphor to denote that all creatures are under God's Control and Authority (N). *Truly my Lord is upon a straight path* means that God is upon the path of truth, is Just, and does not let wrongdoers escape Him. It also means that He will not forsake one who relies upon Him (Z). Regarding *straight path,* see 1:6c.

57–58 *My Lord will cause you to be succeeded by a people other than yourselves* means that God will destroy the ʿĀd and replace them with a people who believe in God's Oneness and worship Him alone (Q, Ṭ); see also 7:69; 9:39; 47:38. By telling his people that they *harm Him not in the least* (cf. 3:144, 176; 9:39; 47:32), Hūd conveys the fact that they do not harm God in any fashion whatsoever by turning away from Him, nor does any harm come to Him if He destroys them, for He did not create them out of His need for them in the first place (Ṭs). Alternately, it can mean that they will not have the ability to cause God any harm if He causes another people to replace them (Ṭs).

God's *Command* here refers to His Punishment (JJ), which was in the form of *a howling wind* (54:19). Since the ʿĀd had experienced an extended drought (see v. 52), they mistook a cloud that had appeared to be a sign of impending rain. Thus in 46:24 they say, *This is a cloud bringing us rain.* But, it turned out to be *a wind carrying a painful punishment,* which 46:25 describes as *destroying everything by the Command of its Lord. They became such that naught was seen but*

Our Command came, We saved Hūd and those who believed with him through a Mercy from Us; and We saved them from a grave punishment. (59) That was ᶜĀd. They rejected the signs of their Lord, disobeyed the messengers, and followed the command of every stubborn tyrant. (60) And they were pursued by a curse in this world, and [shall be] on the Day of Resurrection. Behold! Truly ᶜĀd disbelieved in their Lord. Behold! Away with ᶜĀd, the people of Hūd! (61) And to Thamūd, their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said, "O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. He brought you forth from the earth and settled you therein. So seek forgiveness from Him; then turn unto Him in repentance. Truly my Lord is Nigh, Responsive." (62) They said, "O Ṣāliḥ! You were

*their dwellings.* See also 54:20, which describes it as *tearing out people as if they were uprooted palm trunks,* and 7:72c. Some commentators mention that those who accepted Hūd's message are said to have been forty thousand in number (Z). Their being *saved . . . through a Mercy from Us* refers to their being guided to faith in God as well as to the performance of righteous deeds (R).

59–60 That following *the command of every stubborn tyrant* is bound to fail is similar to *Every stubborn tyrant fails* in 14:15. In other words, those who follow people who stubbornly reject the truth brought by God's messengers will ultimately be unsuccessful, since God will aid His messengers against them; see 14:15c; in connection with the people of Hūd, see also 26:130. The *curse* against the people who rejected Hūd refers to their being distanced from God's Mercy (Bg). *Away with* functions as a kind of refrain throughout this *sūrah,* used here in connection with the ᶜĀd, then with the Thamūd (v. 68), and finally with the Midianites (v. 95).

61 For the story of Ṣāliḥ, see also 7:73–79; 15:80–84; 26:141–58; 54:23–31. Ṣāliḥ was an Arabian prophet sent to the Thamūd, who inhabited a rocky plain located in western Arabia, between the Ḥijāz and Syria; see 7:73c. Like Hūd, Ṣāliḥ is not mentioned in the Bible, and like the ᶜĀd, the Thamūd were descendants of Noah. Ṣāliḥ's call to his people to worship God alone is identical to the words uttered by Hūd to his people; see v. 50. He is likewise described as the *brother* of the people to whom he had been sent, since he was one of them (see also 26:142). For the connection between seeking forgiveness and repentance, see 11:3c; see also vv. 52, 90. *Truly my Lord is Near, Responsive* means that God is close to those who are sincere toward Him in their worship and wish to repent, and that He answers the call of supplicants when they call upon him (Q), as in 2:186: *When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they may be led aright.* According to Islamic theology, God is close to all human beings, even those who feel distant from Him or even deny Him; the condition of sincerity is not a requirement for God's closeness, but those without faith are unaware of it.

62 The response of Ṣāliḥ's people, *You were a source of hope among us before this,* means that before Ṣāliḥ called them to worship the one true God, they had hoped he would eventually assume a leadership role (*sayyid*) among them (Q), as he was already one of his society's most noble and respected figures; see 7:73c. The appeal made by the Thamūd to the religious ways of their *fathers* is a common Quranic theme, namely, that when prophets bring the message of God's Oneness to an idolatrous people, they reject it on the grounds that it does not conform to the ways of their ancestors (see, e.g., 5:104; 10:70; 21:53; 31:21); cf. 7:28. See also 2:170, which responds to a similar statement of loyalty to the traditions of one's fathers: *What! Even though their fathers understood nothing, and were not rightly guided?*

a source of hope among us before this. Do you forbid us to worship that which our fathers worshipped, while we remain in grave doubt about that to which you call us?" (63) He said, "O my people! What think you: if I stand up on a clear proof from my Lord, and He has granted me Mercy from Himself, then who can help me against God, were I to disobey Him? For you would increase me in naught but loss. (64) O my people! This she-camel of God is a sign unto you. Leave her to graze freely on God's earth, and cause her no harm, lest you be seized by a punishment nigh." (65) But they hamstrung her. So he said, "Enjoy yourselves in your abode for three days—that is a promise that will not be belied." (66) So when Our Command came, We saved Ṣāliḥ and those who believed with him, through a Mercy from Us, and from the disgrace of that day. Truly thy Lord, He is the Strong, the Mighty. (67) The Cry seized those who did wrong, and morning found them lying lifeless in their abode, (68) as though they had never dwelt there. Behold! Truly Thamūd disbelieved in their Lord. Behold! Away with Thamūd! (69) And indeed Our messengers came to Abraham with glad

63 For the *clear proof* brought by the prophets, see 11:28c. Ṣāliḥ's rhetorical question, which is similar to Noah's in 11:30, is in response to his people's reaction to his call to them to leave their ways (see v. 62). The reference *Mercy from Himself* is to God's bestowal of prophethood upon Ṣāliḥ (JJ). By *loss* here is meant "misguidance" (JJ) or Ṣāliḥ's actions coming to naught (Z).

64–65 See 7:73c. Ṣāliḥ brought the pregnant *she-camel* forth from a large rock in accordance with the Thamūd's request to produce a miracle in order to prove his claim to prophethood (see 26:154). Hence, the *she-camel* is referred to as *a sign;* see also 7:73, where it is called *a clear proof,* and 54:27, where it is referred to as *a trial for them.* The injunction to let the she-camel *graze freely on God's earth* and to *cause her no harm* (see also 7:73; 26:155), which is recounted here, makes up one part of the command. The other part of the command is recounted in 26:155: *She shall have drink and you shall drink on an appointed day* (see also 54:28). Yet they *hamstrung her* and, as 7:77 says, they *insolently defied the Command of their Lord,* thus disobeying God's Command out of disdain for His message; see 7:77–78c. The Thamūd then challenged Ṣāliḥ, *Bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are among those sent [by God]* (7:77), at which time Ṣāliḥ promised them an impending punishment after *three days.*

66 As in v. 58, *Our Command* here refers to God's Punishment (Q), which Ṣāliḥ promised would be visited upon the Thamūd (v. 65). As was the case with Hūd (see 11:58c), Ṣāliḥ and his followers (regarding whom, see 7:75–76c) are said to have been saved *through a Mercy from* God.

67–68 The punishment that befell the Thamūd is said to have been an *earthquake* (7:78) accompanied by a terrible, loud sound, which is why here the punishment is also referred to as *the Cry;* see also 7:77–78c, which explains why *morning found them lying lifeless in their abode, as though they had never dwelt there* (see the identical wording in vv. 94–95; cf. 7:78).

69 For the story of Abraham, see also 14:35–41; 15:51–60; 37:83–113; 51:24–36; cf. Genesis 17:1–25:10. *Our messengers,* also referred to in 51:24 as the *honored guests* of Abraham and in 15:51 as his *guests,* are said to have been a group of angels (Kl) ranging (according to various accounts) from

tidings. They said, "Peace." "Peace," he said, and he hastened to bring them a roasted calf. (70) Then when he saw that their hands reached not toward it, he conceived a fear of them. They said, "Fear not. Verily we have been sent unto the people of Lot." (71) And his wife was standing there and she laughed. Then We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob. (72) She said, "Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing." (73) They said, "Do you marvel at the Command of God? The Mercy of God and His Blessings be upon you, O People of the House! Truly He is Praised, Glorious." (74) So when the awe had left Abraham and glad tidings had come unto him, he pleaded with Us concerning the people of Lot. (75) Truly Abraham was clement, tenderhearted, penitent. (76) "O Abraham! Turn away from this. Truly the Command of thy Lord has come, and surely a punishment that cannot be repelled comes upon them."

three to twelve in number; see 51:24–25c. The *glad tidings* with which the *messengers* came were the announcement of the birth of Abraham's son (Kl); see 11:71–73c. The *roasted calf* Abraham hastened to bring to his guests is also described in 51:26 as *a fattened calf.*

70 When Abraham saw that they did not partake of the food that he put before them, he feared that they had come with some ill intent (Q, R), confirming a suspicion he had of his guests as mentioned in 51:25, where he refers to them as *an unfamiliar folk.* Refusing to eat food brought by a host would have been a sign of hostility; see 51:27–28c. As al-Rāzī explains, the guests did not eat the food presented to them because, although they came in the form of men, they were angels, and angels do not consume physical nourishment; for another instance of an angel appearing in the form of a man in the Quran, see 19:17. That the angels *have been sent unto the people of Lot* (cf. 15:58–60; 51:32–34) means they have come to destroy them (JJ). According to 15:57 and 51:31, the angels' reply was prompted by Abraham's question, *What is your errand, O messengers?*

71–73 It is said that Abraham's *wife,* Sarah (JJ, R), *laughed* because of her joy over the fact that the guests did not pose a threat to Abraham (R). Alternately, her laughter denotes her happiness over the news of the impending destruction of the people of Lot (JJ, R); cf. Genesis 17:17; 18:12–15. Abraham was said to be 120 years old at this time, and Sarah was 99 (JJ); see also 51:29. Sarah's astonishment over the *glad tidings* (see also 51:27–28; cf. 37:112) that they would have a son (*Isaac;* cf. 51:28; 15:53) and a grandson (Isaac's son *Jacob*) was on account of their old age (see also 15:54; 51:29). The angels' response to Sarah's comment is similar to God's reply to Zachariah's prayer for a child in 19:9; see also 15:55; 51:30.

74 *Abraham . . . pleaded with Us* is understood to mean that he spoke to the angels and tried to dissuade them from bringing destruction down upon the people of Lot (Kl, Ṭ), as in 29:32, where Abraham protests, *Verily, Lot is in it* (cf. Genesis 18:23–33).

75 See also 9:114, which describes Abraham in similar terms with reference to his *plea for forgiveness of his father.*

76 *Turn away from this* is said to have been uttered by the angels (Bḍ, Z); for the same expression in the context of the story of Joseph, see also 12:29. *The Command of thy Lord has come* means that God's Decree and Judgment have been passed concerning the people of Lot and therefore cannot be stopped by supplication or any other means (Z).

(77) When Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account, and felt himself powerless concerning them. And he said, "This is a terrible day!" (78) And his people came hurrying toward him, while earlier they had been committing evil deeds. He said, "O my people! These are my daughters; they are purer for you. So reverence God, and disgrace me not with regard to my guests. Is there not among you a man of sound judgment?" (79) They said, "Certainly you know that we have no right to your daughters, and surely you know that which we desire." (80) He said, "Would that I had the strength [to resist] you, or could seek refuge in some mighty support!" (81) They said, "O Lot! We are the envoys of thy Lord. They shall not reach thee. So set out with thy family during the night, and let none of you turn around, save thy wife; surely that which befalls them shall befall her. Indeed, the morning shall be their tryst. Is not the morning nigh?" (82) So when Our Command came, We made its uppermost to be its lowermost, and We rained down upon them stones of baked clay, one upon another, (83) marked by

77–79 For the story of Lot, see also 7:80–84; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38; 54:33–38. Lot was the nephew of Abraham, but some say he was his maternal cousin. Lot was sent to the people of Sodom and its surrounding towns, calling them to believe in the One God and relinquish their sinful ways; see 7:80–81c.

The angels went from Abraham's village to Lot's village, which was nearby (R). Since they arrived in the form of handsome male youths, when Lot saw them, he did not know that they were angels (R). Thus Lot *was distressed on their account,* because he feared that his people would attempt to have sexual relations with them (R), as the men among the people of Lot were known to have sexual interest in male foreigners, but also in males among themselves. Lot *felt himself powerless,* since he feared that his people had come for his guests and that he would be unable to defend them (R, Z). It is also said that the people of Lot had sought to satisfy their sexual desires with great aggression (see 7:80–81c; 15:67–71; Genesis 19), which would only augment Lot's fears.

Although the plain sense of *my daughters* refers to Lot's own daughters, which is how many commentators understand the expression (Ṭs, Z), others say that the *daughters* here are not Lot's own biological children, but rather the women among the people of Lot (IK, Ṭ). By offering females to his people—that is, offering women to them in marriage (JJ, Ṭ)—Lot was attempting to divert them from his male guests, in search of whom they had come (Ṭ). Lot's statement to his people that his daughters *are purer for* them is related to 7:82, where his people deride the morality of Lot and his followers by calling them those *who keep themselves pure* (cf. 27:56), which some commentators say refers to their refusal to engage in the sexual practices of the Sodomites. The Sodomites' reply to Lot, *You know that we have no right to your daughters,* is understood to mean that they have no sexual need (*ḥājah*) for his daughters (JJ, Ṭs).

80–81 *Strength* here refers to an army (JJ), and *mighty support* to family or both family and friends (Aj). *They shall not reach thee* means that Lot's people will not be able to inflict any kind of evil upon him (JJ). For God's saving Lot and his family, but not his wife, who is believed to have outwardly followed the religion of Lot, but who was secretly a disbeliever and thus was *among those who lagged behind*; see also 7:83; 15:60; 26:171; 27:57; 29:32; 37:134.

82–83 God's *Command* is also referred to as *the Cry* that *seized them at sunrise* in 15:73; for the

thy Lord; and they are never far from the wrongdoers. (84) And unto Midian, their brother Shuᶜayb. He said, "O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. Diminish not the measure and the balance. Truly I see you faring well, but I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing Day. (85) O my people! Observe fully the measure and the balance with justice and diminish not people's goods, and behave not wickedly upon the earth, working corruption. (86) The remnant from God is better for you, if you are believers, and I am not a keeper over you." (87) They said, "O Shuᶜayb! Does your manner of

connection between God's *Command* and *the Cry* with reference to the destruction of the Thamūd, see commentary on 11:66–68. It is said that the people of Lot lived in five (Q) or seven (Āl) cities, of which Sodom was the greatest (Āl, IK, Q). *We made its uppermost to be its lowermost* means that God caused Sodom to become completely overturned, making it the lowliest of the cities of the people of Lot after it had been the greatest of them (Āl); see also 15:75. The rain of *stones of baked clay* that came down upon the people of Lot (see also 15:74) is also referred to as *a rain* in 7:84; 26:173; 27:58. They are described here as *marked,* since it is believed that each stone had inscribed upon it the name of the person for whom it was intended (IK, M, N), and *by thy Lord,* since each stone fell in accordance with God's Judgment (N); see also the identical wording in 51:34 as well as the commentary on this verse. *Never far from the wrongdoers* is understood to mean that these stones were not distant from the people of Lot (M). Alternately, it can mean that these stones could also be sent upon the Makkan idolaters (JJ, M), thus functioning as a threat (N), since it implies that the latter would be liable to the same fate as the people of Lot if they continue in their ways.

84–86 For the story of Shuᶜayb, see also 7:85–93; 26:176–89. Shuᶜayb was also an Arabian prophet who is identified by many Muslim authorities with the Biblical figure Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. Shuᶜayb was sent to the people of Midian, who resided in northwestern Arabia; see 7:85c. Like other prophets, he called his people to worship the One God. He tells them to *diminish not the measure and the balance* (cf. 7:85; 26:181) and to *observe fully the measure and the balance with justice* (cf. 7:85; 26:181–82), meaning that the Midianites should be honest in their business relations. He also calls them to *diminish not people's goods* (see also 7:85; 26:183)—that is, that they should give people the full measure of what they paid for—which was also a problem among the Makkan idolaters during the time of the Prophet; see *Sūrah* 83. For Shuᶜayb's call to his people to *behave not wickedly upon the earth, working corruption,* see 7:85c.

*The remnant from God* renders *baqiyyat Allāh; baqiyyah* literally means "remainder" or "that which remains." The wealth that is obtained through honest commercial practices and given by God is *better* than the gains acquired through fraudulent ones (R), the *remnant* being what is "left" after one observes *fully the measure and the balance with justice* and abstains from what is illicit. Alternately, it can refer to the reward that is with God or His Contentment, which is greater than what is gained through the act of defrauding (R), since it remains and abides in the Hereafter; see also 42:36: *That which lies with God is better and more lasting for those who believe and trust in their Lord;* cf. 20:73, 131. For the Quranic insistence that the Prophet Muhammad is not a keeper or guardian over his people, see 4:80; 6:66, 104, 107; 10:108; 17:54; 39:41; 42:6, 48; 88:22.

87 Some commentators note that the Midianites' question here is a form of mockery (Kl, Q). Even in their estimation of Shuᶜayb as *surely . . . a man of forbearance and sound judgment,* they intimate that he has these qualities only in his own opinion (Q). The implication is thus that the Midianites, who *were arrogant* (7:88), did not take

praying require that we forsake that which our fathers worshipped, or that we should not do as we will with our wealth? Surely you are a man of forbearance and sound judgment." (88) He said, "O my people! What think you: if I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, and He has provided me with goodly provision from Himself? I desire not to do behind your backs that which I forbid you. I desire naught but to set matters aright so far as I am able; but my success lies with God alone. In Him do I trust and unto Him do I turn. (89) O my people! Let not your dissension with me lead you into sin, such that there should befall you that which befell the people of Noah, or the people of Hūd, or the people of Ṣāliḥ; and the people of Lot are not far from you! (90) And seek forgiveness from your Lord; then turn unto Him in repentance. Truly my Lord is Merciful, Loving." (91) They said, "O Shuʿayb! We do not comprehend much of what you say, and verily we consider you to be weak among us. And were it not for your clan, we would surely stone you, for you have no power over us." (92) He said, "O my people! Is my clan mightier over you than God? Yet, you would put Him behind you with disregard. Surely my Lord encompasses whatsoever you do. (93) O my people! Act according to your position; I, too, am acting. Soon you

seriously Shuʿayb's message, instead referring to him as *but one of the bewitched* (26:185) and *among the liars* (26:186).

88 The *clear proof* that Shuʿayb brought is said to be in the form of miracles (*muʿjizāt*), which are given to all prophets by God to prove their veracity; see 7:85c. *My success lies with God alone* (*wa mā tawfiqī illā bi'Llāh*) is a well-known expression in everyday Muslim discourse employed in many diverse contexts; it conveys the idea that no matter what one does, it is ultimately up to God whether it will be successful and carry a blessing in this world and in the next. Shuʿayb's statement *In Him do I trust and unto Him do I turn* is identical to the statement the Prophet is taught to make in 42:10; see also 7:88–89c.

89–90 In a sense v. 89 says, "Let not your enmity toward me cause you to commit sin, so that you become afflicted with the kind of punishment that befell previous generations" (Kl); on not letting anger or resentment (even when justified) lead one to sin, see 5:2, 8. For the destruction of the people of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Lot, see vv. 25–48, 50–60, 61–68, 77–83, respectively. When Shuʿayb tells his people, *The people of Lot are not far from you!* he is pointing out that Lot's community was the most recent one, the closest to them in time, to have perished (Kl). *Seek forgiveness from your Lord; then turn unto Him in repentance* is also uttered by the prophet Hūd in 11:52.

91 The Midianites tell Shuʿayb that they *do not comprehend much* of what he says as a way of expressing derision for him (Z), since, in their eyes, he was *weak,* that is, lowly (Z); see also 11:87c. In ancient Arabian tribal culture people were offered protection by their clan, and since the clan to which Shuʿayb belonged was a part of the religious community of the Midianites, they could not hurt him (R, Z).

92–93 *You would put Him behind you with disregard;* that is, "You would cast God behind your backs and not be fearful of Him?" (JJ).

shall know upon whom there comes a punishment that disgraces him, and who is a liar. So keep watch! I, too, am among you watching." (94) And when Our Command came, We saved Shuʿayb and those who believed with him, through a Mercy from Us. And the Cry seized those who did wrong, and morning found them lying lifeless in their abode, (95) as though they had never dwelt there. Behold! Away with Midian, just as Thamūd was done away! (96) And indeed We sent Moses with Our signs and a manifest authority (97) unto Pharaoh and his notables. But they followed the command of Pharaoh, and the command of Pharaoh was not sound. (98) He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them to the Fire. Evil indeed is the watering place to which they are led! (99) And they were pursued in this [world] by a curse, and [shall be] on the Day of Resurrection. Evil indeed is the gift that will be offered them! (100) These are among the stories We have recounted unto thee of the towns. Among them are some that remain and some that have been mown down. (101) We wronged them not, but they wronged themselves. And their gods whom they called upon apart from God did not avail them in the least when the Command of thy Lord came, and they increased them in naught but ruin. (102) Such is the seizing of thy Lord when He seizes the towns while they are

Shuʿayb's words *Act according to your position; I, too, am acting* are similar to what the Prophet is instructed to tell the Makkan idolaters (see 6:135; 39:39), and serve as both a warning and a threat; see 6:135c. The same is the case with Shuʿayb's statement to those who rejected his message: they should *keep watch;* he too is watching along with them. The Prophet is told to speak similar words to those who do not believe in his message (see 9:52; 10:20, 102; 32:30); see also 6:135c; 7:87c.

94–95 For identical wording in the story of the prophet Ṣāliḥ with respect to the coming of God's *Command,* the role of Divine *Mercy* in the salvation of those who believed in their prophet, the *Cry* seizing the wrongdoers, and morning finding them *lying lifeless in their abode, as though they had never dwelt there,* see commentary on 11:66–68. V. 95 proclaims, *Away with Midian, just as Thamūd was done away,* since their fates were so similar; see also 7:91–92c.

96–97 For the story of Moses, see also 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 28:3–46; 79:15–25. The *signs* with which Moses came, which are also referred to as *clear proofs* (7:105; 29:39), are the miracles he performed (Kl); see 7:105c. Some state that *a manifest authority* refers to Moses' staff specifically (Q); for Moses' staff, see 7:106–8c. On the *notables* of Pharaoh, see 7:103c; 10:75c.

98–99 *Watering place* renders *wird,* a word usually associated with the quenching of thirst, thus emphasizing the severity of the punishment (Z). Pharaoh's people will be led by him to Hell on the Day of Resurrection in accordance with 17:71: *On the Day We shall call every people by their imam.* The sentence *They were pursued in this [world] by a curse* (v. 99) can refer to a curse in general (Z) or specifically to their being drowned in the Red Sea (Ṭ; see 7:136c).

100–102 These verses mark the end of the long sequence of narratives in this *sūrah* about

doing wrong. Surely His seizing is painful, severe. (103) Truly in that is a sign for those who fear the punishment of the Hereafter. That is a Day on which mankind shall be gathered together, and that is a Day that shall be witnessed. (104) And We delay it not, save for a limited term. (105) On the Day it comes, no soul shall speak save by His Leave. Among them shall be the wretched and the felicitous. (106) As for those who are wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein there shall be for them groaning and wailing, (107) abiding therein for so long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills. Surely thy Lord does whatsoever He wills. (108) And as for those who are felicitous, they shall be in the

the prophets who had been sent to their respective communities and those communities' destruction for rejecting the message. The punishments that befell these people were not arbitrary, but were the result of the iniquities that they had committed; they thus wronged themselves and left themselves liable to punishment. In other words, *God wronged them not,* because they had been given fair warning through the sending of messengers, *but they wronged themselves* (cf. 2:57; 9:70; 16:33, 118; 29:40; 30:9) by failing to acknowledge the clear proofs and follow the teachings of the prophets who were sent to them.

The reason that the gods whom these destroyed communities *called upon apart from God* could *not avail them in the least* was because in this world they could not bring about any benefit for them; this would be the case even more so in the Hereafter (cf. 16:20). God destroyed *the towns while they* were *doing wrong,* although if they had changed their ways, He might not have destroyed them, as in v. 117: *And thy Lord would never destroy the towns unjustly, while their people were reforming.*

103–4 *In that is a sign* refers to the previous stories of the destroyed nations (JJ). *Mankind* will all be *gathered together* on the Day of Judgment in order to be judged and recompensed for their actions (Bḍ), an event referred to elsewhere as the *Day of Gathering* (42:7; 64:9). The Day of Judgment is also called *a Day that shall be witnessed,* because it will be the day on which all human beings, from the beginning of creation to its end, will be present (Kl ) and stand before God (Z) when He calls them to account for their actions during their time on earth. A *limited term* refers to the fact that the time of the Day of Judgment is already known to God (R).

105 That none will be allowed to speak on the Last Day except with God's Permission is also related in 78:38: *That Day the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, none speaking, save one whom the Compassionate permits, and who speaks aright;* and 20:108: *And the voices will be humbled before the Compassionate, and you will hear naught but a murmur;* cf. 36:65. The terms *the wretched* and *the felicitous* refer to the damned and the saved, respectively; these are among the more commonly used terms for these two groups in Islamic texts, and much has been written, especially in Sufi literature, about them.

106–8 The inhabitants in Hell are described as *groaning and wailing,* which means that they will be breathing heavily, weeping ceaselessly, and experiencing an extreme state of pain, regret, and incurable grief (R). Al-Bayḍāwī argues that the period in Hell described as *for so long as the heavens and the earth endure* refers to neither serial time nor time as it exists in the physical realm of existence. Rather, it refers to *the heavens and earth* as the basic topographic "setting" of the Afterlife. To support his point, he cites 14:48: *On that Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too].* The *felicitous* too remain in the Garden *for so long as the heavens and the earth endure,* but with the added nuance that it is *a gift unfailing,* which is interpreted to mean that the

Garden, abiding therein for so long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills—a gift unfailing. (109) So be not in doubt concerning that which these [people] worship; they worship only as their fathers worshipped before. We shall surely give them their share, undiminished. (110) Indeed, We gave unto Moses the Book; then difference arose regarding it. And were it not for a Word that had preceded from thy Lord, judgment would have been rendered between them. Yet, truly they are confounded by doubt regarding it. (111) Surely for each, thy Lord shall pay them in full for their deeds. Truly He is Aware of what they do. (112) So be steadfast, as thou hast been commanded—and those who turn in repentance along with you—and be not rebellious. Truly He sees whatsoever you do. (113) And incline not toward the wrongdoers, lest the Fire should touch you—and you will have no protector apart from God. Thereafter you will not be helped. (114) And perform the prayer at the two ends of the day and in the early hours of the night. Truly good deeds remove those that are evil. This is a reminder for those who remember. (115) And be thou patient. Truly God

Garden will never cease (Kl). According to the seventh/thirteenth-century Damascene theologian and jurist Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), the wording in v. 107 is a clear indication that Hell itself will one day cease to exist, but not Heaven (*al-Radd ʿalā man qāla bi-fanāʾ al-jannah wa-l-nār* [Riyadh, 1995], 66–68). The thesis that Hell would one day cease to exist or "freeze over" is also asserted by many other Islamic authorities, especially Sufis. See also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

109 According to this verse, there should be no doubt concerning the final outcome for the Makkan idolaters (Bḍ). The Makkans, like the communities before them, ardently adhered to the religious worldview of their ancestors. See also v. 62 and commentary, where the Thamūd likewise are given to the ways of their *fathers*. The *share, undiminished* that the Makkan idolaters will receive is punishment (IK); cf. 11:15–16c.

110–11 V. 110 is repeated verbatim in 41:45; see commentary on that verse. For the *Book* that was given to Moses, namely, the Torah, see also 6:154: *Then We gave unto Moses the Book, complete for those who would be virtuous, as an exposition of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy, that haply they might believe in the meeting with their Lord* (cf. 2:53; 17:2; 23:49; 25:35; 28:43; 32:23). *A Word that had already gone forth* is commonly employed in the Quran when speaking about God's Decree; see 10:19; 20:129; 41:45; 42:14. That *thy Lord shall pay them in full for their deeds* means that God will give them the full reward for their actions (Kl).

112–13 *Be steadfast,* a command addressed to the Prophet, is understood by some to mean that he should hold steadfastly to the Quran (R); by extension, it is a command also directed toward *those who turn in repentance along with* him, namely, the Prophet's Companions (Q). *And incline not toward the wrongdoers* means that the believers should never approve of the actions of the Makkan idolaters (IK).

114–15 The prayers here are usually understood as referring to the five daily canonical prayers (*ṣalāḥ*) in Islam. The prayers at *the two ends of the day* are interpreted to be the prayers performed at dawn (*ṣubḥ/fajr*) and sunset (*maghrib*), or at dawn and in the late afternoon (*ʿaṣr*), or at midday (*ẓuhr*) and in the late afternoon; *the early hours of the night* can collectively refer to the

neglects not the reward of the virtuous. (116) So why were there not among the generations before you those possessing merit, who would forbid corruption upon the earth, other than a few of those whom We saved among them? Those who did wrong pursued the luxuries they had been given, and they were guilty. (117) And thy Lord would never destroy the towns unjustly, while their people were reforming. (118) And had thy Lord willed, He would have made mankind one community. But they cease not to differ, (119) save those upon whom thy Lord has Mercy—and for this He created them. And the Word of thy Lord is

prayers performed at sunset and during the night (*ʿishāʾ*), or to the latter only (IK). A similar range of opinion regarding the five prayers can be seen in identifying the *middlemost prayer* in 2:238.

*Truly good deeds remove those that are evil* is understood to mean that performing the daily prayers erases one's minor sins, as the Prophet is reported to have said, "Verily from prayer to prayer there is an expiation for the [minor sins committed] between them, as long as the major sins have been avoided" (Z). In a more general sense, it can refer to the manner in which the positive effects of good actions can offset the negative effects of evil actions, as the Prophet said, "Follow up an evil deed with a good deed, and it shall erase it." In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "For everything there is a polish, and the polish of the heart is the remembrance of God" (see also 13:28c), referring to the effect of prayer and remembrance on a heart that is hardened and darkened by sin. On the connection between patience and God's *reward,* see v. 11c. Other verses that mention how God will not *neglect* the reward of believers include 3:171; 7:170; 9:120; 12:56, 90; 18:30.

116–17 The Shiite Quran commentator al-Ṭūsī observes that, in asking the question in v. 116, God intends to produce wonder and amazement in the Prophet that in past communities there were only a few who were righteous while the rest were disbelievers who deserved punishment. Some interpret v. 117 to mean that God would not destroy a people just because they were disbelievers if their worldly transactions and conduct could be characterized as fair and honest; that is, the peoples of Noah, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb were destroyed utterly when God characterized them as harming not only their own souls, but also other human beings and other creatures (Q, R).

118–19 *Mankind* is not *one community,* because the existence of diversity and difference (*ikhtilāf*) is decreed by the Divine Wisdom (Aj); see also 5:48; 16:93; 42:18; 2:213c. As a consequence of what is demanded by God's Wisdom, people *did not cease to differ,* which suggests that strife and difference are a necessary part of life in this world: some people receive the Divine Mercy and follow the truth, while others, namely, those who receive God's Vengeance, pursue falsehood (Aj). More specifically, *they cease not to differ* may be a reference to the religious and sectarian differences among people (Q, R). *Save those upon whom thy Lord has Mercy* suggests that there are people who are not bound up in the strife and difference in the world. As Ibn ʿAjībah explains, they are "a people whom God has guided out of His Bounty. They adhere to what is the root of religion and its foundation, such as belief in God's Oneness, and faith in all of the messengers and that with which they have come."

*For this* can be a reference to the differences to be found of necessity in the human world (Aj); that is, God created the world in order for there to be differences by virtue of His Wisdom. Alternately, *for this* can refer to the Divine Mercy (R), which would mean that God created the world in order to manifest His Mercy. Some, however, interpret this verse as meaning, "We created the people of difference for difference, and the people of mercy for mercy," suggesting that God created human beings for the purpose of bringing about the situation described in the first part of v. 119 (R). Yet another possibility is that *for this* refers to

fulfilled: "I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together!" (120) All that We recount unto thee of the stories of the messengers is that whereby We make firm thine heart. And herein there has come unto thee the Truth, and an exhortation and a reminder for the believers. (121) And say unto those who believe not, "Act according to your position; we, too, are acting. (122) And wait! We, too, are waiting." (123) Unto God belongs the Unseen in the heavens and on the earth, and unto Him are all matters returned. So worship Him, and trust in Him. And thy Lord is not heedless of that which you do.

both differences and Divine Mercy, which would imply that all the differences we see in the world are ultimately nothing but manifestations of God's Mercy. God's Promise that He *shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together* is also repeated in 32:13 (cf. 7:18; 38:85).

120 This verse confirms that the stories of the previous generations were revealed to the Prophet in order to *make firm* his *heart,* that is, to strengthen and console him in the face of the difficulties he encountered in his prophetic mission; see also 11:112–13c. The Quran's accounts of episodes in sacred history are often read as spiritual allegories that teach human beings in general how to overcome the enemies within their own souls. Concerning the message being a *reminder for the believers,* see 51:55: *And remind, for truly the reminder benefits the believers.*

121–22 Regarding these statements, which function as warnings and threats against the Makkan idolaters, see 6:135c.

123 After recounting to the Prophet the fate of the previous generations and granting him assurance that, like the other prophets before him, he and his followers will ultimately triumph over their enemies and that the latter will suffer a humiliating defeat if they do not mend their ways, this *sūrah* ends with a summary of its message to the Prophet and, by extension, to all believers. The call to *trust in Him* is echoed throughout the Quran, as in 3:159: *Truly God loves those who trust;* and 5:23: *And trust in God, if you are believers.* According to a Sufi interpretation of the virtue of trust in God, trust is there when "the heart is at rest because of the Lord's Guarantee" (Aj).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 12

# Joseph

## *Yūsuf*

The third in a series of six *sūrah*s whose opening verses include the letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'* and speak of *the Book, Yūsuf* belongs to the Makkan period (JJ). The *sūrah* is concerned primarily with recounting the entire story of the prophet Joseph (who is also referred to in 6:84 and 40:34) and constitutes the longest and most continuous single narrative in the Quran (vv. 3–101). The general outline of Joseph's life and times accounted here corresponds to Genesis 37:1–46:7, although there are several significant differences between the Quranic and Biblical accounts. The story of Joseph is said to have been revealed to the Prophet when some Jewish scholars in Makkah had persuaded the Makkan idolaters to ask the Prophet about certain details pertaining to Joseph's life and legacy (R). According to another report, God revealed the story of Joseph to the Prophet after his Companions had asked him to provide them with a story (Ṭ).

As the *most beautiful of stories* (v. 3) begins, Joseph discloses a special dream he had to his father, Jacob, who warns Joseph not to convey his dream to his brothers (vv. 4–5), who are exceedingly jealous of him (v. 8). The brothers plot to be rid of Joseph and manage to convince Jacob to allow Joseph to go with them into the wilderness (vv. 9–14). Once left in their care, Joseph is taken into the desert by his brothers and cast into a well (v. 15). Joseph is eventually rescued by a caravan (v. 19) and purchased in Egypt by a high-ranking official (v. 21), identified with the Biblical figure Potiphar (see 12:21–22c).

While Joseph is under Potiphar's care, Potiphar's wife, Zulaykhā (not mentioned by name), falls in love with him and attempts to seduce him, but Joseph does not succumb to her advances (vv. 23–25). After false accusations before Potiphar (v. 25) and widespread rumors throughout Egypt of what had transpired between Joseph and Zulaykhā (v. 30), Joseph is cast into prison (v. 35). Joseph is later exonerated, released from prison, and appointed to high office in Egyptian society (vv. 50–56). By the end of the tale, Joseph's parents and brothers come to Egypt to stay with him (v. 99), and the dream he had at the beginning of the story is fulfilled (v. 100).

Perhaps more than any other Quranic narrative, the story of Joseph has supplied material for an astonishing array of artistic, literary, and spiritual works in the Islamic tradition. The figure of Joseph himself, who is said to have possessed exceptional physical beauty, is often associated in Islamic literature with the reflection of Divine Beauty, patience in times of adversity, and the art of dream interpretation. The commentaries on this *sūrah* reflect this rich tradition and incorporate into their accounts material that is often folkloric and imaginative. The incident between Joseph and Zulaykhā has formed the basis for a variety of mystical and literary romances, one of the most well known of which is a lengthy Persian poem entitled *Joseph and Zulaykhā* (*Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*) by the famous Sufi poet ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492). The philosopher and founder of the School of Illumination, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), also uses the motifs and symbols from the story of Joseph in his philosophical treatise *On the Reality of Love* (*al-Risālah fī ḥaqīqat al-ᶜishq*) in order to explain the metaphysical significance of love and its relation to beauty and joy on the one hand and sadness and longing on the other. Many interpret the story of Joseph symbolically and spiritually as an account of the separation of the human soul from its Divine Origin and its return to It. At the highest level of interpretation it has often been seen as an exalted love tale that speaks about the relationship between the human lover and the Divine Beloved. As al-Maybudī says in his Quran commentary, "How beautiful the story of Joseph is! It is a story of lover and beloved, a report of separation and union. [From it,] the pain-stricken one ought to read of those who are pain-stricken, and the lover ought to receive news of the pain of love and the burning desire of lovers."

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Rā.* These are the signs of the clear Book. (2) Truly We sent it down as an Arabic Quran, that haply you may understand. (3) We recount unto thee the most beautiful of stories by Our having revealed unto thee this Quran, though before it thou wert among the heedless. (4) When Joseph said unto his father, "O my father, truly I have seen eleven stars, and the sun and the moon. I

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'*, which also appear in 10:1; 11:1; 13:1; 14:1; and 15:1, are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and whose ultimate meaning, most commentators maintain, is known only to God; see 2:1c. *The clear Book* refers to the Quran (Kl, Q) and its ability to make the truth manifest (Kl; for identical verses, see 26:2; 28:2; see also 43:2; 44:2). Alternately, *the clear Book* could be a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c; Ṭb). See also 10:1c, where the adjective *wise* is understood to be a reference to the Book's being *clear.*

2 For *Arabic Quran,* see also 20:113; 39:28c; 41:3c; 42:7. Cf. 43:3.

3 In 39:23, the Quran is described as *the most beautiful discourse,* part of which is the story of Joseph, to which reference is made here as *the most beautiful of stories.* This narrative is described this way because it is understood to bring together all of the truths that pertain to one's religious life as well as one's worldly affairs (Q). On the one hand, it speaks about such matters as the Oneness of God; the nature of prophets, angels, saints, righteous people, evil people, people who have knowledge, and people who are ignorant; dream interpretation; forgiveness; and Divine Love. On the other hand, it speaks about kingship, earthly trials and punishments, human love, travel, business transactions, social etiquette, politics, and human deception (Aj, My, Q). *Beautiful* could refer to the beauty of the story's language and eloquence as well as its content (R). *Thou wert among the heedless* means that the Prophet had no knowledge of this story before the revelation of this *sūrah* (Kl, N, R).

4 Joseph's father was Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham—all of whom were prophets; for the Abrahamic line of prophets, see 6:84c. It is widely accepted that the vision Joseph had was a true dream (Aj, R, Ṭ, Ṭs), which in Islamic tradition is bestowed not only upon prophets, but also upon ordinary human beings. True dreams are distinguished from common dreams in that they convey a truth from another level of reality or represent a manifestation of the spirit in the imaginal world (see also 12:6c). Some commentators observe that the dreams of prophets are a form of Divine Revelation (Ṭ). However, others situate the beginning of Joseph's prophetic mission at a slightly later period (see 12:15c), in which case this vision could be seen as a portent of his impending prophetic function, as was the case with the Prophet Muhammad (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 96).

The *eleven stars* are understood to represent Joseph's eleven brothers (Bg, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs); *the sun* represents his father and *the moon* his mother (R), or vice versa (Q, Ṭ). The prostration of these heavenly bodies before Joseph is said to have been interpreted by Jacob to mean that a great calamity would soon befall his son (cf. Genesis 37:10), based upon a belief that a created being does not prostrate before another created being, except that the one to whom prostration is made will undergo a severe trial, such as when the angels bowed down before Adam, who was soon thereafter expelled from Paradise (Aj); for the fall of Adam, see 2:35c. Al-Rāzī interprets the prostration of the heavenly bodies before Joseph as symbolizing Joseph's brothers, father, and mother eventually coming under his care. For the fulfillment of this dream, see 12:100c.

saw them prostrating before me." (5) He said, "O my son! Recount not thy vision to thy brothers, lest they devise some scheme against thee. Surely Satan is a manifest enemy unto man. (6) Thus shall thy Lord choose thee, and teach thee the interpretation of events, and complete His Blessing upon thee, and upon the House of Jacob, just as He completed it upon thy forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Truly thy Lord is Knowing, Wise." (7) Certainly in Joseph and his brothers there are signs for the inquiring. (8) [Remember] when they said,

5 Jacob told Joseph not to relate his dream to his brothers because he feared their jealousy of him, as he knew that the dream meant that Joseph would not only experience tribulations, but would also attain an exalted position (Kl). Some say that Jacob understood Joseph's dream to mean that God had chosen him for prophethood and thus feared that Joseph would suffer on account of his brothers' jealousy and oppression (Bḍ). According to one account, because of the innocence of his young age, Joseph did relate his vision to his brothers (Q; see v. 8); cf. Genesis 37:5, 9–10. For Satan as *a manifest enemy,* see, for example, 2:168, 208; 6:142; 7:22.

6 *Thus shall thy Lord choose thee* means that, just as God had chosen Joseph to have such an exalted vision, so too would He choose him to accomplish great tasks (R), which some understand to be a reference to the function of prophethood (Bḍ, Q). *The interpretation of events* refers to the ability to interpret dreams (see also v. 21 and v. 44c). In traditional Islamic psychology, this art entails knowing the source of dreams. True dreams are said to come from an angelic source, whereas false dreams come from the lower self or a demonic force (Bḍ); regarding Joseph's interpretation of dreams, see vv. 37, 41, 47–49. *The interpretation of events* can also refer to the ability to discern the hidden meanings within scripture (see 3:7c; Bḍ). More generally, it can refer to the gift of being able to discern the true nature of things.

God's completing *His Blessing upon* Joseph *and upon the House of Jacob* (see also 19:6) can refer to the blessing of prophethood (Bḍ, R), in which case *just as He completed it upon thy forefathers, Abraham and Isaac* refers to their prophethood. Alternately, God's *Blessing upon* Joseph and the *House of Jacob* can refer to the combination of blessings they will receive in this world and the next (Bḍ). In this case, God's *Blessing* on the *forefathers Abraham and Isaac* would refer to (1) the fact that Abraham was taken by God as a friend (see 4:125) and saved from the fire into which his people had cast him (see 21:69; 37:97); and (2) the fact that Isaac obeyed Abraham's request to be his sacrifice and then was ransomed by the replacement of a ram at God's Command (Bḍ; see the commentary on 37:102–7).

7 In the account of Joseph and his eleven brothers there are *signs,* meaning lessons (IJ), for those who wish to gain true knowledge and learn the universal import of the story of Joseph (Bḍ, JJ). One of the moral lessons of this narrative is the ultimate futility of envy, which motivated Joseph's brothers and led the Prophet Muhammad's own kin to reject him and cause him harm. Yet, both Muhammad and Joseph were assisted by God, and their enemies ended up under their authority (R). The Prophet is reported to have said, "Beware of envy, for it consumes good deeds as fire consumes wood."

The story of Joseph also contains *signs* for those seeking an answer to their existential situation, counseling them to have patience in times of tribulation on the one hand, and to have gratitude for God's blessings on the other (Qu). Moreover, the story shows many of the ways God gently takes care of His friends through His protection of them. It also contains signs that demonstrate that God's Love is realized through trial and tribulation (Qu).

8 *His brother* refers to Benjamin, Jacob's youngest son and Joseph's only full brother (JJ, Kl, Ṭs). Since at the beginning of the account Joseph and Benjamin were so young, Jacob was particularly kind toward them and kept them

"Truly Joseph and his brother are more beloved unto our father than are we, though we are a group. Surely our father is in manifest error! (9) Slay Joseph, or cast him out to some land, that your father's concern might be for you. And be, thereafter, a righteous people." (10) One among them said, "Slay not Joseph, but cast him into the depths of the well, that some caravan might pick him up, if you would take some action." (11) They said, "O father! What ails thee that thou dost not trust us with Joseph? Truly we wish him well. (12) Send him forth with us tomorrow, to frolic and play. We shall surely be his keepers." (13) He said,

closer to him than he did their brothers, but the other brothers could not bear this distinction and felt envious (Ṭs). *A group* translates *ʿuṣbah,* which conveys the sense of a large group of people usually understood to range from ten to forty in number (Bg, Kl). *Though we are a group* can thus be read as an expression of shock or astonishment, for the brothers thought that, as a larger or more powerful group, they had more right to their father's love than his two younger children (Bḍ, Z). In tribal cultures, having many sons to help with work and to defend the family and tribe was a reason for valuing them. According to this logic, having many grown sons would thus be more valuable than having two young ones, since the latter would not suffice as defenders of their father or as powerful bearers of his legacy. With respect to Joseph in particular, it is said that Jacob loved him so much that he would keep Joseph with him night and day, never parting company (Aj). Joseph's brothers initially envied him because Jacob preferred him, but their envy became more intense after they learned of Joseph's dream (see 12:5c; Ṭs).

9 The brothers believed that slaying or banishing Joseph *to some land* would remove him from Jacob's attention and cause Jacob to eventually set his heart on them instead (My), meaning that his *concern* would then be for them alone. *And be, thereafter, a righteous people* means that the brothers intended to repent later to God for their transgression against Joseph (JJ, Z), and to be upright thereafter (Kl), or that, after they had disposed of Joseph, they would seek to mend their relationship with their father (Kl, Z).

10 *One among them* is a reference to their oldest brother (IK), who is not identified in the Quran but whose action resembles that of either Judah (R) or Reuben (cf. Genesis 37:22–28; Bḍ, IK, Ṭū). According to the majority of commentators, the suggestion to *cast him into the depths of the well, that some caravan might pick him up* did not meet with the brothers' approval until later; see 12:15c.

11–12 The brothers' question is an indication that Jacob feared what they would do to Joseph (R) and that they had previously asked Jacob to allow Joseph to go with them, but that he had refused their request (Q). If so, then the suggestion to throw Joseph into the well mentioned in v. 10 was perhaps one of several other plans that they had made to dispose of him. By saying *Truly we wish him well,* the brothers made it appear to Jacob that they had a great deal of love and compassion for Joseph (R), implying that they did not intend to harm him. It was the brothers' custom to go to the pasture and spend some time there in leisure (R). Thus, their request that Jacob allow Joseph to go with them so that he can *frolic and play* was the perfect pretext for them to carry out their plan. The expression *we shall surely be his keepers* is also employed by the brothers in v. 63, where they attempt to convince Jacob that nothing would happen to Benjamin if he were to send him along with them; see v. 64 for Jacob's response.

13–14 Jacob was saddened by the possibility of being separated from Joseph for even an hour (N) on account of his intense love for him (see 12:8c). From a spiritual perspective, just as Jacob could not be without his beloved for even an hour,

"Truly it grieves me that you should go with him. And I fear that the wolf may eat him, while you are heedless of him." (14) They said, "If the wolf should eat him, while we are a group, then we would surely be losers!" (15) So when they went with him, and agreed to put him in the depths of the well, We revealed unto him, "Verily thou wilt inform them of this affair of theirs, when they are

so should believers not be forgetful of their Divine Beloved for even a moment, since heedlessness of God is separation, while remembrance of Him is togetherness (Aj).

Some commentators relate an account of a dream that Jacob had in which he was at the top of a mountain and Joseph was in a valley, when suddenly ten wolves encircled Joseph in order to devour him. But one of the wolves left him, at which time the ground was rent asunder and Joseph remained concealed underground for three days. According to this account, the wolves represent the brothers; the one wolf who left Joseph represents Judah or Reuben, who convinced the others not to kill him; and the crack in the ground represents the well into which the brothers resolved to cast Joseph (see v. 10). Thus, by speaking of the wolf devouring Joseph, Jacob was referring to the ten brothers (Q), who, like wolves, would act deceptively in devouring their prey. Others, however, say that since wolves were generally the most feared creatures in the pastures, Jacob was referring to an actual wolf (Q), and even a specific wolf, as the definite article *the* in *the wolf* indicates (see also 12:16–17c). The brothers' response is understood to be an oath or a promise that nothing would happen to Joseph (JJ).

15 *So when they went with him* implies that the brothers had been given permission by Jacob to take Joseph with them (IḤ, IJ, R); cf. Genesis 37:13, where it is Jacob who sends Joseph to the brothers. According to one account, when Jacob sent Joseph with his brothers, he took a solemn pledge from them that they would protect him (cf. v. 66). Reuben (in this account) agreed to this, and then Jacob said to him, "O Reuben, he is little. And you know, O my son, my compassion for him. If he is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, quench his thirst. If he is tired, carry him, and then quickly bring him back to me" (Q).

When they *agreed to put him in the depths of the well* refers to both the plan and its implementation (IḤ, JJ, Q, R). Thus, between the words *they went with him* and *agreed to put him in the depths of the well* a sequence of events took place that is not mentioned in the Quran, but that accounts for the period between Joseph's departure with his brothers and his time in the well.

Commentators describe this extra-Quranic sequence of events as follows. When the brothers left with Joseph, they took turns carrying him upon their shoulders, and Jacob saw all of them off. Once they were out of Jacob's sight, the brother upon whose shoulders Joseph was sitting threw him down on the ground, almost breaking some of his limbs (Q). Joseph then sought his other brothers' help, but to no avail, since each brother to whom he went took his turn at striking him (R). It is said he was beaten so severely that he was on the brink of death (R, Ṭ). One common narrative in the commentaries suggests that the brothers had previously promised Judah or Reuben (the eldest brother in some versions) that they would at least not kill Joseph (see 12:10c). When they were about to kill Joseph, this eldest brother interceded and reminded them of their promise (R, Ṭ). It was then that they decided *to put him in the depths of the well.*

According to another account, when Joseph sought one brother's help as his other brothers were attacking him, this brother was moved to compassion for him and thus interceded with the brothers, telling them to return Joseph to Jacob and not to kill him. Upon hearing this, the other brothers accused the one brother of being opportunistic, only seeking to save Joseph in order to gain status in Jacob's eyes. They then threatened to kill him along with Joseph if he chose to help him. So this brother convinced them that they should throw Joseph into a well rather than kill him (cf. Genesis 37:26–27, where he convinces

unaware." (16) And in the evening they came weeping unto their father. (17) They said, "O father! We went racing with one another, and left Joseph with our things, and the wolf ate him. But thou wouldst not believe us, even if we were

the brothers to sell Joseph), since by throwing him into the well Joseph would possibly die, in which case the physical stain of his blood would not be on their hands, or he would eventually be taken off by a caravan, which would at least ensure that he would be taken far away from them (Q).

The brothers took Joseph to the well and tied him up with a rope (IK). It is said that the well was very deep, spacious at the bottom, with a narrow hole at the top (IḤ). They then began to lower Joseph into the well. When he attempted to cling to one of the brothers as they were lowering him, the brother struck him and reviled him; and when Joseph attempted to save himself by grasping the edge of the well, the brothers hit his hands in order to loosen his grip (IK). The brothers also tied up Joseph's hands and tore off his shirt. Then Joseph cried out, "My brothers, return the shirt to me—I will cover myself with it in the well!" to which his brothers sarcastically responded, "Call the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars [cf. v. 2] to comfort you!" (Ṭ, Ṭs). When Joseph was halfway down the well, the brothers cut the rope. He fell into the water at the bottom of the well, and the water covered him completely. In order to save himself, Joseph grabbed hold of a rock in the middle of the well and stood up on it (IK).

When Joseph was in the well, God *revealed unto him,* through the medium of an angel or through inspiration (*ilhām;* Kl), that he would *inform them of this affair of theirs, when they are unaware.* Some commentators have said that this was the very moment in which Joseph became a prophet (Q, Ṭs), as he had received a revelation from God. The commentators agree that these words revealed to Joseph were a foretelling of the future. They were intended to give him solace in a difficult situation (JJ), and to strengthen his heart with the firm knowledge that he would eventually be freed from his current state of trial and that his brothers would one day fall under his authority (R).

*When they are unaware* can also be read to mean "while they are unaware," in which case these words would not be a part of God's direct address to Joseph about a future event, but would instead be a reference within the verse to the actual situation in which Joseph found himself in the well (Bḍ): God was revealing to him something of which his brothers were unaware. Al-Rāzī observes that the wisdom in concealing this revelation from Joseph's brothers was that, had they known that Joseph was a prophet, their jealousy would have been greater, and they would surely have killed him. Al-Bayḍāwī notes that *when they are unaware* is a foreshadowing of v. 58, where Joseph meets his brothers and recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. This reading accords with the sequence of events that follow v. 58, where Joseph knows the identity of his brothers and eventually informs them of their wrongdoing (see vv. 58–90).

Many commentators also transmit popular folkloric details surrounding the story of Joseph. For example, the water of the well was bitter, but when Joseph went into the well, its water became sweet (My, R); and the well itself, which was previously dark, was now illuminated (My). We are also told that the only thing Joseph was wearing when he was in the well was an amulet (*taʿwīdh*) that contained a shirt made from the silk of Paradise. Gabriel had originally brought this shirt to Abraham when he was thrown into the fire by his people (see 21:69; 37:97), who then bequeathed it to his son Isaac, who bequeathed it to his son Jacob. When Joseph was old enough, Jacob tied it around his neck. While Joseph was in the well, Gabriel came to him, opened the amulet, and put the shirt on him (My, R, Ṭs).

16–17 When the brothers came in *weeping,* Jacob became worried and asked them if anything had happened to their sheep that were out in the pasture (Bg, Q, Ṭ). Commenting on the brothers' false tears, al-Qushayrī notes that it was their hypocrisy that allowed them to lie in such a blatant manner, saying that when people become total hypocrites, they can control their eyes to the point that they can cry at will. In responding to Jacob's question, the brothers said that nothing had happened to their sheep, which consequently

truthful." (18) And they brought forth his shirt with false blood. He said, "Nay, your souls have seduced you in this matter. Beautiful patience! And God is the One Whose help is sought against that which you describe." (19) And then a caravan came along and sent their water carrier, and he let down his bucket. He said, "Good news! Here is a boy!" So they hid him as merchandise. And God knew well what they were doing. (20) And they sold him for a low price, a number

led Jacob to ask, "What happened to you then, and where is Joseph?" (Bg). They then put forward their lie: they *went racing with one another* in order to train themselves so that they could combat enemies and the wolf, which had been snatching away their sheep (R); they had left Joseph with their *things,* namely, their garments and clothes (Bg). Upon hearing the news of Joseph's death, Jacob fainted, and the brothers poured water over him to wake him up. Yet he remained unconscious until early the next morning (Q). The brothers told Jacob that they would be unable to convince him *even if* they were speaking the truth, because they felt Jacob had a bad opinion of them (Bḍ); cf. Genesis 37:33, where Jacob believes their account. From Jacob's perspective, he could not believe them, because he was suspicious of them to begin with (R), which is why the brothers themselves asked him in v. 11, *What ails thee that thou dost not trust us with Joseph?* (see 12:11–12c). This mistrust of the brothers foreshadows an incident later in this *sūrah* in which the brothers return to Jacob with some news about which they were actually being truthful; yet he still does not believe them, and they themselves become veiled from the truth of what was happening in large part due to their own actions (see vv. 81–83); see also 12:5c; 12:18c.

18 The brothers had Joseph's shirt from the moment they had torn it off him before they cast him into the well (see 12:15c); cf. Genesis 37:3, which says that Jacob loved Joseph so much that he made him "a long robe with sleeves" or "a coat of many colors." Before returning to Jacob at night, they spattered *false blood* on the shirt from either a baby goat or a lamb that the brothers slaughtered for this purpose (IṬ; cf. Genesis 37:31, where it is the blood of a goat). Jacob's response, *Nay, your souls have seduced you,* indicates that they had convinced themselves that their actions were not grievous (Aj), but that he did not believe them (Ṭb). Jacob also asked his sons why the shirt did not evince any signs that a predator had attacked Joseph, since if a wolf had devoured Joseph, his shirt would have been completely torn apart by the wolf (IṬ, Ṭ).

Upon hearing the brothers' blatant lie and seeing their false evidence, Jacob exclaimed, *Beautiful patience!* which refers to a kind of patience that causes one not to complain to anyone but God; see v. 86 and 70:5c. Some interpret it to mean, "[My patience is/will be] a beautiful patience" (Ṭ). Thus, *Beautiful patience!* is an expression used at times of extreme grief to find solace in the fact that patience will triumph in the end and that the difficulty will eventually pass. *God is the One Whose help is sought against that which you describe* means that Jacob seeks God's Help in bearing the lie that his sons were telling him concerning Joseph's death (Aj); for an almost identical statement, see 21:112. Cf. v. 83. Jacob's words regarding the brothers' souls and his own patience are repeated in v. 83.

19–20 Tradition records that Joseph had been in the well for three days when a caravan came from Midian on its way to Egypt (IK), a caravan that was lost and had come across the well fortuitously (Bg, My). The people in the caravan alighted near the well *and sent their water carrier* to take water from it. When *he let down his bucket,* Joseph clung to its rope and came out of the well (Bg). They presented Joseph *as merchandise* (Ṭ); that is, they said he was being taken as a slave. Joseph complied out of fear that they would kill him if he went against their wishes (JJ). They went on to sell Joseph in Egypt (Bg, IK) for *a low price,* which is understood by some to signify that he was a free person who had been taken unlawfully as a slave (R): *low price* also signifies that any

of dirhams, for they valued him not. (21) The man from Egypt who bought him said unto his wife, "Give him honorable accommodation. It may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son." And thus did We establish Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of events. And God prevails over His affair, but most of mankind know not. (22) When he reached his maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus do We recompense the virtuous. (23) But she in whose house he was staying sought to lure him from himself. She locked the doors and said, "Come, thou!" He said,

price would be "low." *They valued him not* means they did not place much importance on him, considering him only "scavenged goods," or that they did not desire to keep him out of fear that Joseph's rightful owner (as they imagined) would come and lay claim to him (R).

21–22 As in the Bible (Genesis 39:1), *the man from Egypt who bought* Joseph is identified by the commentators as Potiphar (Qiṭfīr or Iṭfīr), referred to in the Quran by the title *al-ʿAzīz,* rendered in this *sūrah* as *viceroy* (a term used for anyone occupying a high-ranking position; see vv. 30, 51, 78, 88; Ṭs) and sometimes identified by commentators (as in Genesis 37:36) as the captain of Pharaoh's guard (Ṭs). *ʿAzīz* can also mean "king" (IK, Ṭ), but, moreover, it denotes someone or something that is grand, powerful, cherished, or honorable; hence it can refer to a lofty or important position. Since this *sūrah* also speaks of a *king* (vv. 43, 50, 54, 76), *ʿazīz* would denote a powerful official, which is what Potiphar was and what Joseph would become. Other Islamic sources state that Potiphar oversaw the treasury of Egypt (Aj, R, Ṭs, Z), which perhaps derives from the fact that when Joseph is later called *al-ʿAzīz,* his role is as keeper of the storehouses of the kingdom (see vv. 78, 88). The name of *his wife* in Islamic sources is sometimes given as Rāʿīl or, more commonly, Zulaykhā (AJ, R, Ṭs), although she is not named in the Quran. It is said that Potiphar purchased Joseph in the marketplace (Kl), after he had been struck by Joseph's inner beauty (My). He then instructed Zulaykhā to give Joseph *honorable accommodation,* in other words, to arrange for a beautiful and dignified dwelling place for Joseph in their home (Bḍ, Z).

*It may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son* are the same words uttered to Pharaoh by his wife in connection with the infant Moses; see 28:9. Potiphar proposed that they might take Joseph as their son, because they did not have children (Ṭs) and were unable to have them (Bḍ, JJ). *And thus did We establish Joseph in the land* (*land* meaning Egypt; IK) refers to God's actions in saving Joseph from death, taking him out of the well, and placing him in the house of Potiphar (cf. Genesis 39:2–6; Bg); see also v. 56. *That We might teach him the interpretation of events* refers to God's teaching Joseph the interpretation of dreams that foretold events (see vv. 6, 36–37, 41, 43–49; Bg); this gift was the primary means by which he would achieve ascendancy in Egyptian society (see vv. 54–56). *God prevails over His affair* is understood to mean that, although Joseph's brothers willed for him to remain in the well, God willed to exalt him to a station of proximity to the king (Qu). *Most of mankind know not* occurs two other times in this *sūrah* (vv. 40, 68) and in 7:187; 16:38; 30:6, 30; 34:28, 36; 40:57; 45:26.

*We gave him wisdom,* that is, prophethood or the ability to judge between people with justice (Aj), *and knowledge,* that is, knowledge of dream interpretation and future events or knowledge of the mysteries and the proper etiquette of servanthood toward God (Aj). *Thus do We recompense the virtuous* also appears verbatim in 6:84 and 28:14; see also 5:85. *Virtuous* is used in connection with Joseph numerous times in this *sūrah;* see vv. 36, 56, 78, 90; 12:36c.

23 The Prophet is reported to have said that Joseph was given half of beauty, which has commonly been interpreted to mean that he was given

"God be my refuge! Truly He is my lord, and has made beautiful my accommodation. Verily the wrongdoers will not prosper!" (24) She indeed inclined toward him, and he would have inclined toward her, had he not seen the proof of his Lord. Thus it was, that We might turn him away from evil and indecency. Truly he was among Our sincere servants. (25) And they raced to the door, while she tore his shirt from behind. And they encountered her master at the door. She said, "What is the recompense for one who desires ill toward thy wife, save

half of the beauty in the world (cf. Genesis 39:7). Potiphar's wife, Zulaykhā, who was commissioned by her husband to tend to Joseph's needs while he was a guest in their home, fell in love with him because of his exceptional physical beauty (IK). His beauty was such that it caused her to desire him sexually (R), and she thus *sought to lure him from himself,* that is, to seduce him (IK). Joseph's objection, *He is my lord, and has made beautiful my accommodation,* can be a reference to Potiphar (Kl, Q, Ṭs), who in v. 21 orders Zulaykhā to give Joseph *honorable accommodation* (N, Z). According to this reading, Joseph's statement is tantamount to saying, "Potiphar has honored me, and I shall not betray him" (Q; cf. Genesis 39:8–10). Alternately, the reference can be to God (Bg, Kl, Qu); according to this reading, it would mean, "He Most High is my true Master and is the One Who saved me from the well and gave me a great standing in the ʿAzīẓ's heart, so that he provided for me an honorable accommodation. Therefore, it is not fitting that I should have the audacity to disobey Him" (Qu).

24 Most commentators mention that Joseph desired Zulaykhā just as she desired him, but he did not act on his desire; for him it was a passing feeling occurring in his heart, and he did not follow through with it. Instead, he immediately turned to God and dismissed the thought of attraction to her as soon as he had *seen the proof of his Lord* (Kl). Al-Rāzī compares this account to righteous persons who, while fasting during the summer, see rosewater with ice in it; they would naturally be inclined to drink it, but, given their faithful adherence to the religious law, they do not do so.

One widely reported incident explains what is meant by Joseph's seeing *the proof of his Lord.* Zulaykhā, who worshipped idols, had covered an idol in the room. When Joseph asked her why she had done that, she replied by saying that she was ashamed to sin before the idol. Upon hearing this account, Joseph asked how she could be ashamed before an idol, which can neither see nor hear, but was not ashamed before God, Who is Hearing and Seeing (My). This exchange led Joseph to contemplate his own situation before God, and this realization served as his *proof* (My, Q). Alternately, it is said that the *proof* was that the Archangel Gabriel appeared before Joseph (R). *That We might turn him away from evil* refers to keeping him from being disloyal to Potiphar (IJ, JJ) or from having a deep-rooted sexual desire (*shahwah*) for Potiphar's wife (Q); *indecency* refers to the illicit sexual act (JJ).

25 Joseph attempted to flee from Zulaykhā and made for the door; she chased after him (JJ), tearing his shirt from behind in her attempt to prevent him from escaping (Kl; cf. Genesis 39:11–12). When they met Potiphar at the door, Zulaykhā sought to exonerate herself by making it appear as though she was the victim fleeing from Joseph (Bḍ). Although Zulaykhā was in love with Joseph, her love for him was not yet complete and sincere, for she lied to Potiphar in order to save herself, even though it meant accusing Joseph of an act that he did not commit (My), namely, intending *ill* toward her, which alludes to illicit sexual relations (Āl); for a discussion of the progression of Zulaykhā's love, see 12:51c. It is also said that with her question to Potiphar, which was actually a suggestion (Āl, Bḍ), Zulaykhā sought to incite Potiphar's jealousy and rage in order to take revenge upon Joseph for not complying with her wishes (Aj; cf. Genesis 39:13–19). Some commentators, especially Sufi ones, mention that Zulaykhā's

that he be imprisoned, or a painful punishment?" (26) He said, "It was she who sought to lure me from myself." And a witness from her own people testified, "If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has spoken the truth and he is among the liars. (27) But if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is among the truthful." (28) So when he saw that his shirt was torn from behind, he said, "Verily this is among the schemes of you women—your scheming is great indeed! (29) Joseph, turn away from this. And you, seek forgiveness for your sin. Truly you were among those at fault." (30) Some women of the city said, "The viceroy's wife sought to lure her slave boy from himself! He has filled her with ardent love. Truly we consider her to be in manifest error." (31) So when she heard of their plotting, she sent for them, and prepared a repast for them, and gave each of them a knife. And she said [to Joseph], "Come out before them!" Then when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands and

love for Joseph was so great that it blinded her to every other consideration.

26–27 Joseph's words in his defense mean, "She wanted to commit indecency with me, but I refused and fled" (Bg). *A witness from her own people* refers, according to many traditional sources, to one of Zulaykhā's paternal cousins who was a wise man (R). If the shirt were torn from the front, it would indicate that Zulaykhā was telling the truth, because it would mean that Zulaykhā struggled to defend herself from Joseph (Kl). That the shirt was torn from the back indicates that Joseph was telling the truth, because it means that Zulaykhā chased Joseph and laid hold of his shirt from the back to keep him from escaping (Kl).

28 *He* in *he saw* can refer to Potiphar or to the wise man from Zulaykhā's family (Q). If it refers to Potiphar, then his statement *Verily this is among the schemes of you women* would be a response to Zulaykhā's lie to him in v. 25, *What is the recompense for one who desires ill toward thy wife?* (Q).

29 Here the speaker is understood by some to be the wise man from Zulaykhā's family (Q). His advice to Joseph to *turn away from this* means that Joseph should not mention this incident to anyone and should conceal its details (Q, Z), lest it become known to the public (JJ) and presumably form the basis of much speculation and rumormongering. The news of this event nevertheless spread, as indicated in v. 30.

30 As the news of what transpired between Joseph and Zulaykhā spread throughout Egypt, some of the wives of the notables began criticizing and blaming Zulaykhā for her attempt to seduce Joseph (IK). *He has filled her with ardent love* means Zulaykhā's love for Joseph had reached the deepest recesses of her heart (My) and become all-consuming (R). Like the brothers who accused Jacob in v. 8 of being *in manifest error* because of his intense love for Joseph, the women considered Zulaykhā *to be in manifest error* because of her ardent love for him (R).

31 The talk among the wives of the notables of Egypt concerning Zulaykhā and Joseph is referred to as *plotting* because it was carried out in secret (Kl) and was therefore tantamount to gossip. Al-Rāzī observes that the women's talk here is called *plotting* because they themselves wanted to look upon Joseph and knew that their gossip would force Zulaykhā to let them do so in order to exonerate herself of any blame. It is said that Zulaykhā invited forty women in total, five of whom were involved in the gossip (Bg, N). They sat together, and she gave each of them some citrons and a knife

said, "God be praised! This is no human being. This is naught but a noble angel!" (32) She said, "This is the one on whose account you blamed me. I indeed sought to lure him from himself, but he remained chaste. And if he does not do as I command, he shall surely be imprisoned; and he shall be among those humbled." (33) He said, "My Lord! Prison is dearer to me than that to which they call me. If Thou dost not turn their scheming away from me, I shall incline toward them and be among the ignorant." (34) So his Lord answered him, and turned their scheming away from him. Truly He is the Hearing, the Knowing. (35) Then it occurred to them, after they had seen the signs, that they should imprison him for a time. (36) Now two young men entered the prison with him. One of them

and told them to cut the fruit, inviting Joseph in the room at the same time (Qm). When they saw Joseph, "the rays of his beauty illuminated their interior temples" (My), and they *cut their hands* instead of the fruit, as they fell into a state of utter bewilderment and lost the ordinary consciousness of themselves (My).

Here *God be praised!* is meant as an expression of amazement over God's creative Power, in this case over His creating the likes of Joseph (Kl). By likening Joseph to *a noble angel* the women sought to express their utter amazement at his unparalleled, celestial beauty. It was also their way of acknowledging that Joseph did not commit any act of lewdness with Zulaykhā, since they saw in him his inner purity. Their vision of him made it clear to them that he was, like an angel, untainted by the normal passions that characterize the human condition (R).

32 Zulaykhā's statement *This is the one on whose account you blamed me* suggests that, since the women could not even withstand the sight of Joseph for one moment without losing their senses, she could not be blamed for what she did, as he was in her presence night and day (Ṭs). In so doing she admitted her "fault" and Joseph's innocence. *If he does not do as I command* refers to her original command to Joseph to lie with her; see 12:23c.

33 It is said that when the women heard Zulaykhā's ultimatum to Joseph, they supported her, telling him that he had no choice but to obey her command, lest he be thrown into prison (R). Joseph's preference for prison over what the women were inciting him to do means that he preferred the next life over the fleeting pleasures of this life; succumbing to the women's suggestion would entail pleasure in this life, but punishment in the next, whereas entering prison would entail discomfort in this life, but great felicity in the next (R), as he was forsaking a human love that was real but illicit for the Love of God. Joseph turned to God in humility (Kl) and asked for His Assistance, since he knew that he could only be saved from his plight by God, not as a result of his own efforts (Qu).

34 God responded to Joseph and *turned their scheming away from him* by so strengthening his ability to resist the women that he actually accepted the hardships of prison (Aj). The connection between supplication and God's Response is established elsewhere in the Quran, as in 40:60: *Call upon Me, and I shall respond to you.*

35 *Them* refers to the family of Potiphar and Zulaykhā or to those members of Potiphar's entourage with whom he consulted about this matter (Kl); *the signs* refers to the indications of Joseph's innocence (JJ, Kl). The decision to imprison Joseph *for a time* was a temporary measure until the rumors about what transpired between Joseph and Zulaykhā had subsided (JJ; cf. Genesis 39:20).

36 Most commentaries state that the *two young men* who were in prison with Joseph were servants to the king of Egypt. One of them was his baker (Ṭ) and the other his wine carrier (JJ, Ṭ). The baker had plotted to poison the king. He was

said, "Truly I see myself [in a dream] pressing wine." The other said, "Truly I see myself [in a dream] carrying bread atop my head, from which the birds eat." "Inform us of its interpretation. Truly we see you as being among the virtuous." (37) He said, "No food with which you are provided will come unto you, save that I shall inform you of its interpretation before it comes. This is among the things my Lord has taught me. I forsake the creed of a people who believe not in God, and they who are disbelievers in the Hereafter. (38) And I follow the creed of my fathers, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. It is not for us to ascribe any partners unto God. That is from the bounty God has bestowed upon us and upon mankind, but most of mankind do not give thanks. (39) O my fellow prisoners! Are diverse lords better, or God, the One, the Paramount? (40) You worship apart from Him naught but names that you have named—you and your

caught and imprisoned, and the wine carrier was imprisoned as well, since the king thought that he had aided the baker in the attempt to kill him (R, Ṭ; cf. Genesis 40:1–3). The young man who had dreamed of the wine was the wine carrier, and the young man who had dreamed of the bread was the baker (Bg; for their dreams as narrated in Genesis, see 40:9–11, 16–17). They reportedly asked Joseph to interpret their dreams for them, because they had seen him interpret other people's dreams (JJ). Al-Rāzī reports that, seeing Joseph's virtuous character and kind behavior toward the other prison mates as well as his devout religious practices, the baker and the wine carrier concluded that he was *among the virtuous,* whose interpretation of dreams could therefore be trusted (cf. Genesis 40:6–8). For Joseph's interpretation of these two dreams, see v. 41.

37–38 In speaking of *food with which you are provided,* Joseph is alluding to the dreams that the young men in prison might have in their sleep, which he assures them he will be able to interpret before they become actualized as events in their waking state (Aj, JJ; cf. Genesis 40:8). For Joseph's being taught the ability to interpret dreams, see 12:6c. Some interpret this verse to mean that God taught him these *things* because he rejected *the creed of a people who believe not in God* (Bḍ). Alternately, the verse may be understood to mean that Joseph made mention of his God-given knowledge and his faith as a means to invite the young men to believe in God's Oneness (Aj).

*That* in *That is from the bounty God has bestowed* is a reference to the affirmation of God's Oneness (JJ) or an allusion to the fact stated by Joseph when he said, *It is not for us to ascribe any partners unto God* (R), meaning, "The nonascription of partners to God is among the bounties that God has bestowed." For the idea that the majority are ungrateful, see 2:243; 10:60; 27:73; 40:61; 10:59–60c.

39–40 After establishing the importance of prophecy in v. 38, v. 39 seeks to establish the basis of prophecy, namely, its Divine Origin (R). The majority of prophets were faced with the reality of people's worship of false divinities, and this was also the case with Joseph. This is why v. 39 begins with a demonstration of the futility of taking gods alongside God (R). The rhetorical question *Are diverse lords better, or God, the One, the Paramount?* alludes to the Quran's teaching that if there were more than one god, the cosmic order would contain fissures and would go to ruin, whereas the being of the One God, who is the Source of all reality, makes possible the order and beauty in the cosmos (R), as in 21:22: *Were there gods other than God in them, they would surely have been corrupted* (R).

After establishing the necessity, both logical and ontological, of God's Oneness, v. 40 then

fathers—for which God has sent down no authority. Judgment belongs to God alone. He commands that you worship none but Him. That is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not. (41) O my fellow prisoners! As for one of you, he shall serve wine to his lord. But as for the other, he shall be crucified, and the birds will eat from his head. The matter about which you inquired has been decreed." (42) And he said to the one of them whom he knew would be saved, "Mention me to your lord." But Satan caused him to forget to make mention to his lord. So he remained in prison for several years. (43) And the king said, "Verily I see [in a dream] seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones; and

draws attention to the need to worship the one true God and not the false gods divinized by idolatrous people. For the Quran's insistence that false gods are nothing more than the names assigned to them, see 7:71; 53:23. God's Command *that you worship none but Him* is analogous to 17:23: *Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but Him.* For *That is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not,* see 6:161c; 30:30c.

41 Joseph offers his interpretation of the young men's dreams: the wine carrier would be saved and restored to his former position (N) as a wine server to the king of Egypt (Kl; cf. Genesis 40:12–13); the baker would be crucified for his crime, and after his death the birds would *eat from his head* (My; cf. Genesis 40:18–19).

42 Joseph told the wine carrier to mention him to the king of Egypt (Kl; cf. Genesis 40:14–15), but *Satan caused him to forget to make mention to his lord;* that is, he forgot to mention Joseph to the king (Kl). On account of this, Joseph's stay in prison was prolonged *for several years,* a total of seven years according to most commentators (IK, N).

*Satan caused him to forget to make mention to his lord* can also be translated, "Satan caused him to forget remembering his Lord," in which case it would mean that at the particular moment when Joseph told the wine carrier, *Mention me to your lord,* he forgot to remember God (Kl, Q). As a consequence of his forgetfulness, God caused Joseph to be in prison *for several years.* According to Ibn ʿAbbās, had Joseph remembered God when he told the wine carrier to mention him to his lord, God would have released him from prison earlier (Q). About this, the Prophet is reported to have said, "God have mercy on Joseph. Had it not been for a statement he made—*Mention me to your lord*—he would not have remained in the prison as long as he did" (Ṭ).

43 The king's request to his *notables,* namely, those in his entourage and in high offices in his kingdom (Kl), to give him their *opinion* means that he wanted them to interpret the dream for him (JJ). By *visions* here are meant true or veridical dreams (see 12:4c). The verb rendered *interpret* (*ʿabara*) in *if you can interpret visions* comes from the root *ʿ-b-r,* which conveys the idea of "crossing over" from one side of something to the other. With respect to dream interpretation, the verb derived from this root connotes the notion of moving from the imaginal and symbolic forms in dreams to the actual meanings they symbolize (Bḍ). For the interpretation of the king's dream, see vv. 47–49 (cf. Genesis 41:1–8).

44 *Interpretation* translates *taʾwīl,* which etymologically conveys the sense of bringing something back to its origin; see also v. 6c and v. 21. In the Quran, the term has several usages, among which are the interpretation of the multivalent, symbolic, or equivocal (*mutashābih*) verses (as in 3:7; see also 10:39) and the explanation of events whose meanings are not immediately clear (as in 18:87). In the context of dreams, *taʾwīl* means to arrive at the original or intended meaning of a dream. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, *taʾwīl* also came to signify more particularly the spiritual or esoteric hermeneutics that reveals the inner meanings of a

seven green heads of grain, and others dry. O notables! Give me your opinion on my vision, if you can interpret visions." (44) They said, "What confused dreams! And we are not experts in the interpretation of dreams!" (45) Now the one who had been saved among the two said, remembering after a while, "I shall inform you of its interpretation, so send me forth." (46) "Joseph, O truthful one! Give us thine opinion concerning seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green heads of grain, and others dry, that haply I may return to the people, that they might know." (47) He said, "You will sow diligently for seven years. Then whatever you harvest, leave in its ear, save a little that you eat. (48) Then after this will come seven hard [years] which will devour that which you have saved in advance for them, save a little of that which you have stored. (49) Then after this will come a year wherein people will be granted succor, and

Quranic verse and is often contrasted with *tafsīr,* which is concerned with its outward meaning. However, the distinction between these two terms is not rigid: the title of al-Ṭabarī's encyclopedic commentary on the Quran uses the word *ta'wīl,* not *tafsīr,* in its title. For the different uses and meanings of *ta'wīl* in the Quran, see 3:7c; 7:53c.

*Dreams* translates *aḥlām,* which in this verse is a synonym for *ru'yā,* or *vision,* in v. 43. The notables describe the king's vision as *confused dreams*—that is, as belonging to the category of mixed-up and false dreams—which stem from the internal chatter of the soul (*nafs*) or from demonic inspiration and are therefore not susceptible to meaningful interpretation (Kl), because there is nothing in them corresponding to objective reality (My). By saying that they are not adept in the art of dream interpretation, the king's notables could be referring to false dreams in particular or, more likely, to their inability to interpret dreams in general (Kl).

45 The wine carrier remembered Joseph's words in v. 42 (Bg). *After a while* refers to a period of seven years (Bg), which corresponds to the length of time Joseph spent in prison (see 12:42c). The wine carrier managed to convince the king to allow him to consult with Joseph about the dream by pointing to his own experience with Joseph's powers of dream interpretation: when in prison, Joseph interpreted the wine carrier's dream, and it came to pass exactly as he had said that it would (My); cf. Genesis 41:9–14.

46 Returning to Joseph's prison cell, the wine carrier calls him the *truthful one,* which can refer to the fact that Joseph interpreted his dream truthfully or to the fact that he had never seen Joseph tell a lie during their time together in prison (R; see also 12:36c). By telling Joseph that he sought his interpretation of the dream *that they might know,* the wine carrier was indicating that the king and his notables might come to know of his interpretation of the king's dream (My), or of Joseph's true rank and knowledge and thus release him from prison (My, Ṭs). When the wine carrier related the dream to Joseph, Joseph saw this as an opportunity to impress the king by interpreting the dream so that he could be set free. At the same time, Joseph also saw an opportunity to help the king, as a part of the dream signaled an agricultural crisis for the people of Egypt (see v. 48); cf. Genesis 41:14–24.

47–49 Joseph's interpretation of the dream offers a window into what would happen during the next fifteen years of Egypt's agrarian cycle. During the first phase, the Egyptians would *sow diligently for seven years,* as this would be a time of great fertility and abundance (R). The second phase would bring *seven hard [years],* that is, a time of dearth that would be exceedingly difficult

wherein they will press [wine and oil]." (50) The king said, "Bring him to me!" So when the messenger came to him he said, "Return to your lord and ask him, 'What of the women who cut their hands? Surely my Lord knows well their scheming!'" (51) He said, "What was your purpose when you sought to lure Joseph from himself?" They said, "God be praised! We know no evil against him." The viceroy's wife said, "Now the truth has come to light. It was I who sought to lure him from himself, and verily he is among the truthful." (52) "This is so, that he may know that I betrayed him not in his absence. Truly God guides not the scheming of the treacherous. (53) But I absolve not my own soul. Surely the soul commands to evil, save whom my Lord may show mercy. Truly my

for people (R). Joseph proposed to store up much of the harvest during the first phase so that the people would have food during the second phase. The year of *succor* during which people will *press [wine and oil]* refers to the last year of the cycle, which would be a blessed year of much bounty for the people of Egypt (R); the pressing of oil and wine is an indication that there would be food in abundance once again; cf. Genesis 41:25–36.

50 When the wine carrier, here called *the messenger,* returned and informed the king of Joseph's interpretation of his dream, the king asked that he bring Joseph to him (JJ). But when the messenger approached Joseph in order to release him from prison, Joseph sought to exonerate himself, asking, *What of the women who cut their hands?* which is understood to have been Joseph's request that the women be confronted by the king (JJ). The messenger then returned and informed the king of Joseph's inquiry, and the king complied by gathering the women before him (JJ).

51 Confronted by the king, the women said they did not know of any *evil against him,* which is to say that they absolved Joseph of any blame (Kl). As for Zulaykhā, it is at this point that her love for Joseph becomes fully real. Before, she had blamed him for a sin he did not commit, because her own desire was more important than his well-being (see v. 25). Later, she admitted Joseph's innocence, but only to a small group of women as a way of absolving herself of scorn in their eyes (see v. 32). Some commentators understand that at this juncture in the story her love for Joseph had grown so strong that it had surpassed her own self-interest, and so she spoke the truth about him (My). The narrative indicates that there was a progression in the degrees of love in Zulaykhā's own soul and therefore in her spiritual journey. Her initial attraction to Joseph was purely sensual, but by this point in the narrative she has overcome her lower self, and her infatuation with Joseph's physical beauty has now been transformed into a spiritual love in which she is able to see Joseph's inward beauty, much like Potiphar did when he first saw him in the marketplace (see 12:21–22c). The catalyst here seems to have been Joseph's inner virtues, marked by his quality of truthfulness, which Zulaykhā recognized when she referred to him as *among the truthful.*

52 The speaker here is Joseph, who seeks to absolve himself of any blame before Potiphar (JJ, My, R, Ṭ). Alternately, the speaker here could be Zulaykhā (Kl, R, Ṭs).

53 Although some have argued that the speaker here is Zulaykhā (IK, R), the majority of commentators see these words as Joseph's (Bḍ, Bg, Kl, Q, Ṭs, Z), and thus as a continuation of his statement in v. 52. It is said that Joseph uttered *I absolve not my own soul* out of humility (Kl), and because he wanted to draw attention to the fact that it was God Who protected him from falling into sin (Bḍ; see 12:24c).

*Surely the soul commands to evil* plays a foundational role in the Muslim understanding of moral psychology and the structure of the human soul. Islamic sources identify three levels of the soul on the basis of Quranic references. The first level is the "soul that commands to evil" (*al-nafs*

Lord is Forgiving, Merciful." (54) And the king said, "Bring him to me, that I might reserve him exclusively for myself." Then when he had spoken with him, he said, "Truly this day thou shalt be of high rank and trusted in our presence." (55) He said, "Set me over the storehouses of the land. Truly I am a skilled keeper." (56) Thus did We establish Joseph in the land, that there he might settle wheresoever he will. We cause Our Mercy to fall upon whomsoever We will, and We neglect not the reward of the virtuous. (57) And the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believe and are reverent. (58) The brothers of Joseph came and entered upon him, and he recognized them, while they knew him not. (59) And when he had arranged for their provisions, he said, "Bring me a brother of yours from your father. Do you not see that I give full measure, and

*al-ammārah bi'l-sū'*, based on the present verse); this is the soul that calls a person to submit to his or her base desires, and to those thoughts and actions that lead to forgetfulness of God and go against His Command. Next is the *blaming soul* (*al-nafs al-lawwāmah;* 75:2), which reproaches a person for his or her evil states and forgetfulness of God, while actively attempting to effect change within that person for the better. Finally, the highest kind of soul is the *soul at peace* (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innah;* 89:27), which has conquered the lower self and resides in peace in the remembrance of God, returning to God *content* (*rāḍiyah*) and *contenting* [to God] (*marḍiyyah*). Regarding these kinds of souls, see 75:1–2c and 89:27c.

54–55 After having summoned Joseph and *spoken with him,* the king realizes his intelligence, wisdom, and virtue (Q, Ṭ); he then expresses a desire to reserve Joseph's abilities *exclusively* for himself and eventually sets him over the *storehouses of the land.* Cf. Genesis 41:37–44.

56–57 As in v. 21, *Thus did We establish Joseph in the land* (cf. Genesis 41:45) comes after Joseph undergoes a period of trial and hardship. The purpose of establishing Joseph in Egypt in v. 21 is so that God *might teach him the interpretation of events*—that is, dreams (see 12:21–22c)—whereas in v. 56 it is in order that Joseph *might settle wheresoever he will.* These two verses are therefore connected, since it was only after Joseph interpreted several dreams that he was given such a powerful position in Egypt that he could choose to live *wheresoever he will,* which some interpret to mean that Joseph could "establish his home in any of Egypt's cities because of his control over all of them" (Kā). It is also said that when Potiphar died, the king of Egypt gave Joseph Potiphar's former position of being in charge of the treasury of Egypt. By extension, this would also mean that Joseph was conferred the title of ʿAzīz.

For God's not neglecting *the reward of the virtuous,* see also vv. 90; 11:115; 11:115c. In several verses, *the reward of the Hereafter* is spoken of as *greater* than the reward of this world (16:41), and the Hereafter itself is described as *better for thee than this life* (93:4). This is because *the life of this world is naught but diversion and play,* whereas *the Abode of the Hereafter is life indeed* (29:64).

58 The brothers came to Egypt because the famine that had afflicted Egypt had also affected Canaan (cf. Genesis 42:1–8), and they sought to purchase some of the provisions that had been stored up during the seven years of Egypt's agricultural prosperity (see 12:47–49c; Bḍ, Kl). The brothers did not recognize Joseph because a long period of time had elapsed since they last saw him. Moreover, he now stood before them adorned in rich Egyptian garments, and their awe of him naturally prevented them from recognizing him as their brother, whom they assumed had perished after they had thrown him into the well so many years before (Bḍ; see 12:15c).

59 *Provisions* here denotes the food that the brothers had purchased from Joseph (Kl).

that I am the best of hosts? (60) But if you bring him not unto me, you shall have no measure from me, nor shall you come nigh unto me." (61) They said, "We shall seek to lure him from his father; that we shall surely do." (62) He said to his servant boys, "Put their merchandise in their saddlebags. Perchance they will recognize it when they have gone back to their people; perchance they will return." (63) So when they returned to their father, they said, "O father! The measure has been withheld from us. So send our brother with us that we might obtain the measure. We shall surely be his keepers." (64) He said, "Should I entrust him to you as I entrusted his brother to you aforetime? But God is the best of keepers, and He is the most Merciful of the merciful." (65) And when they opened their belongings, they found their merchandise had been returned to them. They said, "O father! What [more] do we seek? This is our merchandise

The brother *from your father* whom Joseph has in mind is considered by commentators to be Benjamin (JJ; see 12:8c), although his name is not mentioned in the Quran. The ten brothers who came to Egypt brought with them eleven camels and were requesting eleven camel-loads of food, ten for themselves and one for Benjamin, who was at home (Q). But Joseph requested that the other brother who was not present be brought to him as proof that there was in fact another dependent who would justify the purchase of another camel-load of food during a time of scarcity (Q). His question is seen as a subtle way of denying the brothers their request without accusing them of wrongdoing (R).

60–61 Cf. Genesis 42:9–20. In the Quranic account Joseph tells his brothers that without meeting his request he would not do business with them; nor would they even be allowed to enter the city (Bg), since their failure to meet his condition would mean that they were lying when requesting the extra camel-load of food. The brothers assured Joseph that next time they would return with their eleventh brother, as they knew they would need to come to Egypt for more food in the future.

62 *Their merchandise* refers to those goods that the brothers had presented to Joseph in exchange for food (Bg, Z) or the actual price (*athmān*) the brothers paid for the food (JJ, My, Ṭ). By returning all of the merchandise to the brothers, Joseph sought to gain their confidence and reliance upon him for future transactions, with the intention that they would soon return with their brother Benjamin; cf. Genesis 42:25–26.

63 *The measure has been withheld from us* refers to the rest of the food that the brothers sought to acquire (My), namely, the eleventh camel-load of food (see v. 59; Bg). *That we might obtain the measure* means "that we may obtain the food" (Bg), that is, the full measure of food they were seeking.

64 *His brother* is a reference to Joseph (JJ; see 12:15c). *God is the best of keepers* implies Jacob's trust in God and his resignation of the whole affair to Him (Aj). For God as *the most Merciful of the merciful,* see also v. 92; 7:151; 21:83.

65 Here the brothers appeal to Joseph's gesture of goodwill in order to convince Jacob to allow them to take Benjamin (Bg), whose presence before Joseph was essential for obtaining more food. The *meager rations* are the food that the brothers already had in their possession, namely, the ten camel-loads' worth (see 12:59c), which was not enough to sustain them for long (Kl); cf. Genesis 42:27–36.

returned unto us! Now we can provide for our family, and keep watch over our brother, while getting another camel-load—these are meager rations!" (66) He said, "I will not send him forth with you till you give me a solemn pledge before God that you will surely bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded." So when they gave their solemn pledge, he said, "God is Guardian over what we say." (67) And he said, "O my sons! Enter not by one gate, but enter by separate gates. Yet, I cannot avail you aught against God. Judgment belongs to God alone. I trust in Him; and let those who trust, trust in Him." (68) And when they entered whence their father had commanded them, it did not avail them aught against God, but it fulfilled a need in Jacob's soul. Truly he was possessed of knowledge because of that which We taught him, but most of mankind know not. (69) And when they entered upon Joseph, he drew his brother close to

66 Jacob has his sons make a *solemn pledge* that they will return Benjamin to him, as he did earlier with Joseph (see 12:15c). The only difference is that, with respect to Benjamin, Jacob also includes the caveat *unless you are surrounded,* which is a general condition (Z) interpreted to mean "unless you come to a situation in which you cannot uphold the oath" (JJ). *God is Guardian over what we say* means that God is a witness to the oath (R); cf. Genesis 42:36–38. The same statement is uttered by Moses in 28:28 when he takes an oath with his future father-in-law.

67 Cf. Genesis 43:11–15. Jacob's advice to his sons to enter by *separate gates* was given to help them avoid the evil eye (R), which in many traditional cultures, especially those of the Mediterranean and Near East, is associated with bad omens that afflict people because they are objects of envy. Jacob sought to protect the brothers from the evil eye upon entering Egypt, since they were very handsome (Bḍ, N) and had fallen victim to the evil eye the last time they were there (Aj). By entering through different doors instead of one door in a large group, the brothers' presence would be more discreet, and thus they would be less prone to the effects of the evil eye. Other commentators do not associate this verse with a fear of the evil eye, but simply with practical caution against attracting unwanted attention, since the brothers had become recognizable and might have attracted hostility or jealousy if they entered as a single group (R). *I cannot avail you aught against God* means that, despite Jacob's advice to his sons, they cannot escape what God has destined for them (Bḍ, Z).

68 *It did not avail them aught against God* means that, despite the measures the brothers took to avoid having evil befall them on their second trip to Egypt, they would nonetheless soon undergo a major trial (Bḍ; see vv. 70–82). *But it fulfilled a need in Jacob's soul;* that is, Jacob's advice to his sons, along with their acceptance of it, was a means to assuage Jacob's fear of losing his children (R).

69 Cf. Genesis 43:29–31. When the brothers came to Joseph, he honored them and treated them kindly. He managed to inform Benjamin in private that he was his brother (IK, Kl) and explained all that had happened to him (IK). He then gave Benjamin solace, telling him not to be saddened by what the brothers had done, noting that these events were in the past and according to God's Will (Bg). He also asked Benjamin not to mention their private meeting to the other brothers (IK). Ibn Kathīr states that Joseph and Benjamin then devised a plan that would ensure that Benjamin would remain with him (see vv. 70–82); al-Ṭabarī, however, says that the plan was not known to Benjamin.

himself and said, "Truly I am your brother; so be not distressed on account of that which they used to do." (70) And when he had made ready their provisions, he put the drinking cup into his brother's saddlebag. Then a herald cried out, "O you men of the caravan! Truly you are thieves!" (71) Turning toward them, they said, "What are you missing?" (72) They said, "We are missing the goblet of the king." "For whosoever brings it forth, there shall be a camel-load. I shall be its guarantor." (73) They said, "By God, you certainly know that we came not to work corruption in the land, and we are not thieves." (74) They said, "And what will be the recompense for it if you be liars?" (75) They said, "Its recompense will be that he in whose saddlebag it is found—he himself shall be its recompense. Thus do we recompense the wrongdoers." (76) Then he began with their baggage,

70–71 *His brother's saddlebag* means Benjamin's bag, filled with his belongings (Ṭ). As mentioned in v. 72, the drinking cup was *the goblet of the king.* It was used by him not only for drinking, but also for measuring food (Ṭ); it is said to have been made of gold and studded with jewels (JJ). Jacob had a rule about stealing—whoever was caught stealing would be distanced from him—so Joseph placed the goblet in Benjamin's bag, because that would make Benjamin appear to be culpable for the "crime" (Aj, Kl).

72–73 Joseph's companions were the ones who said, *We are missing the goblet of the king* (Ṭs), but the declaration for *a camel-load* of food (JJ) was uttered by the herald (Kl, Ṭs). *I shall be its guarantor* means whoever is able to produce the cup will be given the camel-load (Ṭ).

74–75 The brothers' response, *he himself shall be its recompense,* means that whoever is the one in whose bag the king's goblet is found will be punished for his crime by being given over by the brothers to Joseph and his entourage. It is said that this was the brothers' custom when dealing with thieves, namely, to give the thief over to the one from whom he had stolen, just as the latter's property had been taken over by the thief (Th). The brothers then let Joseph search their bags (JJ).

76 *Thus did We devise a scheme for Joseph* indicates that the plan to place the cup in Benjamin's bag was based on Divine Revelation (*waḥy*), because the ultimate goal of the plot was for God to show His Solicitude to Joseph's brothers (Aj). Some commentators say that the king's rules for theft were that if someone was caught stealing, the person would be physically beaten for the crime and then charged double the worth of the item that had been stolen (R). Thus, *under the king's law,* Joseph *could not have taken his brother unless God willed:* if Joseph had followed the king's law, which would have been the normal course of action, he would not have been able to keep Benjamin, who would have been free to go back with his brothers after the king's stipulated punishment. Instead, God willed that the brothers would themselves put forward the punishment for theft according to their own custom (see 12:74–75c), because of which Joseph's plan was carried out (R).

For *We raise in degrees whomsoever We will,* see 6:83c; see also 40:15, where God is referred to as *the Raiser of degrees.* In the present context, *above every possessor of knowledge is a knower* means that, although Joseph's brothers were learned and possessed of knowledge, Joseph had more knowledge than they (R), and that all knowledge ends with God (Aj), who is referred to as the *Knower* throughout the Quran. This verse also has a more universal import and is often cited in a more general context by Muslim writers. It points to the hierarchy of knowledge and the fact that no matter how much knowledge a human being gains, there is always a higher degree of knowledge, the highest of which is God's Knowledge.

before the baggage of his brother. Then he removed it from his brother's baggage. Thus did We devise a scheme for Joseph. Under the king's law, he could not have taken his brother unless God willed. We raise in degrees whomsoever We will, and above every possessor of knowledge is a knower. (77) They said, "If he has stolen, a brother of his had stolen aforetime." But Joseph kept it secret in his soul and disclosed it not unto them. He said, "You are in a worse position! And God knows best concerning that which you describe." (78) They said, "O viceroy! He has a venerable, aged father; so take one of us in his place. Truly we see you as being among the virtuous." (79) He said, "God be my refuge that we should take any save the one with whom we found our property! For then we would surely be wrongdoers." (80) So when they despaired of [swaying] him, they conferred privately. The eldest of them said, "Do you not know that your father has taken a solemn pledge from you before God, and earlier you neglected Joseph? Thus I shall not depart from this land till my father grants me leave, or God renders judgment upon me, and He is the best of judges! (81) Return unto your father and say, 'O father! Verily your son has committed theft. And we bore witness to that which we knew, but we are not keepers of the unseen. (82) So

77 *A brother of his had stolen aforetime* is a reference to Joseph, who, when he was younger, is said to have stolen an idol from his maternal grandfather and destroyed it, lest it be worshipped (IK, JJ, R). What Joseph *kept . . . secret in his soul* refers to his response to his brothers, *You are in a worse position,* which he said to himself and did not voice aloud (Z). By it he meant that the brothers were in a worse position than Benjamin, since they stole him (Joseph) from their father and treated him unjustly, and Benjamin did not participate in this act (JJ, Z).

78–79 For the way Joseph came to occupy Potiphar's former rank and position of *viceroy,* see 12:56–57c. Benjamin's *venerable, aged father* refers to Jacob. By mentioning their father, the brothers were saying that Jacob loves Benjamin more than them, and that since Benjamin has been a means of solace for Jacob in place of Joseph, not getting Benjamin back would cause him more grief (JJ).

80 *The eldest of them* refers to Reuben (not named in the Quran, but recorded as such in the commentaries; see 12:10c). For the *solemn pledge* that the brothers took with Jacob, see v. 66. The brothers *neglected Joseph* when they failed to take care of him (Bg, Ṭs) and, by extension, when they broke the vow they had made to Jacob to return Joseph safely (Ṭs; see also 12:15c). Reuben states that he will not leave Egypt until either his *father grants* him *leave*—that is, Jacob calls him to return home (see also v. 83)—or *God renders judgment upon* him, referring to God's Decision to return Benjamin to him or to send him back home without Benjamin (Bg). For God as *the best of judges* and other cognate expressions in the Quran, see 7:87c.

81–82 *We are not keepers of the unseen* means that there was no way the brothers could have foreseen that Benjamin would "steal" in Egypt when they made their pact with Jacob (Z). By stating this point, the brothers wished to absolve themselves of breaking the oath, implicitly invoking the exceptional condition that Jacob included in his pledge with them (see v. 66). The *town* refers to the people of Egypt, and the *caravan* to

ask the town wherein we were, and the caravan with which we approached. Verily we are truthful.'" (83) He said, "Nay, your souls have seduced you in this matter. Beautiful patience! It may be that God will bring them to me all together. Truly He is the Knowing, the Wise." (84) And he turned away from them and said, "Oh, how great is my grief for Joseph!" His eyes had turned white with grief, and he was choked with anguish. (85) They said, "By God, wilt thou go on remembering Joseph till thou art ill to the point of death, or till thou hast perished?" (86) He said, "I complain of my sorrow and grief to God alone. And I know from God that which you know not. (87) O my sons! Go and inquire about Joseph and his brother and despair not of God's Comfort; truly none despairs of God's Comfort save the disbelieving people." (88) So when they entered upon him they said, "O viceroy! Affliction has befallen us and our people. We bring but meager merchandise; yet grant us full measure and be charitable unto us. Truly God shall recompense the charitable." (89) He said, "Do you

the people of Canaan (JJ). It is said that when the latter returned to Jacob, they testified to the brothers' truthfulness (JJ).

83 Jacob's words here are similar to his response to the news of the loss of Joseph in v. 18. The pronoun *them* refers to Joseph, Benjamin, and Reuben, who were still in Egypt (see v. 80; Kl); such a statement is a kind of prophecy, since Joseph was still not known to be alive (see commentary on vv. 85–87).

84 It is said that in his sadness, Jacob wept so much that he went blind (My) or that his eyesight became very weak (Kl), which is indicated by the words *his eyes had turned white*.

85–86 The brothers' question, motivated by love and compassion for their father (Ṭs), is a figurative way of telling him that they fear for his demise if he continues to grieve over Joseph (IK). That Jacob complains of his *sorrow and grief to God alone* harkens back to vv. 18 and 83, where he counsels himself to have *beautiful patience,* which is a form of patience in which one complains only to God about one's suffering and not to other human beings; see 12:18c. *I know from God that which you know not* (see also v. 96) is interpreted by some to refer to Jacob's intuitive knowledge that Joseph was still alive (R); see also vv. 84, 87; 12:18c.

87 Benjamin was in custody, which is why Jacob sent his sons to inquire about him, but Jacob also told them to *inquire about Joseph;* he believed Joseph was still alive, because he had either seen this in a dream or been informed by the Angel of Death that the latter had not taken Joseph's soul (Q). *Despair not of God's Comfort* means that the brothers should not lose hope in God's Mercy (JJ, N; for their forgiveness, see vv. 92, 97). This verse is similar in meaning to 39:53: *Despair not of God's Mercy. Truly God forgives all sins. Truly He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.*

88 The brothers went to Egypt in order to inquire about Joseph and Benjamin in accordance with Jacob's wishes. When they came to Joseph (who was still not known to them as Joseph), they complained about their *affliction,* by which is meant their intense hunger (Bḍ), as well as their *meager merchandise,* referring to what little goods they had with them to trade for food (Bḍ, Q). The brothers were hoping their goods would suffice them in obtaining a *full measure* of food. *And be charitable unto us* is understood as a request for the return of Benjamin (Q).

89–90 Joseph's question is about their separating him from Benjamin when they were young, and about their harming him (Joseph) and

know what you have done with Joseph and his brother, when you were ignorant?" (90) They said, "Art thou indeed Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph and this is my brother. God has been gracious unto us. Verily whosoever is reverent and patient—surely God neglects not the reward of the virtuous." (91) "By God!" they said, "God has preferred thee over us, and we were at fault." (92) He said, "There is no reproach against you this day. God will forgive you. And He is the most Merciful of the merciful. (93) Take this shirt of mine and cast it upon my father's face; he will come to see. And bring me your family, all together." (94) And as the caravan set off, their father said, "Truly I sense the scent of Joseph, if you think me not senile!" (95) They said, "By God! Truly thou art astray as of old." (96) And when the bearer of glad tidings came, he cast it upon his face and he was restored to sight. He said, "Did I not say unto you that I know from God that which you know not?" (97) They said, "O father! Seek forgiveness for

perpetrating injustices against Benjamin, such as debasing and reviling him (Kl). Joseph then makes an excuse for his brothers' wrong actions (Kl, R), as he says, *when you were ignorant,* which refers to either their ignorance of the vileness of their actions or their general state of ignorance on account of their youth (Kl). It is said that the brothers recognized that their interlocutor was Joseph when he spoke these words to them, or when he smiled (Bḍ), or when he removed his crown (Sh). For *Surely God neglects not the reward of the virtuous,* see 9:120; 11:11c, 115c; 12:56.

91–92 Cf. Genesis 45:5–8. Joseph's statement *There is no reproach against you this day* is described in some sources as "a beautiful form of forgiveness" (Kl). *Reproach* here can also mean physical punishment (*ʿiqāb;* Kl). These words of forgiveness and comfort uttered by Joseph were cited by the Prophet Muhammad when he too forgave members of his tribe who had been his oppressors. It is said that, during the conquest of Makkah, when the Prophet had overtaken the city and the Makkan idolaters had no hope of escape, the Prophet addressed the Quraysh, "O party of the Quraysh! What do you see me doing with you?" They answered, "Good. You are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother." Then the Prophet said, "Verily I say to you as Joseph said to his brothers: *there is no reproach against you.* Go, for you are free."

93 Joseph's order to have his shirt cast over Jacob's face was reportedly based on Divine inspiration (Kl, My). The shirt is said to be the same shirt made from the silk of Paradise that Gabriel brought to Joseph when he was in the well (see 12:15c; My); cf. Genesis 45:9–13.

94 Jacob's words were addressed to those of his tribe who were with him (My). Despite the fact that the caravan was on its way from Egypt to Canaan, Jacob was able to perceive Joseph's scent because of the heavenly smell that came from his shirt (Bg, My). Some say that this was a miracle because Jacob and Joseph were prophets (My).

95 Cf. 12:85–86c. By being *astray* here the brothers mean Jacob's overabundant love for Joseph and his hope to meet with him, which they thought unreasonable under the circumstances as they knew them (JJ).

96 Cf. Genesis 45:9–13, 27–28. *The bearer of glad tidings* who cast Joseph's shirt upon Jacob's face was the same brother (see 12:10c; JJ) who had earlier interceded with the brothers when they plotted to kill Joseph (see 12:15c). For Jacob's question, see his announcement in 12:85–86c.

97–98 This conversation occurred after the brothers returned home from Egypt (Q). Some

us from our sins. Truly we were at fault." (98) He said, "I shall indeed seek forgiveness for you from my Lord. Truly He is Forgiving, Merciful." (99) So when they entered upon Joseph, he drew his parents close to himself and said, "Enter Egypt in security, if God wills!" (100) And he raised his parents up to the throne, and they [all] fell prostrate toward him. He said, "O my father! This is the fulfillment of my vision; my Lord has made it come true. He was good to me when He brought me forth from prison, and brought you from the desert, after Satan incited evil between my brothers and me. Indeed, my Lord is Subtle in that which He wills. Truly He is the Knower, the Wise. (101) My Lord! Thou hast given me something of sovereignty, and taught me the interpretation of events. Originator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter! Take me as a submitter unto Thyself, and admit me to the company of the righteous." (102) These are among the accounts of the unseen

record that Jacob delayed his prayer for forgiveness a certain period of time (Q, R), perhaps to ascertain whether they were being sincere and truthful (Z).

99 For *enter . . . in security, if God wills* with reference to the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, see 48:27, which states that the Muslims *shall enter the Sacred Mosque in security, if God wills.*

100 Cf. Genesis 46:5–7. Joseph *raised his parents up to the throne;* that is, he seated them (JJ) upon the king's throne (Kl). For Joseph's vision of which this verse is the *fulfillment,* see 12:4c. *They [all]* refers to Joseph's parents and his eleven brothers, which correspond to the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars, respectively (N). Prostrating toward someone was a way of greeting and honoring that person, much like standing up for someone out of respect or kissing the hand (N).

Joseph does not mention the well from which he was delivered, only the prison, since he had already told his brothers in v. 92, *There is no reproach against you this day* (N). Joseph's blaming Satan for having *incited evil* between himself and his brothers is tantamount to his making an excuse for them for their wrong actions (Qu; see also 12:89–90c). Joseph's description of God as *Subtle in that which He wills* means that the manner in which God carries out His Will is subtle (N).

101 Joseph was granted *something of sovereignty* since he had the highest standing in Egypt next to the king (see 12:56–57c.). For God as the *Originator of the heavens and the earth,* see 2:117; 6:14, 101; 35:1; 39:46; 42:11; see also 6:14c; 35:1c. God is described throughout the Quran as a *Protector,* as in 2:257: *God is the Protector of those who believe.* Joseph says that God is his *Protector in this world and in the Hereafter* since those under God's Protection are considered His friends (*awliyā'*, a term that derives from the same root as *Protector*), upon whom *no fear shall come* (10:62) and for whom *are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the Hereafter* (10:64). Joseph's supplication to God, *Take me as a submitter unto Thyself,* is a request to God that he not die except in a state of complete submission to God's Will (as in 3:102: *And die not except in submission*), and in accordance with the creed of Abraham (see 22:78). For a discussion of the broader meaning of submission (*islām*) in the Quran, see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

102 This verse, addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, points out that he was not with Joseph's brothers when they planned what they would do to Joseph (R). The verse thus argues for the miraculous nature of the Prophet's knowledge, since he was given the unseen details of the

which We reveal unto thee. And thou wert not with them when they decided upon their affair and plotted. (103) And most of mankind, however much thou mightest desire, are not believers. (104) And thou askest of them no reward for it; it is naught but a reminder for the worlds. (105) How many a sign is there in the heavens and on the earth by which they pass; yet they turn away from them! (106) And most of them believe not in God, save that they ascribe partners unto Him. (107) Do they feel secure from the coming of an overwhelming punishment from God upon them? Or from the coming of the Hour suddenly, while they are unaware? (108) Say, "This is my way. I call unto God with clear sight—I, and those who follow me. Glory be to God! And I am not among those who ascribe partners unto God." (109) And We sent none before thee, save men unto whom We sent revelation among the people of the towns. Have they not journeyed

story of Joseph without being physically present during its unfolding and, according to Islamic teachings, without learning of it from human teachers or through books (R), since he is considered *the unlettered Prophet* (7:157).

103 For *most of mankind . . . are not believers,* see 11:17c; 13:1; 40:61. Elsewhere in the Quran, the Prophet's concern for his people (and, by extension, all of humanity) is addressed (see 9:128, 18:6, 26:3), which is part of the broader Quranic theme that it is only God Who guides and only God Who causes people to believe; see 2:272; 3:20; 3:128–29; 28:56.

104 For the meaning of this verse, see commentary on 6:90, where the Prophet is instructed to say, *I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds.*

105 People continuously encounter signs and proofs that indicate the being of their Creator as well as His Wisdom, Power, and Oneness, yet they do not reflect upon the meaning of these signs; nor do they take a lesson from them (Bḍ); thus 6:157 asks rhetorically, *Who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God and turns away from them?* Regarding the variety and significance of God's signs, see the commentary on 45:3–6. More specifically, this verse relates to the previous civilizations and peoples who have passed away and left vestiges behind, from which those who come later are meant to take a lesson, but instead fail to do so (N). Regarding the lessons to be derived from past nations, see 30:9c.

106 It is said that this verse was revealed about the Makkan idolaters, who believed in God but also worshipped other gods alongside Him (Kl). For more on ascribing partners to God, see 4:48c. The gods that one might place on a par with God are not limited to physical idols, but can also be other elements that one "idolizes," such as one's desires, power, or ideas (see also 10:28–29c; 25:43; 45:23).

107 For the rhetorical question *Do they feel secure?* (regarding God's Punishment), see also 16:45–47; 17:68–69; 67:16–17. Here the question is about the Makkan idolaters (Ṭs). The *overwhelming punishment* refers to a thunderbolt (JJ, Ṭs) or some kind of enveloping punishment (Bg); *the Hour* refers to the Day of Judgment. For the sudden nature of the arrival of the Last Day and the general state of heedlessness in which it will find most people, see 6:31c; 7:188; 21:40.

108 Here *way* can refer to either the Prophet's wont (Bg) or the religion he brought (Bg, Z; cf. 16:125). By *clear sight* is meant that by which one can distinguish with certainty between truth and falsehood, namely, certainty (Bg).

109 Some have said that this verse was revealed as a response to the Makkans' question in 6:8, *Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?* (Q). On the significance of prophets being

upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? And the Abode of the Hereafter is better for those who are reverent. Do you not understand? (110) Till, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were deemed liars, Our Help came unto them, and whomsoever We willed was saved. And Our Might shall not be turned back from the guilty people. (111) Certainly in their stories is a lesson for those possessed of intellect. It is not a fabricated account; rather, it is a confirmation of that which came before it, and an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.

human beings and speaking the language of their people, see 6:8–9; 11:12; 14:10; 17:94; 18:110; 23:33; 25:7; 35:15; 41:6; 54:24; 14:4c; 14:11c; 64:6c. Many commentators understand the mention of *the people of the towns* to signify that nomads were never chosen to be prophets since town dwellers were, according to the commentators, more knowledgeable and refined (Q, R, Z), and neither were women chosen as prophets (see 16:43c), though some believe that the mention of *men* signifies not gender but that they were human beings, not angels (Z; see 17:94–95c).

For *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end?* see 30:9c (see also 12:105c). On the superiority of the Hereafter to this world, see 12:56–57c, although 12:57 mentions the *reward of the Hereafter* rather than the *Abode of the Hereafter.*

110 For the prophets' human reactions to the trials they encountered, see 2:214; 15:97; 21:83; 26:3. For God's exacting vengeance upon the *guilty people,* see 32:22.

111 By *their stories* is meant the stories of the messengers mentioned throughout the Quran (JJ). For *those possessed of intellect,* see 5:100c; 38:29c; 39:9c. On the fact that the Quran is not *fabricated,* but rather confirms the scriptures that came before it, see 10:37; cf. commentary on 10:15–17. Like the Quran itself (see also 16:64, 89), the Torah given to Moses is also described as *an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and a mercy* (see 6:154 and commentary).



# 13

# The Thunder

## *al-Raʿd*

The fourth in a series of six *sūrah*s whose opening verses include the letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'*, and which speak of *the Book, al-Raʿd* also contains the detached letter *mīm* in its opening verse. According to some commentators, it is a Makkan *sūrah* (Sy), while others maintain that it is Madinan. Still others are of the opinion that it is mostly Makkan with some Madinan verses (Bg, R, Sy). Al-Zamakhsharī notes simply that its time of revelation is uncertain.

The *sūrah* affirms the Divine Source of what has been revealed to the Prophet, even though most people do not believe in it (v. 1) or doubt both the Resurrection (v. 5) and that the Prophet is a messenger from God (vv. 7, 43). It also draws attention to the many wonders of the natural world, all of which are entirely dependent upon God for their subsistence (vv. 2–4); like the thunder mentioned in v. 13 (and from which the *sūrah* derives its name), they also partake in the glorification of God (vv. 12–13, 15). Drawing on natural phenomena again, an important parable of water from the sky is provided in order to illustrate the stark difference between truth and falsehood (v. 17). Those who disbelieve, fail to heed God's call, and work corruption upon the earth encounter calamities in this world (vv. 25, 31) and are promised Hell in the next (vv. 18, 25, 34); those who believe and are righteous live tranquilly in this world (v. 28) and are promised Paradise in the next (vv. 18, 23–24, 29, 35).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Mīm. Rā.* These are the signs of the Book; and that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord is the truth, but most of mankind believe not. (2) God it is Who raised the heavens without pillars that you see, then mounted the Throne; and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed. He directs the affair, expounding the signs, so that you may be certain of the meeting with your Lord. (3) He it is Who spread out the earth and placed therein firm mountains and streams, and of every kind of fruit He placed therein two kinds. He causes the night to cover the day. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. (4) Upon the earth are neighboring tracts, vineyards, sown fields, and date palms of a shared root and not of a shared root, watered by one water. And We have favored some above others in bounty. Truly in that are signs for a people who understand.

1 For the detached letters, see 2:1c. Whereas *the Book* here is understood by some to refer to this specific *sūrah* (Bḍ, Kl, Z; cf. 10:1c) and *the signs* to its verses (Bḍ, Kl, R), *that which has been sent down* refers to the entire Quran (Q, Ṭ, Z). Despite the fact that the Quran *is the truth,* the majority of people do not accept it as true, which is why they *believe not* (Āl, Ṭs; see also 11:17; 40:59).

2 Some interpret this verse to mean that the *pillars* holding up the heavens cannot be seen, but others say they are not supported by pillars at all (Ṭ). It is, nevertheless, God Who actually sustains the entire cosmic order (R), as in 22:65: *He maintains the sky lest it fall upon the earth, save by His Leave.* Responding to the people who *believe not* mentioned in v. 1, this verse is interpreted by some as drawing attention to the perfect order and harmony of the natural world, implying that deep reflection upon it will inevitably lead one to belief in God (R).

For God's mounting *the Throne* and directing *the affair,* see 10:3c. In the Quran, the notion of *a term appointed* encompasses all things in the created order (see, e.g., 6:60; 7:34; 11:3; 14:10; 16:61; 22:5; 22:33; 29:53; 30:8). In the present verse, mention of *a term appointed* indicates that *the sun and the moon* as well as all heavenly bodies will one day cease to be, as alluded to in 39:67: *The whole earth shall be but a handful to Him on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be enfolded in His right Hand.* Reflection upon the nature of things, the manner in which they are sustained, and how they all exist for a finite measure of time is meant to engender a firm belief in God and the meeting with Him after death.

3 According to Ibn Juzayy, *He it is Who spread out the earth* may appear to suggest that the earth is flat and not, as was widely acknowledged in his time, round. For him, however, the verse speaks of the earth as *spread out* because of the fact that every portion of land on earth, although flat from our perspective, comprises a greater whole, namely, the surface of the earth, which is round. *Of every kind of fruit He placed therein two kinds* has been interpreted as referring to two colors, light and dark, or two types of taste, sweet and sour (Kl). For God's causing *the night to cover the day,* see also 7:54.

4 Despite the fact that the earth is *watered by one water,* what emerges from the *neighboring tracts, vineyards, sown fields, and date palms* is variegated. This is understood to disprove a purely

(5) And if thou dost wonder, then wondrous is their saying, "When we are dust, shall we indeed be [raised] in a new creation?" It is they who disbelieve in their Lord; it is they who will have shackles upon their necks; and it is they who will be the inhabitants of the Fire; they shall abide therein. (6) Yet they would have thee hasten evil before good, though examples have passed before them. Truly thy Lord is Possessed of Forgiveness for mankind despite their wrongdoing, and truly thy Lord is severe in retribution. (7) Those who disbelieve say, "Why has not some sign been sent down upon him from his Lord?" Thou art but a warner; and for every people there is a guide. (8) God knows that which every female bears, how wombs diminish and how they increase. Everything with Him is according to a measure— (9) Knower of the Unseen and the seen, the

naturalistic explanation of the manner in which objects emerge in this world, because the water is the same, yet the things that emerge from the earth are vastly different in type (Bḍ, Kl, Q). If it is argued that this is due to the fact that there are different kinds of seeds in the earth that are actualized by the *one water* that reaches them, it can then be asked where they originated in the first place (Q). Such evidence is provided as an argument for a single Creator, the existence of Whom is the only reality that can account for their existence and their variegated natures; see 13:2c.

5 This verse is saying, "If you are astonished that they do not accept you despite the fact that they know you to be truthful (see 10:16c), then even more astonishing than this is their disbelief in the Resurrection" (Q). The disbelievers' amazement at and rejection of the Resurrection are recounted many times throughout the Quran; their most common objection is, *What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?* (17:49, 98; see also, e.g., 23:35, 82; 36:78). For the *shackles* described as being *upon their necks,* see 36:8c.

6 *Though examples have passed before them* of the past nations who were punished for disbelieving in their messengers (Kl), out of mockery the Makkan idolaters hastened *evil,* namely, God's Punishment (R, Ṭb, Z), *before* the *good,* which is a reference to God's Mercy (Ṭb, Ṭs); see also 10:11c; 10:49c; 27:46; 36:48c. *Truly thy Lord is Possessed of Forgiveness for mankind despite their wrongdoing* means that, despite people's disbelief and disobedience, God covers their faults in this world and does not take them to task right away (Aj). The verse's last sentence is understood to mean that, if they repent, God will forgive them, but if they do not, then they should know that He *is severe in retribution* (R); see also 41:43.

7 For the Makkans' request for a *sign* to be *sent down upon* the Prophet *from his Lord,* see 6:37, 109; 10:20c. For the function of prophets as warners, see 4:165c. *For every people there is a guide* can refer to the fact that all nations have received guidance from God through His sending messengers to them (see 10:47c). According to Ibn ʿAjībah, when this verse was revealed, the Prophet exclaimed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, "I am the warner and you, O ʿAlī, are the guide."

8–9 *God knows that which every female bears* (cf. 35:11; 41:47), whether it will be a male or female, sound or deficient, tall or short (R); and, more important, He knows the inner workings of each soul before it is born (see also 2:117c; 5:7c). *How wombs diminish and how they increase* refers to the length of the gestation period in each womb (JJ). For God as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen,* see 6:59; 59:22c. The use of *measure* (*miqdār*) evokes the use of *measure* in 54:49: *Truly We have created everything according to a measure* (*qadar*). Regarding the theological significance of *qadar,* see 54:49c.

Great, the Exalted. (10) Alike among you are those who speak secretly and those who do so openly, those who lurk by night, and those who go forth by day. (11) For him there are attendant angels to his front and to his rear, guarding him by God's Command. Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves. And when God desires evil for a people, there is no repelling it; and apart from Him they have no protector. (12) He it is Who shows you lightning, arousing fear and hope, and Who produces heavy-laden clouds. (13) The thunder hymns His praise, as do the angels, in awe of Him. He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will. Yet they dispute

10 Following directly upon v. 9, which speaks of God's all-encompassing Knowledge (Bḍ), this verse is understood to mean that no matter what one's condition is, God is fully aware of one's actions (Bḍ, Qm). This fact is meant to engender not only vigilance in one's actions, but also constant and intense self-scrutiny of one's thoughts and the state of one's heart (Aj). As the second Caliph ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 22/644) is reported to have said, "Take yourselves to account before you are taken to account."

11 The angels are continuously *attendant* upon the one who lurks *by night* and goes *forth by day* (v. 10; AF). *God alters not what is in a people,* namely, their blessings related to this life, such as sound health and wealth (M), *until they alter what is in themselves,* that is, until they misuse these blessings to disobey God (Kl, My, R); see 8:52–54c. Some have also understood *God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves* to mean that God will not alter the positive or negative circumstances of people until they themselves bring about changes in their actions and lives. *When God desires evil for a people* refers to when He wishes to punish them (Q) on account of their altering the blessings that He has given them (M); cf. 10:107.

12–13 Cf. 30:24. When one sees the flashes of *lightning,* it inspires *fear* of the impending thunder, but also *hope* that rain may descend (R). This verse is also believed to have symbolic levels of meaning. For example, according to the philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), the *lightning* referred to in this verse symbolizes the initial Divine flashes of illumination that descend suddenly upon the soul of the person walking along the spiritual path, bringing about much joy. Such a person has *fear* that these flashes will vanish and *hope* that they will remain (*Majmūᶜa-yi āthār-i fārsī-yi Shaykh-i Ishrāq* [Tehran, 1980], 301).

That *the thunder hymns His praise* refers to the Quranic notion that all things in the heavens and on the earth glorify God, as in 17:44: *The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving;* see also 57:1; 59:1, 24; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1c. Many commentators also note a tradition asserting that *thunder* is the name of the angel who controls the clouds (Bg, Qm, R); see also 2:19c. In this reading, *the thunder hymns His praise* refers to the angel's voice as it glorifies God (Kl, M), declaring His Transcendence and Incomparability (Bq, Ṭs). The other angels, likewise, hymn His praise out of *awe,* that is, out of reverence for and magnification of Him (N).

*He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will* is said to refer to the mortal thunderbolt with which God struck Arbad ibn Rabīᶜah, who had plotted with ᶜĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl to kill the Prophet (Bḍ, Z). Others, however, say that the wording in this verse is too general to refer to this specific instance (Kl); see also 24:43. According to the Sufi commentator al-Kāshānī, the *thunderbolts* here refer to the "august glories" (*sabaḥāt*) of Divinity that manifest God's Might and Grace, thereby annihilating the egotistical desires of *whomsoever He will,*

concerning God, and He is severe in wrath. (14) Unto Him is the supplication of truth; and those whom they supplicate apart from Him answer them not in the least, save as one who stretches forth his palms toward water that it may reach his mouth, though it never reaches him. And the supplication of the disbelievers is naught but astray. (15) And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening. (16) Say, "Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?" Say, "God." Say, "Then have you taken, apart from Him, protectors who

referring to those who love God and yearn for Him (K).

*Yet they,* namely, the disbelievers (Kl), *dispute concerning God;* see also 22:3c, 22:8; 31:20. *Wrath* translates *miḥāl,* which is derived from *ḥīlah,* meaning "plot" or "ruse." Thus, *He is severe in wrath* is understood to mean that God is intense in plotting (Kl, Ṭs); see v. 42; 3:54; 7:99; 8:30c; 10:21c; 27:50. See also 7:183 and 68:45: *Truly My scheme is firm.*

14 *Unto Him is the supplication of truth* refers to the *shahādah,* "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha illa'Llāh;* AF, Kl, My). More generally, it can refer to any form of supplication that God accepts and to which He responds, as in 40:60: *Call upon Me, and I shall respond to you.* The *supplication of truth* therefore is supplication to God, whereas the supplication to what is other than Him is futile (Kl), as is the case with *those whom they*—that is, the disbelievers—*supplicate apart from Him,* namely, idols and false gods (Z). The false gods that people call upon other than God *answer them not in the least,* because they do not have the ability to bring about harm or benefit (see 5:76; 10:18; 25:55), since they do not possess any power, as in 35:13: *As for those upon whom you call apart from Him, they do not possess so much as the husk of a date stone* (cf. 7:194; 31:29; 34:22). This is why, on the Last Day, they will not be able to answer those who called upon them for help (see 18:52; 28:64). The one who calls upon false gods is thus likened to *one who stretches forth his palms toward water that it may reach his mouth;* just as the water cannot perceive that his hands are outstretched for it, so too are those whom one calls upon apart from God unable to hear his supplications and respond to them (Z). *And the supplication of the disbelievers is naught but astray* is identical to a portion of 40:50.

15 Cf. 16:48–49; 22:18. *Prostrates* here expresses the idea of submission, lowliness, and the inability to refuse (R), which is why 19:93 says, *There is none in the heavens and on the earth, but that it comes unto the Compassionate as a servant;* see also 2:116c. That all things prostrate to God *willingly or unwillingly* means that all things at all moments are "prostrate," that is, submitted existentially before God: either they understand this state of affairs and prostrate voluntarily in recognition of it, or they prostrate involuntarily and unwittingly; see also 3:83c. From a spiritual perspective and with respect to human beings' prostration before God, al-Maybudī says that a prostration is done *willingly* when one submits to God's Command and Majesty without any hope of reward or gain; the prostration done *unwillingly* occurs when one prostrates to God out of desire for something, whether it is to elicit blessings or to avoid some form of harm. *As do their shadows* is a way of saying that even their shadows submit to God (M), which means that every aspect of their being is under His Sway; and *in the morning and the evening* implies that they do so perpetually (N). See also 16:48: *Have they not considered that whatsoever God has created casts its shadow to the right and to the left, prostrating to God while in a state of abject humility?*

16 Commentators observe that the answer, *God,* immediately follows the question posed to the Makkan idolaters, *Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?* because they will not be able

have no power over what benefit or harm may come to themselves?" Say, "Are the blind and the seer equal, or are darkness and light equal?" Or have they ascribed unto God partners who have created the like of His creation, such that that creation seems alike to them? Say, "God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Paramount." (17) He sends down water from the sky, so that the riverbeds flow according to their measure and the torrent carries a swelling froth; and from that which they kindle in the fire, seeking ornament or pleasure, is a froth like unto it. Thus does God set forth truth and falsehood. As for the froth, it passes away as dross. And as for that which benefits mankind, it remains on the earth. Thus does God set forth parables. (18) Those who answer their Lord shall have that which is most beautiful. But those who answer Him not—were they to possess all that is on the earth and

to provide any answer other than "God" (Bḍ), owing to the self-evident nature of His Being (Kl) and because a number of them had some form of belief in *Allāh* among their pantheon of deities (see 10:18c; 39:3). For similar questions posed to the Makkan idolaters that are meant to provoke in their minds the immediacy of God's Lordship and Agency, see also 29:61; 29:63; 31:25; 39:38; 43:87. After establishing God's Lordship, the question that follows, *Have you taken, apart from Him, protectors who have no power over what benefit or harm may come to themselves?* is meant to highlight the irrationality of the Makkans' reliance upon deities other than Him; it makes the point that if these deities cannot benefit or harm *themselves,* surely they cannot bring about benefit or harm for those who call upon them (Bḍ). *The blind and the seer* are metaphors in the Quran for the disbeliever and the believer, respectively, and *darkness and light* for disbelief and faith (Kl) or ignorance and knowledge; see 33:43c. For a fuller discussion of the Quranic symbolism of light, see 6:1c; 24:35c. *Or have they ascribed unto God partners who have created the like of His creation, such that that creation seems alike to them?* is a rhetorical question designed to make clear to them that their *partners* cannot do what God does, and since this is the case, there can be no likeness between God and their idols (Ṭs). This argument is meant to lead them to the conclusion that these idols they have created are not worthy of worship (Ṭs), as *God is the Creator of all things.*

17 This verse provides two similitudes concerning *truth and falsehood* (Bg). In the first similitude, the water that God causes to fall *from the sky* usually fills the *riverbeds . . . according to their measure;* if a *torrent* is generated by the water that God has sent down (Bg), it churns up dirt and impurities, forming *a swelling froth,* which goes on to become attached to trees and the sides of valleys (Bg) and is basically useless. When the torrent subsides, the water returns to its pure state (Bg) and is then useful to people in numerous ways.

In the second similitude, when retrieving precious metals such as gold, silver, or copper from the earth (JJ, Kl), the ores are heated over fire in order to purify them so that the desired metals can be extracted, providing *ornament or pleasure* for people. In the refining process, impurities rise to the top of the molten metal as froth, which is *like unto* the froth carried by the torrent.

Falsehood, like the scum generated by the torrent and the refining process, *passes away as dross.* The truth, like the pure water and precious metals—*that which benefits mankind*—remains; cf. 17:81: *Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing.*

18 *Those who answer their Lord* refers to those who respond to God's Call to believe in Him and accept prophecy (Q). *That which is most beautiful*

the like of it besides, they would seek to ransom themselves thereby. For them there shall be an evil reckoning. Their refuge is Hell. What an evil resting place! (19) Is one who knows that what has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord is the truth like one who is blind? Only those who possess intellect reflect, (20) who fulfill the pact with God and break not the covenant, (21) who join what God has commanded be joined, fear their Lord, and dread an evil reckoning, (22) and who are patient, seeking the Face of their Lord, perform the prayer, and spend from that which We have provided them, secretly and openly, and who repel evil with good. For them there shall be the reward of the Abode— (23) Gardens of Eden that they shall enter along with those who were righteous from among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny; and angels shall enter upon them from every gate. (24) "Peace be upon you

refers to Divine Assistance in this world (Q) or to Paradise (Bg); cf. 10:26–27c. On the idea of seeking to ransom oneself in the Hereafter, see 3:91; 5:36; 10:54; 39:47; 70:11.

19 This verse presents a fundamental distinction between one who knows that what has been revealed is the truth and one who rejects it (AF), or between one who can see the truth and one who cannot (Ṭū). Thus, *one who knows that what has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord is the truth* accepts it, whereas *one who is blind,* which is to say, blind in the heart so that one cannot "see," does not do so (Aj, Bḍ); cf. 11:24; 13:16; 35:19–20; 40:58.

20–22 These verses describe *those who possess intellect* mentioned in the previous verse. Many commentators note that *pact* and *covenant* refer to the same reality, the primordial covenant mentioned in 7:172: *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yea we bear witness."* The word *pact* is thus a specific reference to the pretemporal pledge that human beings made with God before the creation of the world, guaranteeing that they would acknowledge His Lordship. *Covenant,* on the other hand, refers to the *pact* in general, encompassing such matters as the servants' belief in God and their relationship with each other (Z); see 7:172c; 33:7c. Alternately, some have said that *pact* is a reference to the moral and legal responsibility (*taklīf*) with which God has charged human beings, whereas *covenant* refers to the specific details related to that charge in accordance with their free will, such as the promise to obey God and act righteously (R).

*Who join what God has commanded be joined* refers, among other things, to human beings keeping their family ties, acting in the best possible manner toward their blood relatives, and being kind to the poor and the needy (IK). To *join what God has commanded* can also refer to the fulfillment of all acts of obedience (Q). *Fear their Lord* refers to the fear of breaking blood ties or to the fear of all acts of disobedience toward God (Q). For the combination of patience and prayer, see 2:45, 153: *Seek help in patience and prayer.*

*Seeking the Face of their Lord* (see also 2:272; 30:38) means that they accomplish all of the things just mentioned for no selfish reason whatsoever and not out of pride or religious ostentation, but only because they seek God's Contentment or the beatific vision of His Face (Aj). Al-Ṭabarī explains that *repel evil with good* means "repel evil by doing good"; cf. 23:96; 28:54; 41:34–36. *For them there shall be the reward of the Abode*—that is, the most praiseworthy end in the Hereafter (JJ)—namely, Paradise (IJ).

23–24 *Gardens of Eden* are understood to refer to *the reward of the Abode* mentioned in vv. 22, 24 (Ṭ). The reference to *those who were*

because you were patient." How excellent is the Ultimate Abode! (25) As for those who break God's pact after accepting His covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, it is they who shall have the curse, and theirs shall be the evil abode. (26) God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will. They rejoice in the life of this world; yet compared to the Hereafter, the life of this world is but [fleeting] enjoyment. (27) Those who disbelieve say, "Why has some sign not been sent down upon him from his Lord?" Say, "Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides to Himself whosoever turns in repentance— (28) those

*righteous from among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny* is to those who believed in God during life in this world (Ṭ). The *angels shall enter upon them from every gate* with presents and gifts from God in order to honor them (Q); see also 39:75c. For the greeting of peace in Paradise, see 10:10c; 14:23; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73.

25 The first part of this verse is repeated verbatim in 2:27; both verses link corruption to breaking the covenant with God. Elsewhere, working corruption is implicitly or explicitly connected to physical violence (see 2:205; 5:33, 64; 28:4); often it implies a combination of moral or worldly corruption (see 7:103; 11:85). For the overall implications of working *corruption upon the earth,* see 2:11–12c; 30:41c.

*It is they who shall have the curse* is interpreted to mean, as the idea of "curse" often is in the Quran, that they will be distant from God's Mercy (Ṭs); and *theirs shall be the evil abode* can refer to an evil outcome in this world or to punishment in Hell in the Hereafter (Z). According to another interpretation, *it is they who shall have the curse* means that they will be distant from God's Presence (Aj), while *theirs shall be the evil abode* refers to the sorrow that they will experience on account of being veiled from God and remaining behind the door to His Presence (Aj).

26 *God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* appears a number of times throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39); see also 5:64c. The second part of this verse is related to the phrase *the enjoyment of the life of this world* (for which, see 3:14; 9:38; 28:60; 42:36; 43:35). This life, *compared to the Hereafter,* is merely *[fleeting] enjoyment* because, as 29:64 says, *The life of this world is naught but diversion and play; and surely the Abode of the Hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew* (cf. 3:185; 6:32; 47:36). As the Companion Abu'l-Dardāʾ (d. 31/652) is reported to have said, "When you detest this world, you will come to love the next world; and you will abstain from this world according to the measure of your love for the next world" (al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ* [Beirut, 1997], 4:161).

27 For the request for a *sign* to be *sent down upon* the Prophet *from his Lord,* see 10:20c. For God's leading astray, see 4:88–90c; 4:143c (see also, e.g., 17:97; 18:17; 74:31c). *Whosoever turns in repentance* refers to any who believe, repent to God for their sins, and return to Him with their heart (My), namely, *those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God* mentioned in the following verse (AF, Bḍ; Kl). On the concept of repentance, see 4:17–18c; 51:18c; 66:8c; 92:10c; 110:3c.

28 This verse is one of the main scriptural foundations for the Sufi practice of *dhikr Allāh,* or the invocation and remembrance of God. It also refers to the spiritual state of the heart *at peace,* which the Quran presents as the state of the perfected soul. The soul is first a soul that *commands to evil* (12:53), then becomes the *blaming soul* (75:2), and finally is transformed into the *soul at peace* (89:27); see also the commentaries on these verses. *Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?* is therefore understood to refer to the repose (Bḍ) and spiritual intimacy (Aj) that hearts find in remembering and invoking God, which are central to Sufi spiritual practice.

who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God? (29) Those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs is blessedness and a beautiful return.

There are many Prophetic sayings about *the remembrance of God,* such as, "The world and all that is in it is accursed, except for the remembrance of God." Thus it is in the remembrance of God that one may find safety from the din, clamor, and dispersive power of the world. On one occasion, one of the Prophet's Companions said, "O Messenger of God, the laws and conditions of Islam are much for me. Tell me something that I can always keep." The Prophet replied, "Let thy tongue be always moist with the remembrance of God." Also, the Prophet once asked his Companions, "Shall I tell you about the best of all deeds, the best act of piety in the eyes of your Lord, which will elevate your status in the Hereafter, and which carries more virtue than the spending of gold and silver in the service of God or taking part in *jihād* and slaying or being slain in the way of God? The remembrance of God."

Hearts not in the remembrance of God are described in the Quran as "diseased" (see, in particular, 47:20–21c) and "blind" (see 22:46). Regarding the heart, 83:14 states, *Nay! But that which they used to earn has covered their hearts with rust.* The Prophet is reported to have said, "For everything there is a polish, and the polish of the heart is the remembrance of God." One of the most common analogies for the heart therefore is a mirror. When a mirror has stains on it, it does not reflect accurately the object that stands before it. Some aspects of the object standing before a grimy mirror may come through, but not the object in its actual pristine form. The heart, likewise, is capable of becoming sullied by evil actions and thoughts in general and by the forgetfulness of God in particular, so that it cannot reflect the truth in its purity and totality. Sufis thus say that whenever human beings are in a state of forgetfulness of God, the mirror of the heart becomes rusty and is therefore in need of polishing. Constant remembrance and invocation of God thus burnishes the mirror of the heart so that it is no longer covered by the rust of forgetfulness of Him. When a heart becomes totally polished, the Reality that stands before it, namely, God, is reflected in it without the barrier of the human ego. It is this kind of purified heart to whom allusion is made in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī,* "The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant can contain Me." A polished heart, also known in Islamic mysticism as the "eye of the heart" (*ʿayn al-qalb*) when it has opened, thus reflects God as He is to Himself, since He looks at Himself through the polished mirror and only sees Himself. Such a heart is *at peace,* because it is in a state of perpetually witnessing God (Aj, Rb), thereby coming to a deeper understanding of such verses as 2:115: *Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God.*

In the language of spiritual alchemy, the remembrance of God is described as an elixir that eventually turns the lead or base metal of the soul into pure gold (R). This is similar to when God's Majesty descends upon the heart through the act of remembrance: it acts as an elixir for the heart, gradually transforming it from a dark, murky substance into one that is pure, luminous, unchangeable (R), and able to "see." The heart is thus changed from its fallen state, symbolized by lead, to its state of perfection, symbolized by gold.

This verse can also refer to the peace that comes about by virtue of God's remembrance of human beings. One Sufi gloss on this verse states, "There are a people whose hearts are at peace because of their remembrance of God. And there are a people whose hearts are at peace because of God's Remembrance of them—*the Remembrance of God is surely greater*" (29:45; My). Each of these two perspectives, in a sense, emphasizes different aspects of 2:152, *So remember Me, and I shall remember you* (My); see also 2:152c; 29:45c; cf. 7:51; 9:67.

29 *Those who believe and perform righteous deeds* is seen as a reference to those who turn *in repentance,* mentioned in v. 27 (Kl). *Blessedness* translates *ṭūbā,* which can refer to a good life in this world (Āl, Ṭū), Paradise (Ṭū), or a tree in Paradise (R, Ṭū). More generally, it is understood to describe the joyous state of people in Paradise (My). *Beautiful return* (see also 38:25, 40, 49, 55)

(30) Thus have We sent thee unto a community before whom other communities have passed away, that thou mayest recite unto them that which We have revealed unto thee; yet they disbelieve in the Compassionate. Say, "He is my Lord; there is no god but He. In Him do I trust and unto Him do I turn." (31) Were there a Quran whereby the mountains were set in motion, or the earth was cleft, or the dead were made to speak! Nay! Unto God belongs the affair altogether. Do not those who believe understand that if God had willed, He would have guided mankind all together? And those who disbelieve, calamity will never cease to befall them because of that which they have wrought, or to alight close

means that when they die and return to God (Q), they will have a beautiful outcome in the Hereafter (JJ, Ṭ).

30 *Thus have We sent thee unto a community,* namely, the last of communities to receive revelation (N, R), *before whom other communities have passed away,* that is, the previous nations to whom God's messengers have been sent (Aj). *That thou mayest recite unto them that which We have revealed unto thee,* meaning the revelation that God has bestowed upon the Prophet (Ṭ). *They disbelieve in the Compassionate;* that is, they are opposed to and reject God's Oneness (Ṭ) because *most of mankind believe not* (see 13:1c). It is also said that the words *yet they disbelieve in the Compassionate* refer to the incident when the Makkans were told to prostrate to *the Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān,* a Divine Name to which they were not accustomed), and they derisively said, "And who is the Compassionate?" (JJ, Q); see also 25:60c. According to another report, it refers to an incident that took place during the signing of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah in 6/628. When the words "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" were written on the treaty, one of the Makkans said, "We do not recognize the Compassionate!" (Th). For more on the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah and this controversy, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48; 2:114c; 2:190–94c.

*He is my Lord;* that is, "I believe in and affirm the Lordship and Divinity of the One in Whom you disbelieve" (IK). *In Him do I trust* "in all of my affairs" (IK). *Unto Him do I turn;* that is, "In a state of penitence I turn toward Him, for this is His right to which no one else can lay claim" (IK; cf. 11:88; 42:10).

31 Cf. 6:111: *Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and the dead were to speak to them, and We were to gather all things in front of them, they would still not believe, unless God wills.* Similarly, in the present verse the words *Were there a Quran whereby the mountains were set in motion, or the earth was cleft, or the dead were made to speak* were revealed in response to the mocking by the disbelievers of Makkah, who told the Prophet to pray to God, asking Him to move the mountains, cause rivers to gush forth from the ground, and to bring their ancestors back to life so that they could speak with them (W).

*Unto God belongs the affair altogether* refers particularly to the Makkans' guidance, which is to say that their guidance is in His Hands although it has a universal import. If He wills that they believe, then they will believe. But if He does not will it, then the signs that they demand be shown to them will not benefit them (IJ). According to Ibn al-Jawzī, this part of the verse goes on to confirm what follows it, namely, *Do not those who believe understand that if God had willed, He would have guided mankind all together?* For the relationship between God's Will and human guidance, see commentary on 10:99–100; 54:49. *Calamity,* such as afflictions to themselves, their children, and property (Kl), *will never cease to befall them*—that is, the Makkans (JJ)—*because of that which they have wrought,* that is, because of their disbelief

to their abode until God's Promise comes. Truly God will not fail the tryst. (32) Certainly messengers were mocked before thee. But I granted respite to those who disbelieved; then I seized them. How, then, was My Retribution! (33) What of He Who attends to every soul in accordance with what it has earned? Yet they ascribe partners unto God. Say, "Name them! Or will you inform Him of something He does not know upon the earth, or are these vain words?" Nay! But their plotting has been made to seem fair unto those who disbelieve, and they have been turned from the way. And whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. (34) Theirs shall be punishment in the life of this world, and surely the punishment of the Hereafter will be more wretched; they shall have none to shield them from God. (35) The parable of the Garden that has been promised to the reverent: with rivers running below, its food everlasting, as is its shade. That is the ultimate end of those who were reverent, while

(JJ) and the conduct caused by it. *Until God's Promise comes* is understood by many to refer to the conquest of Makkah by the Prophet (JJ, Kl). For the meaning of *Truly God will not fail the tryst* (cf. 3:9, 195; 39:20), see 3:9c.

32 For the manner in which those who mock God's messengers are punished for their mockery, see 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26. *But I granted respite to those who disbelieved; then I seized them. How, then, was My Retribution!* echoes 22:44: *But I granted the disbelievers a respite, then I seized them in punishment. And how, then, was the change I wrought!* The meaning of *How, then, was My Retribution!* is, "What do you think of what I have done with them? The same shall I do to the idolaters among your people!" (Q).

33 In the first sentence the comparison is implied rather than explicit (JJ): Is *He Who attends to,* or watches over, *every soul in accordance with what it has earned,* whether good or evil, like those idols that some worship? *Or will you inform Him of something,* namely, the partners they would ascribe to God (Kl). *Vain words* are words with no inward meaning (JJ), because they are based on a false opinion. For the wider Quranic theme of people's actions being *made to seem fair* to them, which in this verse includes *their plotting,* see 3:14c; 6:42–44c; and also 13:42: *unto God belongs plotting altogether.* For the hopelessness in guiding those whom *God leads astray,* see 4:88, 143: *Whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him;* and 18:17: *Whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protector to lead him aright* (cf. 7:186; 17:97; 39:23, 36; 40:33; 42:44, 46).

34 *Punishment in the life of this world* refers to a variety of trials (N), such as death and slavery (Bḍ, Bg, Q), as well as various forms of illness and affliction (Q). Punishment in the next life is here described as *more wretched* than punishment in the present life (JJ); elsewhere the punishment in the next life is described as *more severe and more lasting* (20:127), *greater* (39:26; 68:33), and *more disgraceful* (41:16). *They,* the disbelievers, *shall have none to shield them from God,* meaning they shall have no one to prevent God's Punishment from afflicting them (JJ); cf. v. 37; 40:21.

35 For Paradise with *rivers running below,* see 2:25c. Al-Zamakhsharī observes that *its food everlasting* is similar to *neither out of reach, nor forbidden* (56:33), which describes the fruits of Paradise. *Its shade,* which is likewise *everlasting,* is to be contrasted with the shade in this life, which withdraws in accord with the sun's positions (see also 56:30c); see also 47:15 and commentary.

the ultimate end of the disbelievers is the Fire! (36) And those to whom We have given the Book rejoice in that which has been sent down unto thee. And among the parties are those who reject some of it. Say, "I have only been commanded to worship God, and to not ascribe partners unto Him. Unto Him do I call and unto Him is my return." (37) Thus have We sent it down as a Judgment in Arabic. Yet if thou followest their caprices after the knowledge that has come to thee, thou shalt have no protector against God, and no defender. (38) Indeed We sent messengers before thee and appointed for them wives and progeny, and it is not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave; and for every term there is a Book. (39) God effaces what He will and establishes, and

36 *The Book* here is the Quran (Ni), and those who *rejoice* (cf. 3:173; 5:83; 8:2; 9:124; 17:109; 39:23; 47:17) are the Prophet's Companions and those who believe in him (Ṭs). *That which has been sent down unto thee* refers to the Divine injunctions and the different forms of knowledge that have been given to the Prophet (Ni). Such people contrast starkly with those who *rejoice in the life of the world* (v. 26). *Those who reject some of it* is in reference to the Jews and the Christians (IK), who accepted those aspects of the Prophet's teachings that conformed to their laws and beliefs, such as their sacred history and some legal injunctions, but rejected what was specific to Islam, such as the prophethood of Muḥammad (Ni).

37 *A Judgment in Arabic* is said to refer to the entire Quran; that is, it judges between truth and falsehood in the language of the Arabs (Q). Alternately, it can refer to the rulings found in the Quran (Q). This does not, however, mean that the Prophet was only sent to Arabs and those who have learned the Arabic language, to which allusion is made in 34:28: *And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner to mankind entire. But most of mankind know not;* see also commentary on this verse as well as 4:79; 7:158; 21:107. According to Islamic belief, the Quran was revealed in Arabic, because God chose an Arab as the Messenger through whom to reveal the Quran. That is why 14:4 states, *We have sent no messenger, save in the language of his people, that he might make clear unto them.* Other verses speak of the Quran as *an Arabic Quran* (12:2; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3) and *[in a] clear, Arabic tongue* (16:103; cf. 26:195; 46:12).

*Yet if thou followest their caprices after the knowledge that has come to thee*—that is, "If you accept the Makkan idolaters' caprices in worshipping other than God and turning to a direction other than the Kaʿbah" (Q)—*thou shalt have no protector against God, and no defender.* Al-Qurṭubī notes that although this verse is directly addressed to the Prophet, it is intended for his whole community. For similar verses condemning the following of caprices after the gaining of knowledge, see 2:120, 145; see also 5:48; 42:15; 45:18. Regarding the nature of caprice, see 45:23c.

38 *Indeed We sent messengers before thee and appointed for them wives and progeny* is meant to be a rebuke of those who objected that the Prophet was a mortal, with human needs (Kl), as in 25:7: *And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?"* In 40:78 the phrase *And it is not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave* is repeated verbatim. *For every term there is a Book* can refer to the fact that God has a fixed term that He has established for every matter that He has determined (M), or to the Quranic theme of the universality of revelation (Bg, Z), for which, see 3:3; 3:19c; 3:85c; 5:48c; 10:47c; 16:36; 22:67; 35:31; 65:12c. See also the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

39 Al-Rāzī explains that *God effaces what He will and establishes* means that, in accordance with

with Him is the Mother of the Book. (40) Whether We show thee a part of that which We promise them, or We take thee [unto Us], thine is only to proclaim, and Ours is the Reckoning. (41) Have they not considered how We come upon the land, reducing it of its outlying regions? And God judges; none repeals His Judgment, and He is swift in reckoning. (42) Indeed those who were before them plotted, but unto God belongs plotting altogether. He knows what every soul earns, and the disbelievers will know whose is the Ultimate Abode. (43) And those who disbelieve say, "You have not been sent." Say, "God and whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book suffice as a witness between you and me."

what the Divine Will has decreed, "He brings things into existence at one moment and makes them nonexistent at another; gives life at one moment and causes death at another; bestows riches at one moment and causes poverty at another." The *Mother of the Book* (*Umm al-kitāb;* cf. 3:7; 43:4) refers, according to some, to the fundamental source of Divine Revelation from which the Quran and other Divinely revealed books are transcribed (Ṭ); others identify it with the *Preserved Tablet* mentioned in 85:22 (see 85:22c; Bġ, Kl, R, Z), and still others say it refers to God's Knowledge (R).

40 *Whether We show thee a part of that which We promise them, or We take thee [unto Us]* is echoed in 10:46 and 40:77 (see also 10:46c). In the Quran the main duty of the prophets is to convey the message they have been given, as in 5:67: *O Messenger! Convey that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord, and if thou dost not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message* (see also 2:272; 3:20; 29:18; 88:21–22). *Ours is the Reckoning* means, "When they come to Us, We shall recompense them" (JJ); cf. 88:26: *Then truly with Us lies their reckoning.*

41 *They* are the people of Makkah (AF, JJ), and *how We come upon the land, reducing it of its outlying regions* (cf. 21:44) refers to God's giving Muhammad victory over the Makkans (JJ; see *Sūrah* 48) and its environs (AF). From a spiritual perspective, one can say that when God comes upon the land of the heart of the sincere believer, He reduces it *of its outlying regions,* that is, the believer's concerns for things other than God. For God as *swift in reckoning,* see also 2:202; 3:19, 199; 5:4; 14:51; 24:39; 40:17.

42 Here *unto God belongs plotting altogether,* but elsewhere He is referred to as *the best of plotters* (3:54; 8:30), which conveys the notion that the outcome of all things is under God's control, since His "plot" will always overcome any plots by human beings; cf. see also 7:99; 10:21c; 14:46c; 27:50; 86:15–16. This notion is connected to the broad Quranic theme that all wrongdoings rebound upon those who commit them, as in 35:43: *Yet evil plotting besets none but its authors.*

*The disbelievers will know whose is the Ultimate Abode* functions as an elucidation of God's *plotting* mentioned earlier in the verse (Bḍ). It is also a way of putting fear in the hearts of the disbelievers, since it implies that, although they are ignorant right now of the end of affairs, in the Hereafter they will come to know who will receive the praiseworthy end (R), namely, Paradise, which is *the reward of the Abode* (see 13:20–22c). In other words, *whose is the Ultimate Abode* will be made clear to the disbelievers when they meet God on the Day of Judgment and they are cast in Hell, and the believers enter Heaven (Ṭ).

43 *Whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book* (cf. 27:40) refers either to those who know the Quran and its inimitable nature (Aj, Bḍ), or to the Madinan Jewish convert to Islam ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and other Jewish and Christian converts who are said to have known about the Prophet Muhammad based on references in the Torah and the Gospel (see 46:10c; Aj). According to Shiite scholars, *whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book* refers to the Shiite Imams (*aʾimmat āl Muḥammad;* Ṭū) generally and/or to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib specifically (Qm).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 14

# Abraham

## *Ibrāhīm*

*Ibrāhīm* is the fifth in a series of six *sūrah*s whose opening verses include the letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'*, and which speak of *the Book*. It is said to have been revealed in Makkah, with the exception of vv. 28–29, which belong to the Madinan period, as these two verses are usually considered to refer to the Battle of Badr (My). This *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of an episode in the life of Abraham (vv. 35–41) in which he prays for the security of Makkah, protection from idolatry for himself and his children, prosperity for his progeny, and forgiveness for his parents and all believers on the Last Day.

Among the key themes of this *sūrah* is the stark difference between gratitude and ingratitude for God's Blessings (see vv. 5, 7–8, 28, 32–34, 37), the importance of patience (vv. 5, 12) and trust in God (vv. 11–12), and the terrible nature of God's Chastisement, whether in this world or in the next (vv. 16–17, 29–31, 42–44, 48–50). Another important teaching to be found throughout this *sūrah* is that those who prefer the life of this world over the Hereafter will end up as losers in the next life. Such people are typified by those who reject God's messengers (vv. 3, 9–10, 28–30), are ungrateful to God for the many blessings that He has given to them (vv. 17–18), take partners alongside God (v. 30), and succumb to Satan's false promises (v. 22). The *sūrah* also emphasizes the importance of prophecy as a means of guiding people *out of darkness into light* (vv. 1, 5), but notes that whether they are guided or not is ultimately in God's Hands (vv. 4, 21, 27, 37).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Rā.* [This is] a Book that We have sent down unto thee, that thou mightest bring forth mankind out of darkness into light, by the leave of their Lord, unto the path of the Mighty, the Praised— (2) God, unto Whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Woe unto the disbelievers for a severe punishment. (3) Those who prefer the life of this world over the Hereafter, and who turn from the way of God and seek to make it crooked; it is they who are far astray. (4) And We have sent no messenger, save in the language of his people, that he might make clear unto them. Then God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will. And He is

1 For the separated letters, see 2:1c. *A Book* refers to the Quran (Bg, My, Ṭ; cf. 13:1). By means of calling people to the Quran (Q), the Prophet brings human beings *out of darkness into light,* that is, from the darkness of disbelief, ignorance, and doubt to the light of guidance, knowledge, and certainty (My); see also v. 5; 65:11. Elsewhere in the Quran God is the subject of similar phrases in which He is said to *bring forth mankind out of darkness into light;* see 2:257; 5:16; 33:43; 57:9. *By the leave of their Lord* refers to God's Kindness in bestowing grace upon people and granting them success in being guided *out of darkness into light* (Ṭ). *The path* can refer to being led to the *light* mentioned in this verse (Aj), or to Islam itself (AF). According to the Shiite commentator al-Qummī, *the path* refers to the leadership of the Twelve Imams. The name *Mighty* refers to the perfection of God's Power, whereas the name *Praised* means that God is deserving of praise in all that He does (R); see also 34:6.

2 For *unto Whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth,* see also 34:1. For a similar verse, namely, *Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth,* see 2:255; 10:68; 20:6; 22:64. *Woe unto the disbelievers for a severe punishment* is seen as a threat against those who do not believe in the *Book* and who are thus not guided by it *out of darkness into light* (Bḍ).

3 *Those who prefer the life of this world over the Hereafter* are those who choose to remain in this life rather than to be in the next life (Ṭs), although *this world* is the abode of impermanence and *the Hereafter* is the abode of permanence (Ṭs). Commenting on this verse, Ibn ʿAjībah says, "Whoever loves something prefers it and pursues it." From a spiritual point of view, it can be said that the more a person's heart is attached to this world, the more the spirit is imprisoned by the body and thus is unable to aspire for what lies beyond the realm of physical existence, namely, the Hereafter. In this vein, the Sufi poet Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 688/1289) said, "Every heart that prefers the caprice of this world, / Increases in body, but diminishes in spirit" (*Dīwān-i ʿIrāqī* [Tehran, 1997], 342).

*Turn from the way of God* (cf. 4:167; 7:45; 9:34; 11:19; 22:25; 47:1, 32, 34) refers to preventing people from having faith (Aj) or turning to the religion of Islam (IḤ, JJ), and can also mean to turn away oneself; see 47:1c. *Seek to make it crooked* means seeking to change *the way of God* through lies, deviation, and falsehood (Ṭ).

4 Messengers speak the language of the people to whom they are sent and know their idiom (Kl) so that they will be understood (Bg). The Prophet spoke to his people, who were Arabs, *in a clear, Arabic tongue* (26:195). According to Islamic belief, this does not mean that the Prophet

the Mighty, the Wise. (5) We indeed sent Moses with Our signs, "Bring thy people out of darkness into light, and remind them of the Days of God. Truly in that are signs for all who are patient, thankful." (6) And [remember] when Moses said unto his people, "Remember God's Blessing upon you, when He saved you from the House of Pharaoh, who inflicted terrible punishment upon you, slaying your sons and sparing your women—and in that was a great trial from your Lord—(7) and when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you give thanks, I shall surely grant you increase, but if you are ungrateful, truly My Punishment is severe!'" (8) And Moses said, "If you are ungrateful—you and whosoever is on the earth all together—[know that] verily God is Self-Sufficient, Praised." (9) Has not the account come to you of those who came before you—the people of Noah, and ᶜĀd, and Thamūd, and those who came after them? None knows them but God. Their messengers brought them clear proofs, but they thrust

was only sent to Arabs; see 13:37c. For the often repeated assertion that God *leads astray whomsoever He will,* see 4:88–90c; 4:143c (see also, e.g., 17:97; 18:17; 74:31c). For God's guiding *whomsoever He will,* see 10:25c (see also 35:8; 74:31).

5–6 For the Quranic account of the story of Moses, see, for example, 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 28:3–46; 79:15–25. In Arabic, "days" has different symbolic meanings, one of which is cosmic periods (22:47; see also 7:54c). It can also be used idiomatically to mean blessings (Q), in which case *the Days of God* can refer to the many blessings that God bestowed upon the Children of Israel, such as His delivering them from bondage in Egypt and saving them from the wrath of Pharaoh and his people (IK, Ṭ). It can also refer to the punishments that God visited upon the disbelievers of previous communities (AF). *In that* refers to *the Days of God* (Q), which contain *signs for all who are patient, thankful,* that is, those who are *patient* in their obedience to God and *thankful* for His Blessings (Q). The Prophet is reported to have said, "Faith consists of two halves: one half is patience, and one half is gratitude" (My); he then recited the last part of v. 5: *In that are signs for all who are patient, thankful* (Q). The words *when He saved you from the House of Pharaoh, who inflicted terrible punishment upon you, slaying your sons and sparing your women—and in that was a great trial from your Lord* are repeated, almost verbatim, in 2:49. The *great trial* might be an allusion to the deliverance of Moses and his people from Egypt, since *trial* can, depending on context, also refer to a blessing (Bḍ); see 2:49c.

7–8 *If you give thanks,* which is to say, if one is grateful for God's Blessings and acknowledges them (Ṭū), *I shall surely grant you increase;* in other words, God will increase one in good in this world, in blessings in the next world, or both (Kl). Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, "Whenever God bestows a blessing upon a servant and he acknowledges it with his heart and praises God for it with his tongue, the blessing does not finish except that God commands that the servant receive an increase" (Qm). *But if* one is *ungrateful* for what God has bestowed, covers it up, or strives against it (IK), then *truly* God's *Punishment is severe;* that is, the recompense for ingratitude will be God's Punishment (JJ). For God as *Self-Sufficient, Praised,* see 2:267; 31:12; 64:6c.

9 The tribes of ᶜĀd and Thamūd are the communities to whom the prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ were sent, respectively. For Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31; for ᶜĀd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16. For the story of Noah, see

their hands into their mouths and said, "Verily we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent, and we are in grave doubt about that to which you call us." (10) Their messengers said, "Is there any doubt concerning God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth? He calls you that He might forgive some of your sins and grant you reprieve till a term appointed." They said, "You are but human beings like us. You desire to turn us away from that which our fathers used to worship. So bring us a manifest authority!" (11) Their messengers said unto them, "We are but human beings like yourselves, but God is gracious unto whomsoever He will among His servants. And it is not for us to bring you an authority, save by God's Leave; so in God let the believers trust. (12) And why should we not trust in God, when He has guided us in our ways? And we shall surely endure patiently, however you may torment us. And let those who trust,

7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; *Sūrah* 71. *None knows them but God* means that no one knows the exact number of communities that came after the people of Noah, the ʿĀd, and the Thamūd except God (R, Ṭ). It can also be an expression used to indicate their vast numbers (Kl), as in 25:38; see also 40:78. *Clear proofs* here refers to the miracles that the prophets brought (*muʿjizāt;* N) that affirmed their prophethood (My). *They thrust their hands into their mouths* means that they bit their fingers either out of anger on account of their intense enmity, or because they were mocking and needed to withhold their laughter (R). Alternately, *their hands* can be a reference to the *hands* of the disbelievers and *their mouths* can mean the *mouths* of the messengers (R), in which case it would be read as a metaphor indicating that the disbelievers rejected the teachings of the messengers and attempted to silence them (R).

10 In response to the disbelievers' doubt mentioned at the end of v. 9, the messengers ask whether there is *any doubt concerning God,* which is to ask if there is any doubt about God's Being or His Divinity (Kl). What the messengers mention next, namely, *the Originator of the heavens and the earth,* serves as a reminder of what should dispel this doubt (Kl), alerting the disbelievers to the Origin of all things that exist. *He calls you;* that is, "He calls you to faith" (Ṭs). Some commentators observe that God will forgive *some . . . sins,* not all of them, because there are some He will not forgive, such as the sin of ascribing partners unto Him (*shirk;* Ṭs) and violating the rights of God's servants (Āl), forgiveness for which is entirely up to the one who has been wronged; on the question of the forgiveness of some or all sins, see 4:48c. Others, however, propose that *some,* used in this instance as a stylistic feature of classical Arabic rhetoric, actually means "all" (Ṭb). *A term appointed* refers to death (Q). For other places in which the disbelievers express their astonishment that a human being has come to them with guidance from God, see 6:91; 11:27; 17:94; 21:3; 23:24, 33; 64:6.

11–12 For the prophets' confirming that they themselves are *but human beings like yourselves,* see 18:110; 41:6. In the context of v. 11, *God is gracious unto whomsoever He wills among His servants* refers to God's bestowal of prophethood (Ṭs, Z) and granting prophets the ability to perform miracles (Ṭs). *Why should we not trust in God?* is understood to mean, "What is it that we have, if we do not trust in God and entrust our affairs to Him?" or "We have no excuse if we do not . . ." (Ṭs). *In God let the believers trust* in v. 11 (see also 3:122, 160; 5:11; 9:51; 12:67; 39:38; 58:10; 64:13) introduces the virtue of trust in God (*tawakkul*), whereas *And let those who trust, trust in God* (see also 12:67) in v. 12 refers to the need to strive in order to maintain this virtue (R, Z).

trust in God." (13) But those who disbelieved said to their messengers, "We shall surely expel you from our land, or you shall revert to our creed." So their Lord revealed unto them, "We shall surely destroy the wrongdoers. (14) And We shall surely make you to dwell in the land after them. This is for those who fear My Station and fear My Threat." (15) And they sought victory, and every stubborn tyrant fails. (16) Beyond him lies Hell; and he shall be given to drink of oozing pus, (17) which he will gulp down, but can scarcely swallow. Death shall come upon him from every side; yet he will not die, and before him lies a grave punishment. (18) The parable of those who disbelieve in their Lord: their deeds are as ashes that the wind blows hard on a stormy day. They have no power over

13–14 For a similar threat issued to the prophet Shuᶜayb by his people, see 7:88; see also 27:56. Although it is the *messengers* who are mentioned explicitly in this verse, it is possible that both the messengers and their followers are intended here (Bḍ). The second option introduced by the disbelievers, namely, that the messengers *revert* to their creed, does not imply that the messengers had previously followed their false creed and are now being given the option to return to it. Rather, *revert* here, in keeping with common Arabic usage, means that the messengers would start to follow that creed (Bḍ, Kl, Z); see also 7:89.

*We shall surely destroy the wrongdoers* is understood to be a promise from God to the messengers that He will assist them against their enemies (Qu). Regarding God's promise to help the prophets, see, for example, 37:171–73; 58:21. *And We shall surely make you to dwell in the land after them;* that is, after God has destroyed the wrongdoers and they have perished (Bg), He will cause the messengers and their followers to inherit their land and homes (N, Qu); see also 7:137. *My Station* refers to human beings' standing before God on the Day of Judgment (Aj, R; see also 55:46; 79:40) or to God's Awareness of all that human beings do, whether in secret or openly (Aj). The expression can also be a reference to the greatness of God's Majesty and Essence (Aj). *My Threat* means God's Punishment in the Hereafter (Bg).

15 *They sought victory;* that is, the messengers sought God's Assistance against their enemies (Bḍ, Kl, Q, Ṭ), as in 7:89, where Shuᶜayb says, *Our Lord! Decide between us and our people in truth, and Thou art the best of deciders.* The phrase *every stubborn tyrant fails* signifies that God aided and granted success to the messengers, whereas their people who acted haughtily before God and stubbornly rejected the truth were not granted success (Bḍ), as the messengers' request for Divine Help was answered and their people were destroyed (Qu).

16–17 The subject of these verses is *every stubborn tyrant* mentioned in v. 15 (Ṭ). *Beyond him lies Hell* is understood to mean that after his death he will go to Hell (Q); it can also be read "before him lies Hell," referring to his state in this world, meaning it is as if Hell is right in front of him and he is on its edge, about to fall into it (Q, Z). The *oozing pus* that he will be given to drink is a mixture of blood and pus (Bg, Ṭ), which oozes from the bodies of the people in Hell (Bg, Z). He will *gulp* it *down* because of the liquid's bitterness and heat (Q). He will *scarcely swallow* the liquid, since he will choke on it. (Bḍ). *Death shall come upon him from every side; yet he will not die* refers to a state of torment in which each part of his body will be affected by the pains and afflictions that bring about death, but they will not lead to death (R), which would be a state of rest from the torment (Bḍ).

18 Like ashes blown about by a stormy wind until no trace of them remains, so too are the disbelievers' deeds—because of their disbelief in God, their deeds become nullified and no trace of them

aught they have earned. That is extreme error. (19) Hast thou not considered that God created the heavens and the earth in truth? If He wills, He can remove you and bring a new creation, (20) and that is no great matter for God. (21) They will appear before God all together, and the weak will say to those who waxed arrogant, "Truly we were your followers; so can you avail us in any way against the Punishment of God?" They will say, "Had God guided us, we would have guided you. It is the same for us whether we are anxious or patient; for us there is no refuge." (22) And Satan will say, when the matter has been decreed, "Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to

remains (R). Yet, there are several ways in which the *deeds* of *those who disbelieve in their Lord* can be understood here. *Deeds* can refer to their good actions, such as giving charity and feeding the hungry; to their evil actions, such as worshipping idols; or to a combination of both good and bad deeds (R). *They have no power over aught they have earned* means that on the Day of Judgment, the disbelievers will not receive even a trace of heavenly reward for their actions (Bḍ). This is another way of saying that the disbelievers will not benefit even from their good actions (Ṭs). *Extreme error* refers to the farthest distance from the path of Truth (Bḍ). It also refers to the extreme grief and regret that the disbelievers will experience upon realizing that their deeds have gone to waste (R). For the deeds of the disbelievers being brought to naught, see also, for example, 2:217; 7:147; 18:105.

19–20 God's creating the heavens and the earth *in truth* means that He did not create them falsely or in vain; rather, He created them for an exalted purpose (My); see also 6:73c.; 64:3c. This part of the verse complements 23:115: *Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously, and that you would not be returned unto Us?* The words *He can remove you and bring a new creation* mean that God can make the present creation nonexistent and bring about another creation in its place if He so wills, because He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Bḍ); see also 4:133; 6:133; 35:16; 47:38; 5:54c. *And that is no great matter for God* means that it is not difficult or impossible for God to bring about *a new creation* (Bḍ). Rather, it is easy for Him, since He is All-Powerful by nature (Bḍ, My).

21 People will *appear before God all together* on the Day of Judgment, when they come forth from their graves (Q, Ṭū). *The weak* represent those who were the followers of *those who waxed arrogant,* that is, their leaders (Q). The latter inform the former, in response to their request for help in averting God's Punishment, *Had God guided us, we would have guided you,* which is to say that had *those who waxed arrogant* been guided to faith in God, they would have guided their followers (Q). But since they had not been guided, they tell their followers that for them too *there is no refuge,* meaning that they have no way to distance themselves from the Fire (Q). In other words, just as they were unable to guide their followers without themselves being guided, so too are they now unable to save them from the Fire if they themselves are not saved from it. This verse seems to provide a wider context for 40:47–48: *And when they are arguing with one another in the Fire, the weak will say to those who waxed arrogant, "Truly we were your followers; so can you avail us against any portion of the Fire?" Those who waxed arrogant will say, "Truly we are all in it. God has indeed judged between His servants."*

22 *When the matter has been decreed* refers to the Hereafter, after people have taken their places of residency in Heaven or Hell, respectively (Bg, Kl). The *Promise* that God made here refers to

me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help. Truly I disbelieved in your ascribing me as partner aforetime. As for the wrongdoers, surely theirs shall be a painful punishment." (23) Those who believe and perform righteous deeds shall be made to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein by the leave of their Lord. Their greeting therein shall be, "Peace!" (24) Hast thou not considered how God sets forth a parable? A good word is as a good tree: its roots firm and its branches in the sky. (25) It brings forth fruit in every season, by the Leave

the Resurrection and the meting out of rewards on the Last Day, whereas Satan's *promise,* which *failed*—taken to mean that he lied (Ṭs)—refers to his promise to God's servants that the Resurrection and accounting on the Last Day are untrue, and that if these are realities, then the idols shall act as their intercessors (Bḍ). But Satan's promises are false, as attested by 4:120: *He makes them promises and stirs in them desires, but Satan promises naught but delusion.* In the Islamic tradition, although there are demonic forces within and external to the self that can prompt one to do evil, they cannot compel one to do evil. Thus, Satan can only lead God's servants astray by inciting them to evil actions by means of whispering or suggesting evil (see 4:119; 114:4c). This explains why he says to his followers, *I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me,* which al-Ṭabrisī takes to mean, "I had no power to force or compel you to disbelieve and disobey—I only had the means of whispering and calling." Listening to Satan's suggestions in no way exonerates one from the responsibility for one's actions, which is why Satan says, *Do not blame me, but blame yourselves.* In other words, they did not have firm proof or evidence to disobey God and follow Satan (Ṭs), especially since they had been shown the truth by God's messengers (IK). *I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help* (see also 8:48; 59:16), which is to say that Satan cannot benefit or save in any manner those who succumbed to his whisperings (IK), since individuals will only be taken to task for their own wrong actions (AF) and their own choice to heed or not heed Satan's call; for the Quranic theme of personal accountability for one's actions, see 74:38. Satan's statement, *I disbelieved in your ascribing me as partner aforetime,* refers to his rejection even before the Day of Judgment, in the life of this world, of his being taken as a partner alongside God (Āl). Alternately, *aforetime* can refer to the time when Satan was commanded to bow before Adam but refused to do so on account of his pride (Ṭs; see 7:12), in which case the verse would be read, "I disbelieved in that which you ascribed to me as a partner," meaning that Satan had already rejected God (R).

23 For the greeting of *Peace!* in Paradise, see 10:10c; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73. For Paradise as the *Abode of Peace,* see 10:25c; 19:62; 56:26.

24–25 *A good word* is understood to refer here to the formula of the *shahādah,* "There is no god but God" (Q), and *a good tree* can be a reference to the date palm (Kl). In a famous report narrated by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, the son of the second Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the Prophet asked his Companions if they knew what kind of tree was being referred to in this verse. Ibn ʿUmar knew the answer, but was too shy to speak in front of his elders. Then the Prophet revealed the answer, and it was just as Ibn ʿUmar had thought: it was a date palm.

Like the date palm, which is firmly rooted in the earth, so too is the meaning of the *shahādah* ("There is no god but God") firmly rooted in the hearts of the people of Divine Unity (Aj). Al-Rāzī refers to this same reality by saying that when the tree of knowledge is firmly rooted in the land of one's heart, one becomes stronger and more complete, thereby enabling "fruit" to issue forth from its "branches" in abundance. This tree of knowledge, which is rooted in the land of one's heart, thus has "branches" that are *in the sky;* that is, it

of its Lord. God sets forth parables for mankind, that haply they may remember. (26) And the parable of a bad word is a bad tree: uprooted from the face of the earth; it has no stability. (27) God makes firm those who believe with firm speech in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. And God leads the wrongdoers astray; God does whatsoever He wills. (28) Hast thou not considered those who exchanged the Blessing of God for ingratitude and caused their people to dwell in the abode of perdition— (29) Hell, wherein they shall burn. What an evil dwelling place! (30) They set up equals unto God, that they might lead astray from His Way. Say, "Enjoy yourselves! For truly your journey is unto the Fire!" (31) Tell My servants who believe to perform the prayer and to spend from that which We have provided them, secretly and openly, before a

has forms of knowledge that reach the Divine realm (R). This tree thus *brings forth fruit in every season,* which is to say that the soul of a person who is firmly rooted in knowledge develops a spiritual disposition through which it produces "fruit" perpetually in the form of beautiful words, righteous actions, a state of humility, self-effacement, weeping, and lowliness (R).

26 *A bad word* is usually understood to mean a statement of disbelief in God (Kl), which is the opposite of the *shahādah* symbolically represented as *a good tree* in v. 24. More specifically, *a bad tree* is usually understood to be a reference to a *ḥanẓalah* tree, which is easily *uprooted from the face of the earth,* because its roots are shallow, close to the surface of the earth (Aj). It thus provides *no stability* and is therefore the opposite of the date palm, which is firmly fixed in its place, with deep roots (Kl).

27 The *firm speech* mentioned here can be interpreted to mean the full form of the *shahādah* formula, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (N), which makes the believers *firm* by protecting their faith from the trials of *this world* (Bḍ), while *in the Hereafter* it makes them *firm* from the moment when the angels Munkar and Nakīr visit them in the grave and ask them the questions, "Who is your Lord?" and "Who is your prophet?" (Bḍ, Q). On the subject of God's leading astray, see 4:88–90c; 4:143c; see also 17:97; 18:17; 74:31c.

28–29 *Those who exchanged the Blessing of God* refers to those who exchanged being grateful on account of God's Blessings (JJ) *for ingratitude.* It is said that the reference here is particularly to the disbelievers among the Quraysh (Bg, JJ), although it can also have a general application. According to the former reading, *the Blessing of God* refers to the Prophet Muhammad (Bg), and *caused their people to dwell in the abode of perdition* refers to the defeat that the Quraysh suffered at the Battle of Badr (IK) or to the destruction they brought upon their own people in general (JJ). Others see *the abode of perdition* as related to the mention of Hell in v. 29 (N).

30 *That they might lead astray from His Way* does not mean that the reason people *set up equals unto God* is so that they can misguide or lead others astray. Rather, it means that misguidance and leading astray are the result of their setting up equals alongside God and thus are tantamount to such a purpose (Bḍ); see also 39:8. *Enjoy yourselves!* is ironic because it encourages them to persist in their incorrect ways, although the net result will be the opposite of enjoyment, since their *journey is unto the Fire;* cf. 16:55; 30:34c; 39:8.

31 *A day . . . wherein there shall be neither bargaining nor befriending* refers to the Day of Judgment, when the ability to negotiate and appeal to friends for help will be of no avail; see the commentary on the almost identical phrase in 2:254: *O you who believe! Spend from that which We have*

day comes wherein there shall be neither bargaining nor befriending. (32) God it is Who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water from the sky, then brought forth fruits thereby for your provision. He has made the ships subservient unto you, so that they sail upon the sea by His Command, and has made the rivers subservient unto you. (33) And He has made the sun and the moon subservient unto you, constant, and He made the night and the day subservient unto you. (34) And He gives you something of all that you ask of Him, and were you to count the Blessings of God, you could not number them. Truly mankind is wrongdoing, ungrateful. (35) And [remember] when Abraham said,

*provided you before a day comes wherein there shall be neither bargaining, nor friendship, nor intercession. And the disbelievers, they are the wrongdoers;* cf. 40:18; 43:67; 44:41; 70:10.

32–33 These verses convey the notion, found elsewhere in the Quran (2:29; 16:5–8, 10–16), that the beings of the natural world have been made subservient (*taskhīr*) to human beings; that is, God has put the world of nature at their service in order to help them fulfill various needs and achieve certain goals in life; see also 16:12c. Although people have nature at their disposal, they are not without responsibility toward it. They are to be its humble custodians, not its tyrannical controllers (cf. 30:4), since God has appointed human beings *as vicegerents upon the earth* (6:165).

Parallel with the idea that all things in the cosmic order have been made subservient to human beings, it can be said that all elements within human beings are made subservient to God. In Islamic anthropology and psychology, the heart is identified as the seat of human beings' consciousness and knowledge; in other words, it is not only the center, but also the "totality" of his being. This is why Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq said that God has made the heart of the believer "subservient to love for, and knowledge of, Him" (Su). So subservient to God is the heart of the sincere believer that the Prophet is reported to have said, "The heart of the believer is the Throne of the All-Merciful (*ʿarsh al-Raḥmān*)."

34 *And He gives you something of all that you ask of Him* can be read to mean that God gives people something of all that they ask for with their tongues, or of what they ask for by being in a state of need without actually articulating it verbally (Bḍ). Because of the possible meanings of the article *mā,* some read this to mean, "He gives you of that which you do not ask of Him," referring to blessings such as the sun and the moon (Q). The Prophet is reported to have said that God will grant one's legitimate requests (i.e., requests that do not involve sin or the severance of family ties) in one of these ways: "Either his request will be granted to him [in this world], or God will store it away for him for the Hereafter, or He will divert from him an evil equivalent to the request."

Not only are people unable *to count the Blessings of God,* they are also unable to thank Him for all of them (Bg; see also 16:18). For human beings as being ungrateful, see 2:243; 10:60; 12:38; 17:67, 69; 22:66; 25:50; 27:73; 40:61; 42:48. *Truly mankind is wrongdoing, ungrateful* is complemented by the last part of 33:72: *Truly he has proved himself an ignorant wrongdoer;* see 33:72c.

35 It is said that when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, Sarah became jealous of her; so Abraham took Hagar and Ishmael from Syria to Makkah. *This land* therefore refers to Makkah (Q). Some commentators see the answer to Abraham's prayer that Makkah be made *secure* in the wording of 29:67: *Or have they not considered that We have made a secure sanctuary while people are snatched away all around them?* (IK). When Abraham says, *Keep me and my children from worshipping idols,* he is saying, "Make me and my children totally

"My Lord! Make this land secure, and keep me and my children from worshipping idols. (36) My Lord! Surely they have led astray many among mankind. So whosoever follows me, he is of me. And whosoever disobeys me, surely Thou art Forgiving, Merciful. (37) Our Lord! Verily I have settled some of my progeny in a valley without cultivation by Thy Sacred House, our Lord, that they might perform the prayer. So cause the hearts of some men to incline toward them, and provide them with fruits, that haply they may give thanks. (38) Our Lord! Surely Thou knowest what we hide and what we disclose. And naught is hidden from God, on earth or in Heaven. (39) Praise be to God, Who bestowed upon me Ishmael and Isaac, in my old age. Truly my Lord is the Hearer of supplications. (40) My Lord! Make me a performer of prayer, and my progeny. Our Lord!

distant from idol worship" (Ṭ). For another aspect of Abraham's prayer at Makkah, see commentary on 2:126–29.

36 *Surely they have led astray many among mankind* is a figurative expression used to indicate the manner in which people have been misguided in their service to lifeless idols (Q); see also 71:24. *So whosoever follows me, he is of me;* that is, whoever follows Abraham in believing in God's Oneness belongs to his monotheistic creed (Q). *And whosoever disobeys me, surely Thou art Forgiving, Merciful* refers to the teaching that any sin will be forgiven by God except for the ascription of partners unto Him (Bg, IJ, Q), as in 4:48: *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will, for whosoever ascribes partners unto God has surely fabricated a tremendous sin* (see also v. 10c; 4:48c, 116). Alternately, this part of the verse can also include the sin of ascribing partners unto God, which, according to some commentators, would then pertain to the time before God informed Abraham that He does not forgive people for ascribing partners unto Him (Bg, IJ, Q).

37 *Some of my progeny* can be a reference to Abraham's son Ishmael (Kl) or to Ishmael and his mother, Hagar (Q). *A valley without cultivation* is a reference to Makkah (Kl), and *Thy Sacred House* is the Kaʿbah. *Prayer* here is said to denote "religion" in its entirety, in light of prayer's superior rank in religion (Q). *That they might perform the prayer* would therefore mean something like "so that they may uphold religion" (see also 42:13).

Although Makkah did not have date trees, Abraham's prayer to God to provide Hagar and Ishmael *with fruits* was answered, since fruits came to Makkah from many outlying regions (IK). According to some commentators, Abraham's prayer was answered by the bestowal of abundant date palms upon the town of Ṭāʾif (JJ), a neighboring region that had a great deal of historical and commercial contact with Makkah.

38 *Surely Thou knowest what we hide and what we disclose* (see also 3:29) means that God knows more about what will benefit human beings than they do themselves, and He is more merciful to them than they are to themselves (Bḍ). Despite this fact, human beings must still beseech God, so that they may manifest their state of servanthood to Him and their need for His Mercy, and because it hastens the Divine Response to their needs (Bḍ).

39 Here Abraham thanks God for giving him Ishmael through Hagar and Isaac through Sarah, despite the fact that he was advanced in years when he had both children. For the glad tidings of the birth of Isaac given to Abraham and Sarah, who was also in her old age, see 11:71–74; 51:28–29.

40 *A performer of prayer* can refer to one who is firm in religion (Q) or to one who is persistent

Accept my supplication! (41) Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and the believers on the Day when the Reckoning is come." (42) Do not suppose that God is heedless of the deeds of the wrongdoers; He merely grants them reprieve till a day when eyes will stare, transfixed, (43) running with necks outstretched and heads upraised, their glance returning not to them, their hearts vacant. (44) And warn mankind of the Day when the punishment shall come upon them, whereupon those who did wrong will say, "Our Lord! Grant us reprieve for a term nigh, that we might respond to Thy Call and follow the messengers." [It will be said unto them], "Did you not earlier swear that there would be no end for

in the actual act of prayer (Bḍ). *Our Lord! Accept my supplication!* may be a request on the part of Abraham that God accept his worship in general or his supplication as mentioned in this verse in particular (Bḍ).

41 Abraham's supplication for the forgiveness of his parents is seen as a request to God that He forgive them on the condition that they submit to Him and believe in Him (Kl); on Abraham's prayer of forgiveness, see also 19:47 and 9:114: *Abraham's plea for forgiveness of his father was only due to a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him;* see 9:113–14c. Alternately, it is said that Abraham made the supplication for his parents before coming to know that his father was an enemy of God (Kl), or that both his parents were enemies of God (JJ). An alternate reading of this verse has "my father" instead of "my parents" (JJ). For Abraham's father, Azar, see 6:74c.

42–43 *Do not suppose that God is heedless of the deeds of the wrongdoers* is understood to be an admonition that God will exact vengeance upon the wrongdoers for their unjust actions. Some argue that if God were not to do so, it would mean that He is ignorant of their injustices, or is incapable of exacting vengeance upon them, or is pleased by their injustices. Since ignorance, incapacity, or pleasure in seeing injustice do not apply to God, it is considered impossible that He not take the wrongdoers to task for their wrong actions (R). *He merely grants them reprieve* from punishment (N) till a *day when eyes will stare, transfixed,* that is, when eyeballs come out of their sockets on account of the terrors that will be seen on the Last Day (N); for God's granting reprieve until an appointed term, see 16:61; 35:45c. That Day, people will be *running with necks outstretched,* in a state of humiliation and defeat, like slaves (Aj); with *heads upraised,* out of intense fear or because of the chains around their necks (see also 36:8; Aj); *their glance returning not to them,* since they will not be able to look at themselves because of their extreme terror (Aj) or because the chains around their necks will prevent this; and *their hearts vacant,* bereft of any kind of understanding they will be so consumed by their stupor (Bḍ).

44 The reference here is to the Day of Judgment (Bg, Kl, Q). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, by *mankind* is meant the Makkan idolaters specifically (Q). The period of *reprieve* they will ask for when they see the punishment—that is, when the truth is made manifest to them in the Hereafter (Q)—is also mentioned in 6:27–28: *If thou couldst see when they are arraigned before the Fire, whereupon they will say, "Would that we were sent back! Then we would not deny the signs of our Lord, but we would be among the believers!" Nay, but it has now become clear to them what they used to hide;* cf. 32:12; 40:49–50. Yet this is a futile request, since 6:28 maintains that even if they were returned to their life on earth to mend their ways, *they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden. Truly they are liars;* see also 6:27–28c.

The *end* that the Makkan idolaters swore would not come to them is their going from the life of this world to the Hereafter and the punishment in the Hereafter itself (Q). Many commen-

you?" (45) And you settled in the dwellings of those who had wronged themselves, though it was made clear to you how We dealt with them, and We set forth for you the parables. (46) And they devised their plot, but their plot lies with God, though their plotting be such as to move mountains. (47) So do not suppose that He would fail to keep His Promise unto His messengers. Truly God is Mighty, Possessor of Vengeance. (48) On that Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too], and they will appear before God, the One, the Paramount. (49) On that Day thou wilt see the guilty bound together in fetters, (50) their garments made of pitch, and the Fire cover-

tators connect the last part of this verse, *Did you not earlier swear that there would be no end for you?* with the Makkan idolaters' statement mentioned at 16:38: *And they swear by God their most solemn oaths [that] God will not resurrect those who die* (Bḍ, IK, Q, Z).

45 *You settled in the dwellings of those who had wronged themselves,* which is to say that the people of Makkah had settled in a land that had previously been inhabited by groups who rejected the prophets sent to them, such as the tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd (Bḍ, Q). *Though it was made clear to you how We dealt with them* means that the Makkans could still witness the vestiges of the destroyed peoples by looking at the ruins of their dwellings and hearing the stories about them that were passed down from generation to generation (Bḍ). *We set forth for you the parables;* that is, in the Quran God shows that the Makkans were like these previous nations in their disbelief, and were likewise worthy of being punished (Bḍ, Q).

46 *Their plot lies with God,* which is to say that God knows either their plot (R) or the recompense for it (Kl); see also 7:99; 10:21c; 13:42c; 27:50; 86:15–16. Many commentators note that *though their plotting be such as to move mountains* implies that no plot, no matter how great—even as great in scope as a mountain—can overcome the Will of God (Z). *Mountains* are also understood as a reference to God's signs, the Sacred Law, and prophecy (Kl, Z), since, like mountains, they are fixed and firmly rooted (Kl; cf. vv. 24–25). In other words, no matter how hard the disbelievers attempt to alter the truth, they will be unable to do so.

47 This verse represents the one instance in the Quran that employs an active participle (*mukhlif,* lit. "one who breaks [a promise]") to refer to a quality that one should never suppose of God, thus conveying the idea that God's Promise is always true; cf. 4:122. The sense here is that one should never deem God to be "a breaker of His Promise" and thus this is an emphatic statement indicating that not breaking a promise is intrinsic to the Divine Nature; cf. 3:9: *Truly God will not fail the tryst.*

48 This verse refers in general terms to the overturning of the entire cosmic order on the Last Day; for specific descriptions elsewhere in the Quran, see *Sūrahs* 81–83. Some maintain that the change that will take place when *the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too]* pertains only to the different attributes that comprise the earth and the heavens, but that their fundamental substance will remain unaltered; others, however, maintain that the change in the attributes of the earth and the heavens will be so total that they will literally become something else in their substance (R). *They will appear before God, the One, the Paramount* refers to the Resurrection, when all people will be driven from their graves (Bg, JJ) and brought face-to-face with God, their Lord and Master (see also 36:51; 40:16).

49–50 *The guilty* is a reference to the disbelievers (JJ). Their being *bound together in fetters* is also mentioned in 38:38 (cf. 25:13). *Their garments*—that is, their shirts (JJ)—will be *made of pitch,* which signifies the extreme degree to which they will be scorched in the Fire (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭs).

ing their faces, (51) that God may recompense every soul for that which it has earned; surely God is swift in reckoning. (52) This is a proclamation unto mankind, that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is the One God, and that the possessors of intellect might be reminded.

51 This verse reiterates a Quranic theme that people will only receive what they deserve in the Hereafter, as God is in no way unjust to His servants; see 4:40; 10:4c. For God as *swift in reckoning,* see 2:202; 3:19, 199; 5:4; 24:39; 40:17.

52 The *proclamation unto mankind* by which *they may be warned* is the Quran; it is an admonishment meant to instill fear of God's Punishment in people (Q). At the same time, people are meant to reflect deeply and ponder over the Quran's verses in order to understand the fact *that He is the One God* (Bḍ, Bg). This awareness will then cause them to worship Him truly and turn away from every kind of false god, such as the passing attractions of this world, their own caprices, or Satan (IḤ). Whoever takes heed is therefore saved (Qu). For *the possessors of intellect,* see 5:100c; 2:269; 3:7, 190; 12:111; 13:19; 38:29, 43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 15

# Ḥijr

## *al-Ḥijr*

*Al-Ḥijr* is the last in a series of six *sūrah*s whose opening verses include the letters *alif, lām,* and *rā'*, and which speak of *the Book.* Like the previous five *sūrah*s in this series, it belongs to the Makkan period (JJ) and seeks to address the Makkan idolaters' negative reactions to the Prophet's message. The *sūrah* begins with a discussion of the inevitability of God's Punishment and the inescapability of His Decree, after whose declaration it will be too late to submit to God or defer His Chastisement (vv. 2–5). It then offers responses to the Makkan idolaters' challenge that the Prophet bring angels to them (vv. 7–8) and reminds them that nothing the Prophet brings them would cause them to gain faith and believe (vv. 14–15).

The *sūrah* also seeks to console the Prophet in light of the insults and mockery (v. 7) he received from the Makkan idolaters (vv. 95–97), reminding him that this was a common phenomenon among prophets (v. 11). The rebelliousness of the Makkan idolaters in face of the truth is then juxtaposed with the refusal of Iblīs to bow before Adam when Adam was created by God (vv. 28–43). The *sūrah* goes on to recount the stories of the prophets Abraham (vv. 51–60), Lot (vv. 61–77), and Shu'ayb (vv. 78–79). The account of the inhabitants of *al-Ḥijr* (vv. 80–84), the community to whom the Prophet Ṣāliḥ had been sent, then follows. They bear this name because they inhabited a rocky plain (*ḥijr,* from which the *sūrah* derives its title). The *sūrah* ends by encouraging the Prophet to have forbearance, to worship, to be resolute in spreading the message, and to not grieve over his people's rejection of it (vv. 88–99).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Rā.* These are the signs of the Book and a clear Quran. (2) It may be that those who disbelieve will wish that they had submitted. (3) Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves and to be beguiled by hopes, for soon they will know. (4) Never did We destroy a town, but that it had a known decree. (5) No community can hasten its term, nor delay it. (6) And they say, "O you unto

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *rā',* which also appear in 10:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; and 14:1, are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaᶜāt*) found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s; their true meaning, most commentators maintain, is known ultimately only to God; see 2:1c. *The Book* and *a clear Quran* (see also 36:69) may refer to the same reality, either the Quran (Bḍ, R, Z) or this particular *sūrah* (Bḍ). Others understand *the Book* to refer to the revelations prior to the Quran, such as the Torah and the Gospel (Q, Ṭ). *A clear Quran* denotes the Quran's ability to make known with clarity what is true as distinct from what is false (JJ).

2–3 That the disbelievers *will wish that they had submitted* is a reference to their state at the time of death or on the Day of Judgment (Kl); see also 4:42; 78:40. The injunction to leave the disbelievers in their state of rebellion is a recurrent theme in the Quran (see also 6:91, 112, 137; 23:54; 43:83; 52:45; 70:42), which is parallel to God's leaving them in this state (cf. 2:15; 6:110; 7:186; 10:11; 27:4). Here they are to be left *to eat and enjoy themselves*—that is, to be immersed in this worldly life (Bḍ)—and *beguiled by hopes,* preoccupied with the thought that they will live long lives, while failing to prepare for their final return to God (Bḍ); cf. 31:24: *We grant them enjoyment a little; then We compel them toward a grave punishment* (see also 3:178; 10:69–70; 16:55; 26:205–7). Being beguiled by one's false hopes is known in Islamic spiritual psychology as the malady of "extended hope" (*ṭūl al-amal*), which can also be thought of as "overconfidence," and which ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib says is what causes one to forget about the Hereafter (R). The warning that *soon they will know* is a theme frequently encountered in the Quran (see 15:96; 29:66; 37:170; 40:70; 43:89). V. 3 is similar to 29:66: *So let them be ungrateful for that which We have given them, and let them enjoy themselves, for soon they will know!*

4 *A known decree* refers to the appointed time for the town's destruction as inscribed upon the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c; Q, Z). This means that God will not destroy a community until its appointed time arrives (Ṭ); cf. 17:15.

5 Since the term of each community is fixed, its members cannot do anything to hurry or delay it, as in 7:34: *And for every community there is a term appointed. When their term comes, they shall not delay it by a single hour, nor shall they advance it* (see also 10:49; 16:61).

6 *The Reminder* here refers to the Quran (JJ; see also v. 9; 7:2c; 16:44; 20:3; 36:11), whereas elsewhere in the Quran *the Reminder* can also refer to the scriptures preceding the Quran (16:43; 21:2, 7; 40:53). It is reported that the Makkan idolaters heard the Prophet say, "Verily God (Most High) has sent down the Reminder unto me" (R). This then prompted his opponents' reference to him as the one *unto whom the Reminder has been sent down.* This was not an affirmation of their belief in him as God's Messenger; rather, as al-Ṭabrisī notes, it was a way of mocking him. For the accusation that the Prophet was *possessed,* see 23:70; 34:8; 44:14; 51:39; 68:51. Elsewhere, the Quran states that this charge of being *possessed* is also leveled against the other prophets by the people to

whom the Reminder has been sent down, truly you are possessed. (7) Why do you not bring us the angels, if you are among the truthful?" (8) We do not send down the angels, save in truth, and were We to do so, they would be granted no respite. (9) Truly it is We Who have sent down the Reminder, and surely We are its Preserver. (10) We indeed sent [messengers] before thee to communities among those of old. (11) And never did a messenger come unto them, but

whom they were sent, as in 51:52: *Likewise, there came no messenger unto those before them, but that they said, "A sorcerer or one possessed."* More specifically, this accusation is also leveled against Moses (26:27) and Noah (54:9).

7–8 The pre-Islamic Arabs understood angels to be the "daughters of God" (see 4:117; 16:57–59; 17:40; 37:149–53; 52:39; 53:19–21, 27; commentary on 43:16–17). V. 7 cites the desire to see an angel as one of the many disingenuous requests made by the Makkan idolaters of the Prophet (see 17:92, where they ask the Prophet to bring *God and the angels*); for more of these kinds of challenges, see 13:31c; 17:90–93c. The demand described in this verse is a variation on a theme related to the Makkans' asking why an angel was not sent with the Prophet (6:8; 11:12; 21:3; 25:7, 21; 43:53), and why angels were not sent as messengers instead of human beings (see 17:94–95c).

Perhaps in response to their request, the Prophet is told to say in 17:95: *Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.* Although they demanded to see the angels as a proof of the Prophet's truthfulness, this request was motivated by the desire to mock (see v. 6), and they would not necessarily have believed in his message even if angels did come down to them (see 6:111). V. 8 also forms a response to the Makkan idolaters' challenge, namely, that God will only send the angels *in truth*—that is, in this case with God's Punishment (JJ, Ṭ)—at which time the disbelievers *would be granted no respite* from the event, which is to say that they would not be able to delay it (JJ). See also 6:8: *Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite.*

9 For *the Reminder* as a reference to the Quran, see v. 6. *We are its Preserver,* which is one of the Quranic phrases most often quoted by Muslims as proof of the inviolability of the Quranic text, is understood to mean that God will protect the Quran from any alterations or additions to its words, as in 41:42: *Falsehood comes not upon it from before it or from behind it; a revelation from One Wise, Praised;* and 4:82: *Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein* (R); see also 18:1; 75:17. Based upon the understanding of this and other verses, Muslims maintain that the Quran is not susceptible to being falsified, owing to the widespread manner in which it has been memorized, studied, and proliferated among believers (R). It is also said that God's Protection of the Quran extends to the miraculous nature of its order, which protects the Quran just as the walls surrounding a city fortify and protect the city (R). According to another interpretation, God preserves the Quran through the Quran reciters (*qurrāʾ*), who traditionally memorize it and whose hearts are "the treasuries of His Book" (Qu). See also the essay "The Islamic View of the Quran."

10–11 The stories of the messengers whom God sent to their respective communities are related throughout the Quran. In this *sūrah,* the stories of Abraham, Lot, Shuʿayb, and Ṣāliḥ are told in vv. 51–84. The common thread in these narratives is that the prophets were mocked by their people (just as Muhammad was mocked by his people, as described in v. 6), but that in the end God destroyed these people for their mockery. For the manner in which those who mocked God's messengers were punished, see 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26.

that they mocked him. (12) Thus do We place it into the hearts of the guilty. (13) They believe not in it, though the wont of those of old has already passed away. (14) Were We to open for them a gate unto Heaven, that they might continue to ascend through it, (15) they would say, "Our eyes are merely spellbound. Nay, we are a people bewitched!" (16) We have set constellations in the sky, and We have adorned them for the onlookers. (17) And We have preserved them from every satan outcast, (18) save him who gains a hearing by stealth, and then a manifest flaming star pursues him. (19) And the earth We spread out, and cast therein firm mountains, and We caused to grow therein all manner of things in due balance. (20) And We placed therein means of livelihood for you and for

12–13 Cf. 26:200 and commentary. The *it* in *We place it into the hearts of the guilty* can refer to misguidance, disbelief, mockery, or idolatry (Q). Alternately, *it* can refer to the Quran (Kl, R, Ṭb, Z), since the pronoun may refer to *the Reminder* mentioned in v. 9. According to this interpretation, God causes the Quran to enter the hearts of the guilty, meaning that He causes them to hear it, but on account of their hardened hearts, ignorance, and obstinacy they disbelieve in it (R) and mock it (Kl). This latter interpretation is supported by the understanding that *in it* in v. 13 refers to the Quran (Bḍ, R, Ṭb, Ṭs). In other words, vv. 12–13 refer to the Quran, which, although accessible to the guilty, is denied by them. The verb in the phrase *We place it into* (*naslukuhu*) might also be understood to mean "cause it to pass through," as a thread passes through the eye of a needle or a spear passes through what it pierces (R). For *the wont of those of old,* see 8:38c; 35:43c.

14–15 *They* refers to those who requested that the Prophet come with angels (see 15:7c; Bg). Taken together, vv. 14–15 mean that even if God were to cause them to ascend to Heaven and witness all of its wonders, they would still reject what they saw because they were in a state of denial and doubt regarding the truth, claiming that they had merely been thrown into a state of bewilderment through sorcery (*siḥr*), of which they were known to have accused the Prophet (Aj). For the Makkans' labeling of the Prophet as a sorcerer, see 10:2; 38:4; 40:24; 51:39; 51:52. For similar accusations of sorcery made against Moses, Jesus, and other Divine messengers, see 5:110c.

16 *Constellations* (*burūj;* see also 25:61c; 85:1c) is believed by many to refer to the twelve constellations of the zodiac (Kl).

17–18 These verses address the role played by the jinn, here referred to as "satans," in providing information for fortune-tellers and sorcerers. See the commentary on the similar verses at 37:6–10 and the introduction to *Sūrah* 72.

19 Cf. 50:7. The reference to the earth being *spread out* by God is generally believed to mean that the earth was spread out over the surface of the water (N). *Mountains* are fixed firmly in the earth so that the earth does not quake (Q; cf. 16:15); as a spiritual metaphor, mountains are often interpreted as a reference to God's signs, the Sacred Law, and prophethood, since, like mountains, these realities are fixed and firmly rooted and also cause human life to be firm and rooted in the truth; see 14:46c; 21:30–31c. *In due balance* refers to something that is weighed on the scales of God's Wisdom and apportioned accordingly (Z), or it can refer more specifically to a measure of something that is weighed (Bg). *Therein* in *We caused to grow therein* can refer to either the *mountains* or *the earth* (Aj). If the former, then *all manner of things* would refer to the different kinds of rocks and minerals that one finds on and in mountains (Q), such as gold, silver, copper, and iron (Z). If, however, *therein* refers to *the earth,* then *all manner of things* refers specifically to the fruits and vegetation that grow on the earth (Q; see 15:21c). V. 20 indicates that this reading is the more likely of the two.

20 Cf. 7:10c. *Therein* refers to the earth, and *means of livelihood* pertains to the food and drink

those for whom you provide not. (21) Naught is there, but that its treasuries lie with Us, and We do not send it down, save in a known measure. (22) And We sent forth the winds, fertilizing. And We sent down water from the sky, providing you with sufficient drink thereby, and you are not the keepers of its stores. (23) Surely it is We Who give life and cause death, and We are the Inheritor. (24) We indeed know those among you who advance, and We indeed know those who lag behind, (25) and verily it is thy Lord who will gather them. Truly He is Wise,

through which people maintain life (Q). *Those for whom you provide not* refers to one's cattle and beasts of burden (Ṭ), or to one's dependants, such as family members (Z). Concerning those who "provide" for their dependants, al-Zamakhsharī says, "They deem that they are providing sustenance for them, but they err. God is the Provider, and He provides for both of them." See also 51:58: *Truly God is the Provider, the Possessor of Strength, the Firm.*

21 *Naught is there, but that its treasuries lie with Us* is understood by some to be a specific reference to rain (Kl, R, Th), which causes vegetation to grow on the earth and produces the means of livelihood mentioned in vv. 19–20 (R; see also 15:22c). More generally, it refers to every existing thing (IJ), meaning that there is nothing that God cannot bring into existence (Bḍ). In this reading, God's *treasuries* symbolize God's Power, and the treasures within them symbolize what is subsumed under His Power (*maqdūrāt*), all of which can be brought into existence by Him easily (Bḍ). See also 6:50; 11:31; 52:37; 63:7, which speak of God's treasuries, and 17:100; 38:9, which speak of the treasuries of God's Mercy. In Islamic theology God's Power (*qudrah*) is directed by His Will (*irādah*), which is determined by His Knowledge (*ʿilm*). Many Islamic thinkers, such as those in the school of Ibn ʿArabī, have conceived of the *treasuries* metaphysically as the archetypes or unmanifested essences of all things in God's Knowledge.

Following this latter interpretation, the reference to "sending down" in *We . . . : send it down* signifies creation (as in 39:6; 57:25; R), meaning that God brings things into existence after they had been nonexistent (R), that is, nonexistent in the world, but with their archetypes residing in His *treasuries*. For *a known measure,* see also 42:27: *But He sends down whatsoever He will according to a measure;* and 54:49: *Truly We have created everything according to a measure* (and the commentary on this verse). According to the famous Sufi Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899), only those who do not fully believe the truth of this verse would depend on other than God for either their worldly or otherworldly affairs (Su).

22 *Winds* are mentioned as signs of God and His Blessings in several places in the Quran; see 7:57; 25:48; 27:63; 30:46; 45:5. The winds are described as *fertilizing* in reference to the rain-laden clouds they carry (Ṭs), which some commentators juxtapose to *the barren wind* mentioned in 51:41 (Ṭ, Z). *You are not the keepers of its stores* means that people are not guardians of the rain, and that they cannot produce rain whenever they wish (Ās). See also 56:68–70: *Have you considered the water that you drink? Is it you who sent it down from the clouds, or is it We Who send down? If We had willed We would have made it bitter; will you not, then, give thanks?*

23 For *give life and cause death;* see 50:43c. *The Inheritor,* which is one of the Divine Names (see also 28:58; cf. 57:10), means that God is the only Reality unto which everything will return after all of creation has perished, and is the Reality that will remain after all of creation has perished (Aj, Āl, R), as in 28:88: *All things perish, save His Face;* cf. 55:26–27.

24–25 *Those among you who advance* refers to those who are dedicated to acts of obedience to God, and *those who lag behind* to those who are not given to these acts (R). Alternately, the former can mean those who have already passed away, and the latter those who are still alive (R). *Them* refers to both of these groups, since all people will be raised from the dead and judged by God, who is the *Reviver of the dead* (30:50; see also 41:39).

Knowing. (26) And We indeed created man from dried clay, made of molded mud, (27) and the jinn We created earlier from scorching fire. (28) And [remember] when thy Lord said unto the angels, "Behold! I am creating a human being from dried clay, made of molded mud; (29) so when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating." (30) Thereupon the angels prostrated, all of them together, (31) save Iblīs. He refused to be with those who prostrated. (32) He said, "O Iblīs! What ails thee that thou art not with those who prostrate?" (33) He said, "I am not one to prostrate to a human

26–27 The clay from which human beings have been created is variously described as simply *clay* (6:2); *a draught of clay* (23:12); *a viscous clay* (37:11); and *dried clay, like earthen vessels* (55:14); see 55:14c. Elsewhere, the jinn are described as created *from smokeless fire* (55:15).

28 The narrative in vv. 28–43 describing the fall of Iblīs from Heaven is similar to the one in 38:71–85; these two accounts are the only ones in which there is no specific reference to Adam. Other accounts throughout the Quran situate the story of Iblīs in the context of the creation, temptation, and banishment of Adam from the Garden; see 2:30–39; 7:11–25; 17:61–65; 20:115–24. The opening verse of the account here is almost identical to 38:71, the major difference being that the latter has *clay* whereas this verse has *molded mud* (see 23:12c). God tells the angels in these two verses that He is going to create *a human being,* but in 2:30 He informs them that He is going to place *a vicegerent upon the earth* (for the meaning of *vicegerent* in this context, see 2:30c.). Although the human being or vicegerent refers to Adam, it also represents humanity as such; see 7:11c.

29 This verse is identical to 38:72; cf. 32:9. *I have proportioned him* is understood to be a reference to God's creating the human being in the most perfect manner in order to receive His *Spirit* (Z); cf. 95:4: *Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature.* In interpreting *I . . . breathed into him of My Spirit,* many commentators see *My Spirit* as a reference to God's Power, though others take the phrase more literally as the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) and see it as explaining why Iblīs would be called upon to bow before Adam; see 38:72c.

God's commanding the angels to bow before Adam is an essential part of the Quranic account of his creation; see 2:34; 7:11; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 38:73–74. The angels' bowing implies that before falling from Heaven, human beings occupied a station higher than that of the angels, or that the angels were bowing to God but taking Adam as their *qiblah* (i.e., the direction of prayer); see 7:11c. See also 12:100, where Joseph's family bows down to him in fulfillment of his dream in 12:4.

30–31 Iblīs is said to have refused God's Command to prostrate before Adam and thus to have *deviated from the Command of his Lord* (18:50), because he *waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers* (2:34; cf. 7:13; 38:74); see also 20:115–16. That *the angels prostrated, all of them together, save Iblīs* suggests that Iblīs was among the angels, although in 18:50 he is said to be *of the jinn.* These verses have given rise to debate among Muslim scholars about whether Iblīs should be classified as an angel or as a jinn; see 2:30c; 7:11c.

32–33 Iblīs's reply, that he is *not one to prostrate to a human being* whom God created *from dried clay, made of molded mud,* is motivated by pride and false analogical reasoning (see also 2:34; 38:74–76). Iblīs, as one of the jinn (18:50), perceives his origin from a smokeless fire (55:15) to be superior to an origin from clay, as when he says, *I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay* (7:12; 38:76). In his commentary on 5:6, al-Maybudī notes that fire can symbolize pride and arrogance, since by nature fire flames up and reaches for the sky, whereas the clay from which Adam was made represents humility, since clay by nature is from the earth and therefore lowly; see also commentary on 7:12–13.

being whom Thou hast created from dried clay, made of molded mud." (34) He said, "Go forth from it! Surely thou art outcast, (35) and surely the curse shall be upon thee till the Day of Judgment!" (36) He said, "My Lord! Grant me respite till the Day they are resurrected." (37) He said, "Then verily thou art among those granted respite (38) till the Day of the Moment Known." (39) He said, "My Lord! Since Thou hast caused me to err, I shall surely make things seem fair unto them on earth, and I shall cause them to err all together, (40) save Thy sincere servants among them." (41) He said, "This is a straight path unto Me. (42) As for My servants, truly thou hast no authority over them, save for those in error who follow

34–35 In 7:13, Iblīs's arrogance is cited as the cause for his expulsion from Heaven, at which time God tells him, *Thou art surely among those who are humbled.* See also the almost identical verses 38:77–78, where Iblīs is banished with God's curse upon him: *Go forth from it! Surely thou art outcast! And surely My curse shall be upon thee till the Day of Judgment.* Iblīs's banishment from Heaven on account of his pride is in accordance with a well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* in which God says, "Pride is My mantle and greatness My garment. Whoever vies with Me for either of them, I shall cast him into the Fire."

36–38 These verses are identical with 38:79–81. One of the signs of Iblīs's pride is that when he is banished from Heaven by God, he does not ask God to forgive him for his pride, but rather asks for *respite till the Day they are resurrected* (see also 7:14; 38:79 for identical wording; see also 7:14–15c). Iblīs's request here contrasts with the response in 7:23 of Adam and Eve after being fooled by Iblīs: *Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou dost not forgive us and have Mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers.*

39–40 Cf. 7:16–17. Unlike Adam and Eve, who attribute their mistake to themselves (7:23), Iblīs tells God, *Thou hast caused me to err,* which is consistent with Quranic verses that, on the surface, seem to indicate that God "misleads" certain people or allows them to go astray (see, e.g., 2:26; 40:74; 74:31). In a sense, God was the "cause" of Iblīs's failure in that His Command to Iblīs to bow down to Adam was the means by which Iblīs's inner pride became outwardly manifest (see 7:16c). It can be said that Iblīs's resolve to misguide God's creatures and *make things seem fair unto them* is the result of his state of despair after being banished from God's Presence ("Iblīs" is said to be etymologically related to an Arabic root meaning "to despair," though its true etymology most likely stems from the Greek *diabolos,* which had already entered into Arabic before the revelation of the Quran); cf. 15:56, where Abraham asks, *Who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord, save those who are astray?*

For other instances in the Quran where Iblīs makes people's actions *seem fair* to them, see 6:43; 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38. This is one of many ways in which he can cause God's servants to go astray. Other instances include his "whispering" to them (e.g., 114:4–5), as he does to Adam in 7:20 and 20:120; commanding indecency (2:268; 24:21); "deranging" human beings with his touch (2:275) or voice (17:64); making them slip (3:155); sowing fear (3:174); making them (false) promises (4:120; 14:22; 17:64); inciting evil between them (12:100; 17:53), sometimes through wine and gambling (5:90); causing them to forget God (6:68; 12:42; 18:63; 58:19); and even attempting to alter revelation (22:52). *I shall cause them to err all together, save Thy sincere servants among them* is identical to 38:82–83.

41–42 The *straight path* to God here implies the true path of servitude and obedience to Him (R), by virtue of which one can avoid the evil insinuations of Satan. For Satan's inability to exercise control over God's servants, see also 16:99–100: *Truly he has no authority over those who believe and trust in their Lord. His authority is only over those who take him as a protector, and those who take him as a partner.*

thee. (43) And verily Hell shall be their tryst, all together." (44) Seven gates it has, and for each gate is appointed a separate portion of them. (45) Truly the reverent shall be amidst gardens and springs: (46) "Enter them in peace, secure"— (47) We shall remove whatever rancor lies within their breasts—"as brothers, upon couches, facing one another." (48) No weariness shall befall them therein; nor shall they be expelled therefrom. (49) Tell My servants that I am indeed the Forgiving, the Merciful, (50) and that My Punishment is the painful punishment.

43–44 *Their* in *their tryst* refers to Iblīs, his party, and those who follow him *in error* (v. 42; R); see also 7:18; 38:85. The mention of Hell's *seven gates* alludes to the seven levels of Hell (Bg, JJ, Kl, Ṭ), which are a part of traditional Islamic eschatological beliefs. *For each gate is appointed a separate portion of them* means that the followers of Iblīs will occupy a level of Hell in accordance with the degree to which they followed him (Aj).

45–46 V. 45 is identical to 51:15; cf. 44:51–52. It is said that the *springs* refer to rivers of water, wine, milk, and honey in Paradise (Q), which are mentioned in 47:15: *Therein lie rivers of water incorruptible, rivers of milk whose flavor does not change, rivers of wine delicious for those who imbibe, and rivers of purified honey.*

*Enter them in peace, secure* is said to be the greeting that *the reverent* shall be met with by God (Q, R, Sh), the angels (Sh), or one of the angels (R) when they enter Paradise (see, e.g., 10:10c; 14:23; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73). For Paradise as the *Abode of Peace,* see 10:25c (see also 19:62; 56:26).

47 By *rancor* is meant the hatred and enmity that existed among the believers during their earthly lives (Aj); see also the identical wording in part of 7:43 and its commentary; cf. 59:10. According to al-Rāzī, this verse alludes to the fact that since spirits in the Hereafter are free from the limitations of the faculties that characterize the embodied human state, they are also free from time-bound thoughts, which are what allow *rancor* to come about.

The *couches* upon which the inhabitants of Paradise will sit, *facing one another* (see also 37:41–44c) and *reclining upon them* (56:16), are elsewhere described as *arrayed* (52:20) and *embroidered* (56:15). According to al-Rāzī, *brothers, upon couches, facing one another* means that the souls in Paradise, being freed from bodily defilements, will be in such a pure state that they will become illumined by the Divine Lights of the next world and will reflect their light to the other purified souls.

48 *Weariness* here means the fatigue and exhaustion that result from great exertion (R); see also 35:35. Al-Rāzī explains that their not being *expelled therefrom* means that the reverent will be in Paradise "eternally without loss, subsisting without annihilation, in a state of perfection without deficiency, and victorious without deprivation."

49–50 V. 49 is meant specifically to bring comfort and hope to God's sinful servants, whose hearts will break upon reading in v. 48 of the rewards in store for the righteous, telling them, "If I am Thankful and Generous toward the obedient, then I am Forgiving and Merciful toward the sinful" (Qu). The Prophet is reported to have said that if the children of Adam did not sin, then God would replace them with a people who did sin and who then would repent to Him, so that He could forgive them. The Prophet also taught believers to pray, "O God, Thou art Forgiving. Thou lovest forgiveness; so forgive us."

The mention of God's Mercy and Forgiveness in v. 49 and the immediate reference to His Punishment in v. 50 indicate that, although God is Forgiving and Merciful, He is also Just and Severe toward those who disbelieve and are morally corrupt. In the end, however, God's Mercy is given precedence over His Wrath, as mentioned in the *ḥadīth qudsī* in which God says, "Verily My Mercy precedeth My Wrath." This is also why in the Quran it is said that God's Mercy *encompasses all things* (7:156), while the same is not said of His Wrath; see also 6:12, 54, which say that God

(51) And tell them of the guests of Abraham, (52) when they entered upon him and said, "Peace!" He said, "Verily of you we are afraid." (53) They said, "Be not afraid. Truly we bring thee glad tidings of a knowing son." (54) He said, "Do you bring me glad tidings when old age has befallen me? So of what do you bring me glad tidings?" (55) They said, "We bring thee glad tidings in truth; so be not among those who despair." (56) He said, "Who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord, save those who are astray?" (57) He said, "What is your errand, O messengers?" (58) They said, "We have been sent unto a guilty people, (59) save for the family of Lot. We shall surely save them, all together, (60) except for his wife; We have determined that she is indeed among those who lagged behind." (61) So when the messengers came to the family of Lot, (62) he said, "Verily you are an unfamiliar folk."

*has prescribed Mercy for Himself,* indicating that Mercy and Forgiveness, in contrast to Wrath, are essential aspects of the Divine Nature.

51–52 For the story of Abraham, see also 11:69–76; 14:35–41; 37:83–113; 51:24–36. Abraham's *guests,* who are also referred to as God's *messengers* (11:69) and Abraham's *honored guests* (51:24), were a group of angels said in various traditional sources to number between three and twelve; see 11:69c; 51:24–25c. Abraham feared the guests because they did not eat of the *roasted calf* (11:69) or *fattened calf* (51:26) that he had offered them following the custom of his day. In the society in which Abraham lived, if guests did not eat the food that was brought to them by their host, it would have been considered a sign of hostility; see 11:70c; 51:27–28c.

53–54 The *knowing son* is a reference to Isaac (see 11:71). Abraham is said to have been 120 years old when the angels came to him, while his wife, Sarah, was 99 years old; see 51:29. Abraham's question, *So of what do you bring me glad tidings?* expresses his shock (JJ); see also 11:71 where, upon receiving glad tidings of Isaac as well as his son Jacob, Sarah likewise expresses her astonishment: *Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing.*

55–56 In replying to the angels' admonition to not be *among those who despair,* Abraham sought to clarify that his statement of shock (see 15:54c) was not on account of his despairing of God's Mercy; rather, he found it hard to believe that he could have a son despite his old age (Q). By saying that only *those who are astray* despair of God's Mercy, Abraham was distancing himself from any notion of despondency, since, as attested in 16:120–21, he was not among those who were astray. For the connection between despair and disbelief, see 12:87; 29:23.

57–58 These verses are identical to 51:31–32. In 11:70, the angels tell Abraham that they *have been sent unto the people of Lot,* by which they are indicating that they have come to destroy the people to whom they have been sent; see 11:70c. The story of Lot, the nephew of Abraham or his maternal cousin (see 7:80–81c), is also recounted in 7:80–84; 11:77–83; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38; 54:33–38. Lot was sent to the people of Sodom and its surrounding towns, calling people to believe in the One God and to relinquish their sinful ways, namely, the *indecency* (7:80) of their coming *with desire unto men instead of women* (7:81); see also 7:80–81c; 26:165–66; 27:54–55; 29:28–29; 37:135.

59–60 For God's saving Lot and his family, but not his wife, who was *among those who lagged behind* (7:83; 26:171; 27:57; 29:32), see 7:83c.

61–62 When the angels came to Lot in the form of handsome male youths, Lot did not know that they were angels; see 11:77–79c. As 11:77 states, he thus *was distressed on their account,* as

(63) They said, "Nay, but we bring thee that which they used to doubt. (64) And we bring thee the truth, and surely we are truthful. (65) So set out with thy family during the night, and follow behind them, and let not any of you turn around, but go forth wheresoever you are commanded." (66) And We decreed this matter unto him: that the last remnant of those people will be rooted out in the morning. (67) And the people of the city came, rejoicing. (68) He said, "Truly these are my guests; so dishonor me not! (69) Reverence God, and disgrace me not." (70) They said, "Did we not forbid you from [providing protection] to all the people?" (71) He said, "These are my daughters, if you must act." (72) By thy life, they wandered confused in their drunkenness. (73) So the Cry seized

he was fearful that his people would attempt to have sexual relations with them; see 7:80–81c; 11:77–79.

63–64 *That which they used to doubt* refers to the impending punishment of which Lot had been warning his people; but they doubted him and accused him of lying (Z).

65 See also 7:83c; 11:81. In the Biblical account (Genesis 19:26), Lot's wife left with him, but turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back as they fled the city.

66 *In the morning* the last of those remaining among Lot's people will be destroyed (Ṭs). See also 11:81: *Indeed, the morning shall be their tryst. Is not the morning nigh?*

67–69 Lot's people came to him *rejoicing,* because they had received the news of the arrival of Lot's male guests and wanted to satisfy their sexual desires with them (Ṭ); see also 11:78, where they come *hurrying.* According to a spiritual and esoteric interpretation of this verse, the people of Lot who come *rejoicing* represent people who are heedless of God: when they find those whom they think will conform to their caprices, they rejoice over them. But if others come to them and admonish them to leave their sinful ways, they turn away and are hostile toward them (Aj). It is said that Lot's wife informed the people of the guests' arrival (R); see also 26:170–71c. By telling his people not to bring *dishonor* or *disgrace* (cf. 11:78) upon him, Lot was asking them not to approach his guests with sexual intent, for if they did, it would bring shame upon him (R); see also 11:77–79c.

70 The reference here is to Lot's people forbidding him from attempting to dissuade them when they intended to approach any man with sexual intent (Q, R). Alternately, it can be a reference to their forbidding Lot from hosting any guests (Kl, Q), for Lot's people used to attempt to have sexual relations with strangers (Q); by hosting them, Lot was obligated to provide his guests protection.

71 For Lot's offering his daughters to his people, which was an attempt to divert them from his guests, see 11:77–79c. *If you must act* refers to their satisfying their sexual desires. In other words, it is as if Lot was saying, "If you wish to satisfy your sexual desires, then marry them [the daughters]" (JJ).

72 *By thy life* is understood to mean that God is swearing by the life of the Prophet Muhammad (IK, Kl, M, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). Alternately, it can be the angels swearing by the life of Lot (Kl, R, Ż). If the former, then God's swearing by the life of the Prophet is seen as an honor for which he alone has been singled out (IK), since in the Qurʾān God does not swear by the life of any other human being (M). There are many beautiful Sufi poems concerning the words *by thy life,* such as the lines of the great Persian poet and Sufi sage Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221): "When the crown of *by thy life* was placed upon his head, / the mountain became immediately like a hill at his threshold" (*Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* [Tehran, 2008], 248).

*They* may refer to the Quraysh (Ṭ) but, more likely, to the people of Lot (Kl). *Confused* refers to their state of misguidance and bewilderment

them at sunrise, (74) then We made its uppermost to be its lowermost, and We rained down upon them stones of baked clay. (75) Truly in that are signs for those who discern, (76) and verily they are on a path still standing. (77) Truly in that is a sign for the believers. (78) And verily the inhabitants of the thicket were wrongdoers. (79) So We took vengeance upon them. Truly the two of them are on a clear road. (80) And indeed the inhabitants of al-Ḥijr denied the messengers. (81) And We gave them Our signs, but they used to turn away therefrom. (82) And they would hew dwellings in the mountains, [feeling] secure. (83) Yet the Cry seized them in the morning, (84) and that which they used to earn availed them not. (85) And We did not create the heavens and the

(Bg), and *drunkenness* to their state of doubt and uncertainty (Bg, JJ).

73–74 See 11:82–83c.

75–77 By *those who discern* [the signs] are meant those who are so given to deep reflection that they can recognize the reality behind the outward forms (*simah*) of things (Z). *On a path still standing* refers to a road upon which people travel, where they can see the vestiges of the destroyed people of Lot (Aj).

78 *The inhabitants of the thicket* (also in 26:176; 38:13; 50:14) refers to the Midianites, a mercantile people from northwestern Arabia who engaged in corrupt business transactions, or it can refer to some other people (see 7:85c). The Arabian prophet Shuʿayb called them to worship the one true God and to relinquish their sinful ways. For the story of Shuʿayb, see also 7:85–93; 11:84–95; 26:176–89.

79 The *vengeance* taken upon Shuʿayb's people was in the form of a *Cry* that effaced them completely (for an explanation of *the Cry,* see 7:91–92c). *The two of them* are the people of Shuʿayb and the people of Lot (JJ), who were relatively close together in time (IK; see also 11:89–90c). *A clear road* refers to a road that is visible (Bg, Q, R) and appears to be identical to *a path still standing* (v. 76; see 15:75–77c).

80 *The inhabitants of al-Ḥijr* are the tribe Thamūd, who inhabited a rocky plain (*ḥijr,* from which they derived their name; Z) located in western Arabia between the Ḥijāz and Syria; the prophet sent to them was Ṣāliḥ; see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31; 7:73c. Although the Thamūd *denied the messengers,* the reference here is to their denial of the prophet Ṣāliḥ specifically (Bg, R, Z). Alternately, *the messengers* here could be interpreted to be a general reference to the prophet Ṣāliḥ and the believers who were with him (Z).

81 The *signs* given to the Thamūd refer to various proofs and miracles (Ṭs) or to the pregnant *she-camel,* which was accompanied by many other signs (Bḍ, Q), such as its enormous size and Ṣāliḥ's miraculously producing it from a large rock (Q; see 7:73c). Elsewhere, the *she-camel* is referred to as *a clear proof* (7:73), *a sign* (11:64), and *a trial* for the Thamūd (54:27). Along with the injunction to let the she-camel *graze freely on God's earth* and *cause her no harm* (see 7:73; 11:64; 26:155), Ṣāliḥ asked his people to let her drink from the well on *an appointed day* (26:155; see also 54:28). Yet they *hamstrung her* (11:65); see also 7:73c; 7:77–78c.

82 That the Thamūd *would hew dwellings in the mountains* is also mentioned in 7:74 (see also 26:149; 89:9). During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the Arabs were familiar with the remains of these mountain dwellings; see 7:74c. It is said that the Thamūd built their homes in the mountains because they would be less vulnerable to destruction (Kl). Alternately, this could be interpreted to mean that they did so in order to evade God's Punishment (Kl, R).

83–84 The punishment visited upon the Thamūd, also referred to as *the Cry* in 11:67, is said

earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth. And surely the Hour is coming; so forbear with beautiful forbearance. (86) Truly thy Lord is the knowing Creator. (87) And We have indeed given thee the seven oft-repeated, and the Mighty Quran. (88) Strain not thine eyes toward the enjoyments We have bestowed upon certain classes of them, and grieve not for them, and lower thy

to have been an *earthquake* (7:78) accompanied by a terrible, loud sound; see 7:77–78c. See also 11:67: *Morning found them lying lifeless in their abode.* The phrase *that which they used to earn availed them not* (cf. 39:50; 40:82) can be taken as a general reference to the communities of old that had rejected their messengers. For an alternate reading of this phrase, see 39:50c.

85–86 The first part of v. 85 is identical to a part of 46:3; cf. 10:5; 30:8. That God's creation has been carried out *in truth* (see also, e.g., 16:3; 29:44) means that it possesses reality and purpose and has not been created *in vain* (3:191; 38:27). See also 44:38–39: *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in play. We did not create them, save in truth. But most of them know not* (see also 21:16).

The Prophet spoke often of the imminence of the Hour, in one instance indicating symbolically that the time between him and the coming of the Hour was as the distance between his index and middle fingers; see 53:57; 54:1c. In a famous *ḥadīth,* the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet as a man and posed a set of questions to him, his last question was about the Hour. He asked, "When is the Hour?" The Prophet replied, "The one questioned knows no more than the questioner." In 33:63 the Prophet is instructed to say that knowledge of the Hour is only with God: *People question thee concerning the Hour. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with God. And what will apprise thee? Perhaps the Hour is nigh."* See also 42:17.

The Prophet is encouraged in several instances in the Quran to *forbear* and have patience in the face of the hostility he was encountering, in both Makkah and Madinah; see 5:13; 43:89; cf. 70:5.

87 Some say that *the seven oft-repeated* refers to the first seven *sūrah*s of the Quran (Ṭ, Z), but many others believe it refers to the first *sūrah* of the Quran, the *Fātiḥah* (Aj, Qm, R, Ṭ, Z), which consists of seven verses (Aj, R) if one counts as a verse the opening formula *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful;* see 1:1c. The *Fātiḥah* is also referred to as *oft-repeated* because it is the most often recited *sūrah* of the Quran, recited in each of the daily prayers (*ṣalāh;* Aj, R).

The Prophet is reported to have referred to the *Fātiḥah* as *the seven oft-repeated* (R) and moreover to have said, "By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, God did not reveal the like of the *Fātiḥah* in the Torah, Gospel, Psalms, or [anywhere else in] the Quran. It is *the Mother of the Book* [43:4] and the *seven oft-repeated.* It is divided between God and His servant, and for His servant is what he asks"; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 1.

88 In the first part of this verse, the Prophet is admonished not to desire the things of the world that have been given to the Makkans who are rejecting him (Aj, Bḍ), since what he has been given, namely, *the seven oft-repeated, and the Mighty Quran* (v. 87), is greater than anything they have (Aj). It is reported that the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, said, "Whoever is given the Quran and thinks that anything given [to him] from this world is better than what he has been given, has deemed a great thing small, and a small thing great" (Aj, Bḍ).

The injunction to the Prophet to *grieve not* on behalf of the Makkan idolaters is in reference to the grief he experienced when they did not believe in the message (Bḍ); see 18:6: *Yet perhaps thou wouldst destroy thyself with grief for their sake, should they believe not in this account* (see also 3:176; 5:41, 68; 6:33; 10:65; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 35:8; 36:76). *Lower thy wing unto the believers* means that the Prophet should be humble and gentle toward them (Aj); see also 17:24c; 26:215.

wing unto the believers, (89) and say, "Truly I am the clear warner." (90) Such as We have sent down for those who make division, (91) who made the Quran into fragments. (92) So by thy Lord, We shall question them all (93) concerning that which they used to do. (94) So proclaim as thou hast been commanded, and turn away from the idolaters. (95) Truly We shall suffice thee against those who mock, (96) those who set up another god along with God; yet soon they will know. (97) And certainly We know that thy breast is straitened because of what they say. (98) So hymn the praise of thy Lord, and be among those who prostrate. (99) And worship thy Lord, till certainty comes unto thee.

89 For the Prophet as a *clear warner,* see also 22:49; 29:50; 38:70; 46:9; 51:50; 67:26.

90–93 V. 90 can be connected with v. 89, such that together they could be read to mean, "I am a clear warner to you of a punishment like the punishment that visited those who make division" (Bg, R). *Those who make division* may refer to a group of Makkans who were stationed on the outskirts of Makkah by al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, one of the main enemies of the Prophet, in order to tell people entering Makkah that there was a man in Makkah who was claiming prophethood, but who was in reality a possessed magician, soothsayer, and poet (R; see 26:224–26c). It may also be a more general reference to the Makkan idolaters who rejected the Quran. Thus, *those . . . who made the Quran into fragments* refers to the Makkans who rejected the Quran by calling it sorcery, fables of the ancients (e.g., 83:13), or soothsaying rather (see 26:224–26c; Bg), meaning that it was not a whole, but rather was cobbled together from these false sources (R). Others say that *those who made the Quran into fragments* refers to those who believe in the parts of the Quran they like and reject the rest (Q; cf. 2:85). According to one reading, *fragments* is understood to come originally from the root *ʿ-ḍ-h* rather than *ʿ-ḍ-w;* if so, it would mean "lies" (Q, R).

According to a *ḥadīth,* God's questioning the Makkan idolaters *concerning that which they used to do* refers to how they responded to the statement, "There is no god but God," that is, whether or not they believed in it and acted in accordance with it or not (Q).

94 This verse enjoins the Prophet to declare openly the teachings that have been revealed to him and to pay no attention to the idolaters (Bḍ); see also 6:106: *Follow that which has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord—there is no god but He—and turn away from the idolaters.*

95–96 This verse is understood as an assurance to the Prophet that God will destroy a particular group of Makkan idolaters known as the "mockers," among whom was al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah (JJ). They were the ones most bitterly opposed to the Prophet's message and, in addition to insulting and mocking him, were known to spit and throw animal entrails on him. That God will *suffice* the Prophet against them is understood to mean that He will destroy them without need of any effort on the part of the Prophet (Kl). On the idea of God's being "enough" or "sufficient," see 2:137c. It is reported that members of this group all died before the Battle of Badr (Kl, Z).

97 For the grief experienced by the Prophet on account of the Makkan idolaters' failure to believe, see 11:12c. See, moreover, 5:68; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 35:8, where the Prophet is consoled by God for his people's rejection of his message; see also 27:70c.

98–99 *Certainty* here refers to death (Q, R, Ṭ, Z), because of death's inevitable nature (R) and because with death one attains to certainty of all that is promised in the Hereafter (Ṭ). In this sense, these verses are understood as an injunction to continue to hymn God's praises and worship Him until the moment of death. Others under-

stand *certainty* here as a reference to the station where the worshipper is with the Worshipped and thus knows God with certainty (Bq, K), so that nothing distracts from the fullness of worship (Bq); this station is known in Islamic sapiential teachings as *the truth of certainty* (56:95; see 56:95c; 69:51; 102:5c).

This verse also alludes to a deep connection between certainty and death: to be certain of the truth is to die to falsehood, since nothing of one's being can dwell any longer in falsehood. In this state one sees nothing but God and converses with none but Him (Su). This type of death, characterized by the station of certainty (*maqām al-yaqīn*), is what is known in Islamic thought as "voluntary death"; in it one undergoes a spiritual transformation while still alive in this world, dying to one's ego and to worldly attachments.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 16

# The Bee

## *al-Naḥl*

A late Makkan *sūrah, al-Naḥl* was likely revealed shortly before the migration to Madinah. Some maintain, however, that vv. 126–27 were revealed in Madinah, after the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), and instruct the Prophet about how to respond to the killing and mutilation of his beloved uncle, Ḥamzah (Q). Some also consider v. 110, which promises God's Mercy toward *those who emigrated after being oppressed,* to be Madinan and to refer to those who emigrated from Makkah to Madinah (Q). An earlier reference to *those who emigrate for the sake of God* (v. 41) is usually understood to refer to those Muslims who emigrated from Makkah to Abyssinia several years before the migration of Makkan Muslims to Madinah (Q), although some consider v. 41 to be Madinan as well (IJ). Others also consider vv. 95–97 (Āl, IJ) and v. 112 (IJ) to be Madinan verses. The *sūrah* takes its name from the discussion of God's revelation to the bee in vv. 68–69. According to al-Qurṭubī, some refer to this *sūrah* as *al-Niʿam* ("The Blessings") because of the many references to the blessings God has given to human beings; and in v. 18, it is said that His blessings cannot be counted.

This *sūrah* is one of the most important of those in the Quran that point out the spiritual significance of nature. Substantial parts of this *sūrah* are devoted to the wonders of the natural world and to rehearsing the specific blessings that God has bestowed on human beings through natural phenomena, including various kinds of livestock and their benefits and uses, crops and vegetation, the celestial bodies, the sea and its bounties, and the mountains, streams, and other natural landmarks that guide human beings' travel (vv. 5–17). Later the *sūrah* mentions the four drinks with which God has blessed human beings (water, milk, drink derived from the fruit of the vine, and honey; vv. 65–69) as well as the blessings of spouses and children (v. 72) and various kinds of dwellings and protections (vv. 80–81).

Much of this *sūrah* is also concerned with the Makkan idolaters, including their denial of and arrogance toward the Prophet, their plotting against

him (vv. 22–26), their corrupt pagan practices (vv. 56–60), and their accusation that the Prophet had fabricated the revelation (vv. 101–5). Contained in it are repeated warnings about the impending punishment to come in this world and the Hereafter for those who disbelieve (vv. 45–55; 61–63; 84–89); in v. 112, it presents a parable about the punishment of a town that was, like pagan Makkah, ungrateful for its blessings. The *sūrah* also instructs believers regarding the importance of fulfilling the *pact of God* and keeping their oaths to others (vv. 91–96). Vv. 114–18 discuss the dietary laws that Muslims should observe, suggesting that more extensive dietary laws were given to the Jews. The *sūrah* closes by instructing the Prophet and his followers about how to deal with their religious opponents, that is, by disputing with them *in the most virtuous manner* (v. 125) and by responding with restraint and patience when they have been wronged (vv. 126–27).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) The Command of God is coming; so seek not to hasten it. Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe. (2) He sends down angels with the Spirit from His Command to whomsoever He will among His servants, "Give warning that there is no god but I, so reverence Me!" (3) He created the heavens and the earth in truth. Exalted is He above the partners they

1 When the Prophet received a revelation saying *the Hour has drawn nigh* (54:1), the Makkan idolaters temporarily stopped what they were doing in order to await the events that were about to unfold. When the Hour did not come, they mocked the warning that the Prophet had delivered (Z). This verse was revealed, affirming that the *Command of God is* indeed *coming;* see also 4:47; 33:37; 65:3, where it is said that the Command of God will be fulfilled. The *Command of God* refers to the coming of either earthly punishment or the Last Day (see, e.g., 11:40; 23:27; 40:78; 57:14; 82:18). The warning *seek not to hasten it* suggests that God's Judgment or Punishment may be hastened by either disbelief or wrongdoing (see, e.g., 6:57–58; 7:150; 10:51). See also 21:37: *Man was created of haste. Soon shall I show you My signs; so seek not to hasten Me;* as well as 22:47; 26:203–4; 27:72; 29:53–54; 37:176; 42:18; 46:24; 51:13–14. That God is *exalted above the partners* people *ascribe* to Him is also mentioned in 6:100; 7:190; 10:18; 16:3; 23:92; 27:63; 28:68; 30:40; 39:67.

2 *The Spirit* with which God *sends down angels* is understood here as a reference to the Quran or to revelation more generally (Q, Ṭs); revelation may be referred to as *the Spirit* since it conveys Divine Guidance and gives life to the soul (Q, Ṭs), reviving hearts just as spirits revive bodies (Q). The *angels* with whom *the Spirit* descends refers most specifically to the Archangel Gabriel (JJ), the agent of revelation. Other verses mention a connection between *the Spirit* and God's *Command,* for example, 17:85: *They ask thee about the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little"* (cf. 40:15; 42:52; 97:4). In Islamic metaphysics, the "world of the Command" (*ʿālam al-amr*) is identified with the world of the Spirit (*al-Rūḥ*). God sends the Spirit *to whomsoever He will among His servants,* that is, to whomever He chooses as messengers (JJ, Ṭ). The Divine command *Reverence Me!* is also found in 2:41, 197; 23:52; 39:16.

3 God created the world *in truth,* that is, with purpose and goodness and not in vain, an idea

ascribe. (4) He created man from a drop, and behold, he is a manifest adversary. (5) And cattle has He created for you, in which there is warmth and [other] uses, and whereof you eat. (6) And in them there is beauty for you, when you bring them home, and when you take them out to pasture. (7) And they bear your burdens to a land you would never reach, save with great hardship to yourselves. Truly your Lord is Kind, Merciful. (8) And [He has created] horses, mules, and asses, that you may ride them, and as adornment, and He creates that which you know not. (9) And it is for God to show the way, for some of

that is repeated in many other verses; see 6:73c; 10:5; 30:8c; 44:39; 45:22; 46:3; 64:3.

4 That human beings were created *from a drop* of fluid (cf. 18:37; 22:5; 23:12–14; 35:11; 40:67; 53:45–46; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19) evokes their essential weakness (IK) and helplessness. Human beings are *a manifest adversary* of the Lord (IK, Z) insofar as they deny His Power and the blessings He has bestowed upon them and refuse to believe in His ability to resurrect the dead (R), although they were created to be servants (51:56), not opponents (IK). This verse was reportedly revealed in reference to Ubayy ibn Khalaf, a Makkan who expressed skepticism about God's ability to resurrect the dead (W). See also commentary on 36:77: *Has not man seen that We created him from a drop and, behold, he is a manifest adversary.*

5–7 In the Quran *cattle* is used to designate four types of grazing animals: sheep, goats, camels, and oxen; see 6:142–44. The manifold benefits of cattle for human beings (also mentioned in vv. 66, 80; 23:21–22; 36:71–72; 40:79–80; 43:12–13) include their service as riding animals and beasts of burden, their provision of milk and meat, and the use of their skin and wool for making dwellings and furnishings. It is only in this passage, however, that their *beauty* (*jamāl*) is invoked (v. 6) as one of their benefits for humanity, indicating that the natural world should be seen as a source of beauty and wonder, not just of material benefits. In his commentary on these verses, al-Rāzī suggests a hierarchy of animals in which human beings are at the pinnacle, followed by those animals of most use to them in matters of material survival, then by those that provide beauty and adornment, then by those that provide no benefit, and finally by those about whom human beings have no knowledge at all (see v. 8, which states that God *creates that which you know not*).

8 The grazing animals mentioned in this verse, *horses, mules, and asses,* unlike the cattle mentioned in vv. 5–7, are of use primarily for riding and *adornment* rather than for food. Most schools of law agree that the meat of mules and asses is not permissible to eat; the latter was explicitly banned by the Prophet during the Battle of Khaybar (7/629; Q). Some consider the eating of horse meat to be permissible, but nonetheless discouraged (Q), primarily because it is seen as a waste of a creature that has greater usefulness as a premier riding animal. Such animals are a source of *adornment* insofar as riding them not only provides a means of transportation, but also confers a measure of dignity or nobility, and hence a kind of worldly adornment, upon the rider. That God creates *that which you know not* is meant to indicate His great Power (Z), which surpasses human understanding (Z).

9 It is for God to guide people to the straight path that leads to salvation (Bḍ), because *some of them*—that is, some paths—*lead astray.* Some commentators understood this to mean that it is God's self-imposed obligation to guide His servants (Z); others described God's guiding people as an act of bounty and generosity on His part, not an obligation (Bḍ, R). This verse can also be understood to mean that only God can guide people in this way, as in 92:12: *Truly Ours it is to give guidance.* That God could have guided all people to the straight path, *had He willed,* is also mentioned in 5:48; 6:35, 149; 16:93. For Ashᶜarite thinkers, this and similar verses indicate that God does not necessarily will that all people should be guided aright (R). Muᶜtazilite thinkers, however,

them lead astray. Had He willed, He would have guided you all together. (10) He it is Who sends down water from the sky, from which you have drink, and from which comes forth vegetation wherewith you pasture your cattle. (11) Therewith He causes the crops to grow for you, and olives, and date palms, and grapevines, and every kind of fruit. Truly in that is a sign for a people who reflect. (12) He has made the night and the day subservient unto you, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars are subservient by His Command. Truly in that are signs for a people who understand. (13) And whatsoever He created for you on the

understood this verse to mean that, although God is capable of compelling all people to follow His Guidance, He prefers to allow them to exercise the free will that He has given them to choose for themselves; or they understood it to mean that God could guide all people to Paradise (regardless of their deeds), but that He wishes that only those who have earned Paradise through their actions should go there (R).

10–11 God's sending *down water* is mentioned throughout the Quran as one of His fundamental gifts to humanity (see, e.g., 15:22; 22:63; 29:63; 30:24; 41:39), since in addition to its direct use by human beings, it also sustains plants and animals that are of use to people as well; see 6:99c; 7:57; 14:32; 20:53–54; 22:5; 23:18–19; 27:60; 31:10; 35:27; 39:21; 78:14–16; 80:25–32. That this and other natural phenomena serve as *a sign for a people who reflect* is an idea also found in 10:24; 13:3; 16:13, 69; 30:21; 39:42; 45:13.

12 Various natural phenomena are described in the Quran as being made *subservient* by God's Command (7:54; 13:2; 29:61; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5). Subservience is also mentioned in relation to the sea (v. 14) and the birds (v. 79). In the present verse and elsewhere, however, it is said that God has made certain phenomena *subservient unto you,* that is, unto human beings (14:32–33; 22:36–37; 22:65; 31:20; 43:13; 45:12). The subservience of natural phenomena to human beings can be understood cosmologically as a consequence of the fact that the human being is God's vicegerent (*khalīfat Allāh*) on earth (see 2:30 and commentary). In some cases, even humanly constructed phenomena, particularly ships that sail upon seas and rivers, are included among those things that God has made subservient to human beings (14:32–33c; 43:13; 45:12).

That such majestic phenomena have been made subservient to human beings means that these phenomena have been designed or constrained by God to serve human needs (R). For example, *night and day* provide human beings the opportunity to rest at night (10:67) and to seek God's Bounty by day (Z), while the *stars* provide them with a means of navigation or guidance on both land and sea (v. 16). To describe something as *subservient* implies the existence of a conscious will that is constrained to obey and serve another. Because the sun, the moon, and other phenomena that are described as subservient are understood to be inanimate objects, some consider their "subservience" merely a metaphor for God's creating them in a particular way to serve their designated function. However, others suggest that the Divine *Command* by which they are made subservient is actually a "prescriptive command," which these phenomena obey as a matter of religious responsibility (R). This latter understanding is consistent with the literal reading of other verses indicating that there are stones that *crash down for the fear of God* (2:74), stars and trees that prostrate to God (55:6), and thunder that *hymns His praise* (13:13). That such natural phenomena are signs of God's Power and Benevolence for *people who understand* is also mentioned in 2:164; 13:4; 16:67; 30:24; 45:5.

13 Cf. 35:27–28, where God's creating the earth, human beings, and cattle *of diverse hues* is a reason to be in awe of Him. The present verse marks a shift from the *sūrah*'s discussion of the wonders of the celestial world to those of the ter-

earth of diverse hues—truly in this is a sign for a people who reflect. (14) He it is Who made the sea subservient, that you may eat fresh meat therefrom, and extract from it ornaments that you wear. You see the ships plowing through it, and [this is so] that you may seek His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. (15) And He cast firm mountains in the earth, lest it shake beneath you, and streams, and ways, that haply you may be guided, (16) and landmarks, and by the stars they are guided. (17) Is He Who creates like one who creates not?

restrial realm (IK). *Diverse hues* refers not only to variations of color, but also to differences in shape and appearance (Bḍ, IK, Q).

14 For a discussion of the "subservience" of natural phenomena, see 16:12c. Regarding the sea as a source of *fresh meat*—that is, fish (Ṭ)—and *ornaments,* alluding to pearls and coral (55:22; Ṭ), see 35:12c. The *fresh meat* of the sea differs from the meat derived from land animals in Islamic Law in that fish do not need to be ritually slaughtered and can be caught and eaten even in a state of *iḥrām* (a state of purity for pilgrimage, which is nullified by the slaughtering of an animal); see 5:1, 95–96. *Ships* that sail upon the sea are mentioned elsewhere as a benefit for which people should be grateful to God (see, e.g., 2:164; 14:32; 23:22; 31:31). *Plowing through it* refers to the ships' cutting through the water or through the wind (Ṭ). The ships allow human beings to *seek His Bounty* (17:66; 30:46; 35:12; 45:12), a reference to the goods that one may acquire through distant trade and the profit one may make thereby (see 28:73; 30:23).

15 A nearly identical verse is 21:31; see 21:30–31c. God's casting or placing *firm mountains into the earth* for humanity suggests their functioning as a source of stability for the earth, *lest it shake beneath* them (cf. 13:3; 15:9; 41:10; 50:7; 77:27; 79:32); see also 21:31; 31:10; and 78:7, where the mountains are described as *stakes* like those that hold up a tent. Al-Rāzī suggests that mountains and streams are mentioned together (cf. 13:3; 27:61), because most streams have their origin in mountain springs. The stability provided by the mountains will be overturned on the Last Day, however, which is described as *a day on which the earth and the mountains shake, and the mountains will be like heaps of shifting sand* (73:14; cf. 56:4–6; 101:5).

16 Just as the *streams* serve as a source of guidance for human beings, so too do other *landmarks,* visible along the roads by day (Q, Ṭ, Z), and the *stars,* which are visible by night or when at sea (R)—thus providing humanity with sources of guidance night and day, on land or at sea. *Landmarks* translates *ʿalāmāt* and may include mountains (Q, Ṭ), springs along the road (Z), and winds (Q), all of which can provide directional guidance. The nomadic pre-Islamic Arabs had developed complex knowledge of winds, which is reflected in the rich vocabulary in Arabic for different kinds of winds, and the Quran makes reference to some of them; cf. 2:266; 17:69; 41:16; 51:41; 52:27. *Stars* translates *najm,* which is "star" in the singular. It may be singular in the Arabic because it is referring to stars as a single category (Q, Z), although others have suggested that it refers to a particular star or constellation, such as the Pleiades, Ursa Major or Minor, or the North Star (Q, Z). Since the Quraysh were dependent on the stars for navigation during their travels in the desert, they should have been particularly grateful for this blessing (Z); for Muslims, these natural sources of guidance are also useful for finding the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) in unfamiliar territory (Q, R).

17 Following the mention in the preceding verses of natural phenomena, which God has created for the benefit of human beings, the present verse asks whether one would still worship lifeless idols rather than God, Who created all of these blessings (R). *The one who creates not* is a reference to the idols worshipped by the Makkan idolaters (R, Z), and the verse serves as a rebuke to those who would make their idols equal to the Creator by referring to them as "gods" and worshipping them (R).

Will you not, then, reflect? (18) And were you to count the blessings of God, you could not number them. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (19) And God knows what you hide and what you disclose. (20) And those whom they call upon apart from God create naught, and are themselves created. (21) [They are] dead, not living, and they are not aware of when they will be resurrected. (22) Your God is one God. And those who believe not in the Hereafter, their hearts deny and they wax arrogant. (23) There is no doubt that God knows what they hide and

Ashᶜarite theologians adduced this verse to indicate that the title "Creator," and thus the act of creation, can only be rightfully attributed to God. Thus human beings cannot be said to be the "creators" of their own acts; rather, all acts, like all things, are created by God (R). Some Muᶜtazilites responded by saying that the verse does not deny that the act of "creating," in a limited sense, can also be attributed to human beings; rather, the point of the verse is that human beings, who possess intelligence and agency and thus have at least some capability for "creating," should not worship idols that do not possess even these limited faculties or capabilities and thus can create nothing at all (R).

18 For the impossibility of counting the blessings of God, see 14:34c. To say that human beings cannot count the blessings of God in their entirety is also to say that human beings can never be sufficiently grateful to God or worship Him "enough," since they cannot mentally encompass the greatness and extent of the gifts that He has given them (R, Z). For this reason, God is described as *Forgiving* and *Merciful* with regard to the incapacity of human beings to offer sufficient praise to Him (R, Ṭs, Z). Al-Rāzī asserts that if one were to contemplate all that God had created for the benefit of human beings, the human intellect would be exhausted and extinguished merely by seeking to comprehend the wisdom with which God created humanity, let alone trying to take into account all of the other bounty and goodness He has provided.

19 This verse and many others like it refer to God's knowledge of what human beings *hide*—that is, their inward thoughts and intentions—as well as of what they *disclose* through outward actions; see also 2:33, 77; 3:29; 5:99; 14:38; 21:110; 24:29; 27:25, 74; 28:69; 33:54; 36:76; 64:4. The reference to God's all-encompassing Knowledge is meant as a warning to those who conceal evil intentions (Z). In the context of this *sūrah,* it may also mean that in addition to their outward polytheism and idolatry, the idolaters also conceal other forms of disbelief and wrongdoing, such as their plots to undermine the Prophet and his mission (R). The statement here may also be intended to provide a contrast between God, who knows human beings both outwardly and inwardly, and the inanimate idols, which have no knowledge at all (R).

20 Cf. 25:3. That the idols are "created" presents an additional contrast with God, Who is "uncreated" and therefore not "created" by another. See 37:95–96: *He said, "Do you worship that which you carve, while God created you and that which you make?"*

21 This verse offers the final contrast between God and the idols: the latter are *dead, not living,* whereas God is *the Living* (2:255; 3:2; 20:111; 40:65) and never dies (R). See 25:58: *And trust in the Living, Who dies not, and hymn His praise.* Some commentators suggest that *they* in *they are not aware* refers to the idols, and *they* in *when they will be resurrected* refers to the idolaters, meaning that the idols have no knowledge of when those who worship them will be resurrected (R); nor do they know when the Hour will come (IK). It is reported from Ibn ᶜAbbās, however, that God will indeed quicken the idols at the time of the Resurrection, bring them together with the satans, and command them all into the Fire (R).

22–23 *Your God is one God* is also found in 2:163; 22:34; 41:6; see also v. 51: *Truly He is only one God.* The *hearts* of the idolaters *deny,* that is, refuse to accept admonition (Q). To *wax ar-*

what they disclose. Truly He loves not the arrogant. (24) When it is said unto them, "What has your Lord sent down?" they say, "Fables of those of old!" (25) [This is so], that on the Day of Resurrection they may bear their burdens completely, along with some of the burdens of those whom they lead astray without knowledge. Behold! Evil is that which they bear. (26) Those before them also plotted. Then God came upon their building from the foundations, and the roof fell down upon them from above, and the punishment came upon

*rogant* is an attitude associated with Satan (2:34; 7:13; 38:74–75) and the disbelievers (6:93; 14:21; 25:21; 28:39; 35:43; 37:35; 40:60; 46:20; 71:7; 74:23), whose pride prevents them from following the Prophet and leads them to deny anything that they do not already know (Bḍ). This attitude contrasts with that of believers, who contemplate the indications and signs of God and the guidance they are given, from which they benefit (Bḍ).

God *loves not the arrogant,* as He loves not the *vainglorious boaster* (4:36; 31:18; 57:23) or the *exultant* (28:76); He also does not love transgressors (2:190; 5:87; 7:55), disbelievers (3:32; 30:45), wrongdoers (3:57, 140; 42:40), those who practice treachery (4:107; 8:58; 22:38), workers of corruption (5:64, 28:77), or the prodigal (6:141; 7:31). *The arrogant* here may mean those who are too arrogant to believe in the Oneness of God, that is, the idolaters in particular, or it may be a general reference to all who are arrogant (Z). In relation to God's knowledge of what people *hide* and *disclose,* mentioned in v. 19 and restated here, al-Qurṭubī observes that arrogance is the only sin that cannot be hidden, since it is an attitude visible by nature, and that it is the root of all disobedience.

24 Regarding the common accusation that the Prophet was bringing mere *fables of those of old,* see 6:25; 8:31; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 68:15; 83:13.

25 Those who lead others astray will carry an extra burden of punishment, as they will be punished for their own sins as well as for the sins of those whom they lead astray; see 11:19–20. At the same time, the Quran asserts that *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). Thus even if those who lead others astray bear an extra or double burden of punishment, this in no way lessens the burden that those whom they led astray bear for their own sins (IK, Q). See 29:12–13: *Those who disbelieve say to those who believe, "Follow our path and we shall bear your sins." But they bear not aught of their sins. Truly they are liars. Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own, and on the Day of Resurrection they will surely be questioned concerning that which they used to fabricate;* and also 7:38. According to a *ḥadīth,* "Whoever calls to error and is followed, upon him are the burdens of those who followed him, without lessening their burdens at all; and whoever calls to guidance and is followed, he shall have the reward [of those who followed him] without lessening their reward" (IK, Q). *Without knowledge* pertains to those who are led astray; that is, they are in a state of ignorance. Despite their ignorance, however, they remain culpable for being led astray, because it is incumbent upon all people to exercise their judgment and intellect to distinguish between what is true and what is false (Z). They *bear their burdens completely,* meaning that the punishment will not be lessened for them in any way; for example, any misfortune that befell them in the world as a result of their disbelief will not absolve them of punishment in the Hereafter (Q).

26 This verse is meant both as a consolation for the Prophet and as a warning to his people, the Quraysh (Ṭs). It is one of several verses that warn of the futility of "plotting" against God, His prophets, or the believers; see, for example, 3:54: *And they plotted, and God plotted. And God is the best of plotters* (see also 6:123; 8:30; 10:21; 13:42; 14:46; 27:50c).

*Those before them also plotted* is reportedly a reference to an ancient tyrannical king among the Nabateans (Ṭ) or the people of southern Syria and Mesopotamia, and commentators commonly

them whence they were not aware. (27) Then on the Day of Resurrection He will disgrace them and say, "Where are My partners on whose account you were defiant?" Those who were given knowledge will say, "Surely, this day, disgrace and evil are upon the disbelievers"— (28) those whom the angels took while they were wronging themselves. Then they will offer submission, "We were not doing any evil." Nay, but God knows best that which you were doing. (29) So enter the gates of Hell, to abide therein. Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant! (30) And it will be said unto those who are reverent, "What has your Lord sent down?" They will say, "Goodness." For those who are virtuous in this

consider the tyrant here to be the one encountered by Abraham in 2:258, which legendary reports identify as Nimrod. The present verse is said to refer to this king's desire to erect a building to Heaven to make war upon its inhabitants (JJ, Ṭ, Th, Ṭs) and God's subsequent destruction of the building. This account is reminiscent of the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and is explicitly connected with this story by several commentators (Ṭ, Th, Z). The identification of the tyrant as Nimrod is perhaps related to the Biblical mention of Nimrod as a mighty and dominant figure in Genesis 10. Others consider the verse to be a reference to Nebuchadnezzar (IK, Ṭ).

*God came upon their building;* that is, God's Command (Ṭs) came upon the building and it was utterly uprooted and destroyed (Ṭ)—God's Command is an expression used elsewhere to refer to the descent of destructive punishment (see, e.g., 7:150c; 10:24). *Their building* may be a metaphor for all the various ways in which the disbelievers and idolaters try to lead others astray (IK). The verse may thus mean that God *came upon* their plot, undoing all their efforts (IK) or making its intended harm devolve upon the plotters themselves (Ṭs). That *the roof fell down upon them* may refer metaphorically to the uncovering of a plot that they had sought to keep hidden (IK) or to the descent of Divine Punishment from the sky (Ṭ).

27 The destruction of their building was their punishment in this life, and *disgrace* will be their punishment in the Hereafter (Z). *Where are My partners?* is meant to rebuke (IK, Ṭs) or mock those who were defiant on account of the false partners they ascribed to God (Z); see also 6:22; 28:62–65; 28:74–75; 40:73–74; 41:47–48. Their ascribing partners to God made them *defiant* toward the believers (Ṭs, Z) as well as toward God (Z). *Those who were given knowledge* refers to the prophets and the learned people (*ʿulamāʾ*) who, in earthly life, have called others to faith and have admonished them (Z); or it refers to the believers (Ṭs), the angels (Ṭs), or all who are noble and truthful in this world and the next (IK).

28–29 *Wronging themselves* refers to the disbelievers persisting in their disbelief. *Offer submission* translates *alqaw al-salam,* which may also be translated "offer peace": they will offer peace and behave humbly—in contrast to their arrogance and dissension in life (Z). Although they *offer submission,* they do so only when death has come upon them, and thus at a time when their submission can no longer avail them (Ṭs). In this verse, the wrongdoers blatantly deny their wrongdoing in a vain attempt to escape punishment (cf. 6:22–24c), although in other verses, they acknowledge their wrongdoing in the face of Divine Punishment (21:46, 23:106; 68:29–31). *Nay, but God knows best that which you were doing. So enter the gates of Hell* is said by some commentators to have been uttered by *those who were given knowledge* (v. 27; Ṭs, Z); others claim these words are spoken by the angels (Ṭs) or by God Himself (IK, Ṭs).

30 The response of *the reverent* to the question *What has your Lord sent down?* is offered without hesitation and serves as a contrast to the response of *the arrogant* to that same question in

world, there shall be good, and the Abode of the Hereafter is better. Excellent indeed is the abode of the reverent! (31) They shall enter the Gardens of Eden with rivers running below. Therein shall they have whatsoever they will. Thus does God recompense the reverent, (32) those whom the angels take while they are in a state of goodness. They will say, "Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden for that which you used to do." (33) Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that the Command of thy Lord should come? Those before them did likewise. And God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves. (34) Thus they were stricken by the evil deeds they had done, and

v. 24 (Bḍ, Z): the *arrogant* considered what has been *sent down* to be mere *fables,* but the reverent describe what God has sent down as *goodness.* For other descriptions of contrasting responses to revelation, see 2:26; 9:124–25. *For those who are virtuous in this world, there shall be good*—that is, in this world (Q)—although some say *good* here may be a reference to Paradise (Q). If the *good* they receive in this world is merely commensurate with good deeds they have done, their reward in the Hereafter will well exceed the good they have earned through their deeds (Bḍ, Z); cf. 6:160. *The Abode of the Hereafter is better* in every respect, but also because, in contrast to this world, it is lasting (Q; see 20:127; 28:60; 42:36; 87:17). Since *with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter* (4:134), people are enjoined to pray to God for the good things of both worlds; see 2:200–2. But just as goodness can be rewarded in this world as well as the Hereafter (see v. 41; 10:63–64), so too are disbelievers and wrongdoers recompensed with disgrace in this world and punishment in the Hereafter (2:114; 3:56; 5:33, 41; 9:74; 13:34, 24:19, 23; 33:57; 39:26).

31 Throughout the Quran, *Gardens of Eden* refers to the paradisal Gardens of the Hereafter; see also 9:72; 13:23; 19:61; 18:31; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50; 40:8; 98:8. Regarding the description of *with rivers running below,* which is repeated dozens of times throughout the Quran, see 2:25c. That those in the paradisal Garden *shall have whatsoever they will* (see also 36:55–57; 37:41–49; 38:50–54; 41:31; 44:51–57; 52:22–24; 55:46–76; 56:12–38; 77:41–44) is understood by some to indicate that human beings can only have all of their desires fulfilled in the Garden (Bḍ).

32 Regarding the angels taking souls of the deceased, see 4:97c; 6:61–62c; 7:37; 8:50; 32:11c. *Peace be upon you* is the greeting the angels give to the righteous, conveying greetings from God Himself and giving them glad tidings of Paradise (Z). *Peace be upon you* is also the greeting heard among those in the Garden (7:46; 10:10; 13:24; 14:24; 19:62; 33:44; 39:73) and is the proper greeting between Muslims in this world generally. In 36:58, *"Peace!"* is a "word" given to them by *a Lord most Merciful.* Those taken *in a state of goodness* refers to those who die innocent of all polytheism and pure in speech and action (Bḍ, Z), or to those who were taken in an easy manner without hardship or pain, in contrast to the way the souls of the disbelievers are taken (Bḍ; see, e.g., 8:50).

33 See 6:158c; 2:210. The coming of *the angels* or the *Command of thy Lord* can refer to either individual death or the coming of the Last Day and thus universal Resurrection and Judgment (Bḍ, Z). The rhetorical question in this verse is meant to indicate the foolishness of waiting until the Final Judgment comes to heed the warnings that have been given or of seeking such proof of impending punishment before believing. *Those before them did likewise* is a reference to previous peoples destroyed for disbelieving in their prophets and is thus meant as a warning for the Quraysh. God *wronged them not, but they wronged themselves* by committing deeds that necessitated their destruction (Z); see also 3:117; 9:70; 10:44; 11:101; 16:118; 29:40; 30:9; 43:76. The repeated Quranic

were beset by that which they used to mock. (35) Those who ascribe partners unto God say, "Had God willed, we would not have worshipped aught apart from Him—neither us nor our fathers—nor would we have considered sacred aught apart from Him." Those before them did likewise. Is aught incumbent upon the Messenger save the clear proclamation? (36) We indeed sent a messenger unto every community, "Worship God, and shun false deities!" Then among them were those whom God guided; and among them were those who were

assertion that human beings *wrong themselves* through their actions indicates that human beings are responsible for their actions and thus confirms human free will in moral matters.

34 People suffer punishment for the deeds they have committed (Z), and the terrible consequences of their deeds fall ultimately upon themselves, since *evil plotting besets none but its authors* (35:43). Those who do wrong are thus solely responsible for the evil that befalls them; see 4:79: *Whatever good befalls thee, it is from God, and whatever evil befalls thee, it is from thyself;* and 6:164: *No soul does evil, save against itself.* That disbelievers will ultimately be beset by *that which they used to mock* is repeated in several places; see 11:8; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26.

35 Cf. 6:148 and 43:19–20, where the idolaters make similar claims. The idolaters' claim that, if not for God's Will, they would not have *considered sacred,* or forbidden, *aught apart from Him* likely refers to the various kinds of camels that the idolatrous Arabs considered sacred and therefore forbidden to be eaten (see 5:103c; IK, Z) or to the arbitrary prohibitions the Arabs placed on the meat of certain animals (6:136–39). The idolaters' assertion is offered disingenuously as an excuse, but from the Quranic perspective their statement is not necessarily untrue, for in 6:137, after recounting the evil practices of the idolaters, the Quran itself states: *Had God willed, they would not have done so.* The latter verse can be understood to mean that at some level God wills all things; but it can also be interpreted to mean that although God is capable of forcibly preventing the idolaters from engaging in such practices, He instead gave them the free will to choose their own religious beliefs and practices, thus making the idolaters fully accountable for their religious choices. Cf. 36:47, where the disbelievers similarly invoke God's Will in order to reject calls to spend their wealth in charity, saying, *Are we to feed those whom, if God willed, He would feed?* All such references to God's Will are based upon the false, if implicit, argument that, since all that exists comes about as a matter of God's Will, everything in existence is as it should be and therefore human beings as moral agents have no responsibility to rectify the errors and injustices or ameliorate the suffering they see in the world.

The verse's final rhetorical question (cf. 3:20; 13:40; 5:99; 16:82; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17) makes it clear that, having delivered the message with which he has been charged, the Prophet is innocent of whatever his people do thereafter of their own free will (Z). For Ashᶜarites, this does not necessarily mean that the responsibility for belief or disbelief lies with each individual as a matter of free will, but only that the Messenger himself is not responsible for it (R), leaving open the possibility that God could cause individuals to believe or disbelieve in His message. This Ashᶜarite view, however, is rejected by most Muᶜtazilite and Shiite thinkers.

36 Regarding the idea that every community of human beings has been sent a messenger, see also 10:47: *For every community there is a messenger, and when their messenger comes, judgment shall be rendered between them with justice, and they will not be wronged;* as well as 35:23; 67:9c. Elsewhere in the Quran it is said that for every community there will be a witness (4:41; 16:84; 28:75) and that *every community is called to its*

deserving of error. So journey upon the earth and behold how the deniers fared in the end! (37) Though thou eagerly desire that they be guided, verily God guides not those who lead astray, and they shall have no helpers. (38) And they swear by God their most solemn oaths [that] God will not resurrect those who die. Nay, but it is a promise binding upon Him, though most of mankind know

*book* (45:28). The command to *worship God* is understood to be the heart of every revealed message and is uttered directly by several prophets, including Jesus (5:72, 117); Noah (7:59; 23:23); Abraham (29:16); Hūd (7:65; 11:50); Ṣāliḥ (7:73; 11:61; 27:45); and Shuʿayb (7:85; 11:84; 29:36). See also 21:25: *And We sent no messenger before thee, save that We revealed unto him, "Verily, there is no god but I, so worship Me!"*

Ashʿarite theologians suggest that *among them were those whom God guided; and among them were those who were deserving of error* (see also 7:30c) means that, after revealing the message to all, God guides some toward believing in it and causes others to disbelieve (R). Muʿtazilite commentators, however, adduce the phrase *deserving of error* as evidence of the opposite—namely, that guidance or misguidance is not compelled by God, but rather is something that is *deserved* or earned through an individual's own moral choices (Bḍ). For example, the Quran indicates that God leads astray wrongdoers in particular (14:27; R) or those who have led others astray (see v. 37). The recommendation that one should *journey upon the earth* in order to learn the fate of earlier disbelieving people refers in particular to the Arabs, who reportedly would pass by the ruins of destroyed peoples as they traveled through the desert (cf. 3:137; 6:11; 27:69; 30:42), although this command is not limited to the Arabs. Regarding the spiritual value of journeying in general, see 30:9c.

37 This verse informs the Prophet that even though he ardently desired for his people to accept the Quranic message, the matter of guidance lay with God. See 10:99–100: *And had thy Lord willed, all those who are on the earth would have believed all together. Wouldst thou compel men till they become believers? It is not for a soul to believe, save by God's Leave.* God does not guide *those who lead astray,* just as He does not guide wrongdoers (2:258; 3:86; 5:51; 6:144; 9:19, 109; 28:50; 46:10; 61:7; 62:5), disbelievers (2:264; 5:67; 9:37; 16:107), or the iniquitous (5:108; 9:24, 80; 61:5; 63:6). *God guides not those who lead astray* could also be translated to mean, "God guides not those whom He leads astray" (IK), as in 13:33: *And whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he* (also 7:186). That such people *have no helpers* means that no one can protect them from God's Punishment on the Day of Judgment (see, e.g., 2:270; 3:22; 5:72; 30:29).

38 The idolaters' denial of the Resurrection is a recurrent Quranic theme (see, e.g., 17:49; 23:35–37; 37:16–17). That the idolaters *swear . . . solemn oaths* when denying the possibility of the Resurrection indicates for some that their hearts and intellects had completely rejected the idea as irrational (R). Other commentators observe that for the idolaters to swear in this way is paradoxical, for, on the one hand, they invoke God in their solemn oaths, indicating the great esteem they have for God's Power, while, on the other hand, they do so in the context of denying His ability to resurrect (Q). Al-Rāzī states that the idolaters' disbelief in the Resurrection and Judgment was, in effect, a rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad, whose mission consisted largely of delivering the message of their moral accountability in the Hereafter.

That the Resurrection is *a promise binding upon Him* means that it is something God has promised to fulfill (Ṭs). According to al-Ṭabrisī, it is a promise that could not but be fulfilled, since without Resurrection and Judgment there would be no purpose or meaning to moral accountability in this world. God can thus be said to have made the Resurrection of human beings and all morally accountable creatures incumbent upon Himself, as when it is said of God in 6:12: *He has prescribed Mercy for Himself* (see also 6:54). What *most of mankind know not* is the certainty of the

not. (39) [This is so] that He might make clear unto them that wherein they differed, and that those who disbelieved might know that truly they were liars. (40) And Our Word unto a thing, when We desire it, is only to say to it, "Be!" and it is. (41) And those who emigrate for the sake of God, after having been wronged, We shall surely settle them in a good place in this world—and the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but knew— (42) those who are patient

Resurrection or the wisdom behind it (Ṭs)—namely, to give purpose and meaning to human moral responsibility and earthly life itself.

39 God also resurrects human beings *that He might make clear unto them that wherein they differed* during their earthly lives (Ṭs); see also 2:113; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:92. This verse may also be read as a continuation of the statement in v. 36, *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community,* meaning that God sent messengers to every community so *that He might make clear unto them that wherein they differed.* For the idea that the prophets and scriptures were sent for the purpose of resolving differences among people, see 2:213; 16:64.

40 This description of the Divine creative Fiat is repeated throughout the Quran (see 2:117c; 3:47, 59; 6:73; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68) and indicates the manner in which God brings all things into existence through His Word, or more specifically through His command *Be!*

41 Cf. 16:110. According to al-Rāzī, after the Makkan disbelievers swore *solemn oaths* that there would be no Resurrection (v. 38), it was clear that they were intent on persisting in their ignorance and disbelief, and the Muslims were thus told to emigrate from Makkah. This verse then addresses the rewards of emigration *for the sake of God,* that is, in the way of God and seeking to please Him (IK, R).

*After having been wronged* may refer to the various forms of persecution that the Prophet and his Makkan Companions endured before leaving for Madinah (Z) and to the persecution of those who had migrated earlier to Abyssinia (Z)—the latter group numbered about eighty and included ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (later the third Caliph, d. 36/656); his wife, Ruqayyah, the daughter of the Prophet; and the Prophet's cousin Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (IK). Some understand the verse as a reference specifically to those Companions who were tortured in Makkah before migrating to Madinah: Bilāl, ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, Abū Jandal ibn Suhayl, Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān, and Khabbāb ibn al-Arat (Ṭs, W, Z).

The verse indicates that emigration *for the sake of God* brings also worldly benefit, for God *will settle them in a good place in this world* (see also 4:100, where it is said that emigrants *will find upon the earth many a refuge and abundance*). That they will be settled in *a good place* may refer to their settling in Madinah specifically (IK, JJ, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z) or more generally to the provision God would make for them in this world (IK, Ṭ) and the ultimate victory He would grant them in Makkah and other lands (R, Ṭs). Emigration also brings *the reward of the Hereafter,* especially for those who suffer and die as a result of it (3:195; 4:100; 22:58). See also 9:20, where those who emigrate are said to be *greater in rank in the Eyes of God. If they but knew* may refer to the disbelievers (JJ, Ṭs) who, if they had known the benefits the emigrants would obtain in this world and the next, would have accepted the religion (R, Z). It could also mean that if the emigrants themselves knew the rewards that awaited them, it would have increased their joy, striving, and patience (R, Ṭs, Z). Although the verse is widely understood as a reference to the historical Emigrants of the first Muslim community, some indicate that it applies to all who set out on the path of God, that is, in search of knowledge of God (Aj).

42 This verse refers to the Emigrants, who endured suffering and separation from their homeland in Makkah (Z). Regarding the importance of patience, see, for example, 2:45; 2:153c; 8:46; 11:11; 12:18c; 16:97, 126–27. Regarding the spiritual quality of *trust* in God (*tawakkul*), see 3:122; 4:81; 5:23; 8:61; 11:123c; 12:67; 25:28. According to al-Rāzī, patience represents the effort to subdue the ego, and trust in God comes when one has severed attachment to all

and trust in their Lord. (43) We sent no messengers before thee, save men unto whom We revealed—ask the people of the Reminder, if you know not— (44) clear proofs and scriptures. And We have sent down the Reminder unto

worldly things and devoted oneself wholly to the Truth (God); patience is thus the beginning of the spiritual path and trust in God is its end.

43 See also 12:109; 21:7. In response to the idolaters' assertion that God is too great to have a mere human being as His messenger, v. 43 asserts that all messengers sent by God were indeed *men*—that is, human beings like themselves (IK, Q, Ṭs)—rather than angels (Ṭ). In several verses, the disbelievers wonder why an angel has not been sent to deliver God's message (6:8; 11:12; 25:7; see also 6:8–9c) or express skepticism that a mere human being has been sent to them (6:91; 7:63, 69; 10:2; 11:27; 14:10; 17:94–95; 21:13; 23:24, 33–34; 26:154, 186; 38:4; 50:1; 54:24; 64:6). Although *men* here translates *rijāl,* which is often understood to be gender specific, most commentators indicate that it refers in this context to the prophets' human rather than angelic character, not to their gender. Al-Rāzī, however, notes that it may also mean that God sends *men,* and not women, as prophets. For further discussion of the possibility of female prophets, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 19. God sends as messengers *men unto whom* He *revealed*—that is, through the medium of angels (Z)—*clear proofs and scriptures* (v. 44). Some commentators suggest that the verse could also mean that when God sends angels (specifically the Archangel Gabriel) to convey revelation or Divine messages, the angels appear in human form (R); see 19:17, where Gabriel appears to Mary in the form of *a perfect man,* and commentary.

*The people of the Reminder* (see also 21:7c) may refer to those Arabs of the Prophet's time (including both believers and disbelievers) who were knowledgeable about earlier peoples and generations (R, Ṭs). Others consider it to be a reference to the People of the Book, specifically Jews and Christians (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z)—since even among the Makkan idolaters some reportedly considered the books of the Jews and Christians to contain true knowledge of past events (Ṭs)—or to the people of the Torah specifically, since the Torah is referred to as *the Reminder* (*al-Dhikr*) in 21:105 (R). Others assert that it refers to former Jews and Christians who had embraced Islam (Ṭ) or to the Jews and Christians of the past (IK). Still others say that *the people of the Reminder* refers to those who are knowledgeable about the Quran, since the Quran is also referred to as *the Reminder* in other verses (see, e.g., v. 44; 7:2; Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), or to all people of knowledge (Q, Qu, R).

According to Shiites, *the people of the Reminder* are the Shiite Imams, since *the Reminder* is a name also given to the Prophet (88:21), and the Imams are *the people of the Reminder* in that they are the family of the Prophet (Ṭs). Both the fifth and sixth Shiite Imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, are reported to have said, "We are *the people of the Reminder* (*ahl al-dhikr*)" (IK, Ṭ). Although this is a predominantly Shiite view, the Sunni commentator Ibn Kathīr agrees with the identification of *the people of the Reminder* as the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), arguing that many of the greatest scholars from the Muslim community were descendants and relatives of the Prophet.

Some legal scholars who opposed the use of *qiyās,* or "analogical reasoning," as a source of Islamic Law adduced this verse to indicate that when jurists are confronted with a new matter for which they have insufficient knowledge, they should seek out a scholar, or *mujtahid* (a jurist capable of deriving Islamic Law from its revealed sources), more knowledgeable than themselves and follow the latter's opinion, rather than relying on their own powers of analogical reasoning. Al-Rāzī reports but also dismisses this interpretation, observing that *qiyās* was a well-established method of deriving legal rulings within the early Muslim community.

44 *Clear proofs* (*bayyināt*), a term used throughout the Quran, may refer to the miracles performed by the prophets (R; see, e.g., 2:87, 92, where the term refers to the miracles performed by Jesus and Moses, respectively) or to anything the prophets bring as a clear demonstration of the truth of the guidance they convey (see, e.g., 2:185,

thee that thou mightest clarify for mankind that which has been sent down unto them, that haply they may reflect. (45) Do those who have plotted evil deeds feel secure that God will not cause the earth to engulf them, or that the punishment will not come upon them whence they are not aware? (46) Or that He will not seize them in the midst of their going to and fro, and they will be powerless to thwart [it]? (47) Or that He will not seize them with a gradual diminishing? And truly your Lord is Kind, Merciful. (48) Have they not considered that whatsoever God has created casts its shadow to the right and to the

where the Quran is said to manifest *clear proofs of guidance*). *Scriptures* translates *zubur,* a term used to denote scripture generally (see, e.g., 23:52) and also mentioned in conjunction with *clear proofs* in 3:184 and 35:25. *Zubur* is related to *zabūr,* which the Quran uses as a specific reference to the Psalms of David (*al-Zabūr;* see 4:163; 17:55; 21:105) and which al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī describes as a scripture that contains spiritual wisdom, but not legal prescriptions. *The Reminder* in this verse refers to the Quran (Q, Ṭs), whose purpose is to *clarify for mankind that which has been sent down unto them,* that is, the laws, rulings, and indications or proofs of God's Oneness (Ṭs). *That haply they may reflect* indicates that God wishes all human beings to ponder and consider carefully the scriptures and prophetic messages sent to them, so that they might come to know the truth, a view contrary to the one that argues that God does not necessarily wish for all to be guided (Ṭs, Z); see 16:9c.

45–47 Cf. 7:97–99; 12:107; 17:68–69; 67:16–17 for similar sets of questions posed to idolaters, all of which are meant as a warning (R). *Those who have plotted evil deeds* refers most likely to the Makkan idolaters and their attempts to persecute and harass the Prophet and his followers by secret means (R) or otherwise to thwart the religion of Islam (Q). That God might *cause the earth to engulf them* may be understood literally, as this seems to have been the fate of the Israelite renegade Korah (21:81; Q, R), but it may also mean that God will cause them to vanish from the earth (Q). That punishment might *come upon them whence they are not aware* (cf. 16:26; 39:25) could be a reference to the destruction of the people of Lot (Q, R) or a foretelling of the disaster that would strike the Makkan idolaters at Badr (Q). God may also *seize them in the midst of their going to and fro*—that is, while traveling (Q, R)—or wherever they may be (Q), or by night or by day (Q). The threat that God might *seize them with a gradual diminishing* (see also 13:41; 21:44) is understood by some to mean "seize them with fear" (Q, R). Despite these threats, God is described as *Kind* and *Merciful,* because He is not quick to punish the disbelievers, but delays punishment (R), in order to give them an opportunity to repent.

48 *Casts its shadow to the right and to the left* refers to the motion of a shadow from one side of an object to the other as a result of the daily movement of the sun from east to west. The "prostrate" position of the shadows on the ground is presented as a symbolic illustration of the idea that all creatures are ultimately submitted to the Will of God—if not voluntarily, then existentially—and that it is in the nature of all created beings to prostrate themselves before God (Bq), as in 13:15: *And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening. While in a state of abject humility* describes the prostration of the shadows, but also describes the created bodies casting the shadows (Bḍ, Ṭs, Z). Just as the prostrate position of a creature's shadow can be said to represent the creature's inward prostration to God (IK), so too can the waves of the sea be said to be "prostrating" when they come crashing down (IK), and the palm tree "prostrating" when it bends over from the weight of its ripened fruit (Bḍ). All such references to the "prostration" of natural phenomena as reflected in their ordinary way of being are meant to serve as a contrast to human beings, who outwardly prostrate or refuse to do so as a matter of will. Thus

left, prostrating to God while in a state of abject humility? (49) And unto God prostrates whatever crawling creatures or angels are in the heavens or on the earth, and they do not wax arrogant. (50) They fear their Lord above them, and they do whatsoever they are commanded. (51) And God says, "Do not take up two gods. Truly He is only one God. So be in awe of Me." (52) Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, and religion belongs to Him

according to Islamic thought, human beings (and jinn) are the only creatures capable of rebelling against God and their own nature, which is submission to God.

49–50 Angels and other nonhuman creatures (except jinn) are not considered to have free will and thus live in utter submission to God's Will. Those *in the heavens* refers to the angels, the sun, the moon (the latter two are described as subservient to God's Command in 13:2; 31:29), and the stars (55:6); those *on the earth* may include all earthly creatures along with the terrestrial angels (Q), meaning those angels who carry out aspects of God's Will on earth rather than residing exclusively in the celestial realm. *Crawling creatures* refers to creatures that have bodies and exercise bodily movements in contrast to the angels, who, as pure spirits, move without bodies (Bḍ). They *do not wax arrogant;* that is, they are not too arrogant to worship God (Q). *They fear their Lord above them,* meaning that they fear punishment may come down upon them from above (Q, Ṭs) or that they fear God, Who is *above them* in His very being—as in the Quranic statement *He is Dominant over His servants* (6:18; see also 7:127)—not that He can be said to be "above them" in a physical sense, since God cannot be defined by a physical relation to anything else (Ṭs). *They fear their Lord above them* can also be rendered, "They fear their Lord from above them," meaning that the angels, despite their lofty position in the celestial realm above human beings, remain always in fear of and submissive to their Lord (Q, Ṭs).

51 This is the only place in the Quran where the idea of a duality, rather than a plurality, of gods is rejected; the likely meaning here, however, is simply that one should not take, in addition to God, any other as god (Ṭs)—*two gods* meaning anything more than the One. In the present context, the Divine command *Be in awe of Me* (cf. 2:40) means that one should fear God and no other (see also 7:154, 205; 13:13; 23:57), as in 2:150: *Fear them not, but fear Me* (see also 3:175; 5:3, 44). From a metaphysical perspective, one can fear nothing but God and long for nothing but God, even if one does not realize it, since all that one might fear or desire is dependent for its own existence upon Him (R).

This verse provides an example of the Quranic phenomenon of *iltifāt,* that is, a change of grammatical voice in the middle of a verse. The verse begins by speaking of God in the third person (*God says, . . . "Truly He is only one God"*), but finishes with a direct Divine command in the first person, *Be in awe of Me!* The shift is meant to inspire fear or awe (R, Z), suddenly revealing to readers or listeners, in a very direct way, the immanence of the Divine Voice and Presence in the Quranic words.

52 *Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth* is repeated throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:116; 6:12; 10:68). *Religion belongs to Him forever* may also be rendered, "Judgment belongs to Him forever," since *religion* translates *dīn,* which is also used to refer to judgment in the Quran, as in the *Day of Judgment* (*yawm al-dīn;* see 1:4c). Many early commentators, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, and Qatādah, understood *dīn* here as a general reference to the obedience that is owed to God (R, Ṭs), in which case the verse might be rendered, "Obedience is ever due unto Him." Since, in addition to "religion," *dīn* can also mean both obedience to God and God's Judgment, the verse can be understood to mean that obedience to God is always obligatory and that the reward or punishment given by God (i.e., His "Judgment") is eternal (Z).

53–55 Cf. 30:33–34. The Quran repeatedly

forever. Will you then revere something other than God? (53) Whatever blessing you have, it is from God. Then, when affliction befalls you, it is unto Him that you cry for help. (54) Then, when He removes the affliction from you, behold, a group among you ascribes partners unto their Lord. (55) So let them be ungrateful for that which We have given them: "Enjoy yourselves! For soon you will know." (56) And they dedicate a share of that which We have provided them unto that which they know not. By God, you shall surely be questioned about that which you used to fabricate. (57) And they assign unto God daughters—

mentions people who turn to the One God for help in times of affliction, fear, or uncertainty, but then return to forgetfulness, idolatry, and polytheism when their troubles have passed; see 7:189–90; 10:12; 11:10; 17:67, 83; 29:65; 30:33; 39:8; 39:49; 41:50; 70:21. For Quranic examples of the correct response to worldly affliction, see 2:155–56; 21:83.

*Whatever blessing you have, it is from God* (cf. 4:79) indicates that, just as all creatures owe their creation, continued existence, and obedience exclusively to Him (see 16:52c), so too do they owe Him all gratitude for the blessings they have been given (R). Some note that this includes the blessing of faith (*īmān*), for *blessings* can be both spiritual (such as knowledge of God) and material (R) and are manifold for all human beings, for *were you to count the blessings of God, you could not number them* (v. 18; see also 16:18c; 14:34). In the face of God's Bounty and Mercy, the Quran presents ingratitude as a basic human flaw, declaring repeatedly, *Man is ever ungrateful!* (17:67; 22:66; 25:50; 42:48; 43:15; 80:17; 100:6). Ingratitude is, in fact, one of the basic meanings of the word *kufr*, usually translated as "disbelief."

*So let them be ungrateful* could also be read to mean that God lifts their affliction "only to have them be ungrateful" (IK, R, Q, Z). The command *Enjoy yourselves!* (cf. 29:66; 30:34) is meant as a warning (Q, R) and takes the form of other Quranic warnings rendered as a statement of license: *So wait!* (9:52; 10:20; 10:102); *So worship whatsoever you will apart from Him* (39:15); and *So do [as you will]; we shall do [as we will]* (41:5). *Soon you will know;* that is, soon the disbelievers will know the consequences of their ingratitude in this life and their punishment (IK, Q, R).

56 This verse refers to the pagans' practice of considering certain animals sacred and their meat forbidden for consumption as well as dedicating a certain portion of their wealth to their idols; see 5:103c; 6:136–39 (R). The Makkans dedicate their animals and their wealth to *that which they know not,* that is, to their idols, whom the idolaters "did not know" were incapable of bringing them harm or benefit or of interceding on their behalf, as they imagined (R, Z). This verse could also be read to mean that the idolaters dedicate a share "to those who know not," meaning to the idols, who are inanimate and thus do not know even that a share has been dedicated to them (R, Z). *You shall surely be questioned* is meant as a threat (R, Z) and may refer to the questioning human beings are said to undergo in the grave after death but before Resurrection or to their questioning on the Day of Judgment after Resurrection (R); see 21:23; 55:39. *That which you used to fabricate* refers to these sacrificial practices, which the idolaters falsely claimed were commanded by God (Q).

57 Regarding the attribution of daughters to God and the Quran's rejection of it, see vv. 58–59; 6:100c; 37:149–53c; 43:16; 52:39, where the idolaters' assigning daughters to God is contrasted with their own preference for sons, which is what is meant here by *they have that which they desire* (Q). The belief that the angels were daughters of God was reportedly particular to the Kinānah and Khuzāʿah tribes in Arabia (Q, R). Their beliefs are considered abominable primarily because they attributed offspring to God, but

glory be to Him!—while they have that which they desire. (58) And when one of them receives tidings of a female [child], his face darkens, and he is choked with anguish. (59) He hides from the people on account of the evil of the tidings he has been given. Shall he keep it in humiliation, or bury it in the dust? Behold! Evil indeed is the judgment they make! (60) Those who believe not in the Here-

perhaps also because they considered the angels to be females (R).

58–59 *Receives tidings* translates *bushshira,* from a root that commonly connotes the deliverance of good news (or "glad tidings"), although al-Rāzī argues that it can be used for any kind of news that alters the expression and demeanor of the hearer. However, the Quran elsewhere uses this term in a way that may seem ironic, for example, when it speaks of *glad tidings of a painful punishment* (e.g., 3:21). In the present verse, the use of this term may be meant to emphasize the contrast between what was in reality good news—the birth of a child—and the idolater's distressed reaction to it as a result of the blindness caused by his false beliefs. *His face darkens* metaphorically describes an expression of extreme sadness and distress; that he is *choked with anguish* means that he is unable to speak due to his overwhelming sadness (IK). He contemplates burying his female child *in the dust,* a reference to the pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide through live burial.

In the warrior culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, daughters were seen as a liability, and burying them alive is alluded to in the Quran and in other Islamic accounts of the period as the common method for killing infant daughters. Sometimes this was done out of fear of poverty (cf. 6:151; 17:31) and sometimes to protect or defend the father's "honor" (R). The Quran's condemnation of this practice, however, makes it clear that killing one's children for such reasons is among the most heinous and evil practices of the idolatrous Arabs. In fact, although embracing Islam was considered to absolve former idolaters or disbelievers of previous sins, many of the Prophet's Companions continued to experience terrible remorse and sadness over what they had done to their infant daughters in pre-Islamic times, to the extent that the Prophet felt compelled to suggest additional forms of atonement for them to assuage their guilt (R).

*Evil indeed is the judgment they make* refers to the idolaters' attitude toward their daughters, their sense of shame on account of them, and their practice of killing them as well as to their attributing daughters to God Himself (R). Ibn ʿAjībah says that this verse should serve as a chastisement and a warning to those who dislike daughters, an attitude that he describes as based on a Satanic impulse and carried over from the practices of idolatrous times. He argues that it is incumbent upon people to show great generosity and kindness to their daughters, even more so than to sons, and that supporting daughters receives greater reward than supporting sons. According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said that whoever has daughters and treats them well will be shielded from the fire of Hell by those daughters (Q).

60 *Evil description* refers to the idolaters' excessive desire for sons and aversion to daughters (R) or simply to their disbelief and ignorance and final end in Hellfire (Q). God possesses the *loftiest description* (see also 30:27); that is, He is exalted above the notion of Him having children at all (R) or He is beyond all need of creatures and any similarity to them (Z). God's *loftiest description* is also said to include His being One, Creator, Provider, and Powerful (Q). Others say the *loftiest description* of God is found in the *shahādah,* the declaration of God's Oneness, "There is no god but God." (Ṭ).

There may seem to be a contradiction between God's having the *loftiest description* in this verse and the command in v. 74, *Set forth no parables for God* (R), or the statement in 42:11 *Naught is like unto Him* (Q). *Description* in this verse translates *mathal,* which has several meanings, including the metaphysical "archetype," but in the Quran *mathal*

after have an evil description, while unto God belongs the loftiest description. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (61) And were God to take mankind to task for their wrongdoing, He would not leave a single creature upon [the earth]. But He grants them reprieve till a term appointed. And when their term comes, they shall not delay it a single hour, nor shall they advance it. (62) They assign unto God that to which they are averse. And their tongues utter the lie that the best shall be theirs. There is no doubt that theirs shall be the Fire, and they shall be hastened [toward it]. (63) By God, We have indeed sent messengers unto com-

more generally denotes a purported description or likeness, or a "parable," meaning an extended metaphor, as it is translated in v. 74. Al-Rāzī asserts that any description or metaphor that God may use for Himself in the Quran should be accepted as true, and al-Qurṭubī gives an example from 24:35, *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth,* which many understand as a metaphorical or symbolical description, although metaphysically this does not exclude its literal and outward meaning. However, human beings should not contrive their own descriptions or metaphors for God (R).

61 See commentary on the similar verse in 35:45; cf. 18:58. Instead of taking people to task, God grants them *reprieve till a term appointed.* However, such reprieve is only given while people are alive, for *God will not grant any soul reprieve when its term has come* (63:11). God grants reprieve or respite to Iblīs/Satan (7:14–15; 15:36–37; 38:79–80) as well as to human beings in various states of wrongdoing (see, e.g., 14:42; 7:183; 13:32; 22:44; 71:4). Reprieve or respite is sometimes granted to allow people to repent of their sins (71:4), but in other cases it provides an opportunity for wrongdoers to increase in sin (3:178) or, in the case of Satan, to cause others to sin. Thus, one cannot assume that a respite from Divine Punishment means permanent security or that it is a sign of Divine approval of one's actions. That people cannot *delay* or *advance* their term is also mentioned in 7:34; 10:49; 23:43; 34:30; 71:4.

62 *That to which they are averse* are daughters, which the Makkan idolaters despise for themselves, but attribute to God (see commentary on 16:57–59). They claim that *the best shall be theirs;* that is, they will have sons (Ṭ); cf. 19:77; 19:77–78c. *Hastened [toward it]* translates *mufraṭūn,* which can also mean "to be abandoned" (Ṭ), so that the clause might be translated, "and they shall be abandoned [in it]." Both interpretations are plausible. It is also possible that *mufraṭūn* should be read *mufriṭūn,* meaning those who are excessive in sin and in the false things they attribute to God (R).

63 The message that some previous communities to whom messengers were sent refused to change their false beliefs and practices because those things seemed "fair" or right to them is meant as a consolation to the Prophet, who was saddened by the ignorance and disbelief of many among his people and their persistence in idolatry (Q, R). The Quran frequently mentions that the deeds of disbelievers and wrongdoers were made to *seem fair* to them (6:122; 10:12; 13:33; 35:8; 47:14); in some cases, as here, it is Satan who makes their *deeds seem fair* (6:43; 8:48; 29:38), although in 6:108 it is God Who makes their deeds *seem fair,* perhaps as a test (see 6:108c). That Satan *is their protector on this day* may mean that he is the protector of such people on the Day of Resurrection (Q, R, Z), in which case this is meant to be ironic or satirical in tone, for to have Satan as a protector on this Day is to have no protector at all (R, Z); see, for example, 14:22, where Satan disowns his followers on the Day of Judgment and says that he can offer them no help. *So he is their protector on this day* also means that Satan is the (false) protector or friend of the disbelievers in earthly life, deceiving them and turning them away from the Prophet, just as he did with those who disbelieved in earlier prophets, by making *their deeds seem fair unto them* (R) and leading

munities before thee. But Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them. So he is their protector on this day, and theirs shall be a painful punishment. (64) And We did not send down unto thee the Book, save that thou mightest make clear to them that wherein they differed, and as a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. (65) And God sends down water from the sky, and thereby revives the earth after its death. Surely in this is a sign for a people who hear. (66) And

them into error (Ṭs, Z). For "satans" as the false friends of the disbelievers, see 6:121; 7:27, 30.

64 The *Book*—that is, the Quran—is sent to clarify differences regarding religion (R), as are all prophets and revelations, and to *make clear* God's Oneness, the principles of just relations between people, and what is permitted or forbidden by God (Ṭs); see also 16:89; 27:76; 43:63. God also clarifies the religious differences between people after their death and resurrection; see, for example, vv. 39, 92; 5:48. The Quran is sent as *a guidance and a mercy* from God; see also 6:157; 7:203; 10:57; 16:89; 27:77; in 6:154 the Torah is described in the same manner. The *guidance* and *mercy* in Divine Revelation are specifically for *a people who believe;* this is similar to 2:2, where the Quran is described as *a guidance for the reverent.* Al-Rāzī says that this should not be understood as contradicting the reality of the Quran as a source of universal guidance and mercy, but rather as indicating that only the believers and the reverent will accept its guidance and benefit from it.

65 In vv. 65–69 the Quran mentions or alludes to four drinks that benefit human beings (cf. 23:81): water, milk, the strong drink of the vine, and honey. If we understand the *strong drink* in v. 67 to refer to wine, then these same four substances are mentioned in the same order as the contents of the four rivers in Paradise in 47:15, suggesting that the enjoyments of this world reflect those of the Hereafter as implied in 2:25: *Whensoever they are given a fruit therefrom as provision, they say, "This is the provision we received aforetime," and they were given a likeness of it.*

God's sending down water in the form of rain (Ṭs) to revive the earth is mentioned throughout the Quran as one of God's most important blessings as well as a symbol of His power to resurrect the dead to new life; see, for example, 6:99; 7:57; 13:17; 14:32; 15:22; 16:10; 20:53; 22:5; 27:60. Based on the description of the Quran in v. 64 as *a guidance and a mercy,* Ibn Kathīr makes an analogy between the Quran, whose guidance revives hearts previously deadened by disbelief, and the "water sent down" in this verse, which *revives the earth after its death. People who hear* means those who heed and pay attention to the signs of God, consider them well, and take a lesson from them (Ṭs).

66 The blessings that God provides to human beings through the cattle are also mentioned in vv. 5–7, 80 and include warmth, food, bearing burdens, and beauty; see 16:5–7c. This verse adds the milk that they provide to the list of blessings from which human beings should take *a lesson* and for which they should be thankful (see also 23:21; 36:73). In addition to being one of the four rivers of the Garden (see 47:15), milk was the drink the Prophet chose when offered either milk or wine during his Night Journey (see 17:1c). Having chosen milk, the Prophet was told that he had been guided to the drink of *fiṭrah* (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah* [Beirut, 1999], 2:31), that is, the drink of primordial purity, which is thus symbolically contrasted to wine, a drink related to notions of maturity and age.

*We give you to drink* translates *nusqīkum,* which can mean to provide a perpetual source of drink (Ṭ), since cattle provide a continuously replenished source of milk throughout most of their lives. The milk comes forth *between refuse and blood,* meaning that it is not contaminated by either of these impure substances that exist in the animal and also issue from it (Ṭ). Commentators observe that there is a barrier between the different fluids, so that neither the color, nor the taste, nor the smell of blood or refuse enters the milk, and it remains pure (Z). The *pure milk* that comes forth from *between refuse and blood* is likened by Ibn ʿAjībah to the pure path of Sufism that emerges

surely in the cattle there is a lesson for you: We give you to drink from that which is in their bellies, between refuse and blood, as pure milk, palatable to those who drink [thereof]. (67) And from the fruits of the date palm and the vine, from which you derive strong drink and a goodly provision. Surely in this is a sign for a people who understand. (68) And thy Lord revealed unto the bee, "Take up dwellings among the mountains and the trees and among that which they build. (69) Then eat of every kind of fruit, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy." A drink of diverse hues comes forth from their bellies wherein there

as a middle way between following the *Sharīʿah* only outwardly, on the one hand, and seeking to cling only to pure truth and ignoring the external requirements of the *Sharīʿah,* on the other. Similarly, he likens it to the path of true spiritual training (*tarbiyah*), which lies between the paths of (sober) wayfaring (*sulūk*) and ecstatic attraction (*jadhb*): if the people of wayfaring are veiled from God and those of pure attraction have left the path of God altogether, the people of spiritual training are a *barzakh,* or "isthmus," between these "two seas" (25:53; 27:61; 55:19), for they are ecstatically attracted inwardly and sober wayfarers outwardly.

67 This verse can be read as a continuation of v. 66, meaning either, "We give you to drink from that which is in their bellies . . . and [We give you to drink] from the fruits of the date palm and the vine" (Q), or that in *the fruits of the date palm and the vine,* as in the cattle, *there is a lesson for you* (v. 66; Q). The vine and date palm are mentioned elsewhere as among God's many blessings to human beings (13:4; 23:19; 36:34; 80:28–29); the two refer symbolically to rich and luxurious gardens (2:266; 17:90).

*Strong drink* translates *sakar,* which etymologically refers to something that is intoxicating and is thus a reference to the wine that can be made from either grapes (the fruit of the vine) or dates. This verse, which suggests that the *strong drink* of the date palm and the vine is among the many blessings God has bestowed on human beings, was revealed to the Prophet in Makkah and is earlier than Quranic verses revealed later in Madinah that discouraged the consumption of intoxicating beverages (2:219; 4:43) and eventually prohibited them altogether (5:90). Wine and, by extension, all intoxicating beverages are therefore considered to have been gradually limited and eventually prohibited by these successive revelations; see 5:90–91c. As Islamic Law explicitly forbids all intoxicating beverages and substances, most commentators and legal scholars consider the present verse to be abrogated (Q, Ṭ). Some, however, do not consider this to be a case of abrogation, technically speaking, since 5:90 explicitly prohibits *khamr* (wine made from grapes), but not more broadly *sakar* (Ṭ). Moreover, abrogation only applies to verses that set down a clear legal ruling, and the present verse simply points out the benefits of the *strong drink* derived from these fruits (Aj), even if it seems to contain an implicit ruling that the *strong drink* of these fruits is permissible (Q). Rather than considering the verse to be abrogated, therefore, some commentators interpreted *sakar* here as referring to the nonintoxicating juices derived from the fruit of these plants (Q, Ṭ), arguing that these licit beverages are only referred to as *sakar* because they could become intoxicating if left to ferment (Q). Others suggested that the drink referred to in this verse is *nabīdh,* a juice made from dates and/or raisins that Ḥanafī law considered permissible to drink as long as it had not become intoxicating (Q).

Despite its legal prohibition, wine retains an important spiritual and symbolic significance in Islam. It is among the pleasures of the Garden, and in 47:15, it is one of the four rivers of Paradise, suggesting that wine in its essence, or at least in its purified paradisal form, is a sublime substance of which the inhabitants of the Garden will partake (see 83:25). The contrast between the Quran's

mention of wine as one of the enjoyments of the Hereafter and the explicit prohibition against drinking wine in this world served to make wine and intoxication a potent symbol in Sufi discourse for knowledge of God (*maʿrifah*), and for the encounter with and the realization of the reality of the Divine Presence, which ordinarily one cannot experience in this life, but which the pious will enjoy in the Hereafter and the spiritually realized might enjoy inwardly even in this life. Moreover, as wine can represent simultaneously both the forbidden and the sublime, it served as a powerful symbol of certain Sufi spiritual practices and experiences, particularly ecstatic ones, the intensity of which was sometimes the subject of criticism by exoteric authorities. Wine in fact became a central symbol in Sufi literature, as seen in the poetry of such great Sufi masters as ʿUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273).

From the date palm and the vine, one also derives *goodly provision,* which is generally considered to refer to all of the lawful things that one might consume from these plants (Q, Ṭ), including their fruits and nonfermented forms of juice made from them. *A people who understand* refers to those who use their intellect to discern and contemplate the signs and proofs of God and take lessons from them (Aj, Ṭ).

68–69 *Thy Lord revealed unto the bee* is understood by some to refer to God's inspiring the bee or placing a certain kind of knowledge in its heart that is unique to this creature (Z). *Revealed* translates *awḥā,* which is derived from a root often used in the Quran for Divine Revelation in a formal, scriptural sense, but also for other modes of Divine communication or inspiration (Ṭs): for example, God's communication to Moses' mother (20:38; 28:7), God's inspiring Jesus' apostles (5:111), God's "inspiring" the earth to relate its chronicles (99:5), and His "revealing" to each heaven its command (41:12). The "revelation" to the bee may simply be a metaphorical way of referring to the innate, instinctual behaviors that God has implanted in the bee (R, Ṭs), although al-Rāzī suggests that it is at least possible that bees can be said to possess intelligence, including the ability to know God's commands and prohibitions. Al-Rāzī argues that there is evidence of the bees' intelligence in their construction of their hives and the perfectly symmetrical, hexagonal structures characteristic of them—the secrets of which elude even human intelligence—as well as their apparent social organization, headed by a leader recognized and obeyed by the rest. The idea that bees knowingly and consciously obey the commands "revealed" to them by God would be consistent with literal readings of other verses that describe all creatures as constituting an *ummah,* that is, a religious community (6:38), as glorifying and praising God (17:44; 57:1; 59:1, 24; 60:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1), or as "prostrating" (see commentary on 16:48–50).

The content of God's revelation to the bee is understood to refer to the bees' construction of hives in *the mountains and the trees* as well as in *that which they build,* that is, in the structures and roofs of human buildings (R, Ṭū, Z). *That which they build* may also refer to the beehives constructed by human beings for keeping bees and obtaining their honey (Q). *Follow the ways of your Lord made easy* enjoins the bee to follow the process God has taught it for making honey (Z) or to follow the paths by which it may obtain the fruits that God has ordained for it to consume (R).

The *drink of diverse hues* that *comes forth from their bellies* is honey (Z), *wherein there is healing for mankind.* According to al-Qurṭubī, this verse legitimates and makes permissable in a general way seeking medicinal treatments for physical ailments, against the view of those who might argue that, since all that befalls one in life comes from God (4:78), one should simply endure illness until God decides to remove it. Regarding the healing properties of honey specifically, a man told the Prophet that his brother had a stomach ailment. The Prophet instructed the man to give his brother honey. When the man later returned to say that the honey had not helped him, the Prophet again instructed the man to feed his brother honey, saying, "God speaks the truth [regarding the healing power of honey] and your brother's stomach lies." The man again fed his brother honey, and he was cured (IK, R, Z). Some Sufi commentators say that a knower and seeker of God who *follows the ways* and commands of the Lord, as does the bee, will, like the bee, become a source of spiritual healing for others (Aj, Su).

The Quran is also described as a source of healing for humanity (10:57; 17:82), and in a

is healing for mankind. Truly in that is a sign for a people who reflect. (70) God created you; then He takes you [unto Himself]. And among you are those who are brought back to the weakest of ages, such that they know nothing after having had knowledge. Truly God is Knowing, Powerful. (71) And God has favored some of you above others in provision. Those who have been favored do not hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess, such that they would be equal in this regard. Would they thus reject the blessings of God?

*ḥadīth* the Prophet combines the mention of these two forms of "healing," saying, "Honey is the cure for every ailment, and the Quran is the *cure for that which lies within breasts* [10:57], so I commend to you the two cures: the Quran and honey!" (Ṭs, Z)—both of which come about, according to the Quran, through *waḥy,* or "revelation," at least symbolically in the case of the bee. It is reported from Ibn ʿAbbās that the Prophet forbade his followers to kill bees and other animals mentioned favorably in the Quran, such as ants (see 27:18–19; Q). According to the Mālikī school of law and some interpretations of al-Shāfiʿī's view, honey is exempt from the mandatory alms (*zakāh*), meaning that one does not have to pay alms on stores of honey (Q).

According to some Shiite interpretations, the bee here is a reference to ʿAlī and the family of the Prophet, and the *drink of diverse hues* refers symbolically to the knowledge of the Quran and its wisdom that is found in the teachings of ʿAlī and his descendants, teachings that are spiritually healing (Kā, Qm). This interpretation is also noted by some Sunni commentators, such as al-Qurṭubī and al-Zamakhsharī, although its soundness is refuted by them. The Shiite commentator al-Ṭabrisī indicates that this interpretation derives from ʿAlī's statement that he was the *yaʿsūb* of the believers (Ṭs); *yaʿsūb* means both a male bee and a leader or chieftain.

70 Cf. 22:5–6c. Life is here described as a process of moving from the weakness of infancy, to the strength of adulthood, to the weakness of old age, as in 30:54: *God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength.* Weakness and strength are here correlated with degrees of knowledge. In v. 78, it is said, *God brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers, knowing naught,* and the present verse describes old age, *the weakest of ages,* as one in which people come to *know nothing* after having had knowledge in their adult lives. God, by contrast then, is *Knowing* and *Powerful,* indicating that His Attributes of Knowledge and Power, unlike human knowledge and power, do not wax and wane (Ṭ). That God *takes you [unto Himself]* is a reference to every individual's earthly death. Some consider *the weakest of ages* to be seventy-five or ninety (R, Ṭ, Ṭs), a time when, for many, weakness begins to appear in limb and mind. That some reach an age when they *know nothing after having had knowledge* refers to the state of forgetfulness and senility that afflicts some in advanced age (Ṭs). This description does not negate, however, the wisdom and maturity associated with old age in the Islamic tradition, as manifested in the term *shaykh* (or in Persian, *pīr*), which in its most basic meaning refers to a person of advanced age, but which is used to designate a Sufi master or any person of great learning and intellectual authority.

71 That God gives greater earthly provision to some and not to others (see also 13:4) is meant as a test (see 6:165) and should not be the cause of envy, covetousness (4:32), or excessive pride (18:32–43), for in any case *surely the Hereafter is greater in ranking and greater in favor* (17:21). Commentators point out that those *favored . . . in provision* and those who are servants or slaves (*those whom their right hands possess*) are equal in their humanity; indeed, Muslims are enjoined to think of them as brothers and sisters, and many *aḥādīth* instruct Muslims to feed and clothe them with the same food and clothing they enjoy themselves (Z). The purpose of this verse is thus not to declare an existential inequality between masters and servants

(72) And God has ordained mates for you from among yourselves, and from your mates He has ordained for you children and grandchildren. And He provided you with good things. Will they then believe in that which is false, and show ingratitude for the blessings of God? (73) And they worship, apart from God, that which has no power over any provision that may come to them from the heavens and the earth; nor are they capable [of such]. (74) So set forth no parables for God. Truly God knows and you know not. (75) God sets forth a parable: a servant enslaved, with power over naught, and he unto whom We have provided a goodly provision from Us, who then spends of it secretly and openly. Are they equal? Praise be to God! Nay, but most of them know not. (76) God sets forth a parable: two men, one of whom is dumb, with power over naught, who is a bur-

or slaves, but rather to make an analogy with regard to human behavior. The verse points to the fact that human masters would not be willing to give their slaves so much of their provision that the slaves would become equal in wealth to themselves; in fact, those masters would consider such a thing unacceptable. Yet those who ascribe partners unto God presume to do exactly this when they make God's servants or slaves—that is, creatures of His own making—equal to God Himself (R, Z). This argument, also made in 30:28, is similar to the argument in vv. 57–59, where the Quran asks how the idolaters can ascribe daughters to God when they themselves loathe having daughters.

72 Among the many Divine gifts to human beings are *mates from among yourselves* with whom one might find rest, affection, and mercy (30:21); see also 4:1; 7:189; 42:11. Here and in 26:33, children are described as a blessing granted by God, but along with wealth children are also emblematic of specifically worldly goods and status (see, e.g., 9:69; 18:39; 23:55), and they cannot avail one in the Hereafter (3:10). Like all worldly blessings, they can also be a trial (8:28; 64:15), a diversion (63:9), and even a spiritual enemy (64:14). *Grandchildren* translates *ḥafadah,* which can also refer to sons-in-law, male aides and servants, and even stepsons (Ṭ).

73 *That which has no power over any provision* refers to the idols and false deities, who, in contrast to God, Whose manifold provision for humanity is recounted in this *sūrah,* give no provision at all (see also 29:17), since it is God Who *outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12; see 34:39c).

74 *Set forth no parables for God* is intended as a criticism of those who would attribute partners unto God or consider other beings to be comparable to Him in some way (Z), for *naught is like unto Him* (42:11; 112:4). The only acceptable "parables" or descriptions of God are those expressed in the Quran itself (see 16:60c). See also 36:78: *And he has set forth for Us a parable and forgotten his own creation, saying, "Who revives these bones, decayed as they are?"*

75–76 Cf. 30:28 and commentary. In these two verses, the difference between God and the idols worshipped by the Arabs is likened to the difference between free persons with great wealth and the power to dispense it for the benefit of others and in the cause of goodness, and helpless slaves, who have power over nothing, not even over themselves, and no means to bring benefit to others (R, Z). The verse makes it clear that not only is it absurd to compare such helpless idols to God, but their power cannot even be compared to the capabilities of human beings. V. 75, like v. 71, should not be read to mean that slaves are somehow inferior to free persons spiritually or with regard to their humanity, but only in their physical and social capabilities or autonomy in external matters. It is this lack of self-determination in their physical and social circumstances that is presented as analogous to the abilities of the idols worshipped by the

den unto his master; wheresoever he dispatches him, he brings no good. Is he equal to one who enjoins justice, and who is on a straight path? (77) Unto God belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. The matter of the Hour is as the blinking of an eye, or nearer still. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (78) And God brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers, knowing naught. And He endowed you with hearing, sight, and hearts, that haply you may give thanks. (79) Have they not considered the birds, made subservient, in midair? None holds them save God. Truly in that are signs for a people who

pre-Islamic Arabs: the idols have no capacity for provision or self-determination, and their physical condition is, ironically, determined by those who worship them, buy and sell them, and move them about at will, similar to the control that masters exert over slaves. In v. 76, the idols are similarly likened to a helpless and useless slave (*dumb, with power over naught*) who is nothing but a *burden unto his master,* for the idols are unable to speak or exercise power over anything. Their devotees have the burden of caring for them and maintaining them, while the idols can give them nothing in return for this "service." *One who enjoins justice, and who is on a straight path* represents individuals who not only are rightly guided and morally upright, but also have control over their own actions and affairs and use that autonomy to accomplish good.

77 This is one of four verses that speak of *the Unseen* as "belonging" to God (see also 10:20; 11:123; 18:26). The Quran more commonly mentions God's Knowledge of *the Unseen* (see, e.g., 2:33; 5:109; 6:73; 9:78), so that His possession of *the Unseen* here likely refers to His Knowledge of it or to His encompassing *the Unseen* in His Knowledge. Possession and knowledge of *the Unseen* are also connected in 6:59, where it is said that God possesses the *keys of the Unseen* and *none knows them but He.* Although the Quran asserts that none knows when the Hour—that is, the Last Day—will come (7:187; 33:63), several verses warn of its imminence; see 54:1: *The Hour has drawn nigh;* and 70:6–7: *Truly they see it as far off, but We see it as nigh.* In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet states, "I and the Last Hour have been sent like this," and then he drew two fingers close to one another. The present verse and others like it are meant to describe the immediacy with which God can bring about the Hour if He so wishes (Ṭ). That the nearness of the Hour is like the *blinking of an eye* is a metaphor invoking something that seems to be immediate to ordinary human perception. But even the *blinking of an eye* encompasses a small extension of time, whereas God's Command of the Hour, like all His commands, is effected instantly; hence the additional qualification *or nearer still* (R).

78 Just as God brings things forth from hidden places—milk from the bellies of cattle (v. 66), honey from the bellies of bees (v. 69), and the Hour from the realm of *the Unseen* (v. 77)—so does He bring forth human beings from the bellies of their mothers. See also 53:32: *He knows you best, from when He brought you forth from the earth and when you were hidden in your mothers' bellies.* Human beings are born *knowing naught;* see v. 70 and 30:54, which together indicate that human beings' strength and knowledge wax and wane throughout the course of their lives. *Hearing, sight, and hearts* are repeatedly mentioned all together or in various combinations as Divine gifts (10:31; 23:78; 32:9). These are the faculties through which guidance is received and through which religious knowledge and understanding are acquired (22:46); but the Quran states that these faculties are corrupted in some human beings, so that they become impervious to Divine Guidance (see, e.g., 2:7; 6:25, 110; 7:179; 18:57).

79 Birds are presented here and elsewhere as one of the marvels of Divine creation (24:41; 67:19), and this verse specifically mentions the wonder of seeing birds in the air with no apparent support (see also 67:19). Birds are also

believe. (80) And God has ordained for you a place of rest in your dwellings, and He has made dwellings for you from the skins of cattle, which you bear with ease on the day you travel and the day you pitch camp. And from their wool, and their fur, and their hair, furnishings and enjoyment for a while. (81) And God has made shade for you from among that which He created, and He has made places of refuge for you in the mountains. He has made coats for you that protect you from the heat and coats that protect you from your own might. Thus does God complete His Blessing unto you, that haply you may submit. (82) Then if they turn away—only the clear proclamation is incumbent upon thee. (83) They recognize the Blessing of God, and then deny it, and most of

distinguished in the Quran by their offering praise to their Creator along with the prophet David (21:79; 34:10; 38:18–19), their rendering service to Solomon (27:17), and their role as agents of Divine Destruction (105:3). The birds are *made subservient* just as all natural phenomena have been made subservient—to God and to human beings—by God's Command; see 22:65: *Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you—and the ship sails upon the sea—by His Command?* (see also, e.g., 7:54; 13:2; 14:32).

80 This verse continues the discussion of the manifold benefits that God has provided to human beings through cattle as mentioned in vv. 5–7, 66 (see commentary on these verses). That God provides the material for dwellings and furnishings from the skins and hair of cattle is similar to the mention of the use of their skin for warmth in v. 5. Their use for bearing burdens is also mentioned in v. 7 and 6:142.

81 *Shade* was experienced as an especially salient Divine gift in the desert environment of Arabia, where it would have been relatively scarce but very necessary during the hottest parts of the day (R). In 24:45–46, the Quran mentions the "spreading out" and "withdrawing" of the shade as a cause for wonder at Divine Power and Beneficence. Shade is also one of the many delights of the Garden (see 4:57; 13:35; 36:56; 56:30; 76:14; 77:41), where, unlike on earth, it is *everlasting* (13:35). *Places of refuge* refers to the caves and crevices in the mountains in which people can make dwellings (following the references to dwellings made from cattle skins in v. 80) and where they may hide and remain out of the sight (Ṭ) of possible enemies (Q).

The *coats* serve a similar pair of purposes. Some coats, like shade, *protect you from the heat,* while others, like places of refuge, *protect you . . . from your own might,* referring to coats of armor that protect one in war; see 21:80, where the art of making armored garments was bestowed on David as a Divine favor. Since all of the objects mentioned in this verse offer protection to human beings, some commentators read the final clause, *that haply you may submit* (*tuslimūn*) with slightly different voweling to mean, "that haply you may be safe (*taslamūn*)" (IK, Ṭ, Z), that is, from the natural elements, human violence, or idolatry and the punishment for it in the Hereafter (Z).

82 For the repeated reminder to the Prophet that he need not concern himself with the way the message he was proclaiming would be received, since *only the clear proclamation* of the message was *incumbent upon* him, see also 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35c; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12.

83 According to some commentators, the Makkan idolaters recognized the blessings mentioned throughout this *sūrah* as coming ultimately from God. They nonetheless denied it by refusing to be appropriately grateful to God for them (Q), or else they believed that these blessings, although created by God, only came to them personally through the intercession of their false idols and deities (Z) or as an inheritance from

them are disbelievers. (84) And on that Day We shall raise up a witness from every community; then those who disbelieved will not be permitted [to speak], nor can they make amends. (85) And when those who did wrong see the punishment, it shall not be lightened for them, nor shall they be granted respite. (86) When those who ascribed partners unto God see the partners they ascribed, they will say, "Our Lord! These are our partners whom we called upon apart

their forefathers (Q, Z). Some interpret the *Blessing of God* here as referring to the prophethood of Muhammad, which many of them recognized, but denied out of stubbornness (Z).

84 The *witness from every community* is likely a reference to the prophets who were sent to particular communities and who on the Day of Judgment will be a witness for or against those to whom they were sent (Z); see also 4:41 and commentary as well as v. 89; 28:85; 33:45; 57:19; and 4:159, where Jesus is said to be a witness against the People of the Book. On this Day, the disbelievers are *not permitted [to speak]* (30:57; 45:35), meaning that they will not be permitted to make excuses (IK, Q, R, Z); see also 77:35–36: *That is the Day on which they speak not, nor is permission granted them, such that they might offer excuses.* They are also not permitted to *make amends,* that is, to try to please or propitiate God, for the earthly world is the only arena of moral choice and the only place in which one might repent of error and evil deeds. After death, it is not possible to make amends (Q, Z), nor can human beings return to earthly life to make amends (Q; see, e.g., 6:27–28 and commentary; 23:99–100; 32:12).

85 Once the judgment is made, the punishment *shall not be lightened,* for wrongdoers cannot repent at this point (Q, Ṭ; see v. 84), nor can they be released from punishment through their own death or annihilation (see 4:56; 20:74; 35:36) or through other means, for example, through the pity of those in the Garden (7:50). See also 2:86, 162; 3:8; 21:40; 43:75–77; and 5:37: *They will wish to come forth from the Fire, but they shall not come forth from it. And theirs shall be a lasting punishment.*

86 The *partners they ascribed* may refer to the idols, the jinn, or other false objects of worship adopted by the polytheistic Arabs. Al-Rāzī suggests that these false objects of worship are identified, even by the idolaters themselves here, as their "partners," both because, by granting them a share of the worship owed only to God, they considered them to be partners with Him and because the idolaters made them "partners" in their own wealth by granting them a share of their crops and cattle through ritual offerings. Some suggest that *partners* here refers specifically to the jinn or satans who led the idolaters into disbelief, since the *partners* themselves speak in this verse, and idols do not speak (see 16:75–76c). Al-Rāzī, however, notes that God is capable of endowing anything with life, intelligence, and speech, as when He grants the bodily limbs and organs of people the ability to testify against them on the Day of Judgment (24:24; 41:20–22).

The idolaters themselves admit and identify these false objects of worship as their *partners,* either in hopes of shifting some of the blame for their idolatry onto the very idols that they worshipped or out of amazement that, although they are facing punishment, the objects of their worship seem to have no sin attributed to them (R). But *they*—that is, the partners they ascribed—will call them *liars,* refuting the idolaters' suggestion that the idols or jinn that they worshipped were somehow complicit in their idolatry and arguing that *they*—that is, the idols or jinn that the idolaters worshipped—neither commanded nor approved of such worship (IK, Ṭ, Z). Satan similarly disowns those who followed him and denies or rejects those who considered him a partner with God (14:22). Several verses speak of the mutual disavowal and dissociation between false objects of worship and their worshippers on the Day of Judgment; see 2:165–67; 19:81–82; 29:25; 35:14; 46:5–6. In his commentary on this verse, Ibn ʿAjībah expands the meaning beyond the context of crass idol worship, saying that indeed

from Thee." But they will retort, "Verily you are liars!" (87) And they will offer submission unto God on that Day, and that which they used to fabricate will forsake them. (88) Those who disbelieve and who have turned from the way of God, for them We shall add punishment on top of punishment, for their having worked corruption. (89) And on that Day We shall raise up in every community a witness against them from among themselves, and We shall bring thee as a witness against these. And We sent down unto thee the Book as a clarification of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy and glad tidings for those who submit. (90) Truly God commands justice, virtue, and giving to kinsfolk, and He forbids indecency, wrong, and rebelliousness. And He admonishes you, that

anything that individuals love apart from God—that is, in a way that is completely disconnected from the love of God—will dissociate from them on the Day of Resurrection.

87 *They*—that is, both the idolaters and the "partners" that they falsely worshipped—will submit themselves to God on the Day of Judgment, in recognition of His Lordship, and disavow any partners or equals they ascribed to Him (IK, R). *That which they used to fabricate* may refer either to the false rituals and corrupt practices that pleased the idolaters in their earthly lives (R) or to their false idols (IK, R) and the idolaters' "fabricated" belief that these idols would intercede for them in the Hereafter (R). But all such idols, practices, and beliefs will *forsake them,* because all hope they may have had in such things will be replaced by an awareness of their utter futility.

88 *Punishment on top of punishment* refers to the double punishment that awaits those who both disbelieve themselves and turn others away from belief in God and His message (see 7:38–39 and commentary; 11:19–20; 29:12–13; 38:61). Those disbelievers who lead other people into disbelief have effectively added "disbelief to disbelief" and thus deserve *punishment on top of punishment* (R). For discussion of the Quranic phrase "working corruption," see 2:11–12c; 5:33c; 30:41c.

89 On the Day of Judgment, each community will have *a witness from among themselves,* meaning that God calls the prophet of every community to bear witness to how well the people received the message he was charged with bringing and how well they followed it (Ṭ); see also v. 84. That God *shall bring thee as a witness against these* means that the Prophet Muhammad will be a witness against his people and his religious community (Ṭ), as the other prophets will be witnesses against theirs. The Book, understood to mean the Quran here, is *a clarification of all things* in that it contains all the religious knowledge that individuals need (Ṭ, Z); regarding the comprehensive nature of "the Book," see 6:38: *We have neglected nothing in the Book;* and 12:111. For "the Book" as a clarification, see v. 64; 5:15, 19; 6:154; 7:145; see also 37:117, where similar statements are made about the Torah. The Quran is also described as *a guidance and a mercy* in 6:157; 7:203; 10:57; 27:77.

90 This verse and the following one together invoke the basic foundations of morality and righteousness as found throughout the Quran, including justice and charity. For more detailed descriptions of righteousness, see 2:83, 177; 4:36. *Justice* can be described as taking the middle or moderate course in all things (R), a quality central to the Quranic perspective, which warns against transgressing "the balance" (see 55:8–9c) and describes Muslim believers as constituting *a middle community* (2:143). Citing well-known *aḥādīth,* al-Rāzī describes *virtue* (*iḥsān*) as the quality of "worshipping God as if you saw Him," or of "loving for one's brother what one loves for oneself." Others gloss *justice* as a reference to the fulfillment of obligatory duties and *virtue* as the performance of supererogatory or recommended deeds (Z). *Giving to kinsfolk* (cf. 2:177) includes

haply you may remember. (91) Fulfill the pact of God when you have pledged it, and break not your oaths after solemnly affirming them, and having made God a Witness over you. Surely God knows whatsoever you do. (92) Be not like she who unravels her yarn, breaking it after it had been strong [by] taking your oaths to practice deception among yourselves, so that one community might be larger and wealthier than another. God only tries you thereby. And on the Day of Resurrection, He will surely clarify for you that wherein you differed. (93) Had

offering charity even before one is asked for it and maintaining good relations with one's family in general (R); cf. 4:36; 8:41; 24:22.

*Indecency* here translates *faḥshā'*, which can refer to any act that transgresses the limits set by God (Z), and the related term *fāḥishah*, also translated "indecency," is often associated in the Quran, implicitly or explicitly, with sexual transgression (see 4:15, 19, 25; 7:80; 17:32). Al-Rāzī therefore says *indecency* here refers to various sins associated with the concupiscent aspect of the soul. God *forbids indecency*, but Satan commands it; see 2:169, 268; 24:21. See 7:28–29: *When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus." Say, "Truly God commands not indecency. Do you say of God that which you know not?" Say, "My Lord has commanded justice. So set your faces [toward Him] at every place of prayer, and call upon Him, devoting religion entirely to Him.* By *wrong* (*munkar*) is meant deeds that any person of sound intellect and rational faculties could not fail to recognize as inherently wrong (Z); al-Rāzī asserts that *wrong* here refers to sins associated with the irascible aspect of the soul, that is, sins rooted in love of power and characterized by violence. Similarly, *rebelliousness* can be interpreted to mean sins that indulge human pride and ambition (R) and entail gross injustice (Z). Perhaps because Satan was the first creature to rebel against God and His Command, al-Rāzī suggests that these sins derive from Satanic whims and illusions.

91 Regarding the importance of fulfilling *the pact of God*, see v. 95, which warns people against selling *the pact of God for a paltry price;* see also 2:40; 3:76; 6:152; 13:20; 17:34; 33:15. *Break not your oaths* is said by some to refer to the Pledge of Good Pleasure (*bay'at al-riḍwān*), which the Companions took with the Prophet (Ṭ, Z) at Ḥudaybiyah, a pledge that is also understood to be one over which God was *Witness* (see 48:10c). Others suggest that *oaths* here has a more general meaning, since any righteous oath is in some sense an oath one takes before God (R), given the religious responsibility to fulfill all oaths that one takes in earnest; see 2:177; 4:33. However, one is not "taken to task" for careless oaths (2:225), and 5:89 provides a means of expiation for broken oaths. See also 3:77, where people are enjoined to be true to both their oaths and the pact of God.

92 Weaving strands of yarn together to form a strong thread, only to senselessly unravel it, was reportedly the practice of a mentally impaired woman in Makkah who did this as a regular habit (JJ, R, Ṭ). In this verse, it is used as a metaphor for those who take oaths to form strong bonds of alliance, only to break those oaths and undo those bonds when they seem to have lost their political expediency or in order to forge an alliance with a larger and more powerful group (IK, JJ, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Insofar as the *oaths* in v. 91 are interpreted as the oaths of allegiance to the Prophet, the temptation to undo one's oath here may refer to the temptation to abandon allegiance to the Prophet and the Muslim community and instead seek alliance with the Quraysh of Makkah, who were larger, wealthier, and more powerful than the early community of believers (Z). To be perfidious with regard to such oaths is what is meant by taking oaths *to practice deception among yourselves.* Regarding God's clarifying of differences on the Day of Resurrection, see 2:113; 3:55; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:124; 22:69; 32:25; 39:3, 46.

93 The counterfactual statement *Had God willed, He would have made you one community* can be interpreted to mean that humanity does

God willed, He would have made you one community. But He leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will. And you shall surely be questioned about that which you used to do. (94) Take not your oaths to practice deception among yourselves, lest a foot slip after it had been firmly planted, and you taste evil for your having turned from the way of God, and yours should be a great punishment. (95) Sell not the pact of God for a paltry price. Surely that which is with God is better for you, if you but knew. (96) That which is with you comes to an end, but that which is with God subsists. And surely We shall ren-

not exist as "a single (religious) community," because God has not willed it to be so, and thus that the multiplicity of religious communities is a matter of Divine Providence; see 5:48c; 2:213; 11:118; 42:8. It may also mean that God does not compel people to be one community or to follow one religion, although He is capable of doing so (Z). That God guides but also "leads astray" whomever He wills (cf. 6:39; 7:178; 13:27; 14:4; 17:97; 18:17; 35:8) is considered by some theologians, especially the Ashᶜarites in contrast to the Muᶜtazilites, to mean that all guidance or misguidance is ultimately a matter of Divine Will rather than exclusively a product of human will. In several verses, however, the Quran notes more specifically that God "leads astray" *the iniquitous* (2:26), *the disbelievers* (40:74), and the *prodigal doubter* (40:34), leading many theologians to argue that God leads people astray only as a consequence of or a punishment for their actions; see 6:39c. According to some, God leads astray those whom He knows will choose error of their own accord and guides those whom He knows will choose guidance (N, Z); others say He "leads people astray" by abandoning them (Bḍ, Z) and guides them by granting them success and ease in their spiritual and moral endeavors (Bḍ, Z).

94 *Take not your oaths to practice deception,* that is, as a means of committing treachery; see 16:92c. *Lest a foot slip after it had been firmly planted* means lest one perish after having been safe from perdition (Ṭ); or lest one slip from the path of Islam after one's feet had been firmly planted upon it (Z); or else lest one slip from faith after having been firmly established in the knowledge of God (Q). To *taste evil* is said to refer in this verse to the experience of Divine Punishment in this world for one's sins (Q, Ṭ, Z), while *great punishment* refers to Divine Punishment in the Hereafter (Q, Ṭ, Z). Negative experiences such as death and punishment are frequently described as being "tasted" (see, e.g., 3:106, 185; 4:56; 6:30; 7:39; 8:14; 21:35; 29:57), perhaps because to taste something is to gain direct and immediate knowledge of it. Moreover taste is also the most intimate of the senses, in that, unlike sight or hearing, it is connected with taking something physically into oneself. Divine Mercy is also sometimes described as being "tasted," although less frequently (see, e.g., 10:21; 11:9–10; 30:33).

95–96 See 3:77, where people are warned not to sell *God's Pact and their oaths for a paltry price,* as well as 3:187, where some of the People of the Book are criticized for selling their covenant with God *for a paltry price.* Selling spiritually valuable realities for *a paltry price* is a common metaphor in the Quran, and other verses warn against selling God's *signs* for *a paltry price* (2:41; 3:199; 5:44). To "sell" God's pact and His signs for a paltry price is understood to mean trading the guidance, protection, and spiritual felicity they offer for the ephemeral goods of this world (R, Z), such as material wealth, power, and status. *That which is with God* is *better,* because it *subsists* (see also 20:131; 28:60; 42:36), while *that which is with you* in this world *comes to an end.* Patience is considered an integral element of piety (2:177; 33:35), a virtue that brings great spiritual reward, for *God is with the patient* (2:153, 249; 8:46) and *loves the patient* (3:146); and the patient are rewarded bounteously in the Hereafter (see 25:75; 28:54; 39:10). The Quranic model for patience is Jacob,

der unto those who are patient their reward for the best of that which they used to do. (97) Whosoever works righteousness, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall give them new life, a good life, and We shall surely render unto them their reward in accordance with the best of that which they used to do. (98) So when thou recitest the Quran, seek refuge in God from the outcast

who patiently bore the absence of his beloved son Joseph (see 12:18, 83–86); and in the Quranic story of Jacob and Joseph, the importance of patience is repeatedly and explicitly emphasized (and rewarded). The patience of Job, often mentioned in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is also implied in the Quran through the mention of Job's enduring great affliction with faith (21:83–84; 38:41–44); and Job, like several other Quranic prophets, is described as *steadfast,* or "patient" (*ṣābir;* 38:44).

97 The Quran indicates that men and women are of the same moral and spiritual stature; that is, they share the same moral responsibility, the same capability for independent moral choice, and the same recompense for their deeds. See, for example, 3:195: *So their Lord answered them, "I shall not let the work of any worker among you, male or female, be in vain; each of you is like the other. So those who emigrated, and were expelled from their homes, and were hurt in My way, and fought and were slain—I shall absolve them of their evil deeds and shall make them enter Gardens with rivers running below, a reward from God;* see also 4:124; 33:35. That God shall give the righteous *new life, a good life* may refer to His provision for them in this world and their contentment with their provision (Q, R) as well as the aid and success He grants them in carrying out acts of obedience that lead to God being content with them (Q). In general, it is understood to refer to the various ways in which belief and virtue make one's life, even in this world, satisfying and peaceful. For example, the *good life* is said to be characterized by the "sweetness of obedience" (Q), turning over to God the management of one's affairs (Q, ST), and having one's breast "expanded" by knowledge of God (R).

As believers become more aware of the ephemerality of worldly things, they are said to be less distressed by the vicissitudes of earthly life (R) and to enjoy a spirit of certitude (Su) that allows them to entrust their affairs to God (ST). The sixth Shiite Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, interprets the *good life* here as referring to the life of an individual who has both knowledge of God and a noble standing with Him (Q, Su). A minority opinion suggests that the *good life* refers to life after death, meaning what believers experience either in posthumous states prior to Resurrection (R) or in the Garden after Resurrection (Q); most, however, consider the *good life* to refer to life in this world, and God's rendering *unto them their reward* to refer to the good they will experience in the Hereafter (Q).

98 Cf. 7:200; 23:97; 41:36; 114:1–4. The specific instruction here to *seek refuge in God from . . . Satan* before reciting the Quran is part of everyday Muslim practice, since almost all Muslims begin every recitation of the Quran with the statement, "I seek refuge in God from the outcast Satan" (*aʿūdhu bi'Llāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm*), followed by the *basmalah.* Most religious authorities agree, however, that this is a recommended rather than a required practice (R, Ṭ). According to one interpretation, the Quran indicates that even prophets were subject to Satan's attempts to insinuate error into the revelation; see 22:52: *And no messenger or prophet did We send before thee, but that when he had a longing Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast.* Although the command in this verse to seek refuge in God from Satan is specifically addressed to the Prophet, all who recite the Quran are similarly advised to do so, for if even the Prophet needs to seek such refuge, all the more do ordinary believers need to do the same (R). Ibn ʿAjībah says that seeking refuge in God is necessary, for Satan is like a vicious dog: if you try to defend yourself against the animal, it only intensifies its barking and may tear your clothes or your skin, but if you turn the matter

Satan. (99) Truly he has no authority over those who believe and trust in their Lord. (100) His authority is only over those who take him as a protector, and those who take him as a partner. (101) And when We replace one sign with another—and God knows best that which He sends down—they say, "You are only a fabricator!" Nay, but most of them know not. (102) Say, "The Holy Spirit has brought it down from thy Lord in truth, to make firm those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who submit." (103) Indeed, We know

over to the dog's master, the master will be able to restrain it.

99–100 That Satan has no *authority over those who believe* (see also 15:39–42; 17:65) means either that he has no power to cause them to commit unforgiveable sins or that he has no power over them at all, because believers seek refuge in God from Satan and thus are protected against him (Ṭ; see 7:200). Al-Rāzī indicates that these verses should dispel any notion that Satan can take bodily control of a person, as some people have thought; rather, it is clear that Satan is only capable of whispering and insinuating and thereby tempting people toward wrongdoing and disbelief. Thus Satan's "authority" is only over the souls of those who have chosen to follow him (15:42) and those who respond to his call (14:22) or, as here, *those who take him as a protector,* that is, those who accept his authority and obey him (R, Ṭ). In context, *those who take him as partner* seems to refer to those who take Satan as a partner, but commentators suggest that the phrase could also be rendered "those who ascribe partners unto Him [that is, God]" (Ṭ, Z); "those who [having taken Satan as a protector] are thereby idolaters"; or "those who are idolaters because of him [that is, Satan]" (R).

101 That God might *replace one sign with another* is widely understood to refer to the possibility of God's abrogating a ruling found in one verse and replacing it with a ruling in another verse (JJ, Ṭ). In some cases, both verses remain part of the Quranic corpus, although some commentators claim that this phrase can refer to the abrogation both of the legal ruling and of the verse itself from the corpus of the Quran (Ṭs); regarding abrogation, see 2:106c; 13:39.

Abrogation is considered a manifestation of Divine Beneficence toward human beings, for what might be a beneficial ruling at one time could pose a moral problem at a later one (Z). A clear illustration of abrogation in the Quran can be found in the verses containing seemingly contradictory rulings on the consumption of intoxicating beverages, which were implicitly or conditionally permitted by some verses (2:219; 4:43; 16:67), but later explicitly forbidden in 5:90–91; see commentary on these verses. Some held that the abrogation referred to here and elsewhere in the Quran related to God's replacing a revealed ruling from an earlier religious community with another one specifically for Muslims, for example, the change of the Muslim direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Makkah (R; see 2:143–44 and commentary). When such abrogation occurred, the Makkan idolaters reportedly accused the Prophet of being *a fabricator,* that is, fabricating the revelations at will (JJ, W, Z). *Most of them know not* means that they are not aware of the possibility and benefits of abrogation (JJ, R, Ṭs) or the reason for it (Ṭs).

102 According to most commentators, the *Holy Spirit* here refers to the Archangel Gabriel, the angel of revelation (R); see also 2:87c; 2:253; 5:110. According to al-Rāzī, the abrogation of verses or rulings, mentioned in the previous verse, was a test for the believers; if they continued to accept the revelation as coming from God and trusted in His Wisdom, this would *make firm those who believe,* in that they would show themselves to be firm in their faith and the path of their religion.

103 This verse refers to an accusation made by some of the Makkan idolaters that the Prophet

that they say, "He has merely been taught by a human being." The tongue of the one whom they falsely implicate is foreign, while this is [in] a clear, Arabic tongue. (104) Truly those who believe not in the signs of God, God guides them not, and theirs shall be a painful punishment. (105) Only those who believe not in the signs of God fabricate lies. It is they who are liars. (106) Whosoever disbelieves in God after having believed—save one who is coerced, while his heart is at peace in faith—but whosoever opens his breast unto disbelief, upon them shall be the

was learning his revelations from a local Christian blacksmith (or, variously, two blacksmiths) who was able to recite the Christian scriptures in his native language. Because the Prophet would occasionally stop to listen to his recitation (Z), the Makkans accused him of deriving the Quranic revelations from what he heard from this man. The Quran's response to this accusation is to point out that the native language of the Christian blacksmith was foreign, and some commentators report that he knew either no Arabic at all or only very little (IK). Moreover the scriptures he recited were in a foreign language, perhaps Greek (Ṭ, Ṭs), which the Prophet did not understand—while the Quranic revelations were, by contrast, in such clear and eloquent Arabic (JJ, W, Z) that even a native Arabic speaker, let alone a foreigner, would have been incapable of composing them (Ṭs). According to some, the one they accused of "teaching" the Prophet was Salmān al-Fārsī (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), but this is doubtful since Salmān was a Persian of Zoroastrian origin who later converted to Christianity before embracing Islam in Madinah, and *al-Naḥl* is a Makkan *sūrah*. Others indicate that the verse is referring to another young man who embraced Islam in Makkah (Ṭs, Z).

104–5 Those who reject the signs of God when they come to them, *God guides them not;* that is, they do not benefit from God's Guidance. The Quran also states that God does not guide wrongdoers (2:258; 3:86; 5:51; 6:144; 9:19, 109; 28:50; 46:10; 62:5), disbelievers (2:264; 5:67; 9:37; 16:107; 39:3), the iniquitous (5:108; 9:24, 80; 61:5; 63:6), or those who lead others astray (16:37). The Makkan idolaters accused the Prophet of fabricating the revelations (v. 101), but v. 105 responds that the true "fabricators" of lies are the disbelievers.

106 This verse is believed by most commentators to have been revealed about the case of ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, an early Makkan convert to Islam whose parents were tortured and killed because of Islam and who was himself coerced through torture and threat of death into outwardly renouncing his faith (Ṭ, W); see 3:28c. When the Prophet was told of this matter, he denied that ʿAmmār had truly renounced Islam, and when ʿAmmār later came to the Prophet weeping with regret, the Prophet asked him, "In what state was your heart?" ʿAmmār replied, "At peace in faith" (Ṭ, Ṭū). The Prophet consoled him and indicated that he approved of what he had done (W). This verse was then revealed (Ṭ, W), indicating an exception for those who renounce their faith outwardly under duress while their hearts are *at peace in faith,* for God only holds one to account for what one believes in one's heart (Ṭ). A minority report claims that the verse was revealed about a group of Makkans who had embraced Islam and were encouraged to migrate to Madinah to become full members of the community. After leaving Makkah, they were pursued by the Quraysh, who caught up to them and compelled them to renounce their faith (W).

The first clause of the verse is the beginning of an incomplete conditional statement whose consequence has been elided. Some suggest that the meaning of the statement is that whoever renounces faith *after having believed—save one who is coerced* (as was ʿAmmār)—"will have a great punishment" (JJ). The elided phrase, "will have a great punishment," is implied by the fact that the second conditional statement in the verse begins with a similar antecedent phrase mentioning disbelievers and concludes with the threat of God's Wrath and of *great punishment.* One can there-

Wrath of God, and theirs shall be a great punishment. (107) That is for their having preferred the life of this world to the Hereafter. And surely God guides not disbelieving people. (108) It is they on whose hearts God has placed a seal, and on their hearing and their seeing. It is they who are heedless. (109) There is no doubt that in the Hereafter they are the losers. (110) Then indeed thy Lord, for those who emigrated after being oppressed, then strove and were patient, surely thy Lord thereafter is Forgiving, Merciful. (111) That Day every soul will come disputing on behalf of itself, and every soul will be paid in full for that which it has done. They

fore assume that the two statements have parallel meaning, or that *upon them shall be the Wrath of God, and theirs shall be a great punishment* is the consequence for both antecedent clauses (Ṭ). Others suggest that the first clause of this verse may be a continuation of the previous verse, so that it could be understood to mean: "They only fabricate lies, those who believe not in the signs of God, . . . [those] who disbelieve in God after having believed," although this is less likely (Ṭ). But *whosoever opens his breast unto disbelief* willingly, in contrast to ʿAmmār and those who were tortured, is the one who has truly preferred disbelief over belief (Ṭ).

107–9 The disbelievers *preferred the life of this world to the Hereafter* (see also 14:3; 79:38), which is a foolish choice according to the Quran, since *the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20) or *play and diversion* (6:32; 29:64; 47:36). The Quran states that it is better to sell the life of this world for the Hereafter (4:74), for *the life of this world is but fleeting enjoyment, whereas the Hereafter is truly the Abode of Permanence* (40:39). That God *guides not disbelieving people* is also mentioned in 2:264; 5:67; 9:37; 16:104; 39:3. God's placing a "seal" on hearts is understood to make them impervious to guidance, but it is often mentioned explicitly as a consequence of or punishment for willful disbelief or wrongdoing; see 2:7c; 4:155; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 40:35; 45:23; 47:16; 63:3. Those whose belief and good deeds have earned them Paradise are described as those who prosper (see, e.g., 2:5; 3:104; 7:8), whereas those who disbelieved are repeatedly described as *the losers* (see, e.g., 2:27; 3:85; 5:4).

110 *Those who emigrated* refers to those who left their homes in Makkah to move to Madinah to join the Islamic community; see 2:218; 3:195; 8:72–75; 9:20; 16:41; and 22:58, where emigrating is similarly connected with striving in the way of God and with Divine Reward and Forgiveness. This verse was reportedly revealed about a group of Muslims who were initially unable to migrate to Madinah with the Prophet in 1/622 and continued to reside in Makkah. The Emigrants in Madinah later wrote to them, informing them that they had to migrate to Madinah to be considered full members of the believing Muslim community (see commentary on 8:74–75); they attempted to leave, but were stopped and brought back by the Makkans. During a second attempt to emigrate, they were again overtaken by the Makkans, but this time they resisted strongly. Some were killed, and some were able to escape (Ṭ, W), after which this verse was revealed; see 4:98–99c; 29:2c. The verse could also be a continuing reference to ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir and those tortured along with him (see 16:106c), indicating that because they emigrated and strove in the way of God patiently after being *oppressed* through torture and compelled to recant their belief outwardly, God is *Forgiving* and *Merciful* toward them (Z).

111 *That Day* refers to the Last Day or the Day of Judgment. Every soul will *come disputing on behalf of itself,* because every soul on that day will be and can be concerned only with itself (IK, R, Z); see 80:37. The disputing of some individual souls will take the form of offering excuses for their wrongdoing (Z), for example, by blaming others for leading them astray (33:67); others will attempt to deny their error (e.g., 6:23). Yet,

shall not be wronged. (112) God sets forth a parable: a town secure and at peace, its provision coming unto it abundantly from every side. Yet, it was ungrateful for the blessings of God; so God let it taste the garment of hunger and fear for that which they had wrought. (113) A messenger from among themselves had surely come unto them, but they denied him. And so the punishment seized them while they were wrongdoers. (114) So eat of the lawful and good things God has provided you, and give thanks for the Blessing of God, if it is He Whom you worship. (115) He has only forbidden you carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that which has been offered to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by necessity, without willfully disobeying or transgressing, truly God is Forgiving, Mer-

each soul will be *paid in full* the reward or recompense for its deeds, without stint and without diminution (R). Some Muᶜtazilite theologians have argued that this verse supports their claim that there are no means by which to lessen God's threatened punishment for those guilty of a major sin, not even intercession on their behalf (R). Others, however, interpret *paid in full* to indicate that neither will the reward earned be lessened, nor the punishment earned be increased (IK).

112–13 The parable of the *town secure and at peace* with *its provision coming . . . abundantly* is meant to evoke the situation of Makkah (R, Ṭ, Z). Makkah was *secure,* because the Kaᶜbah sanctuary in its midst made it a sacred city in which no violence was permitted (R, Ṭ). It was *at peace,* or "at rest," since its residents had no need to leave their homes in search of food (R, Ṭ); that is, its residents were not forced to live the nomadic lifestyle of other Arabs on the peninsula, and the city enjoyed healthy air and a good physical environment (R). *Its provision* came *abundantly* in the form of the wealth it obtained as a result of the yearly pilgrimage and the profit its inhabitants earned along the trade routes between Yemen and Syria. The blessings that Makkah enjoyed can also be understood as a Divine response to Abraham's prayer for the city in 2:126 and 14:35–37.

By putting forth the parable of a city with blessings similar to those of Makkah, which was nonetheless made to *taste the garment of hunger and fear,* the verse directs its warning to the Makkan Quraysh (Z), indicating that their worldly bounty may not last and is no guarantee against sudden and total destruction; see also 6:6: *Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them? We had established them on the earth more firmly than We have established you, and We sent the sky upon them with abundant rains, and made rivers flow beneath them. Then We destroyed them for their sins, and brought into being after them another generation.* That this city "tasted" *the garment of hunger and fear* is said by some to presage, by way of analogy, several years of famine Makkah suffered and their fear of the Prophet's growing military power in the years prior to the conquest of Makkah (Ṭ). *Garment* here is a metaphor for something that covers and surrounds and is meant to suggest the degree to which the town was overwhelmed from all sides by hunger and fear (R, Z). *That which they had wrought* is a reference to their ingratitude for the *blessings of God* as well as their rejection of His signs and the prophethood of Muhammad (R, Ṭ)—the *messenger from among themselves.* Regarding the human tendency toward ingratitude, see 16:53–55c.

114 Human beings are repeatedly enjoined in the Quran to eat the "lawful" and "good" things that God has given them; see 2:168; 5:88. In 5:4 *all good things* are said to be *lawful* for human beings, and 5:87 warns people against arbitrarily forbidding the good things that God had made lawful.

115 For the dietary prohibitions and exemptions listed here, see 2:172–73c; 6:145c. For a more detailed list of dietary prohibitions, see 5:3.

ciful. (116) And utter not lies in what your tongues assert, [saying], "This is lawful and this is forbidden," such that you fabricate a lie against God. Surely those who fabricate lies against God will not prosper. (117) A little enjoyment, while theirs shall be a painful punishment. (118) And unto those who are Jews, We forbade that which We recounted unto thee beforehand. We wronged them not, but they wronged themselves. (119) Then truly thy Lord—for those who commit evil in ignorance, then later repent and make amends—truly thy Lord thereafter is Forgiving, Merciful. (120) Truly Abraham was a community, devoutly obedient to God, a *ḥanīf,* and he was not among the idolaters. (121) [And he was] thankful for His Blessings. He chose him and guided him unto a straight path. (122) And We

116–17 The *lies* regarding the *lawful* and *forbidden* refers to the arbitrary ritual prohibitions the pagan Arabs established for themselves; see 5:103c; 6:138–39. The Quran warns against declaring lawful things to be forbidden; see 10:59: *Say, "Have you seen that which God sent down unto you for provision? Then you made some of it forbidden and some lawful." Say, "Has God granted you leave, or do you fabricate against God?"* According to al-Qurṭubī, this verse means that no one has the right to declare something religiously lawful, *ḥalāl,* or forbidden, *ḥarām,* when there is no explicit Divine or scriptural statement (including *aḥādīth*) about it. Even if the process of jurisprudential reasoning leads one to think that something is *ḥarām,* if it is not *ḥarām* according to one of the main sources of Islamic Law, some consider it better to say that it is "discouraged" or "reprehensible" (*makrūh*), rather than *ḥarām.* Those who render legal opinions (*fatāwā*) should also be careful to avoid making declarations of lawfulness or unlawfulness regarding things that are not directly addressed in scriptural sources; in such cases, some say it is preferable for legal authorities to limit themselves to making recommendations about what one should or should not do (Q). According to Ibn Kathīr, this verse pertains to any situation where one permits what is forbidden or forbids what is permitted on the basis of one's own opinion. The warning that wrongdoers will have *little enjoyment* in this world followed by *punishment* in the Hereafter is also found in 2:126; 3:197; 10:70; 26:204–7; 31:24.

118 *That which We recounted unto thee beforehand* refers to the dietary prohibitions ordained for the Jews, as mentioned in 6:146 (Q, Ṭ, Z): *And unto those who are Jews, We forbade every animal with claws; and of oxen and sheep We forbade them the fat thereof, save that upon their backs or their entrails or that which is mingled with bone. Thus did We recompense them for their willful disobedience, and surely We are truthful.* These dietary prohibitions are more extensive than those established for Muslims in the Quran, and 6:146 indicates that the additional prohibitions were a punishment for earlier disobedience; see also 4:160–61. Although v. 117 criticizes those who would impose arbitrary dietary and ritual prohibitions on themselves, the present verse makes it clear that the additional dietary prohibitions of the Jews are in fact Divinely ordained. *We wronged them not, but they wronged themselves* is repeated verbatim or in slight variation throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 3:117; 9:70; 10:44; 11:101; 16:33; 29:40; 30:9; 43:76).

119 *Those who commit evil in ignorance* may refer to those who sin unintentionally, but some commentators suggest that it refers even to purposeful sinners who are not fully aware of the repercussions of their sin. Some consider it a reference to all sinners, since anyone who disobeys God can be considered, at some level, to be in a state of ignorance; for these interpretations, see 4:17–18c; 6:54c.

120–22 Abraham may be described here as *a community* (*ummah*), because the reference

granted him good in this world, and surely in the Hereafter he shall be among the righteous. (123) Then We revealed unto thee, "Follow the creed of Abraham, a *ḥanīf,* and he was not among the idolaters." (124) And the Sabbath was only or-

to Abraham also includes his sons Ishmael and Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and Jacob's sons. Alternately, some commentators suggest Abraham constituted *a community* unto himself insofar as all good qualities were combined and perfected in him (R, Z) or because he was the only believer on earth, or at least in his land, at a time when all others there were disbelievers (R, Ṭs, Z). Others note that the word for *community* (*ummah*) is derived from the same root as *imām,* a title of spiritual authority ascribed to Abraham and his sons (2:124; 21:73). In the present verse, then, *community* is understood by many to mean one who is a teacher of the good (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z) or one who, like an *imām,* is a leader and model for others to follow or imitate (IK, Ṭ, Z).

Abraham is further described as *ḥanīf* and *not among the idolaters,* a common description of Abraham also found in 2:135; 3:67, 95; 6:79. *Ḥanīf* denotes a primordial monotheist who is neither a Jew nor a Christian. It is associated most frequently in the Quran with Abraham (see also 4:125), but is also used in the Islamic tradition to describe Muhammad's spiritual life prior to his becoming a prophet and to others who were monotheist even in the Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), that is, in pre-Islamic Arabia. *Ḥanīf* refers to a person who is inclined toward the central creed of *islām,* or submission to the One God (Z), and *ḥunafāʾ* (pl.) were said to observe the Abrahamic rites of circumcision and the *ḥajj,* or pilgrimage to the Kaʿbah in Makkah (R). For further discussion of *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c; 30:30c. The mention of Abraham in these verses is meant to make it clear to the Makkan idolaters that Abraham cannot be associated with them, nor they with him (Ṭ), since he had rejected idolatry and they embraced it. Some report that the Makkans wished to associate themselves with Abraham and wrongly considered themselves to be following the creed of Abraham, their forefather (Z).

God *chose* Abraham, either as a prophet (R), as He chooses other prophets (see 6:84–87; 19:58; 20:122–23), or as His "intimate friend" (*khalīl;* Ṭ; see 4:125c) or both. Abraham was *thankful for His Blessings,* unlike those in the parable of the town (a thinly veiled reference to Makkah) in v. 112, and he did not make any other a "partner" with God in the gratitude he rendered to Him (Ṭ). His blessings included being delivered from the fire into which his people had thrown him (21:69; 29:24); his sons, Isaac and Ishmael (14:39; 19:49; 21:72; 29:27); his being made *an imām for mankind* (2:124; 21:73); the gift of prophethood for himself and his progeny (4:54; 29:27; 57:26); *sound judgment* (21:51); and his *sublime reputation* (19:50), meaning that he was and is praised among various religious communities (IK, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), even those of the pagan Arabs (R). That Abraham enjoyed *good in this world* and will be *among the righteous* in the Hereafter is also mentioned in 2:130 and 29:27. This verse can be read as a response to Abraham's prayer in 26:83: *My Lord! Grant me judgment, and bind me to the righteous!* (R).

123 The Prophet is commanded to *follow the creed of Abraham,* that is, by rejecting idol worship and believing in the One God (R) or calling people to God's Oneness in a gentle manner, through sound proofs and arguments (R). The *creed of Abraham* is connected with his being *ḥanīf* and *not among the idolaters;* see 6:161, where the Prophet declares, *Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a* ḥanīf, *and he was not of the idolaters.* Abraham is revered by various religious communities (see 19:49–50c), but the Quran indicates a special connection between Abraham and the Prophet Muhammad and his community, as in 3:68: *Truly the people worthiest of Abraham are those who followed him, and this prophet and those who believe* (see also 22:78). The *creed of Abraham* represents what is best in religion (4:125), and the Quran asks in 2:130, *Who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul?*

124 The *Sabbath* is mentioned in the Quran as an obligation established for the Children of Israel at the time of the covenant on Mt. Sinai

dained for those who differed concerning it, and surely thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection, concerning that wherein they used to differ. (125) Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner. Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided. (126) And if you would punish, then punish with the like of that

(4:154), and the Jews are chastised in several verses for not observing it properly (2:65; 4:47; 7:163–66). The present verse, however, reiterates that the Sabbath is not a universal aspect of religious practice, since it was *only ordained for those who differed concerning it,* understood to mean the Jews. It was not part of the religion of Abraham (Q), nor is it part of religious practice established by the Prophet Muhammad. That the Jews *differed concerning it* may mean that some considered it sacred while others did not (Ṭ, Ṭs) or that sometimes they considered hunting (or fishing) permissible on this day and at other times did not (R, Ṭ, Z); see commentary on 7:163–66. The commentators also use this verse to discuss the different days of congregational worship among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, noting Muslims observe Friday, since it was the day on which God completed His creation (Ṭ); the Jews observe Saturday, because it was a day of "rest" after the completion of creation (although the idea that God tires or rests is unacceptable in Islam; see 2:255); and the Christians are said by these commentators to observe Sunday because it is the day on which God began the creation of the world (Q, R), although in Christian doctrine it is related to the belief that Christ was resurrected on this day. For the idea that God will *judge between them,* or adjudicate religious differences, *on the Day of Resurrection,* see 3:55; 22:69; 32:25; 45:17.

125 To *call . . . with wisdom* may mean that people should call others to religion on the basis of the revelation that has come to them (Ṭ), or with firm and truthful words, avoiding obscure language (Z), or by means of conclusive proofs that bring intellectual certitude, which al-Rāzī considers to be the best way; see 2:269: *Whosoever is granted wisdom has been granted much good.* The term *goodly exhortation* may also be rendered "beautiful exhortation" and can be understood to refer to the beautiful expressions that constitute the arguments, proofs, and reminders found in scripture, including those brought together in this *sūrah* (Ṭ). *Goodly exhortation* can also mean exhortation that is done sincerely and purely for the benefit of people (Z) or exhortation offered without coarseness, in a manner that would soften hearts (Ṭs), that is, with gentle persuasion and reasonable commands (R). Some suggest that *wisdom* and *goodly exhortation* collectively refer to the Quran (Ṭs, Z). Similarly, the injunction to *dispute with them in the most virtuous manner* is understood to mean that one should dispute in matters of religious difference by using logical argumentation based upon sound and mutually agreed-upon principles (R), without harassment (Ṭ), rudeness, or harshness (Z); see also 29:46: *And dispute not with the People of the Book, save in the most virtuous manner,* and commentary on this verse. *Thy Lord is He Who knows best* those who are inherently good, and thus need only the slightest admonition or advice to take the right course, and those without inherent goodness, who cannot be helped and for whom admonishment is like "striking cold iron" (Z).

126 Most commentators consider the last three verses of this *sūrah* to be Madinan (IK, R, Ṭ), although others claim that all of this *sūrah* is Makkan or that it is unlikely that these verses are a sudden reference to something very different than the rest of the *sūrah* (R). If Madinan, they are thought to have been revealed after the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), when the Muslims saw the carnage, especially the mutilation, that the Makkan idolaters had inflicted upon their dead, and they vowed to retaliate in a more devastating way (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). Some say the Prophet himself made this vow after seeing his beloved uncle Ḥamzah terribly

wherewith you were punished. But if you are patient, then that is better for the patient. (127) So be patient, and thy patience is only with God. And grieve not on their account, nor be distressed by what they plot. (128) Truly God is with those who are reverent, and those who are virtuous.

mutilated. This verse was then revealed, enjoining the Muslims to respond only with the like of what they suffered and, better yet, to forgo retaliation altogether (R, Ṭ, Z); the Prophet thereafter renounced his oath of vengeance (Z) and declared he would be patient (Ṭ). When the Quraysh eventually surrendered Makkah to the Prophet in 8/630, one of the Prophet's Companions said, as they prepared to enter the city, "Today is a day of vengeance!" But the Prophet responded, "No, today is a day of mercy." On this day, Hind, the woman who had mutilated Ḥamzah, was allowed to enter Islam under the general amnesty for the Quraysh, and Waḥshī ibn Ḥarb, the Abyssinian slave who had killed Ḥamzah, later sought and was granted the Prophet's pardon. *If you are patient, then that is better* means that it is better to forgo punishing those who have wronged you and to leave their reckoning to God (Ṭ).

Some have suggested that this verse was abrogated by 9:5, which commands Muslims, *Slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them,* although many major commentators disagree, considering the present verse to be general in its meaning, that is, applying to anyone at any time who has been wronged, and therefore not abrogated (Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). The Quran's intention to establish a limitation on retaliation so that it does not exceed the original wrong is also manifest in 2:190: *And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Truly God loves not the transgressors.* Its preference for pardon over retaliation is also seen in 42:40: *The recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it. Yet whosoever pardons and sets matters aright, his reward is with God. Truly He loves not the wrongdoers.* See also the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

127 This verse is addressed to the Prophet (Ṭ). That *patience is only with God* is interpreted to mean that one can only be patient with God's Help (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). The Prophet is instructed, *Grieve not on their account;* that is, he should not be distressed by those who deny him and accuse him of sorcery or of being a poet (Ṭ) or by *what they plot* in order to try to turn others away from the path of God (Ṭ).

128 God is also said to be *with the reverent* in 2:194; 9:36, 123; and *with the virtuous* in 29:69. In other verses, He is said to love the reverent (3:76; 9:4, 7) and the virtuous (2:195; 3:134, 148; 5:13, 93).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 17

# The Night Journey

## *al-Isrāʾ*

*Al-Isrāʾ* is a late Makkan *sūrah,* and most commentators consider the whole of it to have been revealed in Makkah (Āl, IJ). Some, however, consider vv. 73 and 76 to be Madinan, and others have suggested variously that vv. 60, 74–75, 80, and 107 may also have been revealed in Madinah (Āl, IJ, Q).

The *sūrah* takes its name from the elliptical reference in the first verse to the Night Journey (*isrāʾ*) of the Prophet from Makkah to Jerusalem from where the Nocturnal Ascent (*al-miʿrāj*) took place. This journey is likely to have taken place around the year 619, toward the end of the Prophet's time in Makkah and just after the death of his beloved wife Khadījah and his uncle Abū Ṭālib, who had long sheltered him from the idolaters. This Night Journey (*isrāʾ*) to Jerusalem and the Ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the Prophet from the site of the ancient Jewish Temple in that city through the seven heavens, where he encountered several Judeo-Christian prophets and finally came within *two bows' length* of God Himself *or nearer* (53:9; see commentary on 53:7–18), is one of the most significant spiritual events in the Prophet's life. From this time onward, the Islamic community saw itself as deeply connected to the Jewish and Christian prophetic heritage, and this is one of the reasons that Jerusalem was and is revered as a sacred city for Muslims, serving also as the direction of prayer for the Muslim community for several years thereafter, until 2/624. The Prophet was also reportedly given the final form of the Islamic canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*) during his Ascension. This *sūrah* is also sometimes referred to as the *Sūrat Banī Isrāʾīl* (IJ), because vv. 2–8 discuss the Children of Israel and the historical destruction that came upon them and their Temple, or as *Subḥān* ("Glory") after the opening word of the *sūrah* (Āl).

This *sūrah* contains several themes and elements common to later Makkan *sūrahs*, including references to God's Power over the natural world (vv. 66–70), repeated warnings to human beings about the coming of Divine Punishment either on earth or in the Hereafter (vv. 13–18, 58–59, 71–72), and criticism of the idolaters' ascribing partners and daughters to God (vv. 39–41), their

imperviousness to Quranic guidance (vv. 45–47), their disingenuous requests for miracles as proof of Muhammad's prophethood (vv. 90–96), and their denial of the Resurrection and Final Judgment (vv. 49–52, 97–99). In vv. 70–76, the Prophet is said to have nearly succumbed to the idolaters' attempt to lead him away from the revelations that he had received, but that God made him firm. The *sūrah* also contains exhortations to the believers: in vv. 22–38, they are told to be virtuous and charitable and to avoid major sins, such as idolatry, murder, and adultery, as well as dishonesty, excessive curiosity, and pride; and in vv. 78–79, they are instructed to perform the mandatory prayers at different times of the day and night and the supererogatory night vigil. There are also some brief accounts of certain pre-Islamic prophets, including an account of Adam's creation and fall (vv. 61–65) as well as Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and deliverance of the Israelites (vv. 101–4). Finally, the *sūrah* discusses various qualities of the Quran itself, including its benefits for humanity, its revelation by means of the Spirit, its use of parables, its division into sections, and its effects upon the believers (vv. 82–89; 105–9).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer. (2) And We gave unto Moses the Book, and We made it a guidance for the Children of Israel—"Take no guardian apart from Me"— (3) the progeny of those whom We carried with Noah. Truly he was a thankful servant. (4) And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book, "Surely you will work corruption upon the earth twice,

1 This verse refers to the Prophet's Night Journey (*al-isrāʾ*), considered by most to have taken place a year or two prior to the migration to Madinah (R, Z). The Prophet was reportedly taken upon a winged horse, named Burāq, and led by the Archangel Gabriel to Jerusalem; from there he ascended through the seven heavens and came before God Himself. The whole experience occurred outside the realm of ordinary time, because, despite the great distance between Makkah and Jerusalem, the Prophet is said to have made the journey and returned in a single night; according to some, the door of his house, through which he passed when he left on the journey, was still swinging on its hinges when he returned. This event is foundational in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and for Islamic spirituality, and most of the Prophet's Companions agreed that this miraculous journey took place physically and not only spiritually, although a few maintained that it was an inner, purely spiritual journey. Mainstream Islamic tradition holds, however, that the Ascension (*miʿrāj*) was bodily as well as spiritual and considers it a special miracle granted to the Prophet, although spiritual ascension is believed by some Muslims, particularly Sufis, to be a possibility open to all Muslims who follow a spiritual path in this life. Indeed, a well-known *ḥadīth* states, "The canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*) is the ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the believers."

Detailed accounts of the Night Journey exist in the *Ḥadīth,* and the event resonates throughout Islamic literature, especially in mystical works, where the journey is seen as the prototype for all spiritual journeying toward the encounter with God. This central spiritual event in the life of the Prophet has also been the subject of some of the greatest masterpieces of Islamic miniature painting and poetry. Elements of the account of the Prophet's Night Journey may have even influenced accounts of mystical journeying in other traditions, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy,* whose architecture of the heavens is similar to that described in accounts of the Prophet's ascension, some of which had reached the Latin West.

Jerusalem is considered the third most sacred site for Muslims primarily because of the Prophet's miraculous journey to the city and his heavenly ascension from the site of the ancient Jewish Temple located there. In fact, after the Prophet's return from the Night Journey and for several years thereafter, the Prophet and the Muslim community prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, making the city the first direction of prayer (*al-qiblat al-ūlā*), which also contributes to its sacred status in Islam. The direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah in the year 2/624, after the revelation of 2:143–44, which instructed the Prophet and the Muslim community to turn in prayer toward *the Sacred Mosque* in Makkah; see commentary on these verses.

Despite the importance of the Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension, the Quran's mention of this event is brief and elliptical. The present verse is considered to refer to the first, "horizontal," part of the journey, from Makkah to Jerusalem (*isrāʾ*), while 53:1–18 contains allusions to the Prophet's experience during the "vertical" part of the journey, that is, his Ascension (*miʿrāj*) through the seven heavens to the Divine Throne and the encounter with God. In the present verse, then, *His servant* is a reference to Muhammad who was *carried . . . by night from the Sacred Mosque* in Makkah to *the Farthest Mosque,* referring to the site of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, which today is the site of the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock, inside which is the rock from which the Prophet ascended to the Divine Throne. *Carried . . . by night* translates *asrā . . . laylan*. The verb *asrā* by itself means to travel at night, and thus the additional qualifier, *laylan, by night* or "in a night," emphasizes that this journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and back again—a journey that would ordinarily have taken over a month at that time—was accomplished in a single night (R, Z). Although a few have identified the *Sacred Mosque* with the environs of Makkah generally (Ṭ, Z), the literal reading of the verse indicates that he left from the Sacred Mosque itself (Z). The literal interpretation is further supported by a *ḥadīth* describing how the Prophet was roused for the journey by the Archangel Gabriel as he lay between sleeping and waking in the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) that immediately surrounds the Kaʿbah (IK, R, Z).

*The Farthest Mosque* translates *al-masjid al-aqṣā,* which is also the name given by Muslims to the mosque built in Jerusalem in the first/seventh century near the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, which had been destroyed centuries earlier by the Romans. The precincts of the Jerusalem Temple are referred to as *the Farthest Mosque,* according to some, because it was the farthest sacred place visited by the Prophet and the farthest place in which he prayed during his lifetime (Ṭ), although he had likely traveled farther, to Damascus, for trade before he became a prophet. The *precincts We have blessed* refers to Jerusalem and its environs, comprising the Biblical land of Canaan; see also 7:137; 21:71, 81. Some reports indicate that the blessedness of the land referred to its fertility and its abundant fruits and crops (Ṭ), although others indicate that it was blessed with both worldly and spiritual bounty, since many prophets had worshipped or received revelation there (R, Z). *Our signs* may include the miraculous journey itself as well as the visions and encounters with past prophets, angels, and God Himself that the Prophet reportedly experienced during its course.

2–3 *The Book* given to Moses is the Torah. The command to the Israelites, *Take no guardian apart from Me,* is similar to reminders throughout the Quran that one has no protector other than God (cf., e.g., 2:107, 257; 5:55; 6:14). *The progeny of those whom We carried with Noah* is an additional description of the *Children of Israel* in v. 2.

4 *And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book* is understood by most to mean that God informed the Israelites in the Torah of the events alluded to in this verse (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). Some, however, understand this to mean that God decreed these future events in the *Preserved Tablet*

and you will ascend to great height." (5) So when the promise of the first of these came to pass, We sent against you servants of Ours, possessed of great might, and they ravaged your dwellings, and it was a promise fulfilled. (6) Then We gave you a turn against them, and We aided you with wealth and children, and We made you greater in number. (7) If you are virtuous, you are virtuous for the sake of your own souls, and if you commit evil, it is for them. So when the other promise comes to pass, they will make wretched your faces, and enter the Temple as they entered it the first time, and utterly ruin whatsoever they

(see 85:22c; Q). For the meaning of the Quranic concept of "working corruption upon the earth" see 7:56c; 30:41c. In the present context, that the Israelites will *work corruption upon the earth twice* is understood to refer to times of serious deviation from the commands of the Torah (Q, Ṭ), which some commentators connect with particular episodes of spiritual crisis for the Israelites described in the Quran, such as their *slaying of the prophets* (see 2:61c; 4:155; Ṭ, Z). Given the subsequent reference to the destruction of dwellings (v. 5) and the desecration of the Temple (v. 7), the present verse may be an allusion to the two times when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (the first in 586 BC by the Babylonian army of Nebudchadnezzar and the second by the Romans in AD 70) or to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Israel (722 BC), and the Southern Kingdom, Judah (586 BC).

The classical commentators, however, do not seem to have been fully familiar with this history. Events and people associated with these various time periods are mentioned by several commentators in connection with these verses (IK, Ṭ), but there is significant chronological confusion in the reports. The commentators thus do not present these two instances of corruption and destruction as directly or schematically fitting either of these two sets of historical events. Although the literal rendering *you will ascend to great height* may appear positive in context, the commentators understand it to mean that the Israelites had become tyrants (IK, JJ, R), had rebelled against God (IK, Q, Z), or had shown great arrogance toward Him (Q, Ṭ).

5 The commentators do not agree about which events in Israelite history are being referenced in this verse; some identify the leader of the *servants of Ours* whom God sent against the Israelites as Goliath, Sennacherib, or Nebudchadnezzar (Q, R, Z). Some commentators, however, suggest that the identity of those sent against the Israelites is not significant; what is important is the concept that such a fate befell the Israelites at times of collective moral and spiritual failing (IK, R). That *they ravaged your dwellings* is explained by some as referring to the plundering of homes and wealth and the destruction of sacred objects, including the desecration of the Temple, the burning of the Torah, and the killing of those trained to read it (IK, R, Z), as well as taking the remaining Israelites into captivity (R). That it was *a promise fulfilled* indicates that it was a fate decreed by God that could not be avoided (R).

6 God gave the Israelites *a turn against them,* after they had repented of the corruption and arrogance mentioned in v. 4 (Z). Some consider this change of fortune to refer to the killing of Goliath or, more commonly, to the defeat of Babylon, the liberation of the land from the oppressors (Ṭ, Z), and the Israelites' subsequent ability to return to the area around Jerusalem, during which time new prophets rose among them (R). God's aiding the Israelites *with wealth and children* indicates that He increased them in worldly prosperity, since wealth and children are two common signifiers of earthly good fortune in the Quran (see, e.g., 18:46). That He made them *greater in number* means He increased the size of their population (Ṭ).

7 The idea that the consequences of moral or immoral actions ultimately devolve upon those who commit them is conveyed in various ways throughout the Quran; see 2:272, which indi-

overtake. (8) It may be that your Lord will have mercy upon you, but if you revert, We shall revert. And We have made Hell a prison for the disbelievers. (9) Truly this Quran guides toward that which is most upright, and gives glad tidings to the believers who perform righteous deeds that theirs shall be a great reward, (10) and that We have prepared a painful punishment for those who believe not in the Hereafter. (11) Man prays for evil as he prays for good, and

cates that whatever one spends in charity is spent for oneself, and 10:108, where one is guided for the benefit of one's soul and led astray only to its detriment, as well as 17:15; 27:40; 31:12; 39:41; 40:28; 45:15. That being *virtuous,* in particular, is ultimately for the *sake of your own souls* is also alluded to in the rhetorical question in 55:60: *Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?* The *other promise* that *comes to pass* refers to the second time God sent a people against the Israelites (Z). Some reports connect this second set of events with the Jewish king Herod's execution of John the Baptist (JJ, Ṭ) and thus consider it to refer to the time of the Roman occupation, which also saw the second destruction of the Jewish Temple, possibly alluded to by *they will . . . enter the Temple as they entered it the first time.* Although the second destruction of the Temple was carried out by the Romans, the destruction mentioned in this verse is associated by some commentators, anachronistically, with Nebuchadnezzar (JJ, Ṭ). The chronological discrepancy is noted by al-Rāzī, who suggests that interpreting the ultimate meaning of this passage should not be dependent upon knowing the specific details of Israelite history to which it alludes.

When this second period *comes to pass, they*—that is, those whom God will send against the Israelites—will *make wretched* their *faces,* meaning that the grief and distress that will befall the Israelites will show on their faces (R, Z). The face is usually considered a reflection of the soul and serves as its symbol in both positive and negative contexts in the Quran; see, for example, 2:112, where one *submits his face to God;* 3:106, where on the Day of Resurrection *faces whiten and faces blacken* in accordance with the fate of the souls; and 14:50, where those in Hell have *the Fire covering their faces.*

8 The Lord may *have mercy* upon the Israelites and remove the adversity visited upon them if they repent (R); according to some, to say that God may have mercy upon them means that He certainly did or will (Ṭ). But if they again *revert* to corruption, God will also *revert,* meaning that He will punish them again. That this pattern of Israelite disobedience and Divine Punishment would continue into the future is understood by some commentators to be implied in 7:167, referring to the Israelites: *And when thy Lord proclaimed that He would surely send against them, till the Day of Resurrection, those who would inflict upon them a terrible punishment.*

*Hell* is *a prison for the disbelievers,* because, in contrast to earthly punishment, which may change with time and which one may escape through death, the punishments of Hell are inescapable and surround the condemned on every side like a prison (R). Here *prison* translates *ḥaṣīr,* which may also mean a mat or cushion, thus ironically indicating that Hell is where the disbelievers will rest or repose; also see 2:206; 3:12, 197; 13:18; 38:56, where Hell is described as *an evil resting place;* and 7:41, where it is simply the *resting place* of arrogant disbelievers and wrongdoers.

9–10 That the Quran *guides toward that which is most upright* can mean that it guides to the truth or to religion (Ṭ). However, the Arabic pronoun rendered *that which* in *that which is most upright* is grammatically feminine, and thus some consider this to be a reference to the straight, or upright, path (*ṭarīqah*) or to the upright religious community or creed (*millah*), since both are grammatically feminine (Z). The *great reward* is a reference to the paradisal Garden (Ṭ).

11 *Man prays for evil as he prays for good* refers to situations where people pray in ignorance for what seems beneficial to them but will only bring them harm (R), or when they pray, in a moment of anger or passion, for what will bring harm to themselves, their families, or their property by way

man is ever hasty. (12) We made the night and the day two signs. Then We effaced the sign of the night, and made the sign of the day, giving sight, that you might seek bounty from your Lord, and that you might know the number of years and the reckoning. And We have expounded everything in detail. (13) And [for] every man We have fastened his omen upon his neck, and We shall bring it forth for him on the Day of Resurrection as a book he will meet wide open. (14) "Read your book! On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you."

of curse or imprecation (R, Ṭ, Z). The implication is that if God were to respond to such requests, human beings would be destroyed by their own supplications (Ṭ). This behavior reflects that *man is ever hasty,* and throughout the Quran people *hasten unto disbelief* (5:41) and to *sin and enmity* (5:62); they *seek to hasten evil before good* (27:46) and seek to hasten their own destruction when they repeatedly ask their prophets when the punishments about which they have been warned will come to pass (Z; see, e.g., 6:57–58c; 8:32; 29:29). That being *hasty* is intrinsic to human nature is also indicated by 21:37, which says that *man was created of haste.* It is said that when God breathed His Spirit into Adam, He started from the head, and as the Spirit flowed downward, the clay became living flesh. Adam watched, impatient for the process to be completed, and sought to stand up before the Spirit reached his feet (R, Ṭ).

12 This is one of many verses to invoke *the night and the day* as two of God's great signs to humanity (see, e.g., 2:164; 3:190; 6:96–97; 7:54; 10:6, 67; 13:3; 23:80; 24:44; 28:73; 30:23; 40:61). These are both signs of God's Power and Beneficence, in that the night provides a time for repose (6:96) and the day a time for "seeking bounty." The regular alternation between day and night also allows people to know *the number of years* and "reckon" time; see also 6:96 and 10:5, where the reckoning of time is similarly facilitated by the cycles of the sun and moon. That God has *expounded* all things *in detail* means that He has explained them clearly (Ṭ) in the Quran; similarly described as *expounded* are God's signs (6:97–98, 126; 7:133; 11:1; 41:3; 41:44) and His Book (7:52).

13–14 *Omen* here translates *ṭāʾirah,* a word that derives from the same root as that for "birds" (*ṭayr*), since the early Arabs, like certain other premodern societies, considered the movement and behavior of birds as indicators of impending good or bad fortune or as harbingers of the positive or negative consequences of a decision or action (R). That God has *fastened* a human being's *omen upon his neck* is an image used to convey the idea that God has foreknowledge of a human being's ultimate destiny and that from this perspective one's destiny is as if sealed about one's neck. The neck is singled out in particular, as it is said to be the site where tokens of either honor or shame are hung—for example, necklaces indicating high social status or honor, or chains or collars indicating servitude (R, Ṭ). Many commentators consider the *omen* upon one's neck to represent one's deeds in life, which, like an omen, portend either bliss or wretchedness in the Hereafter (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z). But many of these same commentators also take it as referring to the Divine Decree, or *qadar* ("measuring out") for each individual.

Various traditions indicate that all human beings are born with a Divinely apportioned life span, material provision, and number of offspring as well as with the determination of their status in the Hereafter (Q, R, Ṭ). Both these traditions and the present verse can be read in a predestinarian vein to indicate that all moral destiny is foreordained, but they can also be understood simply as indicating that God has foreknowledge of an individual's eventual moral choices and consequent fate; indeed, some suggest that the *omen* may refer to individual moral responsibility itself (*taklīf*), meaning that no human being can escape the responsibility to live according to God's Law and follow His commands (Q).

Here as elsewhere, the collected record of one's deeds in life is described as a *book* that one will encounter on the Day of Judgment (cf. 17:71; 18:49;

(15) Whosoever is rightly guided is only rightly guided for the sake of his own soul, and whosoever is astray is only astray to its detriment. None shall bear the burden of another. And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger. (16) And when We desire to destroy a town, We command those who live a life

69:19–25; 84:7–10). That an individual's book is *wide open* indicates that its contents are well known to the individual as well as to God, and although some of the deeds and their repercussions may have remained hidden in earthly life, they will become fully manifest in the Hereafter. The recording of deeds is often ascribed to two angels assigned to every individual, one recording good deeds and the other evil deeds (IK, R; see commentary on 82:10–12). Al-Rāzī, however, describes the spiritual reality of this recording metaphorically, suggesting that every deed one commits in life is like a drop of water that, no matter how small, leaves some small impression upon the "rock" that is the substance of the soul. Thus each deed—and especially repeated or habitual behaviors—eventually has a part in inscribing the destiny of each individual upon the soul.

It is God, perhaps speaking through the voice of the angels (R), who issues the command in v. 14, *Read your book!* In reading one's own book, one effectively renders judgment upon oneself; since the book is composed solely of one's own deeds, all individuals can be said to be able to judge as to whether they deserve to enter the Garden or the Fire by "reading" their own actions. Although the effect of Divine Mercy on individual salvation remains imponderable and a source of hope, it can be said that human beings are saved or condemned through their own actions. For this reason, the Quran repeatedly states that God does not wrong people; rather, it is they who wrong themselves (e.g., 3:117; 10:44; 29:40). In this way, one's *soul suffices as a reckoner,* and the Quran offers elsewhere the powerful image of one's own limbs testifying against one on the Day of Judgment (24:24; 36:65; 41:20–22). This book can thus be understood as referring to one's very soul, inscribed with its deeds in life. Some describe the book in this way, "Your tongue is its pen, your saliva is its ink, and your limbs are the paper upon which it is written; it is you who dictates [it] to your own memory" (Q).

15 This verse brings together three themes commonly invoked throughout the Quran, including the related ideas that the consequences of one's moral actions and one's state of guidance or misguidance ultimately devolve upon oneself (see 16:7c) and that no one assumes *the burden of another.* This means that no one is punished for the misdeeds of another, but all must bear the consequences of their own actions (see 6:164; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). Although some may lead others astray, the burden of the sins committed by those who were thus misguided is still borne by themselves, although some verses indicate that those who mislead bear an additional burden (cf. 7:38; 16:25; 37:32–33). That God does not punish a people without warning, identified here specifically with His sending *a messenger,* is mentioned elsewhere (26:208; 28:59); see also 6:131, which states that God *would never destroy towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless,* meaning before a messenger had made them aware of their wrongdoing and its destructive consequences (see 6:131c).

16 Throughout the Quran, it is mentioned that it is often the privileged members of a community—its leaders and those who enjoy high social status—who are most resistant to the warnings of the prophets and most likely to be disbelievers (see 6:123c; 7:60–62c; 23:33–38; 34:34–35; 43:23). *We command those who live a life of luxury* is understood by most commentators to mean that God commands such people to belief and obedience (JJ, R, Ṭ, Ṭs), but that they disobey and *commit iniquity.* According to al-Rāzī, *when We desire to destroy a town* means when the time draws near for the destruction of a town whose fate is already known to God. At that time, God commands *those who live a life of luxury* within it, knowing that they will disobey. The disobedience and disbelief of people of privilege is in some ways the least excusable because of the many blessings they have been given, although the attractions of the world may be greater for such people and they may face greater temptation. Al-Zamakhsharī understands

of luxury within it; yet they commit iniquity therein. Thus the Word comes due against it and We annihilate it completely. (17) How many a generation have We destroyed after Noah! Thy Lord suffices as One Aware of the sins of His servants, Seeing. (18) Whosoever would desire the ephemeral, We hasten for him therein whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire. Then We appoint Hell for him, wherein he shall burn, blameworthy, banished. (19) And whosoever desires the Hereafter, and endeavors for it earnestly, and is a believer, it is they

the verse to mean that God commands *those who live a life of luxury* to disobey and to *commit iniquity*. However, al-Zamakhsharī understands this to be a metaphorical statement, meaning that in giving such people the means and power to disobey and lead others astray, it is as if He has commanded them to iniquity, for, as al-Zamakhsharī and others point out, the Quran clearly states that God does not command indecency (7:28). Some have read the verbal phrase *amarnā, We command,* as *ammarnā,* meaning that God places *those who live a life of luxury* in positions of authority (R, Ṭ). That *the Word comes due* for a town or a people indicates that their period of respite has elapsed and the threatened Divine Punishment is imminent (cf. 10:96; 28:63; 32:13; 36:7, 70; 37:3; 39:19; 40:6; 41:25; 46:18). In some of the foregoing cases, *Word* translates *kalimah,* although here and elsewhere it translates *qawl*. That the town is subsequently "annihilated completely" means that it is utterly destroyed and uprooted from its very foundations (R).

17 In Islamic sacred history, Noah is the first in a series of prophets whose peoples were destroyed for rejecting the message of repentance and *tawḥīd* (God's Oneness) brought by these prophets; see, for example, 7:59–136; 7:59c. The Quran repeatedly invokes as signs to be heeded the towns, peoples, and generations destroyed for their wrongdoing, often with phrasing similar to this verse (see, e.g., 6:6; 7:4; 19:74; 20:128; 21:11; 22:45).

18–19 This verse indicates that, for those who seek only worldly things while denying or despairing of the rewards of the Hereafter, God may *hasten* for them precisely what they desire; that is, He may grant them worldly goods in the here and now, but with the caveat *whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire,* for the matter is controlled by Divine rather than human will. He then "appoints Hell" for them in the Hereafter. However, the efforts of those whose desire and endeavor are for the Hereafter are *appreciated* by God, and God's appreciation (lit. "thankfulness") for their deeds is the reward He grants them in the Hereafter (Ṭ); cf. 2:200–201; 3:145.

This verse is an important basis for the Islamic doctrine that deeds are judged according to their intentions (R), since here one is rewarded for desiring and earnestly endeavoring for the good, as a believer, without mention of the success or completion of all of one's endeavors (Z). This verse can be said to set three conditions for attaining reward for a good deed: one must intend goodness by it; one must make an earnest attempt to complete the deed; and one must do so in the context of being a believer (R). Those who *desire the ephemeral* in v. 18 may include not only those whose worldly desires lead them to outwardly sinful behavior, but also those who perform seemingly pious and virtuous acts, but only for worldly benefit or hypocritically (Z). In this vein, the Prophet said in a famous *ḥadīth,* "Deeds are only according to intentions, and verily each shall have what he intended. Whosoever emigrated [to Madinah] for God and His Prophet, his emigration is for God and His Prophet. Whosoever emigrated to attain worldly benefit or to marry a woman, his emigration is for that for which he emigrated" (Z). Having emigrated for a worldly rather than spiritual purpose, one may attain that worldly

whose efforts shall be appreciated. (20) Each do We aid—both these and those—with the Gift of thy Lord; and the Gift of thy Lord is not confined. (21) Observe how We have favored some of them over others, and surely the Hereafter is greater in ranking and greater in favor. (22) Do not set up another god along with God, lest you sit blameworthy, forsaken. (23) Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but Him, and be virtuous to parents. Whether one or both of them reaches old age, say not to them "Uff!" nor chide them, but speak unto them a noble word. (24) Lower unto them the wing of humility out of mercy and

desire, but will not be rewarded for this emigration in the Hereafter.

20–21 God aids both those who *desire the ephemeral* (v. 18) and *whosoever desires the Hereafter* (v. 19), for God's *Gift*, meaning earthly provision, *is not confined* to one group or the other. That He *favored some of them over others* (see 4:34) in earthly life may indicate that *whosoever desires the Hereafter* have been given the greater gift, namely, sound judgment, which is more valuable than the "ephemeral things" desired by others (Ṭ). It might also simply indicate that God gives and withholds provision in different degrees among both believers and disbelievers (R). Al-Rāzī observes that the Divine purpose behind such differences in earthly provision is elucidated in 43:32: *We have apportioned for them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take others into service;* and in 6:165: *He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you.* But the *ranking* and *favor* will be even greater—that is, far more pronounced and clear—in the Hereafter, as the guided and the misguided will be separated into the people of the Garden and the people of the Fire, respectively (R).

22 This is one of many repeated Quranic warnings against "setting up" partners (e.g., 3:151; 4:48; 13:16), equals (e.g., 2:22; 14:30; 41:9), or *other gods* along with God, that is, establishing them as objects of worship (see also 15:95–96; 17:39; 50:26).

23 For other verses in which the imperative to worship God is paired with a command to be good to parents, see 2:83; 4:36c; 6:151; 31:13–14. That the Lord *decrees that you worship none but Him* can mean that He commands it (Ṭ) or that in an ultimate sense nothing is worshipped other than God, as in 13:15: *And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening;* and v. 44: *The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise.*

This verse specifically counsels respect for parents as they age. *Uff!* can be an expression of complaint or annoyance, and the implication here is that one should be tolerant and patient with parents and their needs and dependencies, just as they were patient with one as a child (R, Ṭ, Z). More specifically, *uff* can refer to something that is filthy or soiling (R, Ṭ), and some thus suggest that the verse is addressing the irritation a son or daughter might feel in having to assist elderly parents with personal hygiene (Ṭ). The prohibition against saying *Uff!* to one's parents may also be meant to discourage the use of any kind of ugly, harsh, or dismissive expression with them (Ṭ). To *chide them* (*tanharhumā*) may also mean to rebuff them or turn away from them in anger.

24 To *lower . . . the wing of humility out of mercy* expresses the abundance of mercy, affection, and humility with which children should treat their parents. A child's showing mercy to parents and praying that God will have mercy upon them are a fitting recompense for the mercy they showed the child when he or she was young

say, "My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small." (25) Your Lord knows best that which is in your souls. If you are righteous, then verily He is Forgiving toward the penitent. (26) Give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler, but do not squander wastefully. (27) Truly the wasteful are the brethren of satans, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord. (28) But if thou turnest away from them, seeking a mercy from thy Lord, for

(Z). Moreover, even if one's parents are disbelievers, one should still pray for God's Mercy upon them, asking particularly that He give them guidance (Z). In connection with this verse, al-Zamakhsharī cites the *ḥadīth:* "The Contentment of God lies in the contentment of parents; and the Anger of God lies in the anger of parents."

25 That God knows what is in souls is also mentioned in 2:234 and 11:31. Similarly, He is said to know what lies within breasts (see, e.g., 3:154; 5:7; 11:5; 29:10) and in hearts (4:63; 33:51).

26–27 For a very similar verse, see 30:38; see also 2:83, 177, 215; 4:36; 8:41; 24:22. In 59:7 one is similarly enjoined to be charitable or kind to, among others, relatives, the indigent, and travelers. To *give unto the kinsman his right* may mean to maintain good relations with one's kin and to visit them often (Ṭ, Z), since maintaining kinship relations (*ṣilat al-raḥim*) is an important principle in Islamic ethics. A report attributed to ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 92/711), the pious great-grandson of the Prophet and the fourth Shiite Imam, understands *kinsman* here to refer specifically to the kin of the Prophet Muhammad, meaning that they should be given their specially allotted share of bounties and spoils (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), since they were forbidden from receiving other forms of charity. To *give unto . . . the traveler* may mean to provide travelers with food or accommodation (Ṭ). But one should not *squander* such charity *wastefully* by being excessive in one's giving (Q, Ṭ, Z), perhaps in the interests of pride or enhancing one's reputation or by giving it to those who do not need it rather than to those who have a moral claim upon one's charity (Q, Ṭ), that is, relatives, the poor, and travelers, among other groups (such as orphans) mentioned elsewhere (see 2:177). Wastefulness or prodigality is to be avoided in charity as in all things (see, e.g., 7:31), for God *loves not the prodigal* (6:141). In charitable giving, then, one should strike a balance between being "wasteful" and being "miserly" (see v. 29; 25:67). Those who are *wasteful* are *the brethren of satans,* meaning that they are their friends and supporters (Ṭ).

28 Vv. 28–30 are addressed to the Prophet, but the injunctions they contain apply to all believers. Here, the verse instructs the Prophet regarding situations in which he must "turn away" from someone seeking his charity, because he does not have the means to provide what is being requested. *Seeking a mercy from thy Lord* may be an expression referring to the state of temporary poverty that prevents the Prophet from fulfilling such a request (R). In this context, to call poverty a state of *seeking a mercy* from God suggests both the temporary nature of the Prophet's state of need and his hope and trust that God will eventually grant him the *mercy,* that is, the provision (Ṭ, Z) he needs—for the Prophet anticipates that this mercy will come.

It is reported that when the Prophet was asked for charity that he could not provide, he would remain silent while the provision was not available, preferring to await the necessary provision rather than refuse the request (Q). Instead of remaining silent, however, the Prophet is here instructed to *speak unto them*—that is, the petitioners—*a gentle word,* explaining that he cannot fulfill their need at the moment because of a lack of means (R), but encouraging and promising them that provision from God shall come (Ṭ). *Speak unto them a gentle word* may also be understood to mean "speak for them gentle words," indicating that the Prophet should supplicate God on their behalf to grant them the needed provision (Q). An alternate interpretation explains that this verse was revealed after the Prophet refused to grant the requested charity to a group of people whom he knew would use the funds to engage in corruption. In denying them, the Prophet

which thou dost hope, then speak unto them a gentle word. (29) And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open, lest thou shouldst sit condemned, destitute. (30) Truly thy Lord outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will. Verily of His servants He is Aware, Seeing. (31) And slay not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Surely their slaying is a great sin. (32) And approach not fornication; verily it is indecency and an evil way. (33) And slay not the soul that God has made inviolable,

was *seeking a mercy* from God for thwarting any corruption they had intended (Q).

29 That *thine hand be shackled to thy neck* is a metaphorical reference to miserliness, which is also condemned elsewhere in the Quran; see 47:38: *And whosoever is miserly is only miserly toward himself. God is the Rich, and you are the poor;* as well as 3:180; 4:37; 9:76; 57:24. But even in matters of charity, one's hand should also not *be entirely open,* referring to an excessive and thus irresponsible generosity, which may well leave one devoid of the means to provide for oneself. This is one of several Quranic passages that indicates the importance of moderation in all things and avoiding the extremes of miserliness and prodigality (see vv. 26–27); see also 25:67. Miserliness will render one *condemned* by those to whom one has refused charity (IK, Ṭ), while prodigality renders one liable to condemnation from oneself and others, as well as from God, for depleting one's wealth so quickly (Ṭ), rendering oneself *destitute* through foolish excess (Z). *Destitute* translates *maḥsūr,* which can also mean "exhausted" or "depleted" (R, Ṭ, Z).

30 That God *outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:26; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12) indicates that God controls all earthly provision, an idea also found in a well-known *ḥadīth* from the Prophet that includes earthly provision among the things decreed by God for each individual. *Outspreads* translates *yabsuṭu,* and this action, attributed to God here and elsewhere, is derived from the same root as the Divine Name *al-Bāsiṭ,* the Open-Handed. Although the Name *al-Bāsiṭ* as such does not appear in the Quran, this quality of Divine Open-handedness is also reflected in 5:64: *The Jews say, "God's Hand is shackled." Shackled are their hands, and they are cursed for what they say. Nay, but His two Hands are outstretched* (*mabsūṭatān,* derived from the same root as *al-Bāsiṭ*).

31–33 A similar list of injunctions against slaying one's children, committing adultery (or "indecency" in 6:151), and slaying innocent souls is found in 6:151; see 6:151–52c. As for the slaying of one's children, it was reportedly a common practice in parts of pre-Islamic Arabia to kill infant girls immediately after birth for fear of the shame or liability they might bring to the family (cf. 81:8–9c). Here and in 6:151, the prohibition against slaying one's children out of *fear of poverty* is followed by the assurance of God's Provision. Warnings about the evil of and punishment for *fornication* or adultery (often referred to as "indecency") are also found in 4:15, 24–25; 6:151; 24:2–3; 25:68; 33:30. In 60:12, a promise not to slay one's children or commit adultery is part of a pledge taken by women seeking to join the Prophet's community at Madinah.

The warning against slaying souls *that God has made inviolable*—that is, innocent souls—is also found in 6:151 and 25:68; see also 4:29, 92–93; 5:32. The exception *save by right* refers to cases where the Quran warrants slaying as a punishment for a capital transgression, such as for murder or "waging war against God and His Messenger" (5:33). In the case of one who is *slain unjustly,* meaning without right or just cause, God has *appointed authority (sulṭān) unto his heir (waliyyihi)*—that is, to the relative close enough to the deceased to be responsible for claiming retribution for the death (Z)—to demand the execution of the murderer as retaliation, to pardon the murderer, or to accept the wergild (IK, Q, Ṭ). This verse was invoked by ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 43/664) at the arbitration (37/658) that took place after the Battle of Ṣiffīn

save by right. And whosoever is slain unjustly, We have appointed authority unto his heir. Then let him not be excessive in slaying. Verily he shall be helped. (34) And approach not the orphan's property, save in the most virtuous manner, till he reaches maturity. And fulfill the pact; surely the pact is called to account. (35) And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance. That is better and more virtuous in the end. (36) And pursue not that

(37/657) as part of his argument that Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (then the governor of Syria) had the right to assume the caliphate. ʿAmr's argument was that Muʿāwiyah, as the *walī* (in the sense of a near male relative) of his "unjustly slain" cousin, the third Caliph, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, should be granted *sulṭān,* meaning political authority (IK).

Some commentators indicate that only a male *heir* (*walī*) can exercise this authority, but others disagree. Here *heir* translates *walī,* which can also mean "protector," and thus some cite 9:71, *But the believing men and believing women are protectors* (*awliyāʾ*; sing. *walī*) *of one another,* as evidence that female heirs and next of kin might also be granted such authority (Q). The warning against being *excessive in slaying* is understood to mean that only the actual murderer is subject to the death penalty, and the retaliation must not extend beyond the perpetrator of the crime; this was meant to prevent the extended blood feuds that were often generated by such crimes in pre-Islamic Arabia (Ṭ); see 2:178c; 2:194; 5:45c. It is also understood to mean that the murderer should not be tortured, maimed, or mutilated before execution (Q). *Verily he shall be helped* most likely refers to the heir of the slain individual (Q, Ṭ), although some suggest it is the slain individual who is *helped* (Ṭ).

34 The injunction to *approach not the orphan's property . . . till he reaches maturity* means that the guardian of an orphan is not entitled to take the property belonging to the orphan through inheritance or otherwise. Moreover, the guardian is responsible for maintaining the orphan's property and returning it when the orphan reaches maturity. *Save in the most virtuous manner* may refer to certain exceptions made with regard to the guardian's use of an orphan's property. For example, in cases where the orphan's property is in the form of land or riding animals, the guardian might temporarily use this property as long as it is maintained and not depleted thereby; and indigent guardians might use or borrow an orphan's property to the extent that it is absolutely needed. The orphan's property can also be used or exchanged by the guardian if it is done in order to improve or increase the value of the orphan's inheritance (see 6:151; see also commentary on 2:220; 4:2, 6, 10). The Quran repeatedly enjoins the fulfilling of pacts, covenants, and vows both to God and to others; see for example, 2:40; 3:76; 5:1; 6:152; 13:20; 16:91; 48:10; 33:15c.

35 To *give full measure when you measure* and to *weigh with the straight balance* mean to measure honestly, rather than cheating people when trading goods and currency by using a balance that falsely overstates or understates the weight of what has been placed upon it. It also means, in a general way, to barter or exchange goods fairly and honestly, so that what is given is equal to what is received. For similar injunctions, see 6:151–52c; 7:85; 11:84–85; 26:181–82; 55:8–9; 83:1–3c.

36 *Pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge* can mean that one should not speak of things about which one does not have proper knowledge or falsely claim to have knowledge about something that one does not in fact have (R, Ṭ). The verse can thus be understood as alluding to any type of false or unjust testimony (R, Ṭ, Z). One should not *pursue,* in the sense of investigating, private matters in order to expose the faults of others. In this context in which a series of moral injunctions are given regarding the treatment of others, the verse may be interpreted to mean more specifically that one should not level accusations or charges against others concerning affairs about which one does not have sufficient knowledge, in effect slandering them (R, Ṭ); see, for example, 24:15, which criticizes those who pass along

whereof you have no knowledge. Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account. (37) And walk not exultantly upon the earth; surely thou shalt not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height. (38) The evil of all this is loathsome unto thy Lord. (39) That is from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee. Do not set up another god along with God, lest

false rumors about the sexual transgressions of another: *When you accepted it with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, supposing it to be insignificant, though it is great in the Eyes of God.*

*Pursue not* can also be rendered simply "Follow not," indicating that one should not follow a path or a guide without knowing whether one will be led or misled; the verse can thus be read as supporting the traditional Islamic discouragement of *taqlīd* (Z), the blind imitation or following of another in matters of theology (although not in matters of law, which always requires some degree of following the *Sunnah* and, for those who are not jurisprudents themselves, following the legal rulings of others). In fact, some suggested that this verse meant, with regard to legal rulings, that one should not make judgments based on speculation, even through the process of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), though others argued that various legal determinations, such as estimating the direction of the *qiblah* or issuing a nonbinding legal opinion (*fatwā*), necessarily entail some level of speculation (R).

The human faculties of *hearing, and sight, and the heart* are frequently invoked in the Quran, as they are understood to be three means by which people are guided to truth; the *heart* is traditionally considered the seat of understanding as well as faith; see 2:7c. The three faculties are thus mentioned as gifts for which people should be grateful (see 16:78; 23:78; 32:9c; 67:23), but also as faculties that can be "removed," "sealed," or otherwise rendered ineffective by God as a punishment for wrongdoing or disbelief (2:7; 6:46; 16:108; 45:23; 46:26). Thus these three faculties *will be called to account,* meaning that one will be held accountable for their proper or improper use (R, Ṭs). The verse may also be read to mean that the faculties of hearing, sight, and the heart will themselves be questioned (R, Ṭs). This would be similar to other verses where one's limbs and one's skin are said to testify about and even against one on the Day of Judgment (Ṭ; cf. 24:24; 41:20–22).

37 That one should *walk not exultantly upon the earth* (cf. 31:18) means that one should be humble and moderate in one's demeanor (see 31:19c), rather than acting in a boastful or arrogant manner, for *God loves not one who is a vainglorious boaster* (4:36; cf. 31:18; 57:23). This can also be understood as a moral guideline addressed to all human beings, instructing them not to act triumphantly toward other creatures. In contrast to those who would assume such an arrogant demeanor, *the servants of the Compassionate . . . walk humbly upon the earth* (25:63). A famous report of the Prophet's appearance and demeanor, composed by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, describes the Prophet as walking energetically, but never proudly (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*). That neither the Prophet nor anyone else shall *penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height* is meant symbolically to remind human beings of their own weakness and powerlessness, surrounded as they are by vast phenomena that demonstrate, by contrast, their own smallness. Human beings thus have no reason to assume their own greatness or behave arrogantly or boastfully (R).

38–39 The *evil of all this* in v. 38 refers to the series of sinful behaviors warned against in vv. 31–37. *That* in v. 39 refers more broadly to all of the moral injunctions and prohibitions mentioned in vv. 22–39 (R, Z), which are *from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee,* that is, Muhammad, through the Quran. V. 22 begins this section with an exhortation to *not set up another god along with God,* and v. 39 closes it with the identical admonition, because, according to al-Zamakhsharī, knowledge of the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) is the beginning and foundation of all wisdom. The inherent virtue of the various moral guidelines set out in vv. 22–39 is self-evident to the intellect,

thou be cast into Hell, condemned, banished. (40) Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females from among the angels [for Himself]? Surely you speak a monstrous word! (41) And We have indeed varied [Our signs] in this Quran, that they might reflect, though it increased them in naught but aversion. (42) Say, "If there were gods with Him, as they say, they would surely seek a

according to al-Rāzī, and as such these moral guidelines are found in all religions and creeds and are never subject to abrogation by later revelations. One report specifically mentions that all of these injunctions were found in the tablets of the Torah given to Mōses (R, Ṭ).

40 This is one of several passages that mocks the pre-Islamic belief among the Quraysh that the angels were female and that they were the daughters of God; see also 4:117; 16:57–59; 37:149–53; 43:16–19; 52:39; 53:19–21, 27. Here and elsewhere, the belief that God had daughters is juxtaposed with the extremely low regard the pre-Islamic Arabs reportedly held for daughters in general—the birth of a daughter brought shame and anguish to a family. Thus the rhetorical question *Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females?* is meant to reveal the foolishness of such a belief (cf. 53:21), which is described as *a monstrous word. Monstrous* translates *ʿaẓīm,* which also means "great" or "tremendous," but here in a negative context can be translated "monstrous" or "terrible." Such a belief is *monstrous,* because attributing to God what they would consider a misfortune and a disgrace for themselves reveals the prè-Islamic Arabs' profound lack of reverence for God and His Power.

41 That God varies His signs (6:46, 65, 105; 7:58; 46:27) or elsewhere His parables (17:89; 18:54) in the Quran means that He presents them in varying ways (R): sometimes through rational proofs, sometimes in an awesome manner inspiring fear, and sometimes in a gentle manner that attracts listeners (Bḍ on 6:46). The purpose of the Quran's multifarious presentation is so *that they*—that is, its listeners or readers—*might reflect* upon these truths and signs and come to a greater understanding of them. That *it increased them in naught but aversion* means that it did so for some, which is consistent with other verses of the Quran that describe the wide range of responses among people to hearing and seeing the revelations and signs of God. See, for example, 2:26, where God's parables guide some and mislead others; 9:124–25, where every *sūrah* increases some in faith, but is the cause of spiritual defilement for others; and v. 82, where what is sent down of the Quran is *a cure and a mercy for the believers,* but *increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss.* Disbelievers are also *increased in naught but aversion* by the words of the prophets in 17:46; 25:60; 35:42. Those who are *increased in naught but aversion* in this verse might also be presumed to be disbelievers and wrongdoers (IK). Muʿtazilite theologians argued that this verse indicates that God wills for all to understand His message, since He displays His signs in various ways precisely to encourage different types of people to reflect; but some Ashʿarite theologians adduce this verse to show the opposite, namely, that God wills to turn certain people away from the truth, since He revealed His signs knowing that they would increase some people *in naught but aversion* (R).

42 The Prophet is instructed to challenge the idolaters' belief in multiple gods by asserting that if there were other gods besides God, *they would surely seek a way unto the Possessor of the Throne,* that is, the One God. In other words, if there were multiple gods, they would all vie with one another for a way to dethrone the *Possessor of the Throne* and struggle with Him for dominance (JJ, Q, R, Z), thereby creating chaos; for a similar idea, see 21:22: *Were there gods other than God in them* (i.e., in the heavens and on the earth), *they* (the heavens and the earth) *would surely have been corrupted. So glory be to God, Lord of the Throne, above that which they ascribe.* See also 23:91.

Alternately, the present verse can also be interpreted to mean that these other gods, were they to exist, would *seek a way unto* the One God in order to come near Him and ingratiate themselves with Him, being aware of His Dominance over them (IK, Q, R, Z). If we juxtapose this verse with 39:3, where the idolaters claim to worship other gods as a means of approaching the One God, this verse might seem to respond to their claim by

way unto the Possessor of the Throne." (43) Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above whatsoever they say. (44) The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving. (45) And when thou recitest the Quran, We place a hidden veil between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter. (46) And We have placed coverings over

suggesting, "If there were other gods, would they not seek a way to approach the One God on their own behalf, rather than simply as intermediaries for the idolaters?" This hypothetical situation is meant to demonstrate that there can be only one God, and that whatever one might claim as an object of worship other than God, to the extent it exists at all, is itself dependent on the One God and so cannot rightly be called a "god" in any true sense.

43 *Glory be to Him* (or *Glory be to God*) frequently follows the mention of false deities, or of sons and daughters attributed to God, as it does here. In such contexts, this exclamation is often followed by a statement of God's being exalted above the "partners" the idolaters ascribe to Him or above all false claims and descriptions regarding Him; see 6:100; 10:18; 16:1; 21:22; 23:91; 28:68; 30:40; 37:159, 180; 39:67; 43:82; 52:43; 59:23.

44 This is one of several verses indicating that God is worshipped by all creatures in existence—both those on earth and those in heaven, angels as well as beasts, and even inanimate creatures—as these are variously described as praising or prostrating to God. See, for example, 13:13: *And the thunder hymns His praise, as do the angels, in awe of Him. He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will. Yet they dispute concerning God, and He is severe in wrath;* and 22:18: *Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the beasts, and many among mankind?* See also 13:15; 16:49–50. The present verse can be read as continuing the idea in v. 42 that all things are ultimately subordinate to the One God, Who created them, and correspondingly turn toward Him, *willingly or unwillingly* (13:15). Thus to consider created things to be objects of worship themselves, even as intermediaries, is to be ignorant of the complete and utter dependence of all things on their Creator. See 41:37: *Among His signs are the night and the day, the sun and the moon. Prostrate not unto the sun, nor unto the moon. Prostrate unto God, Who created them, if it is He Whom you worship.* It is the contingency of all these phenomena that points to the existence of the one uncreated Creator, who is necessary in Himself (Bḍ).

Although this universal praise for God transcends human understanding—*you do not understand their praise*—some have considered *Glory be to Him* (as in v. 43) to be the universal prayer of all creatures (Ṭ). Some commentators have suggested that one should never show disrespect to any animal, or indeed to any creature, for they too are possessed of spirit and praise God (Ṭ). God is *Clement*, in that He does not bring punishment down upon wrongdoers immediately (Bḍ), and *Forgiving* of those who seek His Forgiveness; these two Divine Names are also paired in 2:225, 235; 3:155; 5:101; 35:41.

45 This verse is addressed to the Prophet. That God places a *hidden veil* between the Prophet and the disbelievers when he recites the Quran means either that there is a barrier preventing the disbelievers from comprehending the words he is reciting (cf. v. 46), and hence from deriving guidance or spiritual benefit from them (Ṭ), or that the barrier is there to protect the Prophet against harassment or harm from the disbelievers (JJ, R); also see 41:5c. According to al-Rāzī, the *hidden veil* in this verse, like the "seals" that God places on hearing and hearts elsewhere (e.g., 2:7; 7:101; 9:87), is meant to prevent disbelievers and wrongdoers from understanding the revelation and deriving guidance from it.

46 This verse offers a description similar to that of the *hidden veil* placed between the disbelievers and the Prophet in v. 45 and to the "seals"

their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. And whenever thou dost mention thy Lord alone in the Quran, they turn their backs in aversion. (47) We know best that which they listen for when they listen to thee, and when they converse in secret, when the wrongdoers say, "You follow naught but a man bewitched!" (48) Look how they set forth descriptions of thee. Thus they go astray and cannot find a way. (49) They say, "What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?" (50) Say, "Be you of stone, or of iron, (51) or some other created thing more difficult [to resur-

placed on hearts and hearing in 2:7; 7:101; 9:87; and elsewhere. An identical description of the *coverings* placed on their hearts and the *deafness* in their ears can be found in 6:25 and 18:57. See 6:25c and also 41:5, where the disbelievers themselves say, *Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and between us and you there is a veil.* To *mention thy Lord alone in the Quran* refers to the Prophet's reciting verses from the Quran that explicitly mention God's Oneness and refute the idea that He has partners or associates (Bḍ, R).

47–48 When the disbelievers listen to the Prophet, *that which they listen for* is not guidance, but rather an opportunity to mock and deny the Prophet and the Quranic message (Bḍ, R, Z). God also knows what they say *when they converse in secret.* "Secret converse" is mentioned in several verses as having mostly nefarious purposes; see commentary on 4:114: *There is no good in most of their secret converse, save for him who enjoins charity or kindness or reconciliation between men;* as well as commentary on 58:7–10. The *wrongdoers'* accusation that Muhammad is *bewitched* (also 25:8), or deceived by sorcery (R), is a more passive version of the disbelievers' claim that Muhammad and other prophets are active purveyors of *manifest sorcery,* as mentioned in 5:110; 6:7; 10:76, 81; 11:7; 20:57; 21:3; 26:35; 27:13; 28:36; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 46:7; 54:2; 61:6; 74:24. Other prophets are also called *bewitched:* Ṣāliḥ (26:153), Shuʿayb (26:185), Moses (17:101), and the messengers generally (15:15). The *descriptions* they set forth for Muhammad in v. 48 is a reference to their calling him *bewitched* in v. 47 and their dismissing him elsewhere as merely a poet (21:5; 37:36; 52:30) or possessed (15:6; 23:70; 34:8; 44:14; 68:51; R, Q, Z).

49–51 These three verses include a set of skeptical questions about the Resurrection and Judgment that the disbelievers put forth in other verses as well. The first question demonstrates the disbelievers incredulity at the idea that the dead matter of *bones and dust* can be given life anew (cf. 17:98; 23:35, 82; 36:78; 37:16–17; 56:47; 79:10–11). The response, indicating that God could give life even to *stone* or *iron,* is meant to suggest that it should not be so difficult for the disbelievers to conceive of such a powerful God giving bones new life since, unlike stone and iron, bones were once endowed with life by Him and can simply be returned to that state (Z). Their second question asks who has the power to do such a thing (cf. 36:78), and the answer is the God Who created them *the first time,* implying that since they acknowledge that God had created them once, they have no reason to doubt His ability to do so again (cf. 36:79). That the resurrection of human beings will be similar to God's creation of them *the first time* is also mentioned in 6:94 and 18:48. God's power to resurrect implies His total power over death; in connection with this verse some commentators mention a *ḥadīth* that says that on the Day of Resurrection death will be brought forth in the form of a beautiful ram and will then be slaughtered between Paradise and Hell (IK, Q).

The third question in this passage asks when the Resurrection will come about (cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:21; 32:28; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25). The Prophet elsewhere is told to reply to similar questions by saying that he has no knowledge of the coming of the Hour (21:109; 67:26; 72:25), but here he is told to say, by way of further warning, that *it may well be nigh* (cf. 27:72). This is understood by some to mean that it is indeed near at hand, for, according

rect] to your minds." Then they will say, "Who will bring us back?" Say, "He Who originated you the first time." And they will shake their heads at thee and say, "When will it be?" Say, "It may well be nigh." (52) The Day when He calls you, you will respond by praising Him, and you will think that you tarried but a short while. (53) Say unto My servants that they should say that which is more virtuous. Surely Satan provokes ill feeling between them. Surely Satan is a manifest enemy unto man. (54) Your Lord knows you best. If He wills, He has Mercy

to commentators, when the phrase *it may well be* is spoken by God, it indicates something that is necessarily the case, not something that is merely possible (Q, Ṭ). According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said, "I and the Hour have been sent [as close together] as these two," and he raised his index and middle finger to demonstrate (Ṭ).

52 *The Day when He calls you*—that is, when God summons everyone collectively from the grave on the Day of Resurrection—the response of all will be to praise God (cf. 39:75). This universal praise is the result of human beings' now inescapable recognition of God as their Creator (Q), His power to resurrect them (Q), and the many blessings He has bestowed upon them (Ṭs). Their praise is also a way of demonstrating their complete obedience to God's Command (IK, Ṭ) and their full submission to the process of Resurrection and Judgment (Z). However, the recognition and obedience after death of those who refused to recognize and obey God in earthly life bring them no benefit (Q, R, Ṭs). On that day, one's earthly life will seem to have been brief, as if one had *tarried* in earthly life or perhaps in the grave (Bḍ) for *but a short while.* Elsewhere, the Quran says more specifically that those who are resurrected will think that they had tarried for *a day or part of a day* (18:19; 23:113; cf. 20:104; 79:46) or for merely *an hour* of a day (10:45; 30:55; 46:35). In all respects, earthly life will seem utterly transient and contemptible in the face of the Hereafter (Z).

53 *My servants* likely refers to the believers specifically (R, Z), but may also refer to all human beings (Q, Ṭs). *Say that which is more virtuous* may be a general injunction to speak gently, without harshness (Z); see also 2:83; 4:5, 8–9; 6:152; 16:125; 17:23, 28; 29:46; 33:70. Because speaking harshly will only encourage one's opponents to do likewise (see 6:108) and may further entrench them in their opposition (R), one should rather respond to the insults of disbelievers with words such as, "May God have Mercy upon you!" (Q). In this vein, some reports indicate that the verse was revealed regarding an incident in which the prominent Companion and second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 22/644), was insulted by an Arab, whom he then cursed or threatened in return (Mw, Q, W). This verse was revealed indicating that he should pardon the man instead (W).

Since *that which is more virtuous* is in the feminine form, some suggest that there is an elided feminine noun that this phrase describes; the most common suggestion is *kalimah* ("word"), so that the verse would could be rendered, "Say [the word] which is more virtuous" (Q, Ṭs). The "word" in this case may be identified with the Islamic testimony of faith, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (Ṭs), which is sometimes referred to as *al-kalimah* in the Islamic tradition. Others have glossed *say that which is more virtuous* as a reference to enjoining right and forbidding wrong (Mw, Q), a repeated Quranic injunction (see 3:104c).

One of the ways in which Satan seeks to mislead human beings according to the Quran is by provoking *ill feeling between them;* see 5:91, where Satan seeks to *sow enmity and hatred . . . through wine and gambling;* and 12:100, where it is Satan who *incited evil* between the prophet Joseph and his brothers. That Satan is *a manifest enemy* of human beings (see also 2:168, 208; 6:142; 12:5; 28:15; 35:6; 36:60; 43:62) is established in the accounts of Adam's temptation and fall (7:22).

54 The *you* in this verse refers to the believers, continuing the address in v. 53. God *knows*

upon you, and if He wills, He punishes you, and We have not sent thee as a guardian over them. (55) And thy Lord knows best whosoever is in the heavens and the earth. And We indeed favored some of the prophets over others, and unto David We gave the Psalms. (56) Say, "Call upon those whom you claim apart from Him, but they have no power to remove affliction from you, nor to change [it]." (57) It is they who make supplication, seeking a means of approach to their Lord. Which of them is nearer? And they hope for His Mercy and fear

*you best* means that He has full knowledge of the states of human beings and arranges their affairs for their well-being (Ṭs). That God is merciful toward or forgives whomever He wills and punishes whomever He wills is mentioned in several verses (cf. 2:284; 3:129; 5:18, 40; 29:21; 48:14; 76:31) and in most cases is thought to pertain to forgiveness and punishment in the Hereafter. In the present verse, however, some indicate that it means that God may show Mercy to the believers by delivering them from the persecutions of the pagan Makkans or may punish them by continuing to grant the Makkans power over them (Q, R, Ṭs). Or, if v. 53 is read as addressed to the disbelievers themselves, the present verse would mean that God may either lead the disbelievers to faith or punish them for their disbelief (Q, R). The Prophet is not *a guardian over them;* his only responsibility is to deliver God's message to them (see 5:92c; R); see also 6:66; 10:108; 39:41; 42:6.

55 That God has *favored some of the prophets over others* means that, while all prophets possess the highest spiritual station among human beings (Ṭs), God has also given spiritual gifts of varying kinds in different degrees to different prophets; see 2:253c. Elsewhere, the Quran indicates that true believers "make no distinction between" the prophets, meaning that they believe in all the prophets, and make no distinction with regard to their belief in the various prophets (see 2:136; 285; 3:84; 4:152c). Here, however, the Quran is referring to the distinctions between the prophets with regard to the gifts and vocations they have been given by God. This verse presents the example of David, who was given various gifts (see 2:251; 21:79–80; 38:17–20; 34:10–11) and was also distinguished by his being given the *Psalms,* which translates *al-Zabūr.* This Arabic term is generally assumed to refer to the Psalms found in the Biblical corpus; and the Judeo-Christian tradition considers some of the Psalms to be of Davidic authorship. The *Psalms* (*al-Zabūr*) are described by some commentators as a revealed book containing no religious law, but only praises and glorifications of God (Q). The Psalms are also mentioned as a scripture given to David in 4:163; the Psalms are mentioned without explicit connection to David in 21:105.

56 The Quran challenges the idolaters to *call upon* the false deities whom they claim to worship other than God, seeking their help; see 7:194–95; 10:38; 11:13. The Quran indicates that they *will not answer* (28:64), that they have no power to help those who worship them (34:22), and that these false objects of worship will forsake their worshippers on the Day of Judgment (6:94; 7:37; 10:28; 16:86; 28:62–64; 40:73–74). That none can *remove affliction* or change it (see also 6:17) is something the Quran argues that people know innately, since in a situation of true peril or affliction or when faced with judgment and punishment in the Hereafter, they will call only upon God (see, e.g., 6:40–41, 67; 10:12c).

57 According to some, it is the false deities and partners that the idolaters associate with God who *make supplication* and seek *a means of approach* to God (see 17:42c), because these partners *are servants like* themselves (7:194); that is, they are created. According to others, this verse refers to the angels, whom the idolaters falsely claimed were the daughters of God (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), or to the jinn, whom the idolaters took as partners with God (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); see 6:100: *They make the jinn partners with God, though He created them.* As created beings with free will, the jinn are also subject to Divine Judgment, and so they *hope for His Mercy and fear His Punishment.* On the importance of hope and fear as complementary attitudes

His Punishment. Truly the Punishment of thy Lord is something of which to be wary. (58) There is no town, save that We shall destroy it before the Day of Resurrection, or punish it with a severe punishment. That is inscribed in the Book. (59) Naught hinders Us from sending signs, save that those of old denied them. And We gave unto Thamūd the she-camel as a clear portent, but they wronged her. And We do not send down Our signs, save to inspire fear. (60) And [remember] when We said unto thee, "Surely thy Lord encompasses mankind." We did not ordain the vision that We showed thee, save as a trial for mankind,

toward God on the part of the faithful, see 7:56c; 32:16c. One of the ways in which those falsely worshipped by the idolaters will seek *a means of approach* to God is by forsaking the idolaters who worshipped them (see 17:56c). God's Punishment *is something of which to be wary,* even for the prophets (Z); see 10:15, where the Prophet is told to say, *Truly I fear, should I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous day.*

58 The Quran frequently mentions the destruction of "towns" for the wrongdoing of their inhabitants (e.g., 7:4, 59–101; 17:16; 21:11; 22:45), and this destruction usually means the utter uprooting and annihilation of their people (Ṭ, Z). In this verse, however, destruction is the fate that awaits all towns before the *Day of Resurrection.* Some commentators suggest that although all towns will eventually be destroyed, righteous towns will be "destroyed" through ordinary death, whereas *severe punishment,* entailing terrifying modes of destruction, is the fate of those that are wicked (Q, Ṭs, Z). That this fate is *inscribed in the Book*—likely a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c; Ṭ, Ṭs)—means that the appointed time of destruction for all towns has already been decreed (cf. 7:34; 15:4; 18:59).

59 This verse is widely viewed as a response to the repeated requests from the Quraysh for a sign to confirm the truth of Muhammad's prophethood, as when they reportedly asked him to turn the sacred hill of Ṣafā into gold (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); see also 6:109 and commentary as well as 6:37; 7:203; and 10:20, where these requests for signs are dismissed. In at least one case, however, the Prophet is reported to have responded to the request for a sign by cleaving the moon so that it appeared in two halves in the sky (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 54; 54:1c). *Those of old*—that is, previous peoples—had asked for and been granted similar signs, but they *denied them,* just as the Quraysh dismissed the cleaving of the moon by saying they had merely been "bewitched" by the Prophet. Indeed, the Quran indicates that such signs are often rejected (6:4), and as a consequence punishment is brought down swiftly upon the deniers (6:157). The verse then gives the example of Thamūd, who slaughtered the sacred *she-camel* God had sent them in response to their request for a sign, and suffered annihilation by God shortly afterward; see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31; 91:13–14. Given that signs are often rejected, and rejection brings destruction, God's withholding of such requested signs (other than the cleaving of the moon) from the Quraysh ultimately represented an act of mercy, according to commentators (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). God sends signs only *to inspire fear,* that is, as a warning and admonition (Ṭs, Z).

60 This verse assures the Prophet that *thy Lord encompasses mankind* in both power and knowledge, and that none of their actions can overcome His ability to protect and aid the Prophet (JJ, R, Ṭ). Others maintain that it refers to God's informing the Prophet of his eventual victory over the idolaters of the Quraysh at the Battle of Badr (2/624) and in general (R, Z).

*The vision* that God grants the Prophet is most commonly understood to mean the vision he received on the Night Journey, when he was taken from Makkah to Jerusalem and from there to the Divine Throne in a single evening (see 17:1c; JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). This *vision* became a *trial* or a test,

and the Accursed Tree in the Quran. And We inspire fear in them, but it increases them in naught but great rebellion. (61) And when We said unto the angels, "Prostrate before Adam," they all prostrated, save Iblīs. He said, "Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?" (62) He said, "Dost Thou see this, which Thou hast honored above me? If Thou dost grant me reprieve till the Day of Resurrection, I shall surely gain mastery over his progeny, all save a few." (63) He said, "Go! And whosoever among them should follow thee, surely

since it led even some of the Prophet's supporters to doubt him, as they found it difficult to accept his account of this event (JJ, Ṭ). Alternately, some suggest that this *vision* refers to the dream the Prophet had in Madinah that he and his followers would make the pilgrimage to Makkah. When their attempted pilgrimage was blocked by the Quraysh on the outskirts of the city (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48), the apparent thwarting of the Prophet's vision became a test of faith for some of his followers (R, Ṭ, Z). Still others have suggested that the *vision* was a reference to a vision the Prophet had of his overcoming the Quraysh at either Badr (2/624) or the conquest of Makkah (8/630; R). However, since these three events occurred in the Madinan period, it is unlikely that the *vision* in this Makkan *sūrah* refers to them (R, Ṭ).

The *Accursed Tree* in the Quran refers to the tree of Zaqqūm (37:62; 44:43; 56:52), which is created of fire (Ṭ) and has *spathes* like *the heads of satans* (37:65). It is *accursed* in that those who will eat from it are cursed and its fruit is poisonous (R) or because it is distant from all good things and from God's Mercy (R, Z).

The idolaters of the Quraysh ridiculed both the Prophet's account of the Night Journey and the Quranic reference to the tree of Zaqqūm; with regard to the latter, they were incredulous that a tree could grow and not be consumed in the Fire of Hell, which elsewhere is said to consume even stones (JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). Abū Jahl, one of the leaders of the opposition to the Prophet in Makkah, mockingly dismissed the fearful descriptions of the tree of Zaqqūm, suggesting instead that the tree was a source of wonderful rich foods that they would delight in eating (R, W). Thus although the description of the *Accursed Tree* was, like all of God's signs (see v. 59), meant to *inspire fear,* it only increased the Makkans' opposition to the Prophet and the Quran. In other verses, the revelations, warnings, and signs that God delivers through His messengers serve to increase denial in some (cf. 5:64, 68; 17:41, 82; 25:60; 35:42; 71:6).

61 The prostration of the angels before Adam (2:34; 7:11; 15:29–31; 18:50; 20:116; 38:73–74) is understood to indicate the superiority of the spiritually perfected human being (or Adam before the fall) even over the angels, particularly with regard to his knowledge (see commentary on 2:31–33). Iblīs's question, *Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?* (see also 15:33), demonstrates the arrogance for which he is rebuked in 7:13. Iblīs's disregard for Adam on the basis of his physical constitution is made most explicit in 7:12 and 38:76, where he explains his refusal to prostrate before Adam by saying that whereas Adam was made of clay, he himself was made of fire, with the assumption that fire is nobler than clay; see 7:12c.

62 For slightly fuller accounts of Iblīs's request for reprieve from punishment and God's explicit granting of the request, which is only implicit here, see 7:14–15; 15:36–38; 38:79–81. Iblīs's threat to *gain mastery* over Adam's progeny is a threat to lead them astray from the straight path; see 7:16–17; 15:39–40.

63 In response to Iblīs's threat, God banishes him with the command *Go!* (cf. 7:13; 15:34; 38:77) and a promise to *fill Hell* with those who *follow* him in 7:18. *Hell shall be thy recompense* is thus a threat addressed to both Iblīs and those whom he will lead astray; similar threats issued collectively to Satan and his human followers are found in 15:43; 38:85. See also 11:119 and 32:13, where jinn and human beings are said to be punished together in Hell.

Hell shall be thy recompense—an ample recompense! (64) So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice, and bear down upon them with thy cavalry and thine infantry, and be their partner in wealth and children, and make them promises." Satan promises them naught but delusion. (65) "As for My

64 *So incite whomsoever thou canst* should not be understood as a command to Iblīs, but rather as an indication that God will not interfere in the struggle between Iblīs and humanity (Z). It may also be a challenge meant to reveal Iblīs's ultimate weakness (Q), since he has no power over God's *servants* (v. 65). Many commentators nonetheless raised the issue of why God would grant Satan respite and allow him to tempt people in these various ways. According to some Muʿtazilite thinkers, God did this in order to intensify the moral challenges facing human beings in this world and thus provide them with greater opportunity to be rewarded in the Hereafter (R).

That Iblīs (or Satan) incites with his *voice* may refer to any of the various means by which he attempts to mislead human beings (Q, R, Ṭ). Some commentators suggest that *with thy voice* may refer to Satan's misleading human beings through singing or music (IK, Q, R, Ṭ), and this verse was often cited by those who maintained that singing and music should be prohibited in Islam (Q). The verse does not, however, explicitly mention music or singing, and the mention of Satan's *voice* as the instrument of his provocations is more likely an allusion to Satan "whispering" his inducements to people (see 7:20; 20:120; 114:4c). Although the Quran does not directly mention music at all, the acceptability of different kinds of music varies across different Islamic perspectives and cultural settings, and some legal scholars explicitly prohibit all musical forms other than the chanting of the Quran and the call to prayer (*adhān*). Beyond these forms of chanting, however, music and indeed musical expressions of Islamic piety have always had a place in Islamic culture, beginning with the account of the Prophet Muhammad being greeted by a joyous song as he entered Madinah for the first time. This song, known by its first line, *Ṭalaʿa al-badru ʿalaynā* ("The Full Moon Has Risen over Us"), is still remembered and sung often today.

*Bear down upon them* translates *ajlib,* which may also mean to "call forth against them" (Q, R, Z), continuing the connection with Satan's *voice,* or it may mean to bring all of one's forces and might upon them (Q, R). Satan's *cavalry and . . . infantry* was interpreted by some to mean "all those who ride or walk in acts of disobedience" (IK, JJ, Q, R, Ṭ), whether they are jinn or human beings, since both are capable of leading others astray (Q, R, Ṭ; cf. 41:29; 114:6). In several verses, *wealth and children* signify the good things of this world (e.g., 3:14; 9:69; 18:46) and as such can be a source of "trial" for human beings (8:28). Satan is *their partner in wealth and children* when either of these two are acquired or treated wrongfully or are means of distraction from God and religion. In the case of wealth, this may refer to Satanic incitement to acquire wealth through usury or other illicit means or to spend it in immoral ways. With regard to children, this may refer to Satan's incitement to fornication and adultery, through which children may be produced; to mistreating, misguiding, or even killing children (IK, JJ, R, Ṭ); or to taking pride in having children.

Satan will *make them promises* as a means of inciting them to wrongdoing (cf. 4:120; 14:22), perhaps by suggesting to them that there will be no Resurrection or Reckoning and no Heaven or Hell (JJ, Q, R) or by giving them hope that they will be protected by the intercession of idols and false deities in the Hereafter (R). The description of his promises as *naught but delusion* offers a clear contrast with the repeated Quranic assertion that God's Promise is true (see, e.g., 4:122; 10:4; 14:22; 18:21; 30:60; 35:5), and it is consistent with the Quranic reference to Satan as *the Deluder* (31:33; 35:5; 57:14).

65 God's *servants* over whom Satan has *no authority* most likely refers to God's righteous servants (R, Z); see 15:40 and 38:83, where Satan himself exempts God's *sincere servants* from those whom he will cause to err. That Satan has *no authority* over God's sincere servants is understood to mean that he cannot succeed in leading them astray (Z); see also 15:42. Some commentators suggest, however, that *servants* may refer to all

servants, truly thou hast no authority over them." And thy Lord suffices as a Guardian. (66) Your Lord is He Who makes the ships sail upon the sea, that you might seek of His Bounty. Verily, He is Merciful unto you. (67) And whenever affliction befalls you at sea, forgotten are those whom you would call upon, save for Him. Then when He has delivered you safely to land, you turn away. Man is ever ungrateful! (68) Do you feel secure that He will not cause the shore to engulf you or unleash a torrent of stones upon you? Then would you find no guardian for yourselves. (69) Or do you feel secure that He will not cause you to return to it another time, and unleash upon you a tempestuous wind, and drown you for your having been ungrateful? Then you would find no avenger therein against Us. (70) We have indeed honored the Children of Adam, and We

morally responsible individuals, and that this verse thus indicates Satan's ultimate powerlessness over all human beings, who are alone responsible for their spiritual and moral error, as in 14:22, where Satan says to human beings, *I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me.* That God *suffices as a Guardian* is also mentioned in 3:173; 4:81, 132, 171; 33:3, 48.

66 The existence of ships that can carry human beings over the water is repeatedly mentioned as a sign of God's Power and Benevolence and as a gift for which people should be grateful (see 2:164; 14:32; 16:14; 30:46; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 42:32; 43:12; 45:12).

67 This is one of several verses in which people are moved to call upon God when faced with peril at sea (see 6:40–41; 10:22–23; 29:65; 31:32). In the face of such danger, the false deities whom people used to call upon are *forgotten* (lit. "lost"), seeming suddenly useless and contemptible in their eyes (Q, Ṭ, Z). Yet when God has *delivered* them *safely to land,* they *turn away* from their momentary devotion to God alone and revert to their previous practices (cf. 7:189–90; 10:22–23; 29:65; 30:33; 31:32; see also commentary on 10:22–23). That humanity, or at least most human beings, are *ungrateful* by nature is also mentioned in 14:34; 22:66; 25:50; 42:48; 80:17; 100:6. *Ungrateful* translates *kafūr,* which derives from the same root as *kāfir,* meaning "disbeliever." The two meanings are profoundly related in Islamic thought, in that to be a disbeliever is to exist in a state of ingratitude toward God for the various gifts and blessings He has provided.

68–69 Following the indictment of people's ingratitude in v. 67, this set of rhetorical questions emphasizes their constant liability to Divine Punishment for *having been ungrateful;* the disbelievers' false sense of security is similarly challenged in 7:97–99; 12:107; 16:45–47; 67:16–17. For the relationship between worldly security and ingratitude, see also 10:7 and 16:112. The rhetorical questions in this verse invoke some of the punishments brought down on other disbelieving people according to the Quran, as in 29:40: *Each We seized for his sin. Among them are some upon whom We sent a torrent of stones, and among them are some whom the Cry seized, and among them are some whom We caused the earth to engulf, and among them are some whom We drowned.* The punishment of being "engulfed by the earth" is mentioned in 28:81 and 34:9. A *torrent of stones* destroyed the people of Lot (11:82; 15:74; 54:34) as well as the *masters of the elephant* (105:1–4). *Torrent of stones* translates *ḥāṣib,* which may also mean a violent wind that is destructive on land (Ṭs).

*Cause you to return to it another time* means that they may be returned to a situation of peril at sea (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs) after having been *delivered* from it in v. 67. *Tempestuous wind* translates *qāṣif,* which some describe as a destructive wind at sea (Ṭs).

70 According to some, God has *honored the Children of Adam* by granting them authority over other creatures and by making the rest of

carry them over land and sea, and provide them with good things, and We have favored them above many We have created. (71) On the Day We shall call every people by their imam, whosoever is given his book in his right hand, it is they who shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged so much as the thread

creation subservient to them (see, e.g., 14:33; 16:12; Ṭ, Ṭs). Others mention various blessings given uniquely to human beings, including their use of arms and hands (which other animals do not employ in the same way; Ṭs, Z), their powers of intellect, discernment, and speech (R, Ṭs), and their ability to know God (Ṭs). In the Quran God also ennobled Adam and, by extension, his progeny by creating him with His *two Hands* (38:75), breathing into him of His Spirit (15:29; 32:9; 38:72), and endowing him with extraordinary knowledge (2:31). Human beings are carried *over land* by riding animals, which are mentioned elsewhere as a Divine blessing (16:8; 40:79), and *over sea* by ships, for which the Quran indicates people should be grateful (see 17:66c). The *good things* provided to them refer to the various kinds of food and drink provided for them on earth (Ṭ; cf. 8:26; 16:72; 40:64). That God has *favored them above many* whom He has *created* means, according to some, that He favored them over all that He has created (Ṭs), including even the angels (Ṭ, Z), as indicated in God's command to the angels to bow before Adam (2:34; 7:11; 17:61; 15:29; 18:50; 20:116; 38:73–74). Some commentators consider God's "honoring" the Children of Adam as referring to the worldly blessings He gives them and His "favoring" them to spiritual blessings (Ṭs) or the blessings of the Hereafter (Mw).

71 An *imām* (anglicized as *imam*) is a person or sometimes a source of religious instruction taken as a guide or model to be imitated. The term derives from a root meaning to be or stand in front of something; *imām* can thus refer to one who, standing in front, leads the Muslim congregation in prayer. In the Islamic tradition, *imām* is also a title given to a religious scholar who has acquired great knowledge and influence, such as the great theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), who is commonly referred to as Imam al-Ghazzālī. Lexically, however, *imām* is a value-neutral term, and the Quran mentions as *imāms* both righteous individuals, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2:124; 21:73), and iniquitous ones, such as Pharaoh and his hosts, who are described as *imāms calling unto the Fire* (28:41). That people will be called by their *leader* may mean that they will be called according to the prophet (see 4:41c), the revelation (see 45:28), or the religion that they followed in this life (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). The *imāms* of disbelievers or wrongdoers are those who led them into moral and spiritual error, including Satan or other evil guides and authorities (IK, Q, R, Ṭs). By extension, the *imāms* by which people are called may refer to the spiritual leaders, religious scholars, or indirectly the religious schools of thought that they followed in this life (Q, Ṭs, Z).

Among Twelver Shiites, *imām* is the title given to the twelve inerrant spiritual guides of the community from among *ahl al-bayt*, that is, the family and descendants of the Prophet. According to the eighth Shiite Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, "On [the Day of Judgment] He will call all people by the *imām* of their time, the Book of their Lord, and the *sunnah* of their prophet" (Ṭs; see also Q for a similar statement attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib). According to the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, everyone will be called according to the Imam of their time, and the (Shiite) Imams will be called by the Prophet Muhammad (Ṭs). Although the twelfth and last of the Twelver Shiite Imams was said to have gone into indefinite occultation in 329/941, Twelver Shiites believe that this Imam continues to guide the Shiite community to the present day, and he is thus considered by contemporary Shiites to be the Imam of their time (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*).

*Their leader* in this verse may also be a reference to the book of their deeds (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs), since *imām* is used in 36:12 to refer to the record of human deeds. This reading also seems to be supported by the subsequent mention in the present verse of those receiving their book in their right hand. Al-Qurṭubī suggests that this book is referred to as an *imām* because it is consulted as an authoritative register of their deeds (see below).

of a date stone. (72) And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way. (73) And they were about to tempt thee away from that which We revealed unto thee, that thou mightest falsely ascribe unto Us something other than it, whereupon they would surely have taken thee as a friend. (74) And had We not made thee firm, thou wouldst certainly have inclined toward them a little. (75) Then We would have made thee taste double in life and double in death. Then thou wouldst have found for

Another, less favored, interpretation reads *imām* as an unusual plural of *umm,* meaning "mothers," thus suggesting that all people will be called by the names of their mothers. Those who mention this interpretation indicate that this might be done for the sake of Jesus, who had no father; or to manifest the noble descent of the Prophet's grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, by calling them by the name of their mother, Fāṭimah; or in order to avoid defaming the children born of fornication (Q, Ṭs, Z).

Still others give *imām* an inward, spiritual interpretation, suggesting that it refers to the inner reality or particular character trait that defined a person in life: this may be a virtue, such as generosity, the thirst for knowledge, or bravery; or a vice such as hatred, passionate desire, or anger (R; see also Q for a similar interpretation).

To be "given one's book" is to be presented on the Day of Judgment with the full account of one's deeds (see, e.g., 18:49; 45:29). Receiving one's book in the *right hand* is an indication of Divine Contentment, and receiving it in the left portends Divine Wrath (Ṭs; see 69:19–25; 84:7–8). Those given their book in the right hand read it willingly and with joy (Ṭs), but those who receive the book in their left hand are, according to al-Zamakhsharī, so overwhelmed with fear, shame, and regret that they are incapable of reading it. Human beings will not be wronged in the Hereafter (see also 2:272, 281; 3:25; 6:160; 8:60; 19:60; 23:62; 39:69) even *so much as the thread of a date stone,* since God does not treat people unjustly even in the slightest way; see 4:49–50c; 4:77, 124; 19:60.

72 *Whosoever was blind in this [life]* most likely means whoever is blind in "this world" (R, Ṭ); such people will be *blind in the Hereafter,* for if they are blind in this world to the knowledge and reality of God, they will be blind in the Hereafter to the path to Paradise (R). According to the interpretation of many commentators, such people will indeed be more blind in the Hereafter (R, Ṭ, Z), since in this world the possibility of repentance remains open, but in the Hereafter it will be closed to them (R). This latter interpretation fits better the context of the verse, which also describes such people as *further astray* in the Hereafter. Alternately, the verse can be interpreted to mean that "whosoever is blind regarding these [earthly blessings]," which are mentioned in v. 70 and which can easily be seen, is even more blind to the Hereafter, whose blessings are still hidden from human perception (R). The blindness mentioned here and in many other places in the Quran refers to spiritual rather than physical blindness, *for truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* (22:46; cf., e.g., 2:18, 171; 5:71; 6:50). Regarding blindness in the Hereafter, see also 20:124–26. Using a different metaphor, the Quran indicates that on the Day of Judgment the *cover* that had obscured the truth for people will be removed and their sight will be *piercing* (see 50:22c).

73–75 According to one report, these verses were revealed when the people of the town of Thaqīf asked the Prophet to grant them a year's respite during which they could continue to worship their deity, al-Lāt, before fully embracing Islam, or else to make their land as inviolable and sacred as Makkah, or both (JJ, Ṭ, W). Another report connects these verses with the pagan Makkans' request that the Prophet come close to and touch their idols (Ṭ, W)—according to some versions, they requested this in exchange for their permitting him to approach and touch the Black

thyself no helper against Us. (76) And they were about to incite thee from the land, in order to expel thee therefrom, whereupon they would not have tarried after thee, save a little— (77) the wont of those among Our messengers whom We sent before thee. And thou wilt find no change in Our wont. (78) Perform the prayer at the declining of the sun till the darkening of the night. And the

Stone of the Kaʿbah (Ṭ). The reports indicate that the Prophet was close to accepting these terms, as indicated by the opening line of v. 73, *And they were about to tempt thee away from that which We revealed unto thee.* But God then thwarted their attempt by making the Prophet *firm* in the face of their offer (v. 74), demonstrating His protection of the Prophet from moral and spiritual error as well as from the machinations of those who would do evil (IK, Z).

Had the Prophet *inclined toward them a little,* he would have been made to *taste double,* meaning double punishment from God, both *in life* and *in death.* According to some, the *double* punishment in death refers to the punishment in the grave before the Day of Resurrection and the punishment in the Fire after the Day of Judgment (Z). Doubled or multiplied punishment is also mentioned for those who lead others astray (see 7:38; 11:19–20) and for those whose spiritual status would make any serious moral error or sin on their part particularly egregious; for example, the wives of the Prophet are told that, should they commit indecency, their punishment will be doubled (33:30). Although Islamic doctrine holds unequivocally that the Prophet was Divinely protected from sin (*maʿṣūm*), al-Zamakhsharī states, perhaps hypothetically, that the high station of the Prophet would have made any sin on his part especially abominable. He further reports that when v. 75 was revealed, the Prophet said, "O God! Do not entrust me to my own soul, even for the blink of an eye."

76–77 Those who *were about to incite thee from the land* most likely refers to the Quraysh, who through persecution and enmity eventually drove the Prophet and his followers from Makkah (IK, Mw, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). According to some commentators, the fact that the Quraysh did not forcibly *expel* the Prophet from Makkah averted total or immediate Divine punishment for the Quraysh (R, Ṭs); rather, the Prophet left by Divine Command. If they had expelled him, they *would not have tarried* thereafter *save a little,* meaning they would have been annihilated by Divine Wrath. This is because it is the Divine *wont* to punish through complete destruction those who reject their messengers sent by God (Ṭ, Z), as was the case with those who rejected earlier messengers such as Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb, Lot, and Moses. There is *no change in* God's *wont* (cf. 33:62; 35:43; 48:23), that is, in His Will with regard to human beings and His response to their obedience or disobedience.

*To incite thee* can also be interpreted to mean "to kill thee." In this case, the latter part of v. 76 can be understood to mean that once the Quraysh had attempted to kill the Prophet, which immediately preceded the Prophet's migration to Madinah, the Quraysh did not remain in their former state *save a little,* meaning for a short amount of time. This is because within two years of his migration to Madinah, the Battle of Badr significantly weakened the Quraysh (Mw, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

According to a minority interpretation, v. 76 refers to some Jews of Madinah who tried to persuade the Prophet to leave Madinah by arguing that he should go to the land of Syria, from which their previous prophets arose (IK, R, Ṭs, Z). Some reports mention that the Prophet nearly agreed to this suggestion before the verse was revealed (IK, R, Z). Commentators have generally considered the connection of this verse with the Jews of Madinah unlikely, however, since the present *sūrah* is Makkan and thus predates the Prophet's time in Madinah.

78 This verse is commonly interpreted as alluding to all five canonical prayers and the times of day when they are to be performed. Although some consider the *declining of the sun* a reference to the sunset (*maghrib*) prayer (Bḍ, Mw, Q, Ṭ), most understand it as referring to the moment

recitation at dawn—truly, the recitation at dawn is ever witnessed! (79) And keep vigil in prayer for part of the night, as a supererogatory act for thee. It may be that thy Lord will resurrect thee in a praiseworthy station. (80) And say, "My Lord! Make me enter in a sincere manner, and make me go forth in a sincere

when the sun first begins its decline and to the prayer performed at that time, namely, the midday, or *ẓuhr,* prayer (JJ, Bḍ, Mw, Q, Ṭ). The prayer performed at the *darkening of the night* is most commonly thought to refer to the night, or *ʿishāʾ,* prayer. Thus the command to *perform the prayer* from the *declining of the sun till the darkening of the night* can be understood as a reference to completing all four prayers performed during that time period, namely, the *ẓuhr* (midday), *ʿaṣr* (late afternoon), *maghrib* (sunset), and *ʿishāʾ* (evening) prayer (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭs, Z). For Shiites, who often pray the two afternoon prayers and two evening prayers together, the prayers performed at the *declining of the sun* are the *ẓuhr* and *ʿaṣr,* and those performed at the *darkening of the night* are the *maghrib* and *ʿishāʾ* (Ṭs). In some Sunni schools of law, the *darkening of the night* may refer simply to the disappearance of the sun (Q), although the Shiite (Jaʿfarī) school considers it to mean the disappearance of the sun and all its rays or the beginning of the middle of the evening (Ṭs). Since the present *sūrah* was revealed in Makkah, the various interpretations of this verse as relating to specific prayer times may, however, be a result of commentators reading the ritual regularity of the prayers as they were established by Prophetic practice in the middle Madinan period back into the late Makkan and early Madinan periods of the Prophet's life.

The *recitation at dawn* refers to the fifth canonical prayer, namely, the *fajr* prayer (Bḍ, JJ, Q), performed between dawn and sunrise. Although most understand the *recitation at dawn* to refer to the dawn prayer as whole, which like all canonical prayers entails recitations from the Quran, some suggest that it is specifically the Quranic recitation performed during this prayer that is referenced here (Mw, Q). The *recitation at dawn is ever witnessed* by the angels of both the day and the night, according to several *aḥādīth* (Bḍ, Mw, Q, Z).

Although most commentators consider this verse to concern the five canonical prayers, some Sufi commentaries suggest that the command to *perform the prayer* at these various times throughout the day is also a reference to the importance of continuous, inward prayer, or the "prayer of the heart" (Aj), meaning the constant remembrance and invocation (*dhikr*) of God, since the goal of Sufis is to be in a state of constant invocation (*dāʾim al-dhikr*).

79 This injunction to perform the night vigil prayer (*tahajjud*) is addressed specifically to the Prophet, although other Muslims may and many do also perform it. It is described here as *a supererogatory act for thee,* but most commentators agree that the night vigil was made obligatory for the Prophet (Ṭ); see also 73:1–2c. The night vigil is thus referred to as *a supererogatory act* only figuratively (Q) or because it is a *supererogatory* or voluntary act for all other Muslims (Ṭ); see 73:20. The night vigil is said to be a source of merit for the Prophet and a means of expiation for other believers (Mw, Ṭ, Ṭs). In the present verse, the Prophet's performance of the night vigil is implicitly connected with his being resurrected *in a praiseworthy station,* which many commentators consider a reference to the Prophet's power of intercession in the Hereafter (Mw, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs) or to his being seated near the Throne and carrying the "Banner of Praise" (*liwāʾ al-ḥamd*) on the Day of Resurrection (Mw, Q, Ṭ).

The night vigil, which has the same form as the obligatory canonical prayers in its recitations and movements, is performed in the latter part of the night, after one has already slept for a while (Ṭ, Ṭs, Q), although some hold that it may be performed either before or after sleeping (Mw). According to al-Qurṭubī, the purpose of all supererogatory acts is the spiritual expansion, joy, and ennobling of the soul; and the night vigil brings particular spiritual benefit because the prayer is performed when one is completely alone with God.

80 As with v. 76, this verse is read in the context of the Prophet's emigration from Makkah to Madinah (W, Z). Some commentators report that

manner, and ordain for me, from Thy Presence, an authority to help me." (81) Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing." (82) And We send down of the Quran that which is a cure and a mercy for the believers. And it increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss. (83) And whenever We bestow a blessing upon man, he turns away and withdraws.

when the Makkans wanted to expel the Prophet forcibly, God commanded the Prophet to migrate to Madinah before they could carry out their intention, thereby preserving the people of Makkah from destruction through Divine Punishment for expelling their messenger (W); see 17:76–77c. Thus the Prophet's prayer that he might *enter in a sincere manner* pertains to his entrance into Madinah, and his prayer that he might *go forth in a sincere manner* pertains to his going forth from Makkah (JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). The *entering* may also refer to the entrance into the grave at death, and the *going forth* to the going forth from the grave at the time of the Resurrection (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Others suggest that the *entering* and *going forth* may pertain to all situations into which the Prophet entered or from which he went forth (Z), including his prophetic mission (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

The Prophet is instructed to pray for *authority to help* him in establishing the religion of Islam (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z) and aid him in overcoming its opponents (JJ, Ṭ, Z)—a prayer that is perhaps particularly appropriate in the context of his emigration from Makkah to Madinah, since it was in Madinah that the Prophet acquired the social and political authority to establish a society guided by Quranic principles, and it was from Madinah that he was able eventually to establish Islam in the whole of Arabia (Ṭ).

81 This is perhaps the most well known of several Quranic verses that establish the total incommensurability of truth and falsehood, in that truth is always and inherently victorious over falsehood, which is ultimately nothingness and thus always "vanishes" in the face of truth; see also 21:18 and 34:49. This is one of the most often quoted verses of the Quran, used in both political and intellectual contexts. The Prophet is reported to have repeated this verse continuously as he smashed the idols around the Kaʿbah after Makkah had surrendered and accepted Islam in 8/630 (R, Ṭs). In context, the *Truth* that has come may refer to the Quran or to the religion of Islam in general, in the face of which idolatry and false religion were made to vanish (R, Ṭ). From a metaphysical perspective, however, *Truth* refers to the one certain, unchanging, Necessary Being or Reality, which is God, whereas *falsehood* ultimately refers to all contingent realities, which are ever subject to annihilation and indeed are ever in the process of annihilation, or "vanishing" (K).

82 In several verses, the Quran and other scriptures are described as a *mercy* or as containing mercy (see 7:52, 154; 28:43; 31:2–3). The Quranic revelation is described as a *cure* explicitly only here, although it is implied in 10:57, where the *exhortation* brought to the Prophet is described as *a cure for that which lies within breasts*. Some mention a *ḥadīth*, "Whosoever does not seek a cure from the Quran, God will not cure him" (R, Z). For those who are receptive to its guidance, the Quran is said to be a *cure* for various ailments of the heart, including ignorance, doubt, hypocrisy, rancor, hatred, and enmity (K); and it is a *mercy* insofar as it helps one acquire virtue and perfection of character and adorns one with wisdom and knowledge (K). The Quran is both *mercy* and *cure* for the believers, but it has the opposite effect upon the wrongdoers, whom it *increases . . . in naught but loss*. That Divine Revelation may have the effect of leading those who are wrongdoers or iniquitous even further astray is mentioned elsewhere; see, for example, 2:26; 5:64; 9:124–25.

83 The Quran presents the vagaries of human existence as a spiritual and moral test, since God tries people *with evil and with good* (21:35). Yet, human beings often fail the test, responding to "blessing" with disdain (see also 41:51), arrogance, and self-satisfaction (11:10; 39:49; 41:50), rather than with the gratitude they should feel, since *whatever blessing* they *have, it is from God* (16:53; see also 4:79). When *evil befalls* human beings,

And whenever evil befalls him, he is in despair. (84) Say, "Each acts according to his disposition, and your Lord knows well who is more rightly guided on the way." (85) They ask thee about the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little." (86) And if We willed, We could take away that which We revealed unto thee. Then thou wouldst not find, for thyself, any guardian against Us, (87) save a

they are given to *despair* (see also 41:49) and to anxiety (70:20) and will sometimes call upon God, only to forget Him again when the evil has passed (see, e.g., 10:12; 16:54; 30:33). Their response, however, should be to bear their affliction with patience (22:35; 31:17) and to say, *Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return* (2:156).

84 *Disposition* here may be a reference to one's inward nature or inclination (IK, Ṭ), to one's spiritual path (R, Ṭ, Z), or to one's religion and the doctrines that one accepts (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). To act according to one's *disposition* may mean to act according to what one believes to be right and just (Ṭs) or according to one's intentions (Qm, Ṭ). That *your Lord knows well who is more rightly guided* (cf. 53:30) has a universal import, but in its specific historical context, it was likely intended as a warning to the disbelievers in Makkah, similar to the statement that the Prophet is instructed to make to the disbelievers in 11:121: *And say unto those who believe not, "Act according to your position; we, too, are acting"* (IK).

85 The *Spirit* here and elsewhere in the Quran may refer to the Spirit that is the source of human life (JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), as God breathes into Adam *of His Spirit* (32:9; cf. 38:72). As such, many Muslim thinkers consider it the source of human knowledge, perception, and spiritual capability and thus also of human beings' religious, moral, and spiritual obligation. The *Spirit* may also refer, according to some, to the Archangel Gabriel (Z), the angel of revelation, who is given the title *the Holy Spirit,* as in 16:102: *Say, "The Holy Spirit has brought it down from thy Lord in truth, to make firm those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who submit."* According to a tradition from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the *Spirit* is an angel with seventy thousand heads, each of which has seventy thousand tongues with which he praises God (Ṭs). Another opinion interprets *Spirit* here as a reference to the Quran (Z). On the basis of this verse, *Spirit* (*rūḥ*) is often identified with the realm of Divine Command (*ʿālam al-amr*). That the *Spirit* comes down or is revealed by God's *Command* is also mentioned in 16:2; 40:15; 42:52, and in 97:4 the *Spirit* and the angels descend *by the leave of their Lord, with every command.* Various reports indicate that the present verse was revealed in response to a group of either Madinan Jews or Makkan idolaters who asked the Prophet about the Spirit (W).

86–87 Although both of these verses employ the second-person singular, which usually indicates an address to the Prophet specifically, most commentators read v. 86 as addressed to people in general (Ṭ, Z) or to both the Prophet and his community (Ṭs). The last sentence of v. 87, however, is widely held to be addressed to the Prophet (Bḍ, IK, Q, R, Ṭs); in it *Bounty* refers to his station of excellence among human beings (Q, R, Ṭs; cf. v. 79) and his status as "the seal of the prophets" (R, Ṭs; 33:40). In v. 85, human beings are said to have been given only *a little* knowledge, and v. 86 thus warns that even this little can be taken away (Q, R).

That God might *take away* what He had revealed is said to refer to His ability to remove the Quran completely from human access, that is, by removing it from both the "breasts" of human beings (i.e., from their memories) and written copies (R, Ṭ, Z). The Companion and early Quran commentator ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. ca. 29/650) said, "The first thing that will be lost from your religion is trust and the last that will be lost is prayer, so that people will pray but will have no religion, and you will awaken one day and there will be nothing of the Quran with you.... It will be taken by night, and people will awake in the morning and all of it will have been lifted from the written copies and removed from the hearts"

mercy from thy Lord. Truly His Bounty toward thee is ever great. (88) Say, "Surely if mankind and jinn banded together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not bring the like thereof, even if they supported one another." (89) And indeed We have employed every kind of parable for mankind in this Quran. Yet most of mankind refuse aught but disbelief. (90) And they say, "We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth, (91) or till you have a garden of date palms and grapevines, and you make streams gush forth in the midst of it, (92) or till you make the sky fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or you bring God and the angels before us, (93) or till you

(Z). ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar (d. 74/693), the son of the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, is reported to have said, "The Hour will not come until the Quran is returned whence it descended" (Q). When it returns, it will complain that the people were reciting it, but not acting in accord with it (Q).

That they have no *guardian* after the removal of revelation means they would have no one (Ṭ) who could return the Quran to them (R, Z). The exception *save a mercy* means either that God might choose not to remove it or that He might return it after removing it (Q, R, Z). Both the warning and the exception indicate that God's Mercy is manifested not only in revealing the Quran, but also in preserving it in the hearts and writing of human beings (R, Z). God's Mercy and His Bounty are mentioned together in v. 87 as well as in 2:64; 4:83, 113, 175; 24:10, 14, 20.

88 This verse was reportedly revealed in response to a request by some Madinan Jews that the Prophet produce a new verse of revelation to prove his prophethood. The Prophet responded by reminding them that they know that the Quran is only from God, since its teachings are consistent with the Torah's teachings (Ṭ).

The impossibility of *mankind and jinn* producing something *like the Quran* serves as an argument for the Divine provenance of the Quran; it is similar to the challenges issued to the opponents of the Prophet to produce a revelation like the Quran (2:23; 10:38; 11:13) solely to demonstrate their inability to do so. The Quranic assertion that they could never produce the like of the Quran is understood as proof of the inimitability of the Quran—a fundamental doctrine held by all Muslims. The Quran cannot be imitated, it is understood, in any of its aspects, including its eloquence, the beauty of its organization and composition (Z), the knowledge it contains, the excellence of its content and refinement of its expression, or the absence of inconsistency within the text (Ṭs).

89 That God has *employed every kind of parable* (cf. 18:54; 30:58; 39:27) is understood to mean that He has employed in the Quran all of the indications, proofs, and modes of expression that people need to reflect upon for their religious and worldly life (Ṭs); that in it He has given human beings every reminder of the truth as well as everything that they need to follow and do (Ṭ); and that the Quran presents every argument, conclusive proof, and explanation that human beings need to understand the truth (IK). Parables are employed throughout the Quran, sometimes in the form of short allegories (18:32–43), but more commonly as short or extended metaphorical images (10:24; 13:17; 14:18, 24–26; 16:75–76, 112; 18:45; 29:41; 39:29), some of which, like the Light Verse (24:35), are symbolic images with deep metaphysical and cosmological meaning. The elusive meaning of such parables, especially for disbelievers, is mentioned in some verses as a source of their doubt about the Quran (cf. 2:26; 74:31). That *most of mankind refuse aught but disbelief* is repeated in 11:17; 12:103; 40:59.

90–93 These verses relate a series of demands presented to the Prophet by the leaders of the Quraysh (Ṭ, W), who implored him to desist from preaching in Makkah and sought to bribe

have a house of gold ornament, or you ascend to Heaven. And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read." Say, "Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?" (94) And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?" (95) Say, "Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a messenger." (96) Say, "God suffices as a Witness between you and me. Verily, of His servants He is Aware, Seeing." (97) Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whomsoever He leads

him with worldly goods. When that strategy did not work, they asked him for various signs (Ṭ, W) that would demonstrate power over worldly matters, such as the production of springs, gardens, streams (v. 91), or items of gold (v. 93), or that would serve as proof of his prophethood, such as the fulfillment of his warning about the sky falling upon them (v. 92), bringing them into direct contact with God or the angels, or ascending to Heaven and bringing down *a book*. According to some, their request that the Prophet bring *God and the angels* is a request to see God directly (Ṭ); a similar request is made by the Israelites in 2:55. The request that the Prophet bring a physical *book* that they *can read* is also made by the Makkan disbelievers in 6:7 and 6:124 as well as by the People of the Book in 4:153. Disingenuous requests for signs from the Prophet Muhammad and earlier prophets are mentioned in various places in the Quran; see commentary on 6:7–9; 6:37; 13:31.

That God might punish people by causing the *sky* to *fall upon* them *in pieces* is also mentioned in 34:9. *Your ascension* is understood to refer to their challenge to the Prophet to ascend to Heaven, which immediately precedes it (R, Ṭ). The Prophet's response to their extravagant requests, *Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?* indicates his inability to perform such signs upon demand and that he is completely dependent upon God for the "signs" he receives; see also 18:110; 41:6; and 14:11, where similar responses are given by earlier messengers as well.

94–95 In various Quranic passages, disbelievers dismiss the messengers as "mere human beings like themselves" (cf. 11:27; 14:10–11; 21:3; 23:24, 33–34, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 54:24; 64:6; 74:25) and indicate that they expect an angel rather than a human being as a messenger (6:8; 11:12; 15:7; 25:7, 21; 43:53). That God would have sent an angel as a messenger *were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace* is consistent with the Quranic assertion that when God sends messengers, He chooses those messengers from among the very people to whom they are sent (3:164; 7:35, 63, 69; 9:128; 10:2; 16:113; 23:32; 38:4; 62:2); since it is human beings and not angels who walk about on earth, He sends other human beings as messengers (R, Ṭ). Some also mention the idea that angels are not perceptible to most human beings (Bḍ, Ṭ), and thus sending a messenger in angelic form would not be effective; hence in 6:8–9 it is said that even if God were to send an angel as a messenger, He would send him in the form of a human being; when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary, the mother of Jesus, he *assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man* (19:17).

96 That God *suffices as a Witness* is mentioned in 4:79, 166; 13:43; 29:52; 46:8; 48:28. In 6:19, the Prophet invokes God as *Witness between you and me,* meaning between himself and the disbelievers in Makkah. That God is described as *Aware* of His servants and as *Seeing* is meant as a consolation to the Prophet and as a threat to the disbelievers (Z); see also vv. 17, 30.

97 Regarding *whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided* and the subsequent mention of the fate of those whom *He leads astray,* see 18:17; 7:178. For some this statement suggests that God alone determines the fate of human beings

astray, thou wilt find no protectors for them apart from Him. And We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces—blind, dumb, and deaf—their refuge shall be Hell. Every time it abates, We shall increase for them a blazing flame. (98) That is their recompense for having disbelieved in Our signs. And they say, "What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?" (99) Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth, has the power to create the like of them? And He has ordained for them a term, about which there is no doubt. Yet the wrongdoers refuse aught but disbelief. (100) Say, "Were you to possess the treasuries of

by either guiding them or leading them astray, whereas others indicate that God only leads certain people astray as a punishment for disbelief or iniquity; see 7:178c. The Quran indicates that the disbelievers' rejection of revelation is the result of a kind of spiritual insensitivity, which is likened to being *blind, dumb, and deaf;* see 2:18c; 2:171; 5:71; 6:39; 8:22. The description of the unrelenting punishment of Hell with which this verse ends is similar to that in 4:56, where it is said that whenever the skin of those in Hell is burned away, it is replaced with new skin.

98 In several places, the disbelievers express their skepticism about the Resurrection by posing questions about the possibility of giving new life to *bones and dust;* see 17:49–51c; 23:35, 82; 36:78; 37:16, 53; 56:47; 79:10–11.

99 The greatness of God's creative Power is invoked in response to the disbelievers' skepticism regarding His ability to give new lives to the *bones and dust* of dead bodies (v. 98); see also vv. 49–51; 14:19; 21:30; 29:19; 46:33. Since *everything with* God *is according to a measure* (13:8; cf. 15:21; 25:2), all individual creatures have a decreed *term,* referring to their life span and their eventual judgment by and before God (see also 6:60; 11:3; 19:75); such terms are also decreed for communities of human beings (7:34) and the world as a whole (30:8; 46:3). There is *no doubt* about this decreed *term,* just as there is *no doubt* about the Last Day, Resurrection, and Judgment, as mentioned in 3:9, 25; 4:87; 6:12; 18:21; 22:7; 40:59; 42:7; 45:6, 32. For the statement that the wrongdoers *refuse aught but disbelief,* see commentary on 17:89, where the same statement is made about *most of mankind.*

100 In this verse the Prophet is told to address the Makkans in response to their requests for signs in vv. 90–93 (R). The *treasuries of my Lord's Mercy* may refer to the worldly goods (Ṭ) that are part of the Divinely bestowed provision, or *rizq,* for each human being (Z) or to all blessings, including nonworldly ones, decreed and bestowed by God (Ṭs). The *treasuries* of God's Mercy and Bounty are limitless, but the nature of human beings is such that, even if they were to possess limitless bounty, they would still withhold it (R), irrationally, out of a *fear of spending.* The *fear of spending* derives from an inherent fear of poverty and need that exists in all human beings because, as creatures, they exist by definition in a state of existential poverty (R). *Man is ever miserly,* because, given this existential poverty, people can only be generous with what is superfluous to their own needs (R, Ṭs); or if they give, they give only to get something in return (R). Yet many fail to recognize that their instinct for miserliness derives from their own existential poverty and that God alone *is the Rich* and beyond need, while they *are the poor* (47:38); see 92:8, which is critical of the *one who is miserly and deems himself beyond need.* By contrast, God, who has no need, gives to all without limit—to the obedient and the disobedient (Ṭs).

Other commentators note that people only love good things when they benefit themselves (Aj), and that when they are generous, they are acting contrary to their own innate disposition toward miserliness (Su). Regarding the miserly nature of human beings, see 70:19–21. The Quran repeatedly criticizes miserliness (3:180; 4:37;

my Lord's Mercy, you would surely withhold them, out of fear of spending. Man is ever miserly!" (101) And We indeed gave unto Moses nine clear signs. So ask the Children of Israel. When he came unto them, Pharaoh said, "Truly I think that you, O Moses, are bewitched!" (102) He said, "You certainly know that no one has sent these down as clear portents, save the Lord of the heavens and the earth. And truly I think that you, O Pharaoh, are doomed." (103) And he

9:76) and counsels people to spend in moderation, avoiding the extremes of both prodigality and miserliness (see 17:26–27 and commentary; 25:67).

101 Commentators consider the *nine clear signs* given to Moses (see also 27:12) to refer to the various miracles performed by Moses during his prophetic mission, although they do not all agree upon which ones are referred to here, and al-Rāzī maintains that the verse should not be understood to mean that Moses was given only nine signs. The Bible mentions ten plagues brought by Moses upon Pharaoh and his people: blood, frogs, lice, flies, disease of cattle, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the firstborns (see Exodus 7–11). Some commentators suggest that the *nine clear signs* in this verse refers, similarly, to the successive punishments brought upon the Egyptians in 7:130–33 (drought, shortage of crops, flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood) along with other miracles Moses performed. Combining the lists given by different commentators, the nine signs may also be said to include: the miracle of Moses' staff turning into a serpent (7:109; 20:19–21; 26:32; 28:31); his hand turning white after being placed in his bosom (7:108; 20:22; 26:33; 27:12; 28:32); the "untying of a knot" from his tongue (20:27–28); the plagues of flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood (7:133) as well as the drought and scarcity that preceded these plagues (7:130); the parting of the sea (2:50; 26:63); the "blotting out" of the wealth of Pharaoh and his notables in response to Moses' prayer (10:88); his making streams come forth by striking a rock with his staff (2:60; 7:160); the miraculous provision of manna and quails in the desert (2:57; 7:160; 20:80); and the mountain towering over Moses and the Israelites at Sinai (see 2:63–64c; 2:93; 4:154; 7:171; IK, JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). Alternately, the *nine clear signs* given to Moses are identified in a *ḥadīth* as referring to the nine prohibitions given by Moses to his people, namely, the prohibitions against associating other gods with God, theft, adultery, murder, sorcery, usury, slandering chaste women, fleeing from a just and righteous battle, and working on the Sabbath; the last of these, unlike the other eight prohibitions, is unique to the Israelites (IK, R, Ṭ).

Pharaoh's accusation that Moses is *bewitched* (*mashūr*) is similar to accusations that he is a sorcerer (10:76; 20:57, 63; 26:34; 27:13; 28:36; 40:24; 51:39). Some commentators read *bewitched* in this context as synonymous with being a sorcerer (R, Ṭ), but others suggest that here Pharaoh is accusing Moses of being misled or confused by sorcery (JJ, Z).

102 *Clear portents* here renders *baṣā'ir* (lit. "insights" or "perceptions"), which may thus be interpreted to mean signs that should cause people to "perceive" the truth (Ṭ). Other commentators gloss *clear portents* as clear arguments or proofs for the truthfulness of Moses' prophethood (IK, R) or as clear indications of God's Power and Oneness (Q). Moses tells Pharaoh that he (Pharaoh) "certainly knows" that these portents are sent by God alone, despite his rejection of them. According to al-Rāzī, it should be obvious to any who use their intellect that such signs could only be Divine in origin, and it is only willful stubbornness that prevents Pharaoh from accepting them as such. See 27:14, where it is said that Pharaoh and his people rejected the signs of Moses *though their souls were convinced of them. Doomed* translates *mathbūr,* which can also mean "destroyed" (cf. 25:13–14; R, Ṭ), prevented from all goodness (R, Ṭ), or devoid of reason or intelligence (Ṭ).

103 That Pharaoh *desired to incite* Moses and the Israelites *from the land* parallels the desire of the Quraysh to *incite* the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah (see 17:76–77c). As in v. 76, to *in-*

desired to incite them from the land; so We drowned him and those with him all together. (104) And We said thereafter unto the Children of Israel, "Dwell in the land. And when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass, We shall bring you as a mixed assembly." (105) In truth We sent it down, and in truth it descended. And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner, (106) and [We sent it down] as a recitation We have divided in parts, that thou mayest recite it unto men in intervals, and We sent it down in successive revela-

*cite them from the land* can refer to removing them from the land by either exiling or killing them (Q, R) or to inciting them to leave as a result of harassment (Ṭs). The word for *incite, yastafizza,* is the same verb used in v. 64 in God's challenge to Satan, *So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice.* Thus the word might also mean to "unsettle" or "disturb." That Pharaoh and his people were subsequently *drowned* (see also 2:50; 7:136; 8:54; 10:73, 90; 43:55) therefore served as a warning to the Quraysh of the fate that might await them if they continued to reject Muhammad and persecute his followers. Despite their efforts to eliminate Moses and the Israelites, it is Pharaoh and his supporters who are drowned, because *evil plotting besets none but its authors* (35:43; R).

104 God's command to the Israelites to *dwell in the land* may refer to their settling parts of the land of Egypt, now devoid of Pharaoh and his supporters (Z), to their settling in Palestine (Canaan; Ṭ), or to both (Q); see 7:137c. As Pharaoh's destruction in the previous verse was meant to be a warning to the Quraysh, this verse can be understood as a glad tiding to the Prophet of the future conquest of Makkah for Islam (IK). The Children of Israel will be brought in the Hereafter *as a mixed assembly,* meaning that there will be various types of people among them—noble and base, obedient and disobedient, pious and iniquitous, strong and weak (R)—or that God will bring them and their enemies together for judgment on that day (IK).

105 Cf. 2:119. *In truth We sent it down* refers to God's having sent down the Quran commanding justice and virtue and forbidding injustice and iniquity (Ṭ) and to the impossibility of anyone altering it (IK). The Quran attests in many verses that the Prophet has been sent as *a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner* (see also 2:119; 5:19; 25:56; 34:28), as have all the prophets before him (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56).

106 That the Quran was sent down *divided into parts* is understood to refer to the successive and gradual revelation of the Quranic verses to the Prophet (JJ, Ṭ), allowing him to *recite it* to his followers *in intervals.* Some commentators say that the Quran was sent down as a whole to the lower heavens in a single night (IK, Ṭ), the "Night of Power" (*Laylat al-qadr;* see the introduction to Sūrah 97; 97:1–2c), which refers to one of the odd-numbered nights in the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. It was then gradually revealed to the Prophet over twenty-three years. The Quran is also understood by some as having been sent down as a whole into the very heart of the Prophet (see 26:192–94) on this same night; it was then gradually revealed to his consciousness over the period of his prophethood. The reference to the Quran as *divided* can also refer to the division of the Quran into distinct sections (IK, Ṭ), for example, into verses (*āyāt*) or into *sūrahs* of unequal length.

The wisdom of the Quran's revelation in discrete sections is precisely that it allowed the Prophet to *recite it unto men in intervals,* so that they would have time to learn it properly, memorize it, and come to understand it (Bḍ, Ṭ). In 25:32, when the Quraysh express skepticism about the revelation of the Quran in parts, rather than as a whole, a similar reason is given for its gradual descent: *It is so, that We may make firm thine heart thereby. And We have recited it unto thee in a measured pace;* see commentary on this verse. *We sent it down in successive revelations* affirms that the gradual revelation is a matter of Divine purpose.

tions. (107) Say, "Believe in it, or believe not." Surely those who were given knowledge before it, when it is recited unto them, fall down prostrate on their faces. (108) And they say, "Glory be to our Lord! The Promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled." (109) And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility. (110) Say, "Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate. Which-

107 The Prophet is instructed to say to the Makkan disbelievers regarding the Quran, *Believe in it, or believe not,* meaning their belief or disbelief has no effect upon God (Bḍ, Ṭ), for the disbelievers' rejection cannot *harm God in the least* (see 3:144, 176; 11:57; 47:32). Moreover, if the Makkans refuse to believe, *those who were given knowledge before,* meaning the People of the Book, or at least some of them, are said to recognize the Quran's Divine provenance; and as followers of Divine Revelation, the People of the Book are better and nobler than the pagan Makkans (Bḍ, Ṭ). See 2:146 and 6:20, where the People of the Book are said to recognize the Quran *as they recognize their own children* (see also 19:58; 28:52–53). For the believers and the pious among the People of the Book, the recitation of the Quran "softens their hearts and moistens their faces" (Z), as in 5:83, referring to Christians: *And when they hear that which was sent down unto the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize.* According to Ibn Kathīr, when it is *recited unto them* they *fall down prostrate* in gratitude for having lived to see the Prophet as described in their scriptures. Demonstrating humility and obedience upon hearing the Quran is the response of believers, and thus the failure to do so is indicative of disbelief; see 84:20–21, where the Quran asks concerning the disbelievers of Makkah, *So what ails them that they believe not, and when the Quran is recited to them, that they do not prostrate?*

108 The exclamation here of the People of the Book that *the Promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled* may refer to the fulfillment of His Promise to send a future prophet to guide them (Z). Elsewhere, God's Promise is said to be fulfilled at the time of the apocalypse (73:18), and the Quran repeatedly asserts that the Promise of God is true (see 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:98; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17).

109 According to some commentators, the believers among the People of the Book *fall down on their faces, weeping* when they hear the Quran recited because of their humility toward God and their belief in His Book and His Prophet (IK) or because they are greatly moved by the teachings of the Quran (Bḍ). Also see 19:58, which describes the prophets and progeny in the line of Noah and Abraham as falling down *prostrate and weeping* upon encountering the *signs of the Compassionate.* In other verses, the different responses of individuals to hearing the Quran or to encountering the signs of God in any form are indicative of their inward state of belief or hypocrisy (see, e.g., 9:124; 74:49–51; 17:41c.

110 One can *call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate,* because the latter, one of the most important Names of God, is considered a Name pertaining to the Divine Essence; see 1:3c. Although the description of God as *the Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān*) is found throughout the Quran, it is also used on its own as a proper Name of God in several places, including throughout *Sūrah* 19, *Maryam,* "Mary" (see, e.g., 19:18, 26, 44, 58, 61). According to one report, this verse was revealed after some of the Makkan idolaters heard the Prophet invoking God as "O God (*Allāh*), O Compassionate (*Raḥmān*)" or, according to another account, "O Compassionate, O Merciful (*Raḥīm*)" and accused him of invoking two separate Divine beings (Bḍ, IK); this verse was revealed to make it clear that these Names, and indeed all of the *Most Beautiful Names,* refer to the One God. The mention of God's *Most Beautiful Names* is also found in 7:180; 20:8; 59:24. For the significance of the Names of God in Muslim belief, practice, and piety, see 7:180c.

One should *be not loud in . . . prayer* (see also 7:205), but rather demonstrate reverence and humility when praying. Elsewhere, the believers are enjoined not to raise their voice before the

ever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. And be not loud in your prayer, nor too quiet therein, but seek a way between." (111) And say, "Praise be to God, who has no child! He has no partner in sovereignty; nor has He any protector out of lowliness." And proclaim His Greatness!

Prophet or to raise it above his voice (49:2–3), and some understand this to mean in the context of the prayer when the Prophet was leading it. As this verse comes at the end of an extended rhetorical challenge to the Makkan idolaters, some indicate that the injunction *Be not loud in your prayer* meant that one (or perhaps specifically the Prophet, since the command is in the second-person singular) should recite quietly, lest the idolaters overhear the prayer and respond by cursing or disparaging the sacred act (Bḍ, IK).

One should also not be *too quiet* in prayer, lest those who might benefit from hearing the recitation be unable to hear it (IK); or when leading others in prayer, the *imām,* or prayer leader, should not recite so quietly that it is inaudible to those praying behind him (Bḍ). Another report indicates that this injunction pertains to personal supplicatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*), although the verse uses *ṣalāh,* which usually designates the canonical prayer (IK). That one should *seek a way between* is consistent with the Quran's exhortation toward moderation in other matters, for example, being neither miserly nor prodigal when one spends in the way of God (25:67); also, Muslims constitute a *middle community* (2:143) following a *straight path* (see 1:6c), which can be read as a path between extremes. According to Ibn ʿAbbās, one should not pray loudly, so as to make an ostentatious display for other people, or too quietly, out of fear of them (IK).

111 That God has *no child* is a frequent assertion of the Quran (19:35, 92; 25:2; 39:4; 112:3), presented as a refutation, variously, of the Christian belief in Jesus as the son of God, of Jews' and Christians' claim that they are the "children of God" (5:18), and of the pagan Makkan belief in divine or semidivine daughters of God (16:57; 37:149–53; 43:16; 52:39); for a fuller discussion, see 6:100c; 112:3c. *Nor has He any protector out of lowliness* means that God neither seeks nor needs the aid or support of anyone, as a lowly person might for his own protection. The command to *proclaim His Greatness* (*kabbirhu takbīran*) can be understood as a reference to the commonly repeated formula "God is Great" (*Allāhu akbar*), known as the *takbīr.* The *takbīr* is recited ritually at the initiation of each canonical prayer and at its intervals and is repeated multiple times as part of other prayers, such as the funeral prayer. It is also the opening line of the call to prayer (*adhān*) and is repeatedly chanted as Muslims gather in the mosque for both ʿĪd prayers. In addition to these ritual uses of the *takbīr,* Muslims may utter this formula, often in unison, as an exclamation of joy at religiously significant events such as at the conclusion of a marriage ceremony, upon another individual's embrace of Islam, or even after a particularly moving religious sermon. The *takbīr* is also uttered as a means of summoning strength, unity, and resolve in the face of a spiritual or physical challenge and is usually uttered when going into battle or as a response to victory in battle.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 18

# The Cave

## *al-Kahf*

*Al-Kahf* is a late Makkan *sūrah,* although a minority hold that the first eight verses are Madinan (Q). Several reports indicate that reciting the first and last ten verses of this *sūrah* has the power to protect one from the trials of the grave (Q) or from al-Dajjāl, identified with the Antichrist or the figure whom Christ will defeat in the end times (IK, Q). This *sūrah* contains three main narratives—that of the inhabitants of the cave, from which the *sūrah* takes its name (vv. 9–26); the tale of Moses and the mysterious servant (vv. 60–82); and the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn (vv. 83–98)—as well as a lengthy parable about the dangers of enjoying the good things of this world, without gratitude to God, while neglecting the Hereafter (vv. 32–46). Between these narrative sections are woven various warnings to the disbelievers, including reminders about the coming of judgment and punishment in the Hereafter. The *sūrah* closes by evoking the inexhaustibility of God's Word (v. 109), followed by a reminder that the Prophet is but a human being to whom Divine Revelation has been sent (v. 110).

The narratives of the inhabitants of the cave and of Dhu'l-Qarnayn were reportedly revealed to the Prophet in response to a challenge from the Quraysh. According to a widely reported account, the Quraysh sent al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith and ʿUqbah ibn Abī Muʿīṭ to some Jewish religious scholars of Madinah to ask them about Muhammad and his claims to prophethood. The Jewish scholars told them that in order to know the validity of Muhammad's claims to prophethood, they should ask him about three matters, and if he could not answer, then he was not a true prophet: (1) a group of young men of ancient times who had an extraordinary story (the inhabitants of the cave); (2) a man who had journeyed until he reached the east and west of the earth (Dhu'l-Qarnayn); and (3) the Spirit. They returned and questioned the Prophet. He told them that he would give them his response the next day, expecting that a revelation concerning them would come to him. When fifteen days had passed and no revelation had come, the Prophet grew worried, and the Quraysh began to assume that he had no answers to these questions and that his claims of prophethood were

therefore false. The revelation finally came to him, but in v. 6 the Quran reprimands the Prophet for being overly concerned with the disbelief of the Quraysh (IK, Q, Ṭs), and in vv. 23–24 the Prophet is warned not to promise anything in the future (such as answers to questions the next day) without acknowledging that all matters depend on God's Will.

The three main narratives share some thematic elements, including that of journeying or leaving the comfort of one's home. The youths of the cave leave home to escape religious persecution; Moses goes off in search of the servant of God he has been told is more knowledgeable than himself; and Dhu'l-Qarnayn journeys from east to west to establish righteous sovereignty over the land. These three narratives are also concerned with intermediate states of being and hence with the concept of the *barzakh,* which signifies both the meeting point of opposites and the barrier between them. The concept is elucidated in the Quran through reference to the barrier between the "two seas" of saltwater and freshwater (25:53; 55:19–20), at which point the two waters briefly intermingle, but neither trespasses into the realm of the other.

In Islamic tradition *barzakh* came to denote the temporal state between the death of the individual soul and universal judgment, or the period of testing and punishment in the grave, as well as an intermediate posthumous state or number of states between Heaven and Hell. In its mystical interpretation, it refers ontologically to the state of the soul as the intermediate realm between pure spirit and base matter, which together constitute the state of human beings; epistemologically it refers to the realm of the imaginal, known through the power of imagination, which is a mode of knowing between sense perception and pure intellection. The youths of the cave, seeking refuge from religious persecution, are made to sleep in the cave for hundreds of years, and their sleep represents an intermediate realm between life and death and thus, by analogy, the state between individual death and universal resurrection. Moses can only encounter the mysterious servant and esoteric figure, identified traditionally with the enigmatic prophet Khaḍir or Khiḍr, at the *junction of the two seas* (v. 60), at which point the two prophets—one representing exoteric and the other esoteric knowledge—are able to meet and briefly journey together. And Dhu'l-Qarnayn, after journeying to the extremes of west and east, returns to the place of an opening *between the two mountain barriers* (v. 93), which he then seals up, forming a barrier to hold back Gog and Magog from terrorizing people. This barrier will only hold for the intermediate period of earthly life and will be destroyed by God before the Day of Resurrection.

Finally, these three narratives involve figures who are granted miracles and marvelous powers, even though they are not prophets or their prophetic status is somewhat ambiguous. The youths of the cave are righteous men, but not prophets; yet they are given protection by God through a miraculous sleep. Khiḍr is considered by most to be a prophet who is kept alive by God beyond the range of ordinary human life, even beyond the very long lifetime of certain ancient prophets, such as Noah. But his vocation is exclusively a secret and hidden one, in contrast to the vocation of other prophets who are ordered by God to proclaim revelation publicly, give glad tidings, and issue warnings. Dhu'l-Qarnayn is considered by most commentators to have been a righteous

king who was nonetheless granted miraculous means for conquering the world and was spoken to directly by God (v. 86). He is compared by commentators to the prophet-king Solomon, and most commentators have considered him to be Alexander the Great.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Praise be to God, Who sent down the Book unto His servant, and placed no crookedness therein, (2) upright, that He may warn of a great might coming from His Presence and give glad tidings unto the believers who perform righteous deeds that theirs shall be a beautiful reward, (3) wherein they shall remain forever, (4) and that He may warn those who say, "God has taken a

1 *Praise be to God* for sending down *the Book*—that is, the Quran—described by some as God's greatest gift to humanity, since it brings them from darkness into light (IK). *His servant* refers to the Prophet. That God has *placed no crookedness* in the Quran (see also 39:28) is widely understood to mean that it contains no contradictions or discrepancies (Ṭs, Z); see 4:82: *Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein.* This phrase is also understood to mean that the Quran contains no corruption or falsehood (R, Ṭs) and that it remains continuously beneficial (Ṭs) as it guides people toward the straight path (IK); for the Quranic concept of the "straight path," see 1:6c.

2–3 *Upright* translates *qayyim,* which is used elsewhere in the Quran to describe religion (6:161; 9:36; 12:40; 30:30, 43; 98:5), but here describes the *Book* sent down (v. 1); see also 17:9: *Truly this Quran guides toward that which is most upright.* That God made the Quran *upright,* or "straight," emphasizes that there is *no crookedness* in it (v. 1; Z) and that it is balanced and harmonious (Ṭs), and not susceptible to corruption (Ṭs). *Qayyim* can also mean to be a custodian of something or someone, and some thus interpret it to mean that the Quran is a custodian of earlier scriptures, a confirmer of them, and a witness to their truth (Ṭs, Z), while also, according to some, removing falsehoods in them and abrogating some of their laws (Ṭs). The Quran can also be understood as a "custodian" of people's welfare (R, Z) and of religious affairs (R, Ṭs). According to al-Rāzī, the Quran is described as *qayyim,* because it is both perfect in itself and something that perfects something else. The Muᶜtazilite theologian al-Qāḍī ᶜAbd al-Jabbār argued that vv. 1–3 support the Muᶜtazilite view that the Quran is created rather than eternal or uncreated, as the Ashᶜarites claimed, because the descriptions of the Quran in these verses point to a created object: it was *sent down,* which implies change and there can be no change in the eternal, and it was made straight or *upright* and "made" with *no crookedness therein,* both of which suggest something that God made or created (R). This Book was sent down as a means by which the Prophet could both *warn* and *give glad tidings*—the twin vocations of all messengers and prophets; see 2:213; *Mankind was one community; then God sent the prophets as bearers of glad tidings and as warners.* See also 2:119; 6:48; 4:165; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 18:56; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 48:8. The *beautiful reward* refers to the paradisal Garden (Ṭs, Z).

4–5 "To take a child" is a Quranic idiom meaning to assume special paternal responsibility for a child, to recognize a child, to take the

child." (5) They have no knowledge thereof, nor do their fathers. A monstrous word it is that issues from their mouths. They speak naught but a lie. (6) Yet perhaps thou wouldst destroy thyself with grief for their sake, should they believe not in this account. (7) Surely We made whatsoever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may try them as to which of them is most virtuous in deed. (8) And surely We shall make whatsoever is upon it a barren plain! (9) Dost thou reckon that the Companions of the Cave and the Inscription are a marvel

child to oneself or into one's care. This wording choice criticizes not just the belief that God could somehow "beget" a child, but the idea that He would single any individual human being out for that special relationship (even through adoption, for example). The Quran repeatedly rejects the notion that God has offspring of any kind, whether it be the idolatrous Makkan belief that the angels were God's daughters or various claims made by or attributed to Jews or Christians. See 6:100c as well as 2:116; 4:171; 5:18; 10:68; 16:57; 19:35, 88; 21:26; 25:2; 39:4; 43:81. Given that this is a Makkan *sūrah*, however, these verses are likely referring to the idolatrous belief regarding the angels (IK). Those who make such claims *have no knowledge thereof, nor do their fathers,* meaning that their claim derives not from knowledge, but from gross ignorance and blindly following the belief of their ancestors without exercising independent thought (Ṭs, Z). In the Quran, blindly following one's forefathers rather than using one's intelligence to discern the truth of the messages brought by the prophets is presented and criticized as a common human tendency; see 2:170; 5:104; 7:70–71; 21:53–54; 37:68–72; 43:23–24. That the claim that God has offspring is called *monstrous* (also in 17:40) expresses the moral gravity of this claim (Ṭs) as well as the shock and surprise that such a claim should elicit (Z). That the claim *issues from their mouths* emphasizes that it is something completely fabricated for which they have no valid source (IK).

6 Cf. 26:3, which contains a nearly identical statement. To *destroy thyself with grief* could also mean "to expend thyself in grief" (R), that is, to utterly exhaust oneself with concern and sadness on account of those who *believe not in this account,* that is, the Quran (Ṭs). The Prophet is frequently presented in the Quran as being distraught by the failure of the Makkans to accept the message he had brought them as well as by their repeated requests for miraculous signs as proof of his prophethood. Several verses seem to console the Prophet about this matter, as in 6:33: *We know well that what they say grieves thee. Yet it is not thee that they deny. Rather, it is the signs of God that the wrongdoers reject;* see also 3:176; 5:41; 35:8.

7–8 The earth is "adorned" by the various phenomena found upon it or in it, including its flora and fauna and its precious gold and metals (R). *Adornment* may also refer to humanity, which al-Rāzī considers to be the noblest of creatures on the earth. According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, the "adornment" of the earth is a means by which God tries human beings with regard to their ability to maintain an attitude of detachment and asceticism toward the world (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* [Beirut, 2005], 5:340). That God shall *make whatsoever is upon it,* that is, the earth, a *barren plain* indicates that none of its adornments will endure forever, but will come to end and return to God (IK); see 55:26: *All upon it* (the earth) *passes away.*

9 This verse introduces the story of the *Companions of the Cave* (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*), from which the *sūrah* derives its name. This account was revealed to the Prophet in response to a challenge issued by the Quraysh. The Prophet was reportedly unfamiliar with this story and waited for a long period of time to receive revelation about it so that he could relate it to the skeptical Makkans. See the introduction to this *sūrah* for a fuller account.

The story of the Companions of the Cave is also known in Christian tradition as the "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus." The Quranic and Christian

among Our signs? (10) When the youths took refuge in the cave, they said, "Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Thy Presence, and make us incline to sound judgment concerning our affair." (11) So We placed [a veil] over their ears in the

accounts are very similar, both in the religious significance of the story as a proof of God's power of resurrection (cf. v. 21) and in the smaller details of the narrative. Following upon the admonition to the Prophet that he need not destroy himself with sadness over those who disbelieve (v. 6), the story is perhaps meant to suggest that, just as God saved this small group of believers during a time of persecution, so too would He deliver the Prophet and his followers (Ṭs). Moreover, the story of the youths of the cave who fled all earthly goods and benefits to preserve their faith (Ṭs), suggesting a kind of voluntary death to the world, is particularly salient after the reference to the *adornment* of the earth as a trial for human beings (v. 7). Because the *Companions of the Cave* are not considered prophets, but simply very pious and pure youths, and because they are miraculously delivered and protected by God through their long sleep, shaded from the normal light of the sun, the story is adduced by some as evidence of the possibility that miracles (*karāmāt*) of a lesser kind than prophetic miracles (*muʿjizāt*) may be bestowed by God upon His sincere friends (*awliyāʾ*, or "saints"). See al-Rāzī's commentary on v. 11 and al-Qushayrī's commentary on v. 17.

The question to the Prophet, "*Dost thou reckon* that the account of the *Companions of the Cave* is *a marvel among Our signs?*" is meant to suggest that there are other "signs" that are even more wondrous in nature, such as God's creation of the heavens and the earth (IK, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). If the story of the companions is understood as an example of a nonprophetic miracle (*karāmah*), then the rhetorical question can be meant to suggest that the natural order of the world is itself a greater wonder and miracle than the occasional alteration of its regularity through miracles.

*Cave* translates *al-kahf*, which is said to designate more specifically a very spacious cave situated in a mountain (R, Ṭs, Z). *The Inscription* translates *al-raqīm*, a word that derives from a root meaning "to write." Many commentators indicate that *al-raqīm* here refers to an inscription made on a leaden tablet placed at the entrance of the cave or an inscription carved into the mountain near the cave detailing the story and fate of the *Companions of the Cave* (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), although some have suggested that *al-raqīm* in this passage refers to a book containing the laws and teachings of Christianity (Q), as the companions were Christians fearing persecution for their religion (see 18:10c). Alternately, some have suggested that *al-raqīm* refers to the name of the valley, the mountain, or the region in which the cave was located (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), which some say was in the area between northwest Arabia and southern Palestine (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), although other locations in present-day Turkey (Ephesus) or Jordan (near Amman) have also been suggested. Still others report that it is the name of the building built to commemorate the cave (IK), the name of the leader of the companions (ST), or the name of their dog (Z; see 18:18c).

10 *The youths*—that is, the *Companions of the Cave*—*took refuge in the cave,* fleeing to God for the sake of their religion (IK, Ṭs), seeking refuge from a king named Daqyānūs (Th, Ṭs) or Daqyūs (Q), which may be an Arabization of Decius, the name of the king in the Christian account, who was attempting to force his subjects to worship idols (Ṭs). Al-Ṭabrisī also mentions the possibility, as suggested in some Christian sources, that it was a Zoroastrian king trying to force his Christian subjects to follow his religion (Ṭs). Some report that *the youths,* who may have been among the king's courtiers (Ṭs) or the sons of local noble families (Q), lived in Ephesus and were believers hiding their faith out of fear of persecution (Th, Ṭs). Others indicate that they were Christians attempting to maintain the beliefs and practices of Christianity at a time of great religious corruption, oppressive kings, and a turn toward idolatry (Th).

According to some reports, the king eventually learned that the youths had sought refuge in a cave. He thus had the entrance to the cave sealed, thinking that they would die of hunger and thirst (Th). The youths prayed for a *mercy from Thy Presence*—that is, from God's storehouse of Mercy (R,

cave for a number of years. (12) Then We raised them up again, that We might know which of the two parties had best calculated how long they had tarried. (13) We recount their story unto thee in truth. Verily they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance. (14) And We fortified their hearts. When they arose, they said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We shall call upon no god apart from Him, for then we

Z)—and *sound judgment* concerning their affair, expressing their hope that God would grant them guidance and knowledge, provision, patience in their trial, security from their enemies, and eventual deliverance (R, Ṭs, Z). They prayed that the end of their affair would be sound and rightly guided, as in the prayer of the Prophet reported in a *ḥadīth,* "O God, make virtuous the ends of all our affairs" (IK). According to some, they were praying that God would eventually grant them a safe exit from the cave (Ṭs).

The cave is the place where the youths withdrew from the world, having despaired of its kindness, and sought the protection of God alone (Aj). From a mystical perspective, the cave represents the heart. According to some reports, the youths spent their time in the cave praying and praising God and devoting themselves fully to Him (Th). Thus for some, their plea for mercy was a plea for God to preserve them in or through the remembrance of Him (ST). Insofar as one who is fully engaged in the remembrance or invocation of God can be said to be outside the experience of ordinary time, the extended life of the youths of the cave can be seen as symbolic of this experience.

11 God *placed [a veil] over their ears,* literally, "struck them upon the ears," meaning that He made them incapable of hearing sounds that could awaken them (R, Z) or that He put them into a very deep slumber (IK, Th, Ṭs). A *number of years* may refer to a long or short period of time (Z): v. 25 gives the number of years as 309, but the Companions of the Cave experienced this long amount of time as but *a day or part of a day* (v. 19). The description here indicates that the companions did not die, but remained in a deep sleep (Ṭs).

12 *Raised them* means awakened them from their sleep (R, Ṭs). God raised them so that He *might know which of the two parties had best calculated* the time they were asleep. This statement seems to call into question God's foreknowledge of events, since it indicates He had to raise the youths in order to know. However, the Quran frequently uses such language, and it might be understood to mean that, although God might test people in order to know something, He already has the answer prior to the accomplishment of the test (see 2:143c; 47:31c). *The two parties* who differed over the length of time they had remained in the cave may refer to two groups among the companions themselves (see v. 19; R, Ṭs); the companions and the kings who reigned over the city (R); or all those who differed regarding this matter (IK).

Al-Rāzī notes that the Sufis understand this verse to be proof that, besides the evidentiary miracles (*muʿjizāt*) that God gives only to the prophets in support of their prophetic mission and as evidence of their prophethood, other kinds of miracles (*karāmāt*) can be bestowed on those who have attained exceptional nearness to God, that is, the "saints" or "friends of God" (*awliyāʾ Allāh*). These two kinds of miracles are clearly distinguished in Islamic texts.

13–14 In v. 13, the Quran emphasizes the young age of the Companions of the Cave, and some commentators observe that it is often the youth of a community who are most likely to respond to the messages of the prophets, while the elders of the community are more entrenched in their false religious practices (IK); for example, it was the younger members of the Quraysh who were more likely to follow the Prophet. The Quran also juxtaposes the faith of the youthful Abraham against the idolatry of his father and the leaders of his people (see 21:60); see also 7:60, 66, 75, 88, 90, 103; 11:27, 38; 23:24, 33; 34:34; 43:23, where it is the "notables" or "leaders" (presumably elders) of various communities who reject the call of the prophets sent to them. The word for *youths* (*fityah*) is related to the word used in

would have certainly uttered an outrage. (15) These, our people, have taken gods apart from Him. Why do they not bring a clear authority concerning them? For who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God? (16) And when you have withdrawn from them and all that they worship save God, then take refuge in the cave. Your Lord will spread forth something of His Mercy for you, and make you incline to ease in your affair." (17) Thou wouldst have seen the sun when it rose, slanting away from their cave to the right; and when it set,

the classical tradition to denote spiritual chivalry (*futuwwah*), which is based upon faith (Q, Ṭs). *Futuwwah* (or *jawānmardī* in Persian) is characterized by being virtuous and generous, refraining from what is forbidden and from harming others, never complaining about one's situation (Q), being true to one's word, avoiding all hypocrisy, and cutting oneself off from all (worldly) attachments (Su). Later this term became associated with guilds in which these virtues were cultivated.

Although already believers, the youths were *increased . . . in guidance,* meaning their faith was increased (Q) or they were given greater understanding and discernment of the truth through faith (ST) as well as the patience to endure separation from their people (Ṭ). The Quran mentions in several verses that God increases the tendencies already manifested by human beings: if the diseased of heart do not turn to God, their disease is increased (2:10); and for those who believe, their faith is increased (e.g., 48:4). Regarding guidance in particular, see 19:76: *God increases in guidance those who are rightly guided;* and 47:17: *But those who are rightly guided, He increases them in guidance.* God also *fortified their hearts,* strengthening them in patience and faith (R, Ṭ, Z) and also certitude (Qu). *When they arose* refers to the youths' open defiance of the tyrant king Daqyānūs and his demand that they worship his false deities (R, Ṭ, Z) and to their declaration that their *Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth,* while the false deities of Daqyānūs are nothing more than the subjects of the one Lord (Ṭ). According to another report, the youths secretly harbored their belief in one God independently of one other. When the group happened to meet by chance outside the city on one occasion, the eldest of them confessed to his belief in one God (IK, R) and, finding the others in agreement, they collectively uttered the proclamation about their Lord in v. 14, either there and then (R) or after they had returned to the court of the king (IK).

15 *Clear authority* means a clear proof or indication that such deities are worthy of worship; for some this verse supports the important Islamic principle that religious worship must be based upon intellectual proof and should not derive solely from blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of the practices of others (R, Ṭs, Z). The rhetorical question, *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God?* in this case, by ascribing partners to Him, is repeated in several verses; see 6:21c; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 29:68; 61:7c.

16 These are the words of Tamlīkhā (or Yamlīkhā, Iamblichus) the reported chief of the youths (Ṭs). He instructs them to take refuge in the cave, to hide themselves from the disbelievers. Many see this event as analogous to the Prophet and Abū Bakr's seeking refuge in a cave during their migration (*hijrah*) to Madinah as they sought to elude the pursuing Makkans (see 9:40 and commentary; IK). In both cases the cave, which is a symbol of the interior "space" of the heart, offers miraculous sanctuary and refuge from the world and its evils. Tamlīkhā's promise that God will *make you incline to ease in your affair* suggests a response to the youths' supplication to God in v. 10 that He make them *incline to sound judgment* in their *affair.*

17 This verse is addressed to the Prophet, according to al-Ṭabarī, although others consider it to be addressed to an unspecified interlocutor (Q, R). The sun slanted *away from their cave to*

turning away from them to the left, while they were in an open space within it. That is among the signs of God. Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protector to lead him aright. (18) Thou wouldst have thought them awake, though they were asleep. And We turned them to the right and to the left, with their dog stretching forth his paws at the threshold. Hadst thou come upon them, thou wouldst have turned away in flight and been filled with terror on their account. (19) And

*the right* as it rose and turned *away from them to the left* when it set; despite the different phrases, these movements can be understood as parallel to one another (Ṭ). That they were in an *open space* within it is understood to mean that the cave was spacious with a broad opening that allowed fresh air and cool breezes to reach the youths as they slept within it (IK, JJ, Z); the slanting of the sun away from the cave meant that they did not suffer from the heat of direct sunlight, but remained comfortably in the shade (Ṭ, Th, Z). In the Quran, shade is one of God's blessings in this world (2:57; 25:45–46) and especially in the Hereafter (e.g., 4:57; 13:35; 36:56). See also 16:81, where both shade and *places of refuge in the mountains* are mentioned among God's blessings.

In several verses, it is said that God both *guides* and *leads astray;* for the meaning of this idea and the respective fates of those involved, see 7:178c; 17:97c.

18 The youths in the cave are described as *asleep* (see 18:11c), but also as seeming to be *awake,* perhaps because they slept with their eyes open or because of their turning, which some suggested occurred once or twice a year (R, Z). This may indicate that they were in an intermediate state between ordinary waking and sleeping. Sleeping and waking can also serve as metaphors for life and death—as in the well-known *ḥadīth,* "Man is asleep, and when he dies he awakens," where ordinary awakeness is associated with sleep and death with full awakening—and can symbolize death and resurrection, as in 6:60: *He it is Who takes your souls by night, and He knows what you commit by day. Then by day He resurrects you, that a term appointed may be fulfilled.* Sleep can therefore represent the finite space and time of earthly life, situated between the eternity that precedes and follows it, but also the finite period of death in the grave that one experiences between one's earthly death and the universal resurrection.

Thus sleep is associated with the *barzakh,* the intermediate realm between two opposites: when one is sleeping, one is still alive, but one's soul has been "taken" by God (6:60), so that it is a kind of "minor death," after which waking is like a resurrection; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." In this sense, the story of the Companions of the Cave can be read not only as a proof of God's power of resurrection, but also as an allegory for the *barzakh,* or intermediate realm between individual death and universal resurrection. From a Sufi perspective, the turning of the youths in their sleep can also represent their alternation between the states of annihilation (*fanāʾ*) and subsistence (*baqāʾ*) in God (Su).

In their sleep, God caused them to turn *to the right and to the left* in order to prevent them from being covered and eventually consumed by the earth (Ṭ). According to some commentators the dog served as their hunting animal (Th); regarding the permissibility of using dogs for hunting, see 5:4c. Some report that the youths happened to come upon the dog as they were fleeing from the king (Q, Th). They initially tried to chase him off, fearing that he would give away their location, but the dog was miraculously given the ability to speak (Q, Th) and said to the youths, "I love the lovers of God; so sleep while I keep watch" (Q, R, Th). Some report that he was a sheepdog belonging to a shepherd whom they had met on the way, both of whom followed the youths (R). Others do not consider this to be a dog at all, but rather suggest that the word for "dog," *kalb,* was actually the

in this way We raised them up again, that they might question one another. One of them said, "How long have you tarried?" They said, "We have tarried a day or part of a day." They said, "Your Lord knows best how long you have tarried. So send one of you with this money of yours into the city, and let him observe which of them has the purest food and bring you some provision therefrom. Let him be discreet and make no one aware of you. (20) Verily, if they come to know of you, they will stone you, or make you revert to their creed, and then you will never prosper." (21) And in this way We caused them to be discovered, that they might know that God's Promise is true, and that there is no doubt

name of another individual who accompanied the youths, according to some their cook (Ṭ) and according to others their dog keeper (reading *kālib* rather than *kalb*; Z), in which case the word rendered *paws* in the translation would be "arms." *Threshold* translates *waṣīd,* which can also refer to the door or entrance to the cave or to the earth or dust in front of it (Ṭ).

Addressing the Prophet, the verse indicates that had he himself come upon the youths in the cave in their miraculous sleep, he would have fled in fear of them, because, according to some, God had cloaked them in a fearsome appearance to prevent anyone from touching or disturbing them while they slept (Ṭ, Z).

19–21 It is reported that the youths awoke after their cave was discovered by a shepherd looking for a place to shelter his flock from the rain. When he cleared the entrance of the cave, the youths awoke (Ṭ). Unaware of how long they had slept, they reckoned they had *tarried a day or part of a day.* Some say they estimated they had passed a day, since they entered the cave in the morning and awoke at sunset (IK, Ṭ, Z); only upon seeing the length of their hair and nails did they say, *Your Lord knows best how long you have tarried* (R, Z). However, their estimation of having *tarried a day* is identical to that made by a man who had doubted the resurrection, was put to sleep by God, and was then awakened after a hundred years in 2:259. Similarly, on the Last Day, the Quran says that people will reckon that they had tarried but a short while before their resurrection (see 10:45; 17:52; 20:104; 23:112–13; 30:55; 46:35; 79:46). That the reactions of the youths upon awakening are described as similar to the reactions of those resurrected from the dead indicates the close symbolic connection of this story to death, resurrection, and the intermediate state, or *barzakh,* between them; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

One of the youths is designated to take some *money,* referring to a silver *dirham* bearing the imprint of the oppressive king of their own time, and to enter the city in order to purchase food; but he was to do this discreetly, because they feared they would be discovered and persecuted. However, the *dirham* gives him away, for the people were amazed to see the old coin. They informed the youth that centuries had passed. They were now ruled by a righteous king, Tīdhusīs (Theodocius; Ṭ), during whose reign the people had been *disputing among themselves about their affair,* that is, about whether the body was resurrected along with the spirit or the spirit alone was raised. The king believed in bodily resurrection and prayed to God for a sign to convince his people. When he learned of the story of the youths of the cave, he announced it as a sign that resurrection is both a bodily and spiritual reality and, guided by the youth, led a delegation of the people to the cave. When the youth entered the cave where his companions were, however, he was instantly returned to his deep sleep, as were his companions. The king and the townsfolk later entered and found them in a state of bodily perfection, without any sign of decomposition (Ṭ).

There are varying versions of this account in the commentaries; some indicate that the youth talked briefly with the king and the townspeople, bidding them well, then returned to their state

about the Hour. When they were disputing among themselves about their affair, they said, "Erect a building over them; their Lord knows them best." Those who prevailed over their affair said, "We shall build a place of worship over them." (22) They say, "[They were] three, and the fourth was their dog." And they say, "Five, and the sixth was their dog"—guessing at the unseen. And they say, "Seven, and the eighth was their dog." Say, "My Lord knows best their number; none know them save a few." So dispute not concerning them, save with clear argument, nor consult any of them about them. (23) And say not of anything, "Surely, I shall do it tomorrow"— (24) Save that God wills. And remember thy Lord when thou dost forget, and say, "It may be that my Lord will guide me nearer than this to rectitude." (25) And they tarried in their cave three hundred

of sleep, and finally died. Some report that the townsfolk later found in the cave the tablets bearing the inscription (v. 9) that told the names of the youth and their story (Ṭ). In this way, God is said to have *caused* the youths *to be discovered* by the king and his people so *that they might know that God's Promise is true* and so that they would not have doubt regarding *the Hour,* or the Resurrection on that Day, for one who can raise sleepers unaltered after many centuries can certainly raise the dead (Ṭ). Later some of the townsfolk suggested that they *erect a building over them,* but others decided it better to erect a place of worship (*masjid*) at the site. According to al-Ṭabarī, they erected a building that later become a place of prayer. Some consider the *disputing* among the townspeople to refer to their disagreement about how to memorialize the site of the cave, in which the disbelievers argued for a building and the believers for a place of prayer (JJ, R), or to their disagreement regarding the state of the youth, whether they were dead or sleeping, the time they spent in the cave, or their number (see v. 22). When they could not solve their disagreements, they said, *Their Lord knows them best.*

22 This verse discourages further debate and discussion about the number of youths, as all such debate amounts to *guessing at the unseen,* a vain endeavor, for as the Quran says in 6:59: *And with Him are the keys of the Unseen; None knows them but He.* With regard to the youths, however, it is said that *none know them save a few.* Some identify the "few" here as the People of the Book (Ṭ). *So dispute not concerning them, save with clear argument* is addressed to the Prophet and instructs him not to debate with them about the matter, but rather to let the parts of the story that had been revealed to him in this Quranic account suffice (Ṭ). The verse adds *nor consult any of them about them,* meaning that he should not question the People of the Book further about this matter (Ṭ).

23–24 These verses are addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, reminding him that he should never make a promise regarding what he might do *tomorrow,* meaning the future in general (Z), without acknowledging that its fulfillment depends upon the Will of God. In context, it pertains to the Prophet's initial promise to the Makkans that he would respond to their queries about the youths of the cave the following day, assuming he would receive revelation from God before that time about how to answer their questions; he did not receive revelation for fifteen days according to some, leading the Makkans to doubt his ability to answer their questions and ultimately to doubt his prophethood (Ṭ). Some commentators suggest that the verse can be read as an instruction to the Prophet to acknowledge verbally God's Will in all such matters by adding the conditional clause, "if God wills" (*in shāʾ Allāh*) to any promise of future action (R, Z). It is thus a regular Muslim practice to utter this formula whenever one is speaking of what one expects to accomplish or hopes will come to pass

years, plus nine more. (26) Say, "God knows best how long they tarried. Unto Him belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. How well He sees, how well He hears! They have no protector apart from Him, and He makes no one a partner unto Him in His Judgment." (27) Recite that which has been revealed unto thee from the Book of thy Lord. None alters His Words. And thou wilt

in the future. This practice serves as a constant reminder that nothing happens outside the Will of God and acknowledges that the future is firmly in His Hands.

V. 24 further instructs the Prophet, and by extension all people, to *remember thy Lord* again if he were to *forget* to mention the dependency of all future action on God's Will. The Quranic injunction here, to respond to forgetfulness of God not with bitter regret, but simply with renewed recollection and correction of one's state of soul and mind, is similar to the injunction in 6:68: *And when thou seest those who engage in vain discussion about Our signs, turn away from them till they engage in other discourse. And if Satan should cause thee to forget, then once thou hast remembered, sit not in the company of wrongdoing people.* According to some, it is best if one realizes one's error in forgetting to acknowledge the role of God's Will and corrects oneself while still in the same place and situation in which one made the original statement (JJ, Z). Others assert than one can utter the formula even much later (Ṭ, Z), although one may still be liable for offering expiation for an unfulfilled oath (Ṭ); regarding the importance of keeping oaths, see commentary on 16:91–92; regarding expiation for broken oaths, see 5:89c. *It may be that my Lord will guide me nearer than this to rectitude* may be understood to be the content of the remembrance one makes upon realizing one has forgotten to acknowledge God's Will in a matter (Z), or it may be the Prophet's prayer that he would be given even greater signs and proofs of his prophethood than that of his having been informed by God about the youths of the cave (Bḍ, JJ, Z).

25–26 The statement that the youths remained in the cave for 309 years is said by some to be God's informing the Prophet of the number of years the People of the Book say they remained in the cave (Ṭ, Z); however, it may not be the actual number of years, as suggested by the statement that follows it, *God knows best how long they tarried* (v. 26). Others claim that this figure represents the actual number of years the youths slept in the cave (Ṭ), and *God knows best* refers to the amount of time they remained in the cave after their death, which occurred shortly after their waking and being discovered (see 18:19–21c; Ṭ). Still others suggest that the figure of 309 years represents the actual number of years in the cave and settled an existing dispute about the matter, hence *God knows best how long they tarried* (Z). Some commentators also note that the number of years is referred to as *three hundred years, plus nine more,* because 300 years represents the amount of time they slept in the cave according to the solar calendar, and another 9 years would have to be added if this same period of time were reckoned according to the lunar calendar, which was followed by the Prophet and the Arabs (IK, JJ, Q).

The *Unseen* belongs to God alone (10:20, 11:123; 16:77) and God alone knows the unseen, as in 6:59: *And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He; and He knows what is on land and sea; no leaf falls but that He knows it, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is inscribed in a clear Book* (see also 23:92; 27:65; 72:26). *How well He sees, how well He hears* is an exclamation indicating that none sees or hears like or better than God (IK, Q), who is *the Hearing, the Seeing,* and regarding whom it is said, *Sight comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all sight* (6:103). *They*—that is, either the youths of the cave (R) or those who disputed about their affair (R)—*have no protector* but God (see also, e.g., 6:70; 11:20; 29:22; 33:18; 42:32; 46:32). That He has no *partner . . . in His judgment,* means that His Judgment is final and that there is no appeal to or revision of it (IK); or in this context specifically, it may mean that His statement about the youths of the cave and the length of time they slept is the final judgment on the matter (R).

27 The Makkans, who were displeased by the Quran revealed to the Prophet, used to ask

find no refuge apart from Him. (28) Make thy soul patient with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face. Turn not thine eyes away from them, desiring the adornment of the life of this world, nor obeying one whose heart We have made heedless of the remembrance of Us and who follows his caprice and whose affair exceeds the bounds. (29) And say, "It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve." Verily We have prepared for the wrongdoers a Fire whose canopies will encompass them. And if they plead for relief, they will be showered with water like molten lead that will scald faces—an evil drink indeed, and

him to bring a different Quran or to alter it to be more to their liking (see 10:15). The present verse is a response to such requests (Z), instructing the Prophet to *recite that which has been revealed* to Him (see also 29:45) and reminding him that *none alters His Words* (see also 6:115; 10:64). Only God can alter His revelations, replacing one with another (see 16:101 and commentary).

28 This verse relates to the time when some prominent Makkans indicated that they were willing to sit and listen to the Prophet's teachings, but they wanted the Prophet's poorer followers to leave, so that they would not have to associate with those of low social standing (Ṭ, W), a story discussed in detail in the commentary on 6:52: *And driveth not away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face. Naught of their reckoning falls upon thee and naught of thy reckoning falls upon them, such that thou mightest drive them away and thus become one of the wrongdoers.* Here, as in 6:52, the Prophet is instructed to remain steadfast with his sincere followers who *call upon their Lord*—that is, by invoking Him, praising and glorifying Him, supplicating Him, and performing their prayers (Ṭ).

That they call upon Him *morning and evening* may mean that they do so at these times specifically or that they do so constantly; the injunction to praise, glorify, or invoke God *morning and evening* is also found in 33:42; 48:9; 76:25. They call upon him *desiring His Face,* that is, seeking to please God and earn His Reward rather than earthly rewards or benefits (Ṭ); cf. 2:272; 13:22; 30:38–39; 76:9; 92:18–20. From a mystical perspective this phrase, on the highest level, can refer to seeking a vision of God. The Prophet is instructed not to *turn* his *eyes away from them, desiring the adornment of the life of this world,* that is, not to look past them toward other potential followers who may be wealthier or more influential (Ṭ; for a similar situation, see 80:1c) or prefer to sit with the wealthy and prominent rather than the lowly, who are pious and sincere (Ṭ). Later, the Prophet was reported to have said concerning this latter group: "Praise be to God, Who did not let me die before commanding my soul to be patient with some men among my community" (IK, Ṭ, W). The *one whose heart We have made heedless* refers to the Makkans who wished the Prophet to drive away his poorer followers (Ṭ). That their *affair exceeds the bounds* means that they are prodigal, wasteful, and negligent, putting their own petty desires before the truth.

29 This verse is also said to have been revealed in connection with the incident described in v. 28. *Whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve* is meant as a warning. The implication of this statement is that the Prophet's duty is only to declare *the truth;* he is not responsible for determining who will accept the truth and who will reject it. This is a matter that lies ultimately with God (Q, R) or, from the human point of view, with the individual, who must choose whether to follow the truth or turn away from it (Z). That this verse is meant as a warning rather than a license is indicated by the lines in the second half of the verse, which recount the horrors of Hell that have been *prepared for the wrongdoers.*

The Fire is described as taking the form of *canopies* that *encompass them;* that is, the Fire

how evil a resting place! (30) As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, surely We neglect not the reward of one who is virtuous in deed. (31) For such as these, theirs shall be the Gardens of Eden with rivers running below. Therein they shall be adorned with bracelets of gold, and shall wear green garments of fine silk and rich brocade, reclining upon couches. Blessed indeed is the reward, and how beautiful a resting place! (32) Set forth for them the parable

will surround them from all sides, from above and below; see also 29:55; 39:16. *Water like molten lead* is one of several terrible liquids that will torment the denizens of Hell. Either such liquids are poured upon those in Hell, or they are made to drink them; see 6:70; 10:4; 22:19; 37:67; 38:57; 40:72; 44:48; 47:15; 56:42, 54, 93; 78:25; 88:5 as well as 44:43–46: *Truly the tree of Zaqqūm is the food of the sinner, like molten lead boiling in their bellies, like the boiling of boiling liquid.* In the present verse, the *water like molten lead* is both *showered* on those in Hell and made an *evil drink* for them. Some describe the image here as a wall of water poured down into Hell, and when those in Hell seek to drink from it to seek relief, the heat of the water burns their faces (Z). The evil drinks of Hell—both boiling and freezing cold—are meant to contrast with the exceedingly pleasant drinks of the Garden (see 47:15). That this water will *scald faces* is consistent with other verses indicating that punishment in the Hereafter is either meted out or manifested upon "faces"—faces being symbolic here of persons as a whole, rather than merely indicating a part of their bodies; see 3:106; 4:47; 8:50; 10:27; 14:50; 17:97; 21:39; 23:104; 25:34; 27:90; 33:66; 39:60; 47:27; 54:48; 67:27; 80:40–41.

30 Believing and performing righteous deeds are frequently mentioned together as the twin bases of success in this world as far as it affects life in the Hereafter; see, e.g., 2:25; 3:57; 4:57; 5:69; 7:42; 17:9. See also 98:7: *Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, they are the best of creation.* For *We neglect not the reward of* the *virtuous,* cf. 9:120; 11:115; 12:56, 89; the same is said for the *believers* (3:171) and the *workers of righteousness* (7:170). Belief, submission through the performance of righteous deeds, and virtue represent the three basic components of religion—*īmān, islām,* and *iḥsān*—according to the well-known *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, in which *īmān* is associated with fundamentals of belief; *islām* with the five pillars, or essential practices (bearing witness to God's Oneness, performing the prayer, paying the alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and performing the *ḥajj*); and *iḥsān* with virtue.

31 The believers described in v. 30 will be rewarded with the Gardens of Eden (also described as such in 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50; 40:8; 98:8). The description of paradisal Gardens as having *rivers running below* them is found in more than two dozen verses throughout the Quran; for a discussion of this image, see 2:25c. This verse also describes the joys of the Garden as including what appear to be, at least on a literal level, a set of material or sensual pleasures, including *bracelets of gold* (or of *silver* in 76:21) and *green garments of fine silk;* see also 22:23; 35:33; 76:21, where these are also mentioned together as well as 44:53, which mentions only silk garments. These sensual descriptions are considered by many commentators to be symbolic, however, and not to be taken literally. The garments are described as *green,* because, according to some, this color is the most pleasing to the eye (Q), and in 55:76 those in Paradise recline on *green cushions.* Al-Rāzī speculates that the green silken garments represent what they have earned with their deeds, while the bracelets represent an additional bounty from God (R). According to a *ḥadīth,* the extent of one's ornaments in the Garden reflects the degree to which one has purified oneself through ablutions in earthly life (Q). The inhabitants of Paradise are also said to be *reclining upon couches* (see also 15:47; 36:56; 37:44; 52:20; 56:15; 76:13; 83:23, 35; 88:13), which are described by some as curtained or canopied (IK, Q, R, Ṭ) and bejeweled (Q). Gold jewelry, fine silk garments, and raised couches would all have signified immense luxury, particularly in the context of Arabian desert life, where rough woolen garments and sitting

of two men: For one of them We made two gardens of grapevines, and surrounded them with date palms, and placed crops between them. (33) Both gardens brought forth their produce and failed not in the least, and We made a stream gush forth in their midst. (34) And he had [abundant] fruit and said unto his companion as he conversed with him, "I am greater than you in wealth and stronger in men." (35) And he entered his garden, wronging himself, and said, "I

on the ground would have been the norm, and some commentators indicate that these images are meant to suggest that those in Paradise will be like kings, finely ornamented and seated upon thrones (Q, Z). If interpreted in a literal fashion, these paradisal pleasures may seem worldly and materialistic in nature; indeed, in 43:35 gold ornaments and couches are described as the *enjoyment of the life of this world.* At the same time, gold and silk are considered noble in nature; they are also luxuries forbidden for Muslim men, according to several *aḥādīth,* and thus are goods that only women are permitted to enjoy in earthly life. Although the prohibition against men wearing gold and silk was not as central or important as the prohibition against consuming intoxicating beverages (see 5:90), there is an analogy between such beverages and gold and silk in that, at least for men, they were pleasures present but forbidden in this world, to be enjoyed only in the Hereafter. In Sufi interpretations, the various luxuries of the Garden as described in the Quran are understood to be symbols of the spiritual joys of witnessing God in all His Majesty and Beauty and of the intimacy, love, and union with God that the righteous will experience there (Qu, Su).

32–33 The parable of the two men told in vv. 32–44 follows the discussion of the prominent and wealthy Makkans' aversion to sitting with those of the Prophet's followers whom they considered below their social status. It warns that those who are ungrateful for the worldly blessings that God has granted them and make them a source of personal pride are liable to think that these blessings are impervious to change and to be devastated when they are lost; cf. 2:264–66; 68:17–32; 34:15–16. That this parable is aimed most immediately at the Makkan idolaters is suggested by the fact that the gardens as described in this parable are similar to those the Makkans challenged the Prophet to bring forth as a condition of their believing in him in 17:90–91: *And they say, "We shall not believe in thee till thou makest a spring gush forth for us from the earth, or till thou hast a garden of date palms and grapevines, and thou makest streams gush forth in the midst of it."* Gardens of grapevines and date palms are emblematic in the Quran of worldly prosperity but also Divine Beneficence; see 6:99, 141; 23:19; 36:34.

Some reports say that the two men were brothers—either two Israelites or two brothers among the Makhzūm clan in Makkah—one of whom was a believer and the other a disbeliever (R, Z); the disbelieving brother invested all of his inheritance in worldly goods, while the believing brother gave his away in charity (Z). Some commentators suggest that these two brothers are the same two debating resurrection in 37:51–60 (R, Z). That the two gardens *failed not in the least* could be translated more literally to mean that the gardens "did him no wrong," since they produced fruit regularly. This contrasts with the description of the garden owner as *wronging himself* with his pride and worldly illusions in v. 35.

34 The man with the two gardens *had [abundant] fruit,* which may refer to the fruit of the gardens, although *thamar,* here rendered "fruit," also means "profit," and may refer to great wealth of various kinds, including gold and silver (R, Ṭ, Z). The wealthier man also boasts that he is *stronger in men,* meaning in children, especially sons, as well as aides and servants (Z). Wealth and children are mentioned together in the Quran as signifiers of worldly status (see v. 46), although the Quran warns that these blessings are not necessarily signs of Divine Favor (9:55, 85; 23:55–56) and cannot protect one against Divine Punishment (3:10, 116; 9:69; 26:88), despite the claims of some disbelievers who rejected prophetic warnings of

think not that this will ever perish. (36) Nor do I think that the Hour is imminent. And if I am brought back to my Lord, I shall surely find something better than this in the Hereafter." (37) His companion said unto him as he conversed with him, "Do you disbelieve in the One Who created you from dust, then from a drop, then fashioned you as a man? (38) But He is God, my Lord, and I ascribe none as partner unto my Lord. (39) When you entered your garden, why did you not say, '[This is] as God wills. There is no strength save in God.' If you see that I am less than you in wealth and children, (40) it may be that my Lord will give me something better than your garden, and unleash against it a reckoning from the sky, so that it becomes a flattened plain. (41) Or its water may sink deep, so that you cannot seek after it." (42) And his fruit was encompassed.

destruction, saying: *We are greater in wealth and children, and we shall not be punished* (34:35).

35–36 The description of disbelief and sin as acts of "wronging oneself" is found throughout the Quran (e.g., 3:117; 10:44). Here, the wealthy man "wrongs himself" through pride and his refusal to acknowledge that his provision comes from God (Z). The abundance of his gardens deludes the man in this parable into thinking that they will never perish, though *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88; cf. 55:26). This delusion points to the moral error of "excessive hope in worldly things" (*ṭūl al-amal;* Z), which entails being heedless of the impermanence of all created things and of one's own mortality. See 104:3, where it is said that some who amass great wealth suppose that their *wealth makes* them *immortal.* The wealthy man in this parable does not think that the *Hour is imminent,* and commentators understand this and his conditional statement *if I am brought back to my Lord* to indicate his overall doubt in the Hereafter or his own resurrection (Ṭ). Despite this uncertainty, he is confident that if he is indeed resurrected, he will *find something better than this*—that is, better than his abundant gardens—*in the Hereafter.* This is because he believes that his wealth and good fortune belong to him on the basis of his own personal merit, and since he assumes that this merit transcends death, he expects to enjoy wealth and children in the Hereafter as well (R); see also 19:77: *Hast thou not considered the one who disbelieves in Our signs, and says, "I shall be given wealth and children";* and 19:77–78c.

37–38 That human beings are made from *dust* (cf. 3:59; 30:20) and created from *a drop* (cf. 16:4; 23:13–14; 36:77; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19) is understood as an indication of human beings' lowliness, especially in relation to God. Elsewhere, human beings' origination from dust and then from a drop represents two stages in human development (22:5; 35:11; 40:67). *Fashioned you as a man* refers to God's having further shaped him as a mature individual (Z), endowed with intelligence and religious responsibility (*taklīf;* R). The believer continues his address to the disbeliever, saying, *I ascribe none as partner unto my Lord;* that is, he realizes that all poverty and wealth comes from God (Q, R) and so is grateful in times of plenty and patient in times of adversity (R).

39–41 *As God wills* (*mā shāʾ Allāh*), a very common phrase in everyday Muslim speech, indicates a recognition that nothing happens outside of God's Will; see 7:188, where the Prophet is told to say, *I have no power over what benefit or harm may come to me, save as God wills* (see also 10:49). *There is no strength save in God* (*lā quwwata illā bi'Llāh*) acknowledges that no individual can accomplish anything without the Help of God (R). According to Ibn Kathīr, this verse is the source of the Muslim religious custom of saying, whenever one is pleased by some good fortune, *mā shāʾ Allāh* ("as God wills") and

So he began to wring his hands on account of what he had spent on it while it lay in waste upon its trellises, saying, "Would that I had not ascribed anyone as partner unto my Lord!" (43) And he had no party to help him apart from God; nor could he help himself. (44) There, protection belongs to God, the Real. He is best in reward and best in requital. (45) Set forth for them a parable

*lā quwwata illā bi'Llāh* ("there is no strength, save in God"), although the latter phrase is also uttered commonly in situations where one feels helpless in the face of distress or difficulty. According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet identified the latter phrase, or the related formula *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi'Llāh* ("there is no power and no strength, save in God"), both used regularly in Muslim discourse, as among the "treasures of the Garden" (IK).

In v. 40, the believer's words continue, as he challenges the boasts of the disbeliever, and expresses his hope that God may well *give* him *something better* than the gardens of the disbeliever, either in this world or in the Hereafter (Aj, R); see 4:77; 7:169; 12:57; 16:30, where the *Hereafter* is said to be *better* for the *reverent* than this world. The believer's expression of hope for his own future is followed by a warning to the disbeliever that God may *unleash* against his gardens a *reckoning from the sky,* that is, a punishment from above (IK, R, Ṭ). Some commentators interpret *reckoning from the sky* here as thunderbolts (*ṣawā'iq;* Bḍ, R, Z), suggesting a torrential storm or rain that will wash away his trees and crops and render his gardens a *flattened plain,* that is, as nothing but bare and barren earth (IK). The thunderbolt is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran as an agent of Divine Punishment and destruction or as a demonstration of Divine Power; see 4:153; 13:13; 14:13, 17; 51:44. See also vv. 7–8, which state that despite the many "adornments" God has made for the earth, it will eventually be rendered a *barren plain;* see also 20:106.

42–44 His *fruit was encompassed*—that is, by ruin—meaning either that he lost all his wealth or that his garden was destroyed unexpectedly as his believing brother had warned him in vv. 40–41 (IK, JJ). Upon seeing this he *began to wring his hands* as a gesture of remorse and regret (IK, R). Despite the disbeliever's earlier boasts that he was *stronger in men* than his brother (v. 34), in this state of ruin he finds himself without any *party to help him apart from God,* as he is helpless by himself (see also 28:81).

Some commentators note that vv. 43–44 can be punctuated differently to read, "And he had no party to help him apart from God, nor could he help himself there. Protection belongs to God," so that "there" is an adverb describing the disbeliever's helplessness rather than the state in which "protection belongs to God" (IK). *Protection* translates *walāyah,* and it belongs to God alone, ultimately, since God is the *Walī,* "Protector" (from the same root), particularly for the believers (see 2:257; 3:68; 5:55 and commentary). The Quran asserts often that there is no protector other than God (2:107, 120; 4:123, 173; 6:70).

*Walāyah* here can also be read as *wilāyah,* in which case it would mean "authority belongs to God" (IK). The two terms, *walāyah* and *wilāyah,* are written identically in an unvoweled Arabic text, and scholars differ over which pronunciation was intended in this verse (IK, Ṭ). Although the meaning of the two terms can overlap in ordinary usage, *walāyah* designates primarily a state of closeness, nearness, friendship, attachment, and protection. *Wilāyah* more commonly denotes a kind of authority that comes from one's relationship to a higher authority—in political usage it may denote the authority of a local or provincial governor who has been appointed by the caliph or some other central authority; in mystical discourse, it refers to the state of Sufi saints who have acquired spiritual authority by virtue of their closeness to God, and thus have the power to initiate others into the mystical path.

*The Real* translates *al-ḥaqq,* which could also be rendered "the True" or "the Truth." *The Real* or "the True" (*al-Ḥaqq*) is considered one of the ninety-nine Divine Names and is particularly favored as a reference to God in philosophical and mystical writings. Alternately, some suggest that *al-ḥaqq* in this verse can be read as an adjective

of the life of this world: [It is] like water We send down from the sky. Then it mixes with the vegetation of the earth. Then it becomes chaff, scattered by the winds. And God is capable of all things. (46) Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world, but that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord, and better [as a source of] hope. (47) On the Day We will set the mountains in motion, and you will see the earth an open plain. And We will gather them, and leave not one of them behind. (48) They shall be arrayed before thy Lord in ranks. "Indeed, you have come unto Us as We created you the first time. Nay, but you claimed that We would never appoint a tryst for you." (49) And the Book will be set down. Then thou wilt see the guilty

describing *protection,* so that the verse could be rendered, "true protection belongs to God" (Bḍ).

45 This *parable* recapitulates the moral lessons of the longer parable in vv. 32–44, namely, that *the life of this world* is dependent on Divine Beneficence, here in the form of *water* sent *down from the sky.* For a while life flourishes, as God's Power and Mercy allow vegetation to come forth; but He then allows it to become *chaff,* that is, lifeless matter *scattered by the winds.* This imagery evokes the gardens of the disbeliever in the earlier parable, which flourish seemingly without end through God's Provision, but then come to an abrupt end as a flat and barren plain. For similar parables, see also 39:21; 57:20.

46 *Wealth and children* are the *adornment* of this world, because they are considered a source of status and security. However, the Quran makes it clear that these blessings are not necessarily indications of Divine Favor, that they cannot protect one from punishment in this world or the next (see 18:34c; 17:6c), and that like all other "adornments" in this world, they will ultimately pass away (see 18:7–8c). By contrast, righteous deeds "endure" in that they bring lasting reward in the Hereafter; see also 19:76: *And that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord, and better in return.*

47 The *mountains* are referenced in several verses as a source of stability and support for the earth (see 16:19; 21:31; 31:30; and also 78:7, where they are described as *stakes,* in the sense of supports for a tent). Yet *on the* Last *Day,* or at the apocalypse, the mountains are described as being *set . . . in motion* (see also 27:88; 52:10; 78:20; 81:3); some understand this to mean that they will be removed from the earth (Ṭ, Z) or rendered nonexistent (R), or that they will be lifted from it and pass through the air *like clouds* (27:88; Q). Elsewhere, they are described as *scattered* (20:105; 77:10); *pulverized to powder* (56:5); *ground up* (69:14); *like heaps of shifting sand* (73:14); and *as carded wool* (70:9; 101:5) on the Last Day. With the mountains removed or leveled, the earth will then become *an open plain* with nothing to obstruct one's vision. Some say that it will be *an open plain,* because all trees and vegetation as well as all human constructions will be removed from it (Q, R, Ṭ). *Open* translates *bārizah,* which comes from a root meaning "to come into clear view," or "to emerge," and some suggest that the reference here is to the emergence of the dead from their graves for the final gathering and judgment (R).

48 On the Day of Judgment, people will be *arrayed . . . in ranks* before God; commentators describe these ranks or rows as similar to those formed for prayer (Q) or around the Kaʿbah in Makkah (R). Each rank or row is said to be occupied by a particular religious community (Q). This phrase may also be translated "arrayed . . . in a row," that is, in a single line so that all are visible to one another (R).

On this Day people will come to God as He *created* them *the first time,* indicating that just as He created and gave life to people initially, so too does He have the power to give them new life on the Day of Resurrection. This is a repeated argument against those who believed in God as Cre-

fearful of what is in it. And they will say, "Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof." And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did. And thy Lord wrongs no one. (50) When We said unto the angels, "Prostrate before Adam," they prostrated, save Iblīs. He was of the jinn and he deviated from the command of his Lord. Will you then take him and his progeny as protectors apart from Me, though they are an enemy unto you? How evil an exchange for the

ator, but denied His power to resurrect, as in 17:51: *Then they will say, "Who will bring us back?" Say, "He Who originated you the first time";* see also 36:79; 41:21. That people will come to God on this Day as He *created* them *the first time* could also mean they come to Him in the same state as that in which He initially created them, that is, alone, bare, and without any worldly support (Q, Z), as in 6:94: *And [God will say], "Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and you have left behind that which We had bestowed upon you;* see also 19:80. This verse is a response to those who, like the prominent Makkans, considered themselves superior to those who did not enjoy the same wealth and social standing, indicating that all such worldly distinctions will be absent on that Day (R). The *tryst* refers to the time when the Resurrection and Gathering of which the prophets warned will come to pass (Z).

49 *The Book* here refers not to the Quran or sacred scripture in general, but to the record of deeds done in life that all will receive on the Day of Judgment. That this book serves as a comprehensive witness to human deeds is also mentioned in 10:61; 34:3–4; 36:12; 45:29–30. Elsewhere this book is described as being written by *noble guardians,* understood to mean angels (82:10–12), and *fastened* as *an omen* upon the *neck* of every human being (17:13). It is given to some in their right hand, which portends a favorable judgment, and to some in their left, which portends punishment (69:18–25; 84:7–11); see also 83:7–9, 18–20.

*The guilty* express regret for having squandered their lives (IK) and are fearful of the book that *leaves out nothing,* and in which they find all of their deeds, good and bad, *small* and *great* recorded. They fear both punishment from God and disgrace in the eyes of other people (R), for the book now openly reveals those evil deeds that may have been hidden from others during earthly life. That the *Lord wrongs no one* in the process of judgment is mentioned throughout the Quran, for the punishment meted out to individuals on this Day will be only for what their own *hands have sent forth* (3:182; 8:51; 22:10), that is, the deeds they freely chose to commit. Furthermore, a *ḥadīth* states that God will place no one in either the Garden or the Fire until all accounts between human beings are fairly settled, and all that is due to the people headed for the Fire, even from those destined for the Garden, has been rendered and vice versa (IK). Reading this verse together with v. 47 makes clear the point that human beings have no escape from judgment for their actions, for God will *leave not one of them behind* (v. 47) on the Day of Resurrection, and there they will confront a record of their deeds that *leaves out nothing,* a point emphasized by the use of the same verb, *ghādara,* to mean "leave behind" or "leave out."

50 The reference to the command given to the angels and Iblīs to *prostrate before Adam* is part of the fuller account of the creation and fall of Adam found elsewhere in the Quran; see 2:30–39; 7:11–25; 15:28–43; 17:61–65; 20:115–24; 38:71–85 (see also commentary on 2:35–37; 7:19–25). The account is briefly referenced here as a further admonition to the wealthy and proud Makkans, reminding them that Iblīs's refusal to prostrate before Adam was based similarly on pride and a false sense of superiority to Adam (R). That all the angels prostrated, *save Iblīs,* suggests that Iblīs himself was among the angels, although immediately after this statement Iblīs is identified as *of the jinn.* This has given rise to a debate among Islamic scholars as to whether

wrongdoers! (51) I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor to their own creation. And I take not those who lead astray as a support. (52) On the Day when He says, "Call those whom you claimed as My partners," they will call upon them, but they will not respond to them, and We will place a gulf between them. (53) The guilty will see the Fire, and know they shall fall into it, but they will find no means of escape therefrom. (54) And indeed We have employed every kind of parable for mankind in this Quran. And

Iblīs should be classified as an angel or a jinn; see 2:30c. Some say the fact that Iblīs is identified as a jinn immediately after the reference to his failure to prostrate before Adam in this verse is an explanation of that act; that is, if he were an angel, he would have bowed, since angels are protected against any disobedience toward God (see 21:27), but because Iblīs was a jinn, he refused to do so and thus *deviated from the command of his Lord* (Z). Others hold that he was indeed an angel, perhaps the head of the angels, but after his disobedience he was transformed from an angel into a satan (Satan is the name used to refer to him after his disobedience) and thus into a jinn (Z). *His progeny* refers to the evil *jinn* and the *satans* mentioned elsewhere in the Quran who, like him, seek to lead human beings astray. That some people take Satan or his minions as *protectors apart from* God—meaning that they obey them instead of God (Z)—is also mentioned in 7:30: *Some He has rightly guided, and some are deserving of error. Truly they took satans as their protectors apart from God and deem them rightly guided* (cf. 4:119). They are the enemies of human beings, like Satan himself, who is repeatedly described as a *manifest enemy* (see, e.g., 2:208; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15). The *evil exchange* is the exchange of God's true protection (see 18:42–44c) for the illusory "protection" of Satan (see 14:22c).

51 That God did not make the satans *witnesses to the creation of the heavens and the earth* indicates that, since the satans were not partners with God in creation, it is illogical to consider them as partners with God in being worshipped (Z); cf. 10:28; 13:16. That they were not witness even to *their own creation* emphasizes that they are themselves mere creatures (R).

52 This is one of several verses according to which on the Day of Judgment God will challenge those who ascribed partners to Him in earthly life to call upon their "partners" (see, e.g., 6:22; 16:27; 28:62) to intercede for them or to help them (R), but only as a means of rebuke, for those partners will abandon them, dissociate from them, or be unable to help them in any way (e.g., 6:94; 10:28; 16:86; 28:63). The *gulf* (*mawbiq*) between *them* may refer to a place of destruction (IK, Q, R, Ṭ) or a valley of Hell into which those who ascribed partners to God will be cast (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). Others suggest that *mawbiq* may refer here to the enmity that will manifest itself between the idolaters and the partners they ascribed to God on the Day of Judgment (R, Ṭ, Z). Still others interpret the *gulf between them* as referring to the vast intermediate expanse (*barzakh*) in the Hereafter between those who considered the angels to be partners to God (as did the Makkan idolaters) and the angels themselves, for the former will be in the depths of Hell and the latter in the highest reaches of the celestial realm (R, Z).

53 That the guilty *know they shall fall into it* means that they are certain that it is their destiny (R, Z). *Know* here translates *ẓannū*, which can also mean merely to think or suppose something to be the case. Al-Rāzī therefore suggests that the verse may also mean that the guilty see the Fire while it is still far away; yet they think that it is near because of the intensity with which they can *hear its raging and roaring* (25:12), and they fear that they will fall into it at that moment. In either case, they cannot escape; that is, they have no means of changing their course, since they are being driven forward by the angels (R); see 37:1–3c; 50:21c. See also 19:86, where the guilty are driven into Hell *as a thirsty herd;* and 39:71, where the disbelievers are *driven unto Hell in throngs;* as well as 41:19.

54 For the statement that the Quran contains *every kind of parable for mankind*—that is,

man is the most contentious of beings. (55) And naught prevents men from believing when guidance comes unto them, and from seeking forgiveness of their Lord, save that [they await] the wont of those of old to come upon them, or the punishment to come upon them face-to-face. (56) And We send not the messengers, save as bearers of glad tidings and as warners. And those who disbelieve dispute falsely in order to refute the truth thereby. They take My signs and that whereof they were warned in mockery. (57) And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them and forgets that which his hands have sent forth? Surely We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. Even if thou callest them to guidance, they will never be rightly guided. (58) And thy Lord is Forgiving, Possessed of Mercy. Were He to take them to task for that which they have earned, He would have hastened the

for the moral and religious instruction of human beings—see 17:89c; 30:58; 39:27. Human beings are *contentious,* vainly opposing and arguing against the prophets and messengers sent to them (Ṭ) on the basis of false ideas (Bḍ); see v. 56, and also 16:4, where human beings are described as a *manifest adversary,* and the commentary.

55 People wait for the *wont of those of old to come upon them;* that is, they wait to see if the same worldly destruction that befell earlier peoples will be visited upon them as well (Z); cf. 16:33; 43:86; 47:18. Elsewhere, the Quran suggests that similar destruction may well be imminent, for God does not change His way of dealing with disbelievers; see 35:43: *So do they await aught but the wont of those of old? Thou shalt find no alteration in the wont of God, and thou shalt find no change in the wont of God.* The *punishment* that may *come upon them face-to-face* likely refers to punishment in the Hereafter (Z). *Face-to-face* translates *qubulan,* which may also mean "suddenly" (Ṭ), as this is the manner in which Divine Punishment is often said to come upon people (see, e.g., 6:44; 7:95; 26:202). It is also possible to read this word with alternate voweling as *qabalan,* meaning "in the future" (Z).

56 The term *messengers* here translates *mursalīn* and so denotes all message bearers from God, including both messengers (*rusūl*) and prophets (*anbiyāʾ*). The *messengers* were sent both *as bearers of glad tidings and as warners* (cf. 2:213; 4:165; 6:48). The same is said of the Prophet Muhammad specifically in 2:119; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28. The disbelievers not only *dispute* the truth, but they also mock the signs and warnings they have been given, which commentators note is the worst kind of denial (IK) and an attitude that manifests their profound ignorance and hardness of heart (R). Other verses speak of those who *take* God's signs or religion itself *in mockery* (2:231; 5:57; 45:9, 35).

57 The rhetorical question beginning *Who does greater wrong than* is repeated throughout the Quran, often in relation to those who deny God's signs; see 32:22, where the identical question is posed, as well as 6:21; 7:37; 10:17; 29:68; 39:32. Regarding God's placing *coverings over their hearts . . . and in their ears a deafness,* see commentary on the identical statement in 6:25, and on a similar statement in 2:7. Those who are spiritually "covered" or "deaf" are impervious to the guidance offered by God's signs; thus, even if they are called *to guidance,* it will have no effect. See also 2:6: *Truly it is the same for the disbelievers whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe.*

58 Similar warnings about God's ability to *take* the disbelievers *to task for that which they*

punishment for them. Nay, but theirs is a tryst, beyond which they shall find no refuge. (59) And those towns, We destroyed them for the wrong they did, and We set a tryst for their destruction. (60) And when Moses said unto his servant, "I shall continue on till I reach the junction of the two seas, even if I journey for a long time." (61) Then when they reached the junction of the two, they forgot their fish, and it made its way to the sea, burrowing away. (62) Then when they

*have earned* are found in 16:61 and 35:45, although in those verses the warning is that if God were to do so, He *would not leave a single creature upon the earth;* see 35:45c. In the present verse, God does not take the disbelievers to task immediately, because He is *Forgiving* and *Possessed of Mercy.* Rather, He leaves them be until their *tryst,* referring to the appointed time for their death or destruction, in order to give them time to repent and mend their ways. According to some, this verse is understood to be a warning to the disbelievers in Makkah specifically, whom God did not punish immediately despite their extreme enmity toward the Prophet (R, Z). The *tryst* appointed for their destruction may refer either to their coming to judgment on the Day of Resurrection (R) or to the Battle of Badr (2/624; R, Z), during which many Makkans, including several prominent opponents of the Prophet, were killed. *Beyond* or after this tryst has arrived, *they shall find no refuge* or means of deliverance from God's Punishment (R, Z).

59 The Quran refers repeatedly to the destruction of whole *towns* as a result of their disbelief and wrongdoing. All such references are found in Makkan *sūrah*s and it is widely understood that these were intended as warnings for the Quraysh of Makkah; see 6:131; 7:96; 11:100–102; 28:59; 46:26–27. That God has *set a tryst* for their destruction means that He has appointed a specific time, known only to Him, for their punishment, and it cannot be advanced or delayed; see 34:30, where the Prophet is instructed to warn the Makkans, saying, *Yours shall be the tryst of a Day that you cannot delay by a single hour, nor advance.*

60–82 These verses contain the account of Moses and the mysterious "servant" he meets at *the junction of the two seas* (v. 60). This is the only account of Moses in the Quran that does not also have some reference in the Biblical text. The mysterious servant is not named in the Quran, but is identified by all commentators and by a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet as Khiḍr (or al-Khaḍir, the "Green One"). Khiḍr is considered widely to be a prophet who lives well beyond the ordinary span of a human lifetime and is indeed associated with eternal life or with what lies beyond or between the realms of life and death. This association with perpetual life and the contrast between Moses as the bringer of Divine exoteric law and Khiḍr as the possessor of an esoteric *knowledge from* God's *Presence* (v. 65) are the bases of the story's metaphysical and mystical richness and have made it the subject of much interpretation and elaboration in Islamic literature. In Sufism, Khiḍr is considered the prophet of initiation into Divine mysteries as well as a special spiritual guide from whom many, including the famous Sufi metaphysician Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), claimed to have received initiation.

With the other two major accounts in this *sūrah*—that of the youths of the cave in vv. 9–26 and that of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in vv. 83–98—this story shares the theme of intermediate realms: between life and death, between exoteric and esoteric knowledge, between the *two seas,* between *the two mountain barriers* (v. 93) lying between the eastern and western extremes reached by Dhu'l-Qarnayn.

The story of Moses and Khiḍr recounted in these verses has been read in many different ways. It provides one of the most dramatic demonstrations of God's power over life, death, and resurrection, a theme also found in the earlier account of the youths of the cave. But this story is also understood to be a symbolic account of the difference between formal and exoteric knowledge, based upon revealed scripture or reason, on the

one hand, and esoteric knowledge that comes directly from God, on the other; it is also a symbolic account of spiritual mastery and discipleship and of the different levels of the human soul and its spiritual training. Finally, the story indicates that God's Will is mysteriously operating through all events and actions and attests to the existence of a hidden interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of what one witnesses and experiences in this world—an interpretation known only to a few, like Khiḍr, who have been given this knowledge directly by God Himself. This knowledge may transcend the understanding of even a great prophet like Moses, who in this story represents the exoteric, or outward, dimension of religion.

60 Moses' *servant* is widely identified as Joshua (Q, R, Ṭ, Z). *Servant* translates *fatā*, which can also mean simply a youth or a young man. In a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet instructed people to refer to their slaves or servants as my "young man" (*fatā*) or my "young woman" (*fatāt;* Q, R, Z) rather than as "my slave" or "my servant"; in this case, the term refers to the fact that the younger Joshua followed Moses, served him, and gained knowledge from him (Z). The relationship between Moses and Joshua is one in which Moses is the master and Joshua the disciple, and it is Moses who sets the goals and parameters for their journey, saying *I shall continue . . . even if I journey for a long time.* Eventually, when Moses meets Khiḍr, Moses will become the disciple to the master, Khiḍr, while Khiḍr himself is a servant only to God (see v. 65, where Khiḍr is described as *a servant from among Our servants*).

Moses is seeking the *junction of the two seas* (*majma' al-baḥrayn*). In the Quran, the *two seas* are understood in the most literal sense to refer to the freshwater of rivers and the saltwater of the seas (25:53). The Quran mentions the point where the two meet as the site of an impenetrable "barrier" (*barzakh* or *ḥājiz*) set between them, in which the two types of water mingle, but neither transgresses beyond that into the other (cf. 25:53; 27:61; 55:19–20). Several commentators suggest possible locations for the *junction of the two seas* mentioned in this verse, although these suggestions tend to be vague or geographically impossible, such as the meeting point of the Persian sea (perhaps the Persian Gulf) and the Roman sea (likely a reference to the Mediterranean) or in Tangiers (R, Ṭ, Z). The geographical location, however, is ultimately immaterial to the story. Rather, Moses seeks this *junction,* because he was told that at this location he would meet one more knowledgeable than himself (Z). It is reported in a *ḥadīth* that Moses was once questioned by his people as to who was most knowledgeable, and he replied that he was. God was displeased by this, since Moses did not acknowledge Him as the source of all knowledge and therefore as the most knowledgeable, and He responded (through Gabriel) by telling Moses that there was a servant of God whose knowledge exceeded Moses' own and that Moses would find this servant at the *junction of the two seas* (IK, Q, Z; for different versions of this story, see R).

Some commentators suggest that the *two seas* here refer to Moses and Khiḍr themselves as representatives of two "seas of knowledge" (R, Z). To the extent that this story is a symbolic narrative about knowledge, the two seas represent two kinds of knowledge. The freshwater rivers, with their linear and directional nature, symbolize rational thought and knowledge of the Divine Law that leads to salvation or to God, while the saltwater sea, with its vastness, unpredictable currents, and fathomless depth, symbolizes deep inner knowledge and the infinite and all-encompassing nature of Divine Knowledge, or the Divine Itself, which human beings cannot "penetrate" with linear or logical forms of knowing, just as the freshwater of the rivers cannot penetrate the barrier between the two seas. The *two seas* thus serve as a symbol of the different kinds of Divine Knowledge possessed by Moses and Khiḍr—Moses represents Divine Knowledge as manifested in Divine Law, and Khiḍr represents Divine Knowledge in direct and immediate form, the acquisition of which is the goal of the mystical path (see 18:65c). If this verse is read as an allegory for the nature of the soul, then the *two seas* can refer to the world of the spirit and the world of bodies (K), with the human soul representing the *junction,* or the meeting point, of these two realms.

61 Although Moses and his servant, Joshua, knew that they were seeking the *junction of the two seas,* the story suggests that they did not recognize this junction when they reached it and that it is at this point that they *forgot their fish.* They also lost their fish at this junction when it came back to life and *made its way to the sea.* The fact that the fish was revived in that place is an indication of Khiḍr's presence there (Qu), insofar as Khiḍr rep-

had passed beyond, he said to his servant, "Bring us our meal. We have certainly met with weariness on this journey of ours." (63) He said, "Didst thou see? When we took refuge at the rock, indeed I forgot the fish—and naught made me neglect to mention it, save Satan—and it made its way to the sea in a wondrous manner!" (64) He said, "That is what we were seeking!" So they turned back, retracing their steps. (65) There they found a servant from among Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge

resents life that transcends the limits of time—in both his "greening" effect upon his surroundings (see 18:65c) and his apparent agelessness.

It is reported that at one point in their journey, Moses and Joshua settled down to sleep by a rock near a spring referred to as the "spring of life" (IK, Q, Z), not knowing that this was indeed the *junction between the two seas* that they had been seeking. The *fish* they were carrying in a basket was said to have been a salted and preserved fish, and Moses and Joshua had already eaten from it (Q, Th, Z). Nonetheless, at this point the salted and partially eaten fish came in contact with the water from the spring and miraculously sprang back to life. The fish contacted the water either when Moses or Joshua accidentally splashed the fish with some water as they were making their ablutions for prayer (Q, R, Z) or when water from the stream, coming from the "spring of life," flowed near the basket, reaching and reanimating the fish inside and eventually overturning the basket, allowing the fish to escape to the sea (Q). The fish is also described as *burrowing away,* making itself a tunnel to the sea. Although one might expect that such a tunnel to the sea would be filled with water flowing from the sea toward the opening of the tunnel, the commentators report that the water from the sea was miraculously held back from the tunnel, allowing the fish to travel through it to the sea (JJ, Q).

62 Despite the miracle of the fish—unknown to Moses, and witnessed but forgotten by Joshua (see v. 63)—Moses and Joshua *passed beyond* that place to continue their journey. That Moses and Joshua "miss" the *junction* or do not recognize it for what it is can be explained by understanding that this *junction* represents a *barzakh,* a liminal place between two worlds or realms, which itself has no space or extension. Having left the *junction* and the spring of life, Moses began to experience hunger and *weariness* (K, Z); Moses thus asked *his servant,* Joshua, to bring them their *meal,* meaning the fish. Some suggest that God induced Moses' hunger in order to remind him of the fish (Ṭs) and so facilitate his return to the junction of the two seas.

If this story is read as a symbolic narrative for the soul in its journey away from God into worldly existence and then its journey back to God, one can say that while at the *junction of the two seas,* Moses was sustained like a child in the mother's womb, having no need to eat or struggle, and experiencing no hunger or weariness; but his passing beyond this point symbolizes the soul being born into worldly existence and its separation from its source of nourishment, and Moses, like the soul, is thus wearied by the new difficulties and needs that this birth entails (K).

63–64 When asked for the fish, Joshua remembered having witnessed its miraculous escape to the sea. *Didst thou see?* is not meant as a question, for Joshua knew that Moses had not witnessed the loss of the fish; rather, this is Joshua's way of introducing the marvelous account to Moses (Ṭs).

Commentators note that Joshua, like Moses, knew that they were seeking the *junction of the two seas*—according to some reports, he even knew that losing their fish was to be a sign that they had reached their destination (JJ, R)—yet he fell asleep after witnessing the fish's escape and forgot the matter upon awakening. Joshua attempted to excuse his oversight by claiming it was Satan who had caused him to *neglect to mention*

the matter of the fish to Moses (Q). But now, as Joshua recounts the matter of the fish to Moses, he marvels at it.

When Moses learned what had happened to the fish, he exclaimed, *That is what we were seeking!* as he immediately realized—or according to some accounts was apprised beforehand (R, Ṭ)—that the place where the fish was lost to the sea was precisely where he would meet the servant of God more knowledgeable than himself (see 18:60c). Moses thus knew that they must return to that place, so they *turned back, retracing their steps*. If the story is read as a symbolic narrative for the journey of the soul, Moses retracing his steps represents the spiritual journey back to God, reversing the "fall" into worldly existence and separation from God—a return to the first *fiṭrah* (see 30:30c), or *primordial nature*, in which the human being was created (K).

65 The *servant from among Our servants* is identified by all commentators as Khiḍr on the basis of *aḥādīth* (IK, Q). He was said to have been given the name Khiḍr (or al-Khāḍir, "the Green One") because wherever he prayed or stood, everything around him became green (Q, R, Th), that is, renewed with life; and in Islamic art forms, such as Persian miniatures, Khiḍr is always portrayed as wearing green.

Khiḍr is widely considered a prophet (Q, R), although some say that he was just a righteous servant of God or an angel (Q). Commentators put forward several arguments in support of Khiḍr's being a prophet, however, including that he was given direct and unmediated knowledge from God, which is the mark of prophethood (R), and that Moses followed him and sought knowledge from him, suggesting that, at least in some ways, Khiḍr was superior to Moses, and none can be superior to a prophet save another prophet (Q, R). Moreover, in v. 82, Khiḍr states that the various acts that he performs, which are shocking to Moses, are not acts that he did *upon* his *own command*, indicating that he did them upon God's Command, another mark of prophethood, as in 21:27: *They precede Him not in speech, and they act according to His Command*. Finally, some commentators observe that the inner meaning of acts and events known by Khiḍr (see vv. 78–82) can only be known through Divine revelation, such as is received by the prophets alone (Q).

According to one report, when they returned to the *junction of the two seas*, Moses found Khiḍr seated or lying on a green carpet upon the water and enshrouded in his robe, and Moses offered him greetings of peace (Q). Various accounts report that Khiḍr removed the part of the robe covering his face and asked, "Is there peace in your land? Who are you?" after which Moses introduced himself (Q, Th); in another account, Khiḍr immediately recognized Moses and greeted him as the "prophet of the Children of Israel" (Q). Some consider Khiḍr to have been alive at the time of the legendary Persian hero and king Afarīdūn (Faraydūn), and at the beginning of the time of Dhu'l-Qarnayn (whose story follows immediately upon this one), as well as during the time of Moses (Z). Khiḍr remains an important figure in Islamic thought, particularly among Sufi practitioners, some of whom consider him to be an eternal and mysterious mystical master who still guides or even initiates certain people into the Sufi path through dreams and visions.

In the present verse, Khiḍr is said to have been *granted a mercy from* God, which many understand as a reference to prophethood (Q, R, Z) or to a kind of spiritual perfection that allows him to remain completely unencumbered by base matter (K), bestowing upon him perpetual life. He has also been *taught knowledge from Our Presence* (*ʿilm min ladunnā*), which is widely understood to mean knowledge of the Unseen, which lies only with God (JJ, Q, Z). It is an esoteric knowledge of the inner realities of things and of universal truths revealed directly to him (K, Q) without the intermediary of a human teacher (K, R, Su)—acquired through Divine inspiration rather than through human effort (Qu). Invoking the Arabic terminology in this verse, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī and other Sufis often refer to the knowledge that can be acquired only through Divine "unveiling" (*ʿilm al-mukāshafah*) as "knowledge from God's Presence" (*ʿilm ladunī*; R), and the Baghdādī Sufi master Junayd (d. 297/910) referred to Khiḍr's knowledge as the "unveiling of lights from the recesses of the Unseen" (Su). The description of Khiḍr receiving both "a mercy from God" and "knowledge from His Presence" echoes the supplication of the youths of the cave in v. 10, where they pray to God seeking *mercy from Thy Presence*.

Khiḍr told Moses that God had given him knowledge that He had not given to Moses, but

from Our Presence. (66) Moses said unto him, "Shall I follow thee, that thou mightest teach me some of that which thou hast been taught of sound judgment?" (67) He said, "Truly thou wilt not be able to bear patiently with me. (68) And how canst thou bear patiently that which thou dost not encompass in awareness?" (69) He said, "Thou wilt find me patient, if God wills, and I shall

also that Moses had also been given knowledge that God had not given to him (i.e., Khiḍr; see IK, R, Z on 18:60); hence the reference to Moses and Khiḍr as representing "two seas" of knowledge (see 18:60c). The Sufi commentator al-Sulamī says in his commentary on 18:66 that although Moses was more knowledgeable than Khiḍr in what Moses had taken from God, Khiḍr was more knowledgeable in other ways; and although Moses "subsisted" in the truth, Khiḍr was annihilated in it, referring to the two spiritual stations that Sufis describe as subsistence in God (*baqāʾ*) and annihilation in God (*fanāʾ*). Yet for all of the knowledge between them, Khiḍr is reported to have said to Moses, as he watched a sparrow by the water: "My knowledge or your knowledge, compared with the Knowledge of God, is naught but the small amount of water the sparrow takes in its beak" (IK, Th).

66 Upon encountering Khiḍr, Moses immediately asks, *Shall I follow thee, that thou mightest teach me?* which reveals Moses' genuine quest for inner knowledge for its own sake, his lack of pride, and his willingness to humble himself before one more knowledgeable than himself despite his own status as a prophet (R). In light of the previous account of the youths of the cave, in which the Jews told the Makkans that they could determine whether Muhammad was a legitimate prophet by testing his knowledge of the youths and their story, al-Rāzī observes in his commentary on 18:60 that the account of Moses and Khiḍr makes it clear that even great prophets, such as Moses, do not possess all knowledge, for *above every possessor of knowledge is a knower* (12:76). Moses therefore demonstrates the proper attitude one should have when encountering those who know more than oneself, namely, an attitude of humility and a sincere desire to learn from them. Moses' attitude and behavior also serve as a moral rebuke to the idolatrous Makkans, whose arrogance and rejection of the revelation brought by the Prophet contrast sharply with Moses' humility and sincerity upon encountering Khiḍr. Moses requests specifically to be taught *some of that which* Khiḍr had been taught *of sound judgment;* in v. 10, the youths of the cave also pray to God to grant them *sound judgment* in their affairs.

67–68 Khiḍr's response, *Thou wilt not be able to bear patiently with me,* is not merely a protest, but a statement of truth and a foreshadowing of Moses and Khiḍr's parting in v. 78. Moses cannot *bear patiently* with Khiḍr, because Moses has been sent as a prophet of the Divine Law, while Khiḍr has been entrusted with some acts that seem outwardly to be contrary to that Law, but possess an inner significance. Knowing this, Khiḍr warns that both he and Moses have been entrusted with a particular, but distinct or even apparently contradictory spiritual vocation, and that Moses therefore cannot be his companion (IK, Ṭs), at least not for very long. Like the water of the two seas that briefly comingle at the *junction,* or *barzakh,* between them, Moses and Khiḍr can travel together for a short period of time, but ultimately each must go his separate way so that the one prophet does not compromise the mission of the other. Khiḍr asks, *How canst thou bear patiently that which thou dost not encompass in awareness?* for, according to other verses, what one encompasses of Divine Knowledge is a matter of God's Will and choosing, as in 2:255: *And they encompass nothing of His Knowledge, save what He wills.* In this narrative, Moses has only been taught what is just and righteous with regard to the outward and apparent reality of things, and he has no knowledge of the Unseen—a knowledge that has been granted to Khiḍr (K). Moses, unlike Khiḍr, is bound by time and the limits of the material body, which according to some Sufi commentators, is what veiled him from knowledge of the unseen realities and spiritual truths that had been granted to Khiḍr (K), who in his agelessness appears free of the body's encumbrance and decay.

not disobey thee in any matter." (70) He said, "If thou wouldst follow me, then question me not about anything, till I make mention of it to thee." (71) So they went on till, when they had embarked upon a ship, he made a hole therein. He said, "Didst thou make a hole in it in order to drown its people? Thou hast done a monstrous thing!" (72) He said, "Did I not say unto thee that thou wouldst not be able to bear patiently with me?" (73) He said, "Take me not to task for having forgotten, nor make me suffer much hardship on account of what I have done." (74) So they went on till they met a young boy, and he slew him. He said, "Didst thou slay a pure soul who had slain no other soul? Thou hast certainly done a terrible thing!" (75) He said, "Did I not say unto thee that thou wouldst not be able to bear patiently with me?" (76) He said, "If I question thee concerning

69–70 Moses affirms, *Thou wilt find me patient,* because of the strength of Moses' preparedness to receive this knowledge and the sincerity of his seeking (K), but he adds the qualification *if God wills,* acknowledging that all future events depend on God's Will (Q, Ṭs). See vv. 23–24, where the Prophet Muhammad is advised never to promise anything in the future without acknowledging God's Will in the matter. Khiḍr instructs Moses, as a condition of allowing Moses to follow him, *Question me not about anything, till I make mention of it.* Al-Qushayrī observes that Khiḍr's request indicates the proper etiquette that a student should demonstrate toward a teacher or a disciple toward a master (Qu). Having placed his trust in Khiḍr as his guide, it is for Moses only to follow his teacher's path; it is not for him to seek out spiritual truths until the teacher has determined that the time has come for them (K, R). Khiḍr's words also suggest the etiquette of a teacher or master toward a disciple: the master assumes the responsibility for taking into account the needs and capabilities of the student for a particular teaching (R).

71 Moses and Khiḍr boarded a ship whose owner reportedly recognized Khiḍr as a prophet and therefore allowed them to ride without charge (IK, Th, Z). Khiḍr then made a hole in the ship, nearly sinking it, which outraged Moses. If this account is interpreted as a symbolic narrative for the journey of the soul, the ship may then symbolize the body, which carries individuals across the sea of material existence and allows them to perform acts of worship; Khiḍr's breaking the ship can thus represent the manner in which the hold of the body upon the soul may be "broken" through spiritual exercises and asceticism (K).

72–73 Khiḍr reminded Moses of his warning that Moses would not be able to *bear patiently with* him, which is a warning that one's resolve must be stronger if one is to follow such a path (K). Moses' asking not to be taken *to task for having forgotten* his promise not to question Khiḍr recalls 2:286, where the believers pray, *Our Lord, take us not to task if we forget or err!*

74 Journeying farther, Moses and Khiḍr encountered a young boy whom Khiḍr killed, reportedly by striking him in the head with a stone (IK). Moses was outraged that Khiḍr would *slay a pure soul,* that is, a young, innocent boy who *had slain no other soul* or even committed a major sin (IK). Such a slaying is completely contrary to the Divine Law brought by Moses; see 5:32, *We prescribed for the Children of Israel that whosoever slays a soul—unless it be for another soul or working corruption upon the earth—it is as though he slew mankind all together.* Moses considered this act to be worse than what Khiḍr had done before (IK). From a mystical perspective, the slain boy represents the soul that inclines toward evil and is "slain" when one overcomes the anger and other negative passions within oneself (K).

75–76 Khiḍr repeated his warning about Moses' inability to be patient, and Moses was

aught after this, then keep my company no more. Thou hast attained sufficient excuse from me." (77) So they went on till they came upon the people of a town and sought food from them. But they refused to show them any hospitality. Then they found therein a wall that was about to fall down; so he set it up straight. He said, "Hadst thou willed, thou couldst have taken a wage for it." (78) He said, "This is the parting between thee and me. I shall inform thee of the meaning of that which thou couldst not bear patiently: (79) As for the ship,

again contrite. His statement *If I question thee . . . after this, then keep my company no more,* like Khiḍr's warning, also anticipates the ultimate parting of ways between Moses and Khiḍr in v. 78. *Thou hast attained sufficient excuse from me* is Moses' acknowledgment that he has already given Khiḍr sufficient justification to leave his company, since Moses had twice violated Khiḍr's demand that he not ask questions.

77 The people of the town, which some speculate may have been Antioch or Eilat (R), *refused to show them any hospitality.* As they were leaving, Khiḍr stopped to repair a wall that was leaning. Moses had promised to ask no further questions, but his statement *Hadst thou willed, thou couldst have taken a reward for it* contains an implicit question about why Khiḍr sought no compensation for the good deed he had done for a town that had shown them no kindness. Moses' protest here led Khiḍr to declare their final parting (in v. 78). Commentators read a moral lesson into Moses' protest and Khiḍr's reaction, namely, that doing a good deed and then seeking worldly reward for it nullifies the spiritual merit of the good deed (Su). Spiritual virtue and perfection come from God and should be sought for their own sake, not for the sake of worldly reward (K). Some commentators also suggest that Moses' protest here was the last straw, because although Moses' earlier protests concerned the welfare of others (those on the ship, the young boy), his protest in this case arose from his own hunger and desire (Qu).

According to the interpretation of this account as a symbolic narrative for the journey of the soul, if the ship broken by Khiḍr represents the body "broken" by spiritual exercises and asceticism, and the slain boy represents the lower soul inclined to evil, which is slain by overcoming the passions, then the repaired wall symbolizes the "soul at peace" (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innah;* see 89:27c), which can be restored through the perfecting of character and virtue once the bodily passions and the lower soul have been subdued (K).

78 As suggested from the beginning of this account, the *parting* between Moses and Khiḍr is inevitable, for when Moses did not prove to be patient enough to refrain from questioning Khiḍr's actions, as Khiḍr predicted, Khiḍr no longer had the patience to keep company with Moses (Qu). The *junction* between these "two seas of knowledge" (see 18:60c), like the junction between the two physical seas, can only be a temporary meeting. Despite the brief intermingling of Moses, as representative of exoteric law and prophet of the Divine Word revealed in time, and Khiḍr, as representative of esoteric and timeless truth, the two prophets must carry out their vocations separately from one another—like the two seas, whose distinct natures as salty and fresh must remain separated, though they mingle at the *barzakh.* Yet al-Qushayrī states that although Moses desired to remain with Khiḍr and continue to learn from him, Khiḍr preferred to leave Moses' company, preferring solitude with God to the company of created beings.

Before their parting, however, Khiḍr offered to *inform* Moses of the *meaning* (*ta'wīl*), or hidden wisdom, of his actions (R), which Moses could not *bear patiently. Ta'wīl* is translated both here and in 3:7 simply as "interpretation," but in later Islamic tradition this term is often used to refer to the inner or esoteric meaning of Quranic verses and *aḥādīth*—a usage of the term that seems to be supported by the statement in 3:7 that the *ta'wīl* of certain Quranic verses is known only to God (see 3:7c). If *ta'wīl* is understood here to signify inner or esoteric meaning, then Khiḍr's use of this term suggests that there is a hidden or esoteric meaning

it belonged to indigent people who worked the sea. I desired to damage it, for just beyond them was a king who was seizing every ship by force. (80) And as for the young boy, his parents were believers and we feared that he would make them suffer much through rebellion and disbelief. (81) So we desired that their Lord give them in exchange one who is better than him in purity, and nearer to mercy. (82) And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father was righteous, and thy Lord desired that they should reach their maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from thy Lord. And I did not do this upon my own command. This is

to all phenomena and events as well as to what God has revealed in sacred scriptures—a meaning that is known only to God and those who, like Khiḍr, have been given *knowledge from* God's *Presence* (v. 65). Although this verse marks the parting between Khiḍr and Moses, Khiḍr's ability to share the *ta'wīl* of his actions with Moses indicates that Moses' soul had been purified and strengthened enough for the reception of the spiritual meaning and the encounter with the Unseen that had been veiled from Moses up to this point and about which he was forbidden to ask (K).

79 Khiḍr explained that his act of damaging the ship was actually a means of saving it, for a tyrannical king was seizing all sound vessels, and Khiḍr's damage to the ship made it undesirable for the king and ultimately saved it for its owners. The moral lesson here may be that when forced to choose between two harmful things, one should choose the least harmful, for damaging the ship resulted in a lesser harm to its owners than having it seized from them permanently (R). Following the interpretation of this account as a symbolic narrative for the soul's journey, al-Kāshānī suggests that Khiḍr's damaging the ship symbolizes the "breaking" of the body through spiritual exercise and asceticism in order to prevent the body from being "seized" by the lower soul inclined to evil (K). That Khiḍr's seemingly destructive act is ultimately a salvific one draws parallels with the casting of the infant Moses into the water in a basket—an act that may have seemed likely to result in his death, but one that is ultimately the means of his deliverance from Pharaoh's tyrannical order to "seize" and kill every male Israelite child.

80–81 In these verses the slaying of the young boy is explained as a means of sparing his parents grief and distress over the *rebellion and disbelief* he would exhibit later in life. However, given that the boy is described as still very young, his parents would not yet have witnessed *rebellion and disbelief* from him and thus could only have considered his death a tragedy, not knowing what future difficulties God had spared them. Thus in connection with these verses, Ibn Kathīr quotes the *ḥadīth,* "God does not decree anything for a believer, save that it is better for him" (IK). Moses' objection to Khiḍr's slaying of the boy is based upon the religious law that forbids the killing of innocents, whereas Khiḍr's explanation indicates that the slaying was commanded as an act of wisdom and ultimately of mercy on the part of the Omniscient God. The story also serves as a narrative demonstration of the difference between God's Will for human beings as discerned through the prescriptive commands found in Sacred Law and revelation and His ultimate Will or Decree, which transcends human understanding. It thus serves as a source of meditation on the different levels of God's Will and the relationship between Divine Will and human justice.

82 Khiḍr explained that the *wall* was about to fall in a place where the inherited treasure belonging to *two orphans boys* was buried. By repairing and straightening the wall, Khiḍr made it possible for the boys to access their treasure when they grew up. Although the treasure beneath the wall would seem to refer to wealth of some kind, commentators suggest that it might refer to some form of knowledge (IK, R) that had been hidden

the meaning of that which thou couldst not bear patiently." (83) And they question thee about Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Say, "I shall recite unto you a remembrance of him." (84) Truly We established him in the land, and gave him the means to all things. (85) So he followed a means, (86) till when he reached the place of the setting

or "buried" for the boys to discover later, when they were capable of understanding it. This interpretation seems especially likely given the earlier mention of the hidden interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of Khiḍr's actions, which, like the buried treasure, was obscured from Moses' outward vision. Reading the story as an analogy for the soul, al-Kāshānī suggests that the repaired wall symbolizes the "soul at peace" (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innah;* 89:27; see also 18:77c), which can be "repaired" once the baser elements of the soul have been subdued. The treasure buried beneath the wall refers to spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifah*) buried within the heart, which can only be accessed once the soul has been rendered "at peace" and once intellectual faculties *reach their maturity* (K) and are free from the temptations of the body and the lower soul.

Khiḍr affirms that he did not act upon his *own command,* indicating that he was acting upon the Command or Will of God, which remains inscrutable to the human mind, even the mind of a prophet like Moses, without an explanation of the hidden meaning (*ta'wīl*) of phenomena, such as Khiḍr provides here. Reading the reference to Khiḍr's *ta'wīl* of his actions in conjunction with the reference in 3:7 to a *ta'wīl,* or interpretation of revelation, known only to God and those firm in knowledge indicates that whatever one encounters, either in scripture or in the world, contains a meaning that is known only to God and perhaps to a very few of His "servants," such as Khiḍr. That Khiḍr's acts are done according to God's Command, as Khiḍr suggests here, indicates further that the Will of God is manifest on one level in Divine Law (i.e., in His prescriptive commands for human beings), but on another level in all that He brings into being, including events and acts that on their surface seem to contradict the Divine Will as manifest in the Law.

Al-Rāzī comments that the judgments of the prophets are necessarily based upon the outward aspect of phenomena and events, citing the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "We judge according to the outward; and God is responsible for the inward [or secrets, *sarā'ir*]"; by contrast, Khiḍr's judgments were based upon the true purposes of the phenomena and events. Yet after Moses had perfected the state of knowledge of the *sharī'ah*—that is, the Divine Law, as applied to outward phenomena—God sent him to Khiḍr in order to teach him knowledge on a more perfect, inward level. This indicates, for al-Rāzī, that the proper trajectory for religious knowledge is for people to move from a mastery of the science of *sharī'ah,* or Divine Law, which orders and judges according to the outward aspect of phenomena, to the science of the inward, which apprises one of the true realities of things (*ḥaqā'iq al-umūr;* R).

83 The story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, "the man whose travels encompassed the east and the west," is one of the matters about which the Makkans questioned the Prophet on the advice of some Jewish scholars, whose counsel the Makkans had sought in trying to determine the truth of Muhammad's prophethood; see the introduction to this *sūrah.* According to one report, some of the People of the Book came to the Prophet directly to ask him about Dhu'l-Qarnayn (Ṭ).

A *ḥadīth* identifies Dhu'l-Qarnayn as a youth from Rūm (i.e., from the western lands) who built the Egyptian city of Alexandria (Ṭ, Ṭs), in other words, the Greek Alexander son of Philip (R), widely known as Alexander the Great. Although he is most widely identified with Alexander in traditional Muslim commentaries, some Islamic scholars of the modern period have identified him with the ancient Persian king Cyrus the Great (Ṭb). According to a *ḥadīth,* Dhu'l-Qarnayn was visited by an angel who ascended with him through the sky until he could see the whole of the earth and the fathomless sea that surrounds the world (Q, Ṭ). Some consider him to be simply a righteous servant of God to whom God granted sovereignty over the world along with knowledge and wisdom (R, Z). Others suggest that he was a prophet (R, Ṭs, Z) or an angel (R, Z). He is described as one who loved God and whom God loved (Ṭ, Ṭs). The clouds, and even light and dark-

sun, he found it setting in a murky spring, and there he found a people. We said, "O Dhu'l-Qarnayn! Thou mayest punish, or thou mayest treat them well." (87) He said, "As for the one who has done wrong, we shall punish him. Then he shall be brought back to his Lord, whereupon He will punish him with a terrible punishment. (88) But as for the one who believes and works righteousness, he shall

ness themselves, were said to have been placed at his service, so that if he traveled by night, a guiding light would illuminate the path before him, while darkness would protect him from behind (R, Z).

Much speculation and legend surrounds the meaning of his name or title, Dhu'l-Qarnayn (lit. "he of the two horns"). Some suggest that he had on his head what appeared to be two horns (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); after calling people to the One God, he was struck in the right horn and killed, but then resurrected by God; then he was struck in the left horn, died (Ṭ), and, according to some, was resurrected again (R, Z). Other accounts say this name refers to his being the king of both Rūm and Persia (Ṭ, Z); or according to a *ḥadīth,* it refers to his journeys, which are said to have circled around both "horns" of the earth—the east and the west (R, Ṭs, Z). Some report that he had a dream in which he drew near to the sun until he seized in his grasp the eastern and western horns of it, and after that the people referred to him as Dhu'l-Qarnayn (R, Ṭs). Still others mention that the two sides of his head were made of copper (R, Ṭ, Z), or that he wore a headdress or helmet with two horns at the side (R, Z). Finally, some suggest that it was simply a title he was given as a way of indicating his bravery and fearlessness (R, Z). Some suggest that his name means that he lived for two centuries (*qarnayn;* Ṭs), although this is inconsistent with the historical Alexander, who died quite young.

84 That God *established* Dhu'l-Qarnayn *in the land* means that He made the land smooth and easy for him (Ṭ, Ṭs), so that he could journey through it and bring it under his control with ease. God is also said to have given him the *means to all things,* which most understand to mean a knowledge of all things (Ṭ, Ṭs) as well as the power and the tools with which to acquire all that he desired (R, Ṭs, Z).

85–86 Dhu'l-Qarnayn *followed a means;* that is, he journeyed along a path or a route (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs) between east and west (Ṭ), following landmarks and various stopping points (Ṭ). Since God gave Dhu'l-Qarnayn the *means to all things* (v. 84), al-Rāzī says that when he desired something, he would follow these *means* to attain it (R). That he found the sun *setting in a murky spring* is not understood literally by most commentators, but is rather thought to describe how the setting sun would appear to the human eye (IK, JJ, Ṭs): the westernmost point of the land known to Dhu'l-Qarnayn (if understood as referring to Alexander) was bordered by the ocean (IK, R), and as the sun set, it would appear to set into the distant reaches of the ocean, which would appear dark in the distance.

At this westernmost point, he *found a people,* according to legend, residing in a city of twelve thousand gates (IK, R). The context of the verse suggests that Dhu'l-Qarnayn found this people living in a state of disbelief (*kufr*) or idolatry (*shirk;* R, Ṭs). Thus God gave him the choice to either *punish* them, that is, slay them for their persistence in idolatry (R, Ṭs, Z), or *treat them well,* literally "take [a way of] kindness regarding them" (*tattakhidha fīhim ḥusnan*). This is understood to mean that he should call them to *islām*—that is, to submission to and worship of the One God—and should seek to guide them (Z), or that he should be generous and forgiving toward them (R). Dhu'l-Qarnayn chose to call them to *islām,* indicating that those who rejected his call would be punished (v. 87), while those who believed would receive a most beautiful reward (v. 88). That God spoke to him and instructed him directly in this way suggests that he received a form of Divine revelation (*waḥy*), which supports the idea that he was a prophet (R, Ṭs), although others understand God's instructions to him as having been communicated through inspiration (*ilhām;* Ṭs).

87 *The one who has done wrong,* in this context, refers to those who ascribed partners unto God (Ṭs) and persisted in disbelief (R) after having been called to monotheistic belief by Dhu'l-Qarnayn (IK). *We shall punish him* refers to their

have a reward, that which is most beautiful, and we shall speak unto him that which is easy from our command." (89) Then he followed a means, (90) till he reached the place of the rising sun. He found it rising over a people for whom We had not made any shelter from it. (91) Thus [it was], and We encompassed that which lay before him in awareness. (92) Then he followed a means, (93) till he reached the place between the two mountain barriers. He found beyond them a people who could scarcely comprehend speech. (94) They said, "O Dhu'l-Qarnayn! Truly Gog and Magog are workers of corruption in the land. Shall we

being slain in this life as punishment for their disbelief (R, Ṭs), and the *terrible punishment* mentioned later in the verse refers to the disbelievers' punishment in the Hereafter (Ṭs).

88 *The one who believes and work righteousness* refers to those who do so after Dhu'l-Qarnayn calls the people to monotheistic worship (IK). Both faith and good deeds are requirements for entry into the paradisal Garden, as is repeated in dozens of verses (e.g., 2:25; 3:57; 4:57; 5:9; 7:42; 19:60; 28:80; 34:37). *Have a reward, that which is most beautiful* may mean that the reward itself is *that which is most beautiful* (R); see, for example, 3:148; 4:95; 10:26; 13:18; 18:2, where the reward of the believers and the virtuous is described as *beautiful.* Some also suggest that it may mean "have a reward [for the deed] which is most beautiful" (R, Z); this "most beautiful" deed may refer to the utterance of the testimony of God's Oneness (*shahādah;* Z) or to "believing and working righteousness" (R). That Dhu'l-Qarnayn will speak unto them *that which is easy from our command* may mean that he will only impose the requirements of mandatory charity and land tax (*zakāh* and *kharāj*) to a degree and in a manner that is easy for them to fulfill (R, Z); or it may simply mean that he will treat them with kindness (IK).

89–90 For *followed a means,* that is, a path, see 18:85–86c. When Dhu'l-Qarnayn came to the *place of the rising sun,* that is, the easternmost point of human civilization, he found a *people for whom We had not made any shelter from it,* that is, from the sun. Commentators report that this people lived in a land with neither mountains nor trees for natural shade, nor buildings or other structures for shelter from the sun (Ṭ). Some suggested that the land could not sustain buildings (JJ, Z) or that these people had no knowledge of how to build structures (Ṭs). When the sun was on the ascendant, they sought refuge from its rays by either going into the water or burrowing in tunnels underground (Ṭ, Z); after the sun reached its highest point and began to set, they would emerge again (Ṭ, Z). Some say that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was given the same Divine mandate regarding this people as he was given for those in the region of the setting sun (v. 86; Ṭs).

91 That God had full awareness of *that which lay before* Dhu'l-Qarnayn may be understood to mean that He had knowledge of these strange people whom Dhu'l-Qarnayn encountered (Ṭ). *That which lay before him* can also be taken to mean "that which was with him," in which case God had knowledge of the armies, tools, and other means that Dhu'l-Qarnayn possessed (IK, Ṭs, Z).

92–93 For *followed a means,* that is, a path, see 18:85–86c. The *two mountain barriers* are most widely reported by commentators to refer to the mountains of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which formed a "barrier" to lands and peoples lying farther north (R, Ṭ). In a *place between the two mountain barriers,* that is, in an opening between the mountains (Ṭ), he found a people dwelling on the near (or southern) side of the mountains. They could *scarcely comprehend speech,* meaning that they spoke a language they alone could understand and they could understand no other (Ṭs) or that they could only understand others with great difficulty or by means of gestures (R). Yet they spoke to Dhu'l-Qarnayn, and he understood them, perhaps, some suggested, because God gave him a special ability to understand their language, as He had given Solomon knowledge of the language of the birds (27:16; Ṭs), or because there was a translator (Ṭs).

assign thee a tribute, that thou mightest set a barrier between them and us?" (95) He said, "That wherewith my Lord has established me is better; so aid me with strength. I shall set a rampart between you and them. (96) Bring me pieces of iron." Then, when he had leveled the two cliffs, he said, "Blow!" till when he had made it fire, he said, "Bring me molten copper to pour over it." (97) Thus they were not able to surmount it, nor could they pierce it. (98) He said, "This is a mercy from

94 Gog and Magog translate Yaʾjūj and Maʾjūj, also called Yājūj (or Ājūj) and Mājūj elsewhere in Arabic literature (R, Ṭ). Commentators report that Gog and Magog are the offspring of Noah's son Japheth (IK, Ṭs, Z); see Genesis 10:2, where Magog is listed as one of Japheth's sons. Some have speculated that Gog and Magog were the ancestors or distant relatives of the Turks (IK, R, Ṭs, Z) or possibly the Daylamites (who hailed from regions to the north of Iran; R, Z), although such speculations seem to be based upon the rather fearsome reputation these two peoples had as warriors for medieval Muslims. Some suggest that Yaʾjūj or Ājūj may derive from *taʾajjuj,* meaning to ignite a fire, and Maʾjūj from *mawj,* referring to the waves of the sea (R)—both of which may be destructive forces. Gog and Magog are also mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures and in the New Testament as forces of destruction: in Ezekiel 38:2, the prophet Ezekiel is told to prophesy against Gog, of the land of Magog, who would attack Israel; and in Revelation 20:8, Gog and Magog refer to the nations that Satan will rouse to fight with him in the end times.

A *ḥadīth* describes Gog and Magog as huge in size (Ṭs), although other speculative reports describe them variously as very small in stature or very large (R), with the claws and teeth of wild beasts (R); each male among them was said to beget a thousand offspring, all of whom bear arms and eat from every manner of beast on the earth (Ṭs). They are described as *workers of corruption,* a term used throughout the Quran to indicate spiritual corruption as well as violent and wicked behavior on the earth, see 2:11–12c; 5:33c. That Gog and Magog were *workers of corruption* is said to mean that they used to devour people (R, Ṭ) as well as all the food and resources of the land (R, Ṭs, Z), and that the people had suffered much torment and slaughter from them (Ṭs, Z). The people of this region thus offered Dhu'l-Qarnayn *a tribute,* that is, some form of payment for setting up the barrier between themselves and Gog and Magog (Ṭs).

According to another interpretation, this verse refers to Gog and Magog working corruption on earth at a later point, near the time of the approach of the Hour (Ṭ, Ṭs), and their appearance is mentioned in conjunction with eschatological events as described in the *Ḥadīth* and other Islamic sources. Esoterically or symbolically, Gog and Magog may be identified with the various negative and destructive developments in the human psyche and religious culture that Islamic tradition foretells as coming about near the end times, when the traditional barriers against such tendencies have been weakened or broken. See also 21:96–97, which refers to the future destruction Gog and Magog will wreak at this time: *Till the time when Gog and Magog are unleashed, and they rush down from every hill, and the true promise draws nigh.*

95 Dhu'l-Qarnayn responded, *That wherewith my Lord has established me is better,* indicating that God had given him such great wealth and expanse of land that he had no need of what they could offer him (R, Ṭs) and that he would provide this service simply for the sake of righteousness and doing good (IK). Al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr note that the response is similar to that of Solomon in 27:36 when given gifts by the Queen of Sheba: *Do you offer me wealth? What God has given me is better than what He has given you.* Dhu'l-Qarnayn did, however, ask the people to *aid* him *with strength,* meaning to provide him with able-bodied men and the tools and materials to assist him in making the barrier (IK, R, Ṭs).

96–97 Dhu'l-Qarnayn *leveled the two cliffs* by filling in the gap between them with the pieces, or ingots, of iron (JJ, Ṭs). With the command *Blow!* he ordered them to blow fire on iron pieces now filling the mountain opening until the heap

my Lord. And when the Promise of my Lord comes, He will crumble it to dust. And the Promise of my Lord is true." (99) And We shall leave them, on that Day, to surge against one another like waves. And the trumpet shall be blown, and We shall gather them together. (100) And We shall present Hell, on that Day, as an array before the disbelievers, (101) those whose eyes were veiled from the remembrance of Me, and could not hear. (102) Do those who disbelieve reckon that they may take My servants as protectors apart from Me? Truly We have prepared Hell as a welcome for the disbelievers! (103) Say, "Shall I inform

of iron was itself intensely hot or flaming (JJ, Ṭs). He then poured *molten copper,* or alternately molten brass or iron, over the burning iron barrier to fill in the holes between the iron pieces (JJ, Ṭs) and form a solid wall (Ṭs), which Gog and Magog were unable to surmount from above or breach from below (Ṭs). Although most commentators locate these mountains and the opening between them in the regions of Armenia and Azerbaijan, some say the two mountains were located near where the Roman (Mediterranean) sea meets the (Atlantic) ocean (Ṭs).

98 Dhu'l-Qarnayn declared that *this* barrier he had constructed, or else the ability to construct it (R), was *a mercy from* his *Lord* to hold back the terrors of Gog and Magog from the people. He also said that when the *Promise of* the *Lord comes*—that is, with the onset of the events of the Hour, only after Jesus has killed the Antichrist, according to some (Ṭs), and as the time of Resurrection draws near (R)—God would *crumble* the barrier *to dust* and level it to the ground (Ṭs). This is similar to the Quranic descriptions of God's destruction of the mountains in general with the coming of the Hour; see 20:105; 56:5; 69:14; 70:9; 73:14; 77:10; 78:20; 81:3; 101:5. Some connect this story to the figure of Khiḍr (see 18:65c), indicating that Khiḍr and Elisha (al-Yasaʿ; see 6:86; 38:48) meet every night at this mountain barrier to prevent Gog and Magog from getting out (Ṭs). That the *Promise of* God *is true* is repeated in several verses; see 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21; 28:13; 30:60; 31:33; 35:5; 40:77.

99 *On that Day* means on the Last Day, before the Resurrection but after the slaying of the Antichrist (IK). Those who are left to *surge against one another* are either Gog and Magog and human beings, whose lives and property they are overtaking (IK), or human beings and jinn, who come against one another at this time (Aj, IK). Some say that these forces who *surge against one another* will not, however, be able to enter Makkah, Madinah, or Jerusalem (Aj). At this time, *the trumpet shall be blown,* heralding the onset of the Day of Resurrection. The trumpet is said to be blown by Seraphiel (Isrāfīl) or one of the other archangels (IK); for other references to the trumpet as a herald of the Resurrection and in some cases as the sound that will rouse the dead from their graves, see 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68; 50:20; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18; see also 39:68c.

100 *On that Day,* God will present *Hell... as an array for the disbelievers,* so that they can see it and hear its raging and groaning (Aj), even before they enter it.

101 *Those whose eyes were veiled... and could not hear* refers to those who were spiritually blind and deaf in life, making them impervious to the revealed messages of the prophets and to the Oneness of God. Similar references to the veiling of eyes and the failure to hear as metaphors for spiritual blindness and deafness are found in several verses; see 2:7c; 6:25c.

102 The Quran states that people have no helpers apart from God (see, e.g., 42:46) and repeatedly warns those who would vainly seek protectors other than Him (7:3; 13:16; 42:9), such as idols (2:257) or Satan and his minions (7:30; 18:50). See 29:41: *The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a*

you who are the greatest losers in respect to their deeds? (104) Those whose efforts go astray in the life of this world, while they reckon that they are virtuous in their works." (105) They are those who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord, and in the meeting with Him. Thus their deeds have come to naught, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall assign them no weight. (106) That is their recompense—Hell—for having disbelieved and for having taken My signs and My messengers in mockery. (107) Those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be the Gardens of Paradise as a welcome. (108) Abiding therein, they seek not any change therefrom. (109) Say, "If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We

*house. Truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house, if they but knew.* That Hell is described as a *welcome* (*nuzul,* implying an offering of hospitality) may be considered a somewhat ironic usage, similar to those verses in which the disbelievers are given *glad tidings of a painful punishment* (31:7; 45:8) or the Fire of Hell is described as a *refuge* for them (24:57). Hell and its punishments are also described as a *welcome* in 56:52–56; 56:92–94. Cf. v. 107, where the Garden is analogously described as a welcome for *those who believe and perform righteous deeds.*

103–5 Those who *disbelieve in the signs of their Lord, and in the meeting with Him* (v. 105) are described in this passage as *the greatest losers,* because their efforts in this world are in vain; see also 7:147: *As for those who deny Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter, their deeds have come to naught.* Such people *reckon that they are virtuous in their works,* for as mentioned in several verses the deeds of the disbelievers and wrongdoers *seem fair* to them (see 6:108c). But *their deeds have come to naught,* because they are disbelievers, and deeds without faith are assigned *no weight* (cf. 2:217; 3:21–22; 5:5, 53; 6:88; 9:17; 33:19; 39:65; 47:9–10, 32). In 25:23, it is said that the deeds of those who are guilty of denying their prophets will be as *scattered dust.*

106 *Hell* is the *recompense* for those who mock God's signs and messengers by denying them and belittling their warnings; cf. v. 56, in which the disbelievers mock the truth, as well as 2:231; 5:57; 45:9, 35, which mention those who mock God's signs or warnings.

107–8 Just as Hell is a "welcome" for the disbelievers, the Garden is a welcome for those who *believe and perform righteous deeds;* see also 3:198; 32:19; 41:31–32.

109 *The Words of my Lord* may be a reference to God's Knowledge and Wisdom (ST, Z) or to the many spiritual meanings and benefits of the Quran and other Divine Revelation (Ṭs), rather than to the literal words of the Quran itself. It may also be a reference to His capacity to create and to command whatever He wills (Ṭs), for God creates by the "Word," as in 2:117: *When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is* (see also 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68), and as in 4:171, where Jesus' miraculous creation is described as God's Word having been *committed to,* or cast upon, Mary. In the context of discussions of the Garden and Hell in vv. 102–8, some have suggested that the *Words of my Lord* here refers to the rewards promised and punishments threatened in the Hereafter (Ṭs) or the generous words God will speak to the people of the Garden in the Hereafter (Aj). All of these are described here as more inexhaustible than the sea itself, for as vast as the sea is, it is still finite, while the Words of God are infinite (Aj, R) and eternal (ST). See also commentary on 31:27: *And if all the trees on earth were pens, and if the sea and seven more added to*

brought the like thereof to replenish it." (110) Say, "I am only a human being like you. It is revealed unto me that your God is one God. So whosoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him perform righteous deeds and make no one a partner unto his Lord in worship."

*it [were ink], the Words of God would not be exhausted. Truly God is Mighty, Wise.*

110 In several verses, the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets assert that they are *only a human being* delivering a message from God (see, e.g., 14:11; 17:93; 41:6). However, it is the merely human nature of prophets itself that causes some people to doubt them; see 6:91; 11:27; 14:10; 21:3; 23:24; 23:47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 54:24; 64:6; 74:25. *Whosoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord,* and thus believes, should *perform righteous deeds* and should ascribe no partners to God; that is, they must avoid the unforgivable sin of *shirk,* or idolatry (see 4:48c). As believers are, by definition, not committers of *shirk* in its outward sense, Ibn ʿAjībah cites in connection with this verse a *ḥadīth* that warns the believers to be wary of the "minor *shirk*." When asked what "minor *shirk*" meant, the Prophet responded that it referred to hypocrisy or religious ostentation (*riyāʾ*).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 19

# Mary

## *Maryam*

*Maryam* is a Makkan *sūrah* believed to have been revealed after *Sūrah* 35, *Fāṭir,* although some report that vv. 58 and 71 were revealed in Madinah (Q). The *sūrah* is named for Mary (*Maryam*) the mother of Jesus, whose story it recounts in detail. This is the only *sūrah* named for a female figure, and indeed Mary has the distinction of being the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran; other female figures are identified only by their relation to others, such as the wife of Adam and the mother of Moses, or by their title, such as the Queen of Sheba.

Since nearly all named figures in the Quran are considered prophets, and since Mary receives the message about her miraculous conception of Jesus, identified as God's "Word," from the Archangel Gabriel, the angel of revelation, a small minority of Islamic authorities, such as the Andalusian theologian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) and the Persian Sufi Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209), consider her to be a female prophet. However, since Mary is not explicitly identified as a prophet in the Quran and Islamic tradition generally holds that all prophets are male (based on the description of prophets as "men" in 12:109; 16:43; and 21:7), most Muslim authorities do not consider Mary a prophet, but rather an exceptionally pious woman with the highest spiritual rank among women. In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet names Mary as one of the four spiritually perfected women of the world.

Mary represents a unique point of connection between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. She was born into a priestly Jewish family and dedicated to service in the Temple, but she was also the mother of Jesus and thus plays a central and miraculous role in the establishment of Christianity. In the Quran, Mary's importance is indicated by the fairly substantial detail with which her story is recounted, both here and in 3:35–48. She also plays a role of significance in certain forms of Islamic piety.

This *sūrah* is reported to have played an important role in the history of the early Islamic community. After the Battle of Badr, in which many prominent Makkans were killed, the Makkan leaders sent a delegation to the Negus,

the Christian king of Abyssinia, who had given refuge to a small group of the Prophet's followers. The Makkan delegation demanded that the king hand over some of these Muslims, so that they could exact retribution upon them for the loss of those Makkans who died at Badr. The Negus summoned a delegation of the Muslims and asked them to recite something from the revelations that had been sent to the Prophet Muhammad. Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 7/629), the Prophet's cousin and older brother of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, came forth and recited from this *sūrah*. Upon hearing the Quran's words regarding Mary and Jesus, the Negus and the religious leaders of his court began to weep profusely and refused to hand over the Muslims, indicating that the religious teachings of the Quran were deeply related to those of the Christian faith (Q).

*Maryam* has several unique characteristics that give it a distinct linguistic and thematic unity. It is one of the longest *sūrah*s to have a clearly defined rhyming pattern; sixty-seven of its ninety-eight verses end with the same final sound, and other, shorter passages contain separate, but related, rhyming patterns. Also in this *sūrah,* God is repeatedly and most commonly referred to by the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān* ("the Compassionate"); nearly a third of all instances of this Divine Name in the Quran (i.e., other than in the opening *basmalah* formula) are located in this *sūrah* alone.

The *sūrah* begins with substantial accounts of the related figures of Zachariah and John (vv. 2–15) and of Mary and Jesus (vv. 16–36), followed by more succinct accounts of Abraham (vv. 41–50) and Moses (vv. 51–53). These four accounts bear some common thematic elements, including God's bestowal of prophetic children or relatives upon other prophets or sacred figures: God grants John to Zachariah, Jesus to Mary, Isaac and Jacob to Abraham, and Aaron to his brother Moses. In all four accounts these Divine "gifts" are granted only after Zachariah, Mary, Abraham, and Moses withdraw from their people and enter a state of separation from the world. The juxtaposition of speaking and silence also ties the accounts together: Zachariah and Mary's temporary silence (vv. 10–11, 26) is complemented by the infant Jesus' miraculous ability to speak (vv. 29–33).

These four accounts are followed by a brief mention of other prophetic figures, including Ishmael (vv. 54–55) and Idrīs (vv. 56–57), and then by a warning that many who came after these prophets went astray and that only those who repent, believe, and work righteousness will enter the Garden (vv. 58–63). After a reminder in v. 64 that revelation only comes to the Prophet by God's Command, the *sūrah* proceeds to address the criticisms leveled against the Prophet and the Quranic message (vv. 65–82). Vv. 88–95 issue a strong rejection of the claims of those who say that God has begotten a child. The *sūrah* concludes in v. 98 with a sobering observation about the utter silence of earlier generations destroyed by God for their wrongdoing, from whom one no longer hears even the slightest sound.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Kāf. Hā. Yā. ʿAyn. Ṣād.* (2) A reminder of the Mercy of thy Lord unto His servant, Zachariah, (3) when he cried out to his Lord with a secret cry. (4) He said, "My Lord! Verily my bones have grown feeble, and my head glistens with white hair. And in calling upon Thee, my Lord, I have never been wretched. (5) Truly I fear my relatives after me, and my wife is barren. So grant me from Thy Presence an heir (6) who will inherit from me and inherit from

1 The five Arabic letters at the beginning of this *sūrah* are among the "separated letters" (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s. Among them, this *sūrah* is the only one that begins with these particular letters, which constitute the longest set of such letters found in a single verse. Although the meaning of these letters is considered by most commentators to not be known clearly, some have speculated that the letters at the beginning of this *sūrah* may stand for various Names and Attributes of God found in the Quran. For example, some suggest that the *Kāf* stands for the Divine Name *Kabīr* ("Great") or *Karīm* ("Generous"). Alternately, some consider these five letters, strung together but pronounced individually (i.e., *kāf-hā-yā-ʿayn-ṣād*), to constitute one of the Names of God or else a name for the Quran (Ṭ). For a fuller commentary on the separated letters, see 2:1c.

2–35 These verses recount the intertwined stories of Mary, Zachariah, John (the Baptist), and Jesus; see 3:35–62 for a similar account. The two stories are also connected in 21:89–91 as well as in the Biblical account found in Luke 1:5–80. The connection between John's miraculous birth to the aged and formerly barren wife of Zachariah and Jesus' miraculous birth to the young virgin Mary makes the point that God's power to create transcends all ordinary, physical boundaries and that age and human limitations are irrelevant to the manifestation of God's Will in sacred history.

2–3 Zachariah's request for a son is also described in 3:37–41 and is mentioned briefly in 21:89–90. In 6:85, Zachariah is described as *among the righteous,* and he is understood to be a descendant of Aaron—that is, a member of the Jewish priestly class—as well as Mary's paternal uncle. The text may also be read, "A reminder of the Mercy of thy Lord, His servant Zachariah," indicating that Zachariah himself was a mercy from God bestowed upon his people (R). That the *sūrah* begins with an account of God's Mercy (*raḥmah*) may be related to a significant feature of this *sūrah,* namely, that God is referred to throughout as *al-Raḥmān,* "the Compassionate" (derived from the same root as *raḥmah*); see, e.g., vv. 18, 26, 44–45, 58, 61.

That Zachariah cries out to God *with a secret cry* indicates his sincerity, since praying or supplicating in a loud voice may suggest hypocrisy (Z) or the desire *to be seen of men* (4:142); see 7:55, where people are enjoined to *call upon* their *Lord humbly and in secret.* His supplication may also have been in a low voice because this mode of supplication is particularly favored by God (IK), or as a result of his age and frailty (Z), or because of fear of his relatives (see v. 5; Z).

4–6 Cf. 3:38; 21:89–90; and Luke 1:5–25. In v. 4, Zachariah describes the physical effects of his age, as he was said to be between sixty and eighty-five years old at this time (Z). His statement that he has *never been wretched* in his supplications means that in the past God had always answered his prayers (Bḍ, Mw). Given that Zachariah was from a priestly Jewish family, his statement *I fear my relatives after me* is understood to mean that he feared that his relatives would not continue to guide the religious community or uphold the religion properly after his death (Bḍ). Zachariah's *relatives* (*mawālī*) may refer to his agnatic relatives, who would inherit his position after him if he

the House of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, well-pleasing." (7) "O Zachariah! Truly We bring thee glad tidings of a boy whose name is John; We have not given this as a name to any before him." (8) He said, "My Lord! How shall I have a boy, when my wife is barren, and I have grown decrepit with old age?" (9) He said, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for Me! I had

had no son (Mw) or to other, unrelated religious scholars who might assume religious leadership of the Jewish community after him (Mw).

In v. 5, *heir* translates *walī,* which elsewhere in the Quran is translated "protector" or "friend," but in this context refers to an heir, since it concerns Zachariah's desire for a child of his own (Bḍ) who could be *heir* to his religious knowledge and authority and perhaps to his function of prophethood (Mw), but not necessarily to his wealth. Zachariah was a prophet, and a well-known *ḥadīth* asserts that the prophets do not have heirs to their wealth (Bḍ). That it is spiritual and not material inheritance that is meant here is indicated by Zachariah's description of his *heir* as one who will *inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob;* see 12:6, where the *House of Jacob* is blessed by God; and 4:54, where God *gave the House of Abraham the Book and Wisdom, and . . . a mighty sovereignty.* Additionally, such a child would be *an heir* from *Thy Presence*—that is, God's Presence—since the age of Zachariah and his wife meant that any child born to them would greatly transcend the normal limits of human childbearing and could thus be nothing other than a Divine Gift (Bḍ).

Zachariah also prays that this *heir* will be *well-pleasing* (*raḍiyyan*), that is, that God will be pleased with his character and deeds (Mw). The related term *riḍā* is usually translated "contentment," and elsewhere the Quran states that the Contentment of God is what true believers strive for (3:162, 174; 5:2, 16); it is also associated with the paradisal state (3:15; 9:21). In 5:119, the *great triumph* in the Hereafter belongs to those about whom it is said, *God is content with them, and they are content with Him;* see also 9:72, 100. Regarding the relationship between Divine and human contentment, there is also a *ḥadīth* that states, "Whosoever is content with God's Decree, God is content with him"; see also 89:28c.

7 The announcement to Zachariah is understood to be God's response conveyed to him either directly by God or through the medium of an angelic messenger (R) or messengers (Ṭs; see 3:39). The Arabic for John is Yaḥyā, which means "he lives"; it may refer to John's having been brought to life through Zachariah's faith (Ṭ) or simply to his having been brought to life miraculously in his mother's womb (Bḍ). Others indicate that it refers to God having enlivened his heart with faith and obedience (R).

That God Himself gives John his name is a distinct honor (R, Ṭs); Jesus is also given his name by God (3:45). That God has *not given this as a name to any before him* indicates the special favor bestowed upon John, and his virtue (Ṭs; see vv. 12–15). The uniqueness of his name may reflect the fact that he was named by God Himself prior to his birth, while other children are named by their parents after they are born (R). The Shiite tradition connects the story of John, whose name had no precedent and who was martyred when he was beheaded by the tyrannical Herod (see Matthew 14:1–12), with that of the grandson of the Prophet, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, whose name, according to Shiite sources, was given by the Prophet himself and also had no precedent and who was similarly martyred, after which his head was delivered to the Umayyad ruler, Yazīd (Ṭs).

8 Cf. 3:40. Zachariah responds in this way either to indicate his awe and wonder at God's creative Power or because he wishes to know *how*—that is, by what means—he will be granted this son, given his wife's barrenness (IK, Mw). But as God's response in v. 9, *It is easy for Me,* indicates, God has no need of "means" by which to create (Z). Zachariah's questioning as to *how* he shall have a boy is also justified, insofar as the announcement in v. 7 only indicated that Zachariah would be given a *boy* (*ghulām*), rather than a "son" (*walad;* R), and thus did not specify that the child would be conceived and born in the normal manner.

9 *Thus shall it be* translates *kadhālika* and might also be rendered "Thus it is." Bringing

created thee before, when thou wast nothing!' " (10) He said, "My Lord! Appoint for me a sign." He said, "Thy sign shall be that thou shalt not speak with men for three nights, [while thou art] sound." (11) So he came forth from the sanctuary unto his people, and signaled to them that they should glorify morning and evening. (12) "O John! Take the Book with strength!" And We gave him judgment as a child, (13) and a tenderness from Our Presence, and purity; and he

creatures into being is *easy* for God, for *when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is* (2:117; 3:47, 59; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68). The identical statement is given as a response to a similar question from Mary in v. 21. As an example of how easy creation is for Him, God reminds Zachariah that He had created him when he was nothing, indicating that God's bringing John into existence through aged parents was no more miraculous than His ability to bring all things from nonexistence into existence (R, Ṭ).

10 Cf. 3:41. That Zachariah will *not speak with men* is understood to mean that he was rendered temporarily incapable of speaking, though his faculties were still sound (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). His sudden inability to speak was also said to be a sign for his people, who thus knew that his request had been granted (Ṭs). Some report that he continued to be capable of uttering prayers and praises to God, but was unable to speak to people (Ṭs). His temporary inability to speak draws parallels with the instruction given to Mary that she observe a fast of silence after the birth of Jesus (v. 26), further indicating the symbolic relationship between the two accounts. That both Zachariah and Mary were commanded to observe silence after these miraculous events suggests the spiritual significance of silence. Many Sufis have indicated that silence is the only true way to communicate or express an encounter with God's Presence, as all words are inadequate in such cases. Outward silence, moreover, can be a manifestation of an inward suppression or emptying of the self in the Face of the Divine.

11 The *sanctuary* (*miḥrāb*) likely refers to Zachariah's personal prayer room in the Temple (Ṭ, Ṭs); *miḥrāb* is also used to describe Mary's private prayer room (3:37) and David's private residence (38:21). In Islamic mosque architecture, *miḥrāb* designates the prayer niche carved into the wall of the mosque indicating the direction of prayer (*qiblah*). *Miḥrāb* derives from a root related to waging war; according to al-Ṭabrisī, the prayer niche is given this name, because when one turns toward it in prayer, one is spiritually waging war against Satan.

Zachariah *signaled to* his people, meaning that he gestured to them through *signs* (see 3:41) or communicated to them by writing (Ṭ, Ṭs). In various places the Quran enjoins people to call upon, glorify, or invoke God *morning and evening* (see 6:52; 18:28; 24:36; 33:42; 48:9; 76:25), which can mean either that one should do so continuously or that one should do so at these particular times, given their association with the transition between darkness and light or night and day, symbolizing the transition between life and death (see 6:52c). The "glorifying" (*tasbīḥ*) of God *morning and evening* may be a reference to the regular morning and evening prayers, during which God is praised, or to any manner of praising God (Ṭs).

12 This address to John is understood to have been made immediately after his birth (Q, Ṭ); it enjoins him to take *the Book*—that is, the Torah—*with strength,* meaning to follow it in earnest and to observe its commands and prohibitions (Ṭ). *Judgment* here refers to the understanding of *the Book* that God gave John as a youth or perhaps to his prophethood (R). John's precocious spiritual understanding reportedly made him disinterested in play as a child (Ṭ).

13 *Tenderness* translates *ḥanān,* a term that connotes a gentle mercy or compassion. That it is *from Our Presence* means that it is a quality of mercy that can only be bestowed by God (Ṭ). Some suggest that *a tenderness from Our Presence* refers to the love and compassion God had for John (Ṭ), or to John himself, who was a "tender mercy" to Zachariah (Ṭ). *Purity* refers to John's purity from sin as well as to his righteousness in

was reverent, (14) and dutiful toward his parents. He was not domineering, rebellious. (15) Peace be upon him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive. (16) And remember Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place. (17) And she veiled herself from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a

deed (Ṭ). For the quality of "reverence" (*taqwā*), see 2:2c.

14–15 John is described as *dutiful toward his parents,* that is, obedient and loving (Ṭ); regarding the importance of filial piety, see 2:83c and 6:151–52c as well as 4:36; 17:23; 29:8; 31:14; 46:15. Rather than *domineering* and *rebellious,* he was gentle and humble by nature (R) toward both God and his parents (Ṭ), which al-Rāzī asserts is a characteristic of all believers. The triple blessing of peace upon him is identical to Jesus' statement about himself in v. 33. The blessing upon him *the day he was born* refers to God's protection for him against the evil promptings of Satan (R, Ṭ); the blessing upon him *the day he dies* indicates that he is exempt from the trials of the grave (R, Ṭ); and the blessing upon him when *he is raised alive* means that he will not suffer the fear and dread that will overcome others on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭ) or experience any punishment (R, Ṭ).

16 Maryam, the daughter of ᶜImrān (66:12), was reported to hail from a pure and noble family of the Davidic line (IK); see commentary on 3:35–37 for the account of her birth and dedication to the Temple by her mother's vow. Mary's purity is mentioned in several Quranic verses, including 3:36, where her mother's prayer that God will protect her from Satan is considered to have been granted; 21:91; and 66:12. In his commentary on this passage, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī asserts that Mary's very substance was the holy, unadulterated *fiṭrah,* or the primordial human mold itself.

Mary *withdrew from her family* in order to devote herself to solitary worship (R, Z). An *eastern place* may refer to an area "east" of the Temple sanctuary (IK, Ṭ, Z) or east of her home (JJ, Z). Some commentators speculate that perhaps she withdrew there after the onset of menstruation (IK, R, Ṭ) or to purify herself afterward (R, Z), although others report that she miraculously escaped her locked prayer room in order to seek solitude on a hillside or mountainous area near the Temple (R, Z). Still others interpret this verse to refer to Mary's spiritual withdrawal from the realm of existent beings, symbolized by *her family,* in order to enter the holy realm of the Spirit, the *eastern place,* where she would witness and encounter the Divine and the "eternal breath of union" (Rb); cf. 66:12, where she conceived Jesus after the Spirit was *breathed* into her. Viewed in this way, the present verse can be understood to mean that one cannot encounter the spiritual dimension of reality until one withdraws from all worldly things that distract one from the remembrance of God (Aj).

17 *She veiled herself from them,* literally, "She drew a veil (*ḥijāb*) before them." The *veil* may indicate a curtain or wall that shielded her from view (Ṭ, Z), perhaps while she was purifying herself (R). In this state, Mary encountered the angel (Z) who gave her the news that she would conceive a son. *Our Spirit* is considered by most to be the Archangel Gabriel (IK, R, Ṭs, Z), who is referred to elsewhere as the *Holy Spirit* (*Rūḥ al-Qudus;* 2:87, 253; 5:110; 16:102) or as the *Trustworthy Spirit* (26:193), perhaps because religion is "revived" through him (Z), as spirit is also associated strongly with the giving of life. The angel appeared to her in the form of a *perfect man,* whose appearance some describe as that of a young, beardless man, beautiful and radiant in appearance, perfectly proportioned (Ṭ, Z), and without blemish (Z). He appeared in this form, according to some, so that she would not be overcome with fear and recoil from him (Z). Alternately, the Companion and early Quran reciter and commentator Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb (d. 29/649) considered the *Spirit* and the *perfect man* references to the spirit of Jesus (IK, Rb; see also R, Ṭs for a similar interpretation that is not attributed to Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb), who is described in 4:171 as a *Spirit from* God.

perfect man. (18) She said, "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if you are reverent!" (19) He said, "I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy." (20) She said, "How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?" (21) He said, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for Me.' " And [it is thus] that We might make him a sign unto mankind, and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter decreed. (22) So she conceived him and

18 When Mary sees the angel, she is afraid, since he appeared as an unfamiliar man of whose intentions she was unsure (IK, Ṭ). She thus utters a formula of seeking refuge in God, who is addressed here and throughout the *sūrah* by the Name *al-Raḥmān* ("the Compassionate"). The formula for seeking refuge is found in the opening verses of *Sūrahs* 113 and 114 and is commonly uttered by Muslims in the face of great danger or evil or prior to the *basmalah* when performing ritual ablutions or beginning any form of prayer or recitation of the Quran.

19 *Messenger* translates *rasūl,* which can refer to angelic as well as prophetic messengers. The angel has come *to bestow upon* Mary *a pure boy,* that is, to be the cause of her conceiving a son by breathing into her sleeve or clothing (Bḍ, R, Z; cf. 21:91; 66:12) or else simply to bring her the news that she will conceive such a son (Q, R, Z). The boy will be *pure* of all sin or fault (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). *Pure* here renders *zakī,* which also relates to the concept of growth, and some have thus suggested that this means that Jesus would grow in purity and goodness from infancy to manhood (Aj, R, Ṭs).

20 See Zachariah's similar response in v. 8 and 3:40 and Mary's in 3:47. As with Zachariah in v. 8, Mary's response is understood to be an inquiry as to how the conception of the child would come about, for example, through marriage to someone or in another way (IK, Ṭ), rather than an expression of doubt regarding the message the angel has brought. *No man has touched* her means that she had not engaged in normal sexual relations through marriage, while her statement that she had not been *unchaste* refers to her innocence of all illicit sexual relations (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Although, as mentioned above, a minority of Islamic scholars have considered Mary a female prophet (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 19), most have not. Thus for some commentators, Mary's miraculous conception of Jesus is proof that inimitable evidentiary miracles (*muʿjizāt*), usually given to the prophets in order to serve as proof of their prophethood, may also be given to those who are not prophets (Ṭs). Others have considered the conception of Jesus in this manner to be a miracle bestowed upon Jesus or Zachariah (Ṭs) rather than upon Mary.

21 *Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, "It is easy for Me"* is the same response given to Zachariah in v. 9; see 19:9c. Jesus is *a sign unto mankind* in that he serves as a proof of God's Power as Creator (IK), since his birth shows that God is capable of bringing a child into being without a father (IK, R), just as He was capable of bringing Adam into being without a mother or a father (IK). Through his miraculous conception and birth and his speaking as an infant (vv. 30–33), Jesus is also a sign or proof of his own prophethood and of his mother's innocence (Ṭs). Cf. 23:50, where Mary and Jesus together are said to constitute *a sign.* Jesus is also *a mercy from* God to Mary and to those who believe in him and are guided by him (Ṭ, Ṭs).

22 Mary *conceived* Jesus when the Spirit was *breathed into her* (21:91; 66:12); according to a common account, the Spirit was breathed through the opening of her shirt or its sleeve (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). Adam is similarly brought to life when God *breathed into him of His Spirit* (15:29; 32:9; 38:72), although it is their creation through Divine fiat rather than through ordinary human means that is explicitly identified as the basis of the similarity between Adam and Jesus in 3:59: *Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him "Be!" and he was.* According to some, when Zachariah's wife came to Mary to announce her own pregnancy, she found Mary pregnant as well, and the child in the womb of Zachariah's wife seemed to prostrate before the child in Mary's (IK, Ṭ), hence fulfilling

withdrew with him to a place far off. (23) And the pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, "Would that I had died before this and were a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!" (24) So he called out to her from below her, "Grieve not! Thy Lord has placed a rivulet beneath thee. (25) And shake toward thyself the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon

the angels' proclamation in 3:39 that John would *confirm a Word from God,* the *Word* being Jesus; cf. Luke 1:41, where the baby in the womb of Zachariah's wife, Elizabeth, "leaped" when she encountered the pregnant Mary.

Some identify the *place far off* to which she withdraws, like the *eastern place* in v. 16, as an area east of the Temple (Ṭ). However, others describe it more convincingly as a distant place where she and her family were not known. She goes far off in order to avoid embarrassing Zachariah as well as out of fear for her child and perhaps herself, anticipating that her people, among whom she had a reputation for great piety and asceticism, would not understand (R). Wahb ibn Munabbih, who was familiar with the Jewish and Christian scriptures, reports that Mary's pregnancy was known to one of her relatives named Joseph, who also served in the Temple and helped her during her pregnancy (R, Ṭ; see also IK for a similar account not attributed to Wahb ibn Munabbih). Some accounts assert that she later fled with Joseph to Egypt as her time of delivery drew near (R, Ṭ); cf. Matthew 2:13–14, where Mary and Joseph, who are married in the Biblical account, flee to Egypt after Jesus' birth.

23 The *date palm* to which Mary is driven—seeking both refuge from the sight of others and strength, by leaning on or clinging to the tree for support (R, Ṭs, Z)—is said to have been a dried-up palm trunk, devoid of fruit or green fronds because its top had been cut off. Moreover, the season is said to have been winter (R, Z), making the tree's production of ripe dates in v. 25 particularly miraculous.

Mary's wish to have *died before this* means that she wished she could have died before the onset of the difficulties she now faced as a woman giving birth to a child alone, without a husband, including both the physical pain of labor and embarrassment about what people would think of her (Aj, IK, Ṭ). Some commentators assert that Mary's longing for death should not be understood to mean that she lacked patience, contentment, or trust in God (Aj). Al-Rāzī observes that longing for death is often the response of the righteous to suffering (R), as they refuse to abandon their moral or spiritual duties, but are nonetheless fearful of or saddened by the consequences that may result. Al-Rāzī gives, as one of several examples, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's similar statement before the Battle of the Camel (36/656), the opening battle of the First Civil War during his caliphate. *Forgotten* (*nasyan*) and *utterly forgotten* (*mansiyyan*) translate different forms of the same root and convey Mary's desire to be completely forgotten from memory, such that no one would look for her, all trace of her would be erased, and it would be as if she were completely unknown or had never dwelt upon the earth (IK, Ṭ). On a spiritual level, Mary's statement can be understood as expressing the ultimate victory against the worldly ego, for it indicates that she wished not only to withdraw from and forget the world, but also to be utterly forgotten by it.

24 The voice that calls out to Mary here may be the Archangel Gabriel's or Jesus' (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Because the voice calls out *from below her,* many consider it more likely that it is Jesus addressing her after he has been delivered (Ṭ, Ṭs), although some point out that if it is Gabriel calling to her, then *from below her* (*min taḥtihā*) may mean "in front of her" (Ṭ, Ṭs). Alternately, *from below her* may mean from below the palm trunk (Ṭ, Z), which is also grammatically feminine and would take the feminine pronoun; or else it may mean that Gabriel was calling to her from the valley or the foot of the mountain below her (IK, Ṭs). *Rivulet* translates *sariyyan;* however, some suggest that *sariyyan,* which can also be an adjective meaning "noble" or "distinguished," may be a description of Jesus himself (IK, Qu, Ṭs, Z).

25 The *trunk of the date palm,* which was said to have been dried out (IK, Ṭ), became a source

thee. (26) So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if thou seest any human being, say, 'Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate, so I shall not speak this day to any man.' " (27) Then she came with him unto her people, carrying him. They said, "O Mary! Thou hast brought an amazing thing! (28) O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not an evil man, nor was thy mother unchaste." (29) Then she pointed to him. They said, "How shall we speak to one who is yet a child in the cradle?" (30) He said, "Truly I am a servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. (31) He has made me blessed

of fresh dates (Ṭ). The miracle of fresh, ripe dates falling from a dried-out tree symbolically replicates the miracle of the birth of John from his old and formerly barren mother (vv. 7–9); it also recalls the miracle of fresh fruit "out of season" that came to Mary while locked in her solitary prayer room; see 3:37c.

26 *So eat* is an injunction to Mary to nourish her body with the fresh dates, said to be particularly beneficial for women during childbirth (IK, Q, Z), but may also be a command to "nourish her soul" (Bḍ, IK) and to be consoled (Z) thereby, as the provision of miraculous food and drink are symbolic of God's love and concern for her (Rb). To *cool thine eye* (*qarrī ʿaynan*) is a common Arabic expression meaning to be comforted and to become at peace. A version of this expression is also used to describe the state of Moses' mother when the infant Moses is temporarily restored to her so that she might nurse him (20:40). According to some, Mary is enjoined to be at peace upon contemplating the radiant beauty of her son (Rb).

*I have vowed* translates *nadhartu,* the same word used by Mary's mother in making her vow to God regarding the child in her womb (3:35). The verb *nadhara* is similar to the Biblical term "Nazarite," used to describe those who had undertaken a vow to "separate themselves to the Lord" for a stated period of time (see Numbers 6:2) and refrain from speech except in the case of prayer. Some report that it was a practice among some Israelites and Jews of Mary's time to fast by abstaining from speech as well as from food and drink (Ṭ, Ṭs). Mary's fast of silence also evokes Zachariah's temporary inability to speak as a *sign* of the impending birth of his son (v. 10; 3:41); and some say her fast of silence served as a similar "sign" (Ṭ). Her fast of silence, however, also allowed Jesus to speak on her behalf (Ṭs). This freed her from the burden of having to argue for her own innocence before her family (Bḍ).

27 *Amazing thing* translates *fariyyan,* which indicates something that is serious and grave as well as unprecedented (Bḍ, Ṭ, Ṭs).

28 That Mary is addressed as *sister of Aaron* is not, according to commentators, meant to indicate that she was the biological sister of the prophet Aaron, brother of Moses. This would be chronologically impossible, although Mary's father's name is ʿImrān (66:12), as is that of the prophets Moses and Aaron, according to Islamic tradition. Some commentators explain that the name Aaron signified righteousness among the Jews of this time, and so the title *sister of Aaron* was meant to indicate that Mary was like Aaron in righteousness (Ṭ, Ṭs). Another explanation is that the name Aaron was common among the Israelites and that Mary had a half brother named Aaron (Th, Ṭs, Z). The most widely held view among the commentators is that Mary was a descendant of the prophet Aaron and the title *sister of Aaron* is meant as a reference to her noble lineage (Bḍ, Th, Ṭs, Z); see also 3:33–34c.

29 Mary *pointed to* the infant Jesus, indicating that they should speak to him (Ṭ). Their response reflects their incredulousness at being instructed to speak to an infant. According to some commentators, their response suggests a tone of anger, for they initially thought Mary's instruction was meant mockingly or in jest (Q, Ṭs, Z). *Child in the cradle* here may mean a child in the mother's lap (Ṭ).

30–31 According to some commentators, Jesus' sudden ability to speak, like Zachariah's

wheresoever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I live, (32) and [has made me] dutiful toward my mother. And He has not made me domineering, wretched. (33) Peace be upon me the day I was born, the

sudden inability to do so in v. 10, was a temporary matter and that after delivering the statements recounted in vv. 30–33 Jesus returned to the ordinary state of an infant as yet incapable of speech (R, Q). The miraculous and temporary gift of speech was bestowed upon him in order to absolve his mother of any blame or suspicion (Q). Al-Ṭabrisī notes, however, that some claimed that Jesus' intellect was perfected and he was a prophet from this time onward, in which case his miraculous ability to speak as an infant continued beyond this encounter with his mother's family.

It is significant that the first words spoken by Jesus were an assertion of his servanthood in relation to God (Q); emphasis is also placed on Jesus' servanthood in 4:172, and the idea of Jesus as "servant of God" is understood by Muslims to serve as a response to Christian claims regarding the divinity or sonship of Jesus (see 4:172–73c; 5:75c). The Prophet Muhammad is also repeatedly described as God's *servant* in the Quran (see 17:1; 25:1; 53:10; 57:9), and according to Islamic tradition, one of the Prophet's names, like the name of his father, was ʿAbd Allāh ("servant of God").

Jesus' words *He has given me the Book*—that is, the Gospel (Z)—mean that it had been decreed that Jesus would be given the Book (Ṭ), since he was still an infant and the meaning of these words would only be fulfilled in the future (Th, Ṭs). Others suggest that Jesus was taught the Torah through inspiration while he was yet in the womb (Th) or, as noted above, that he was made a prophet when he was still a child; see 3:48 regarding God's teaching the scriptures, including the Torah and Gospel, to Jesus. That Jesus had been *made . . . blessed* is understood to mean that Jesus is a source of spiritual benefit (Ṭ, Z) for those who follow his religion (Th), that he is a "teacher of the good" (Ṭ, Th, Z), a guide for those in error, a vindicator of the oppressed, one who brings abundance to the deprived, and an enjoiner of right and forbidder of wrong (Q, Qu, Ṭ), which the Quran describes as a characteristic of the believers in 3:104, 110, 114; 9:71, 112; 22:41; 31:17, and of the Prophet Muhammad specifically in 7:157. *Prayer and almsgiving* are frequently mentioned together in the Quran as pillars of correct religious practice for Muslim believers (see, e.g., 2:110, 177, 277; 4:162; 9:71) as well as for the People of the Book (e.g., 2:43, 83; 5:12). *Almsgiving* translates *zakāh,* a word that, in addition to almsgiving, may also refer to the practice of purifying oneself spiritually by avoiding sin and disobedience (Ṭ). *So long as I live* refers to the duration of Jesus' time on earth, for Muslims believe that Jesus has not yet died; he was taken directly to God (4:158) and will return to earth and die just prior to the end of time; see 4:158c.

32 Jesus, like John in v. 14, is characterized by filial piety; regarding the importance of filial piety, see 2:83; 4:36; 6:151; 17:23; 29:8c; 31:14; 46:15. Like John, he is also not *domineering,* that is, neither arrogant nor disobedient to God's commands (Ṭ) nor violent in anger (Q). Jesus is reported to have lived humbly: he ate mostly plant foods, wore a coarse hair shirt, sat on the ground, and was itinerant, without a fixed residence (Q). Despite his filial piety, Jesus is said to have treasured those who followed the truth of his message above all. According to one report, when a woman saw Jesus raising the dead and healing the sick, she said to him, "Happy is the womb that bore thee and the breasts that nursed thee!" He replied, "Happy are those who recite the Book of God and follow what is in it" (Ṭ, Th). A similar sentiment is conveyed in Mark 3:31–35; Matthew 12:46–50; and Luke 8:19–21, where Jesus identifies his true family not as his biological mother and relatives, but as those who "hear the word of God and do it."

33 Jesus' statement in this verse is identical to that regarding John in v. 15, although here the triple invocation of peace is uttered in the first person by Jesus himself. The invocation is understood to mean that Jesus enjoys protection from God against Satan; he was spared Satan's touch on the day he was born (Ṭ), and he will be free from fear on the day he dies (after his return to

day I die, and the day I am raised alive!" (34) That is Jesus son of Mary—a statement of the truth, which they doubt. (35) It is not for God to take a child. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is. (36) "Truly God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path." (37) Yet the parties differed among themselves, and woe unto those who disbelieve for the witnessing of a tremendous day! (38) How well they will hear and how well

earth; see 43:61c) and on the day he is raised alive (Ṭ) with the rest of humanity (see commentary on 4:157–59).

34 *A statement of the truth* (*qawl al-ḥaqq*) is most likely a description of the account of Jesus as presented in the Quran, which is understood by Muslim commentators to be the true account of his life and person, as opposed to the account of the Jews, who did not accept his prophethood, and the account of the Christians, who considered him to be the son of God and Divine (Q, Ṭ). The phrase might also be meant to describe the words uttered by Jesus in vv. 30–33 (Q). *Which they doubt* would then refer to the Jews and Christians (Ṭ, Th), who are said elsewhere to be *in doubt* concerning the true nature and story of Jesus (see 4:157 and commentary). Alternately, *a statement of the truth* may be related to the description of Jesus as a *Word* from God in 3:45 (Q, Th), although in that verse it is *kalimah,* which is translated *Word,* rather than *qawl* (*statement*) as is found here. Since *the Truth* (*al-Ḥaqq*) is one of the Names of God, some consider *Truth* here to be a reference to God, so that *a statement of the truth* could be rendered "the Word of God" and would thus be a description of Jesus that is synonymous with his description in 3:45 as *a Word from Him.*

35 The Quran repeatedly rejects and derides the notion that God could have a child; see 6:100–102 and commentary as well as 2:116; 4:171; 10:68; 16:57; 21:26; 39:4. Quranic refutations of God's having a child are usually accompanied, as here, by the exclamation *Glory be to Him!* See also commentary on 112:3: *He begets not, nor was He begotten.* Regarding the Divine creative fiat *Be!* as the means by which God brings creatures into existence, see 2:117 and commentary, as well as 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 36:82; 40:68. See 3:59 regarding Jesus specifically.

36 As translated, this verse is read as a continuation of the words that Jesus speaks in vv. 30–33 (Ṭ, Ṭs), and the first sentence is nearly identical to Jesus' words in 5:117. Read in this way, the statement reiterates the idea that Jesus is a servant in relation to God, Whom he describes as *my Lord and your Lord.* The command *so worship Him* indicates that those who would worship Jesus should worship God instead, who is Jesus' Lord as well as their own. However, the verse may also be read as a continuation from v. 34, so that it could be rendered: "That is Jesus son of Mary . . . and that is God, my Lord and your Lord" (Ṭ, Ṭs). Regarding the *straight path,* understood to be the path of true religion that leads to salvation, see 1:6c.

37 *The parties* who *differed among themselves* are said by some to be the Jews and the Christians, who differ with each other over the status of Jesus (Q, Z). Others suggest that *the parties* refers to different Christian sects, for example, the Jacobites and Nestorians (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), which were based in the Near East. The *witnessing of a tremendous day* refers to the witnessing or experiencing of great fear in the face of the reckoning and punishment meted out on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭ, Z). The *witnessing* may also be a reference to the testimony of others against the disbelievers on that Day, including the testimony of the angels, the prophets, and leaders of their respective religious communities as well as the testimony of even their own skin and limbs against themselves (see 24:24; 36:65; 41:20; Z). *Witnessing* translates *mashhad,* which most literally denotes the time and place of the reckoning and judgment (Z). The verse may thus allude to the great fear that this scene or setting will induce.

38 *On the Day* of Resurrection and Judgment, the disbelievers will hear and see keenly, in contrast to their spiritual "blindness" and "deafness"

they will see on the Day they come unto Us. But the wrongdoers, today, are in manifest error. (39) And warn them of the Day of Regret, when the matter will have been decreed, while they are in a state of heedlessness and believe not. (40) Surely We shall inherit the earth and whatsoever is upon it, and unto Us shall they be returned. (41) And remember Abraham in the Book—verily he

in earthly life to the signs of God and the teachings of the scriptures and prophets (Ṭs); regarding spiritual blindness or deafness in this life, see, for example, 2:18c as well as 2:171; 5:71; 17:97. See also 50:22, which says regarding the Last Day: *You were indeed heedless of this. Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing.* In order to point to another aspect of existence in the Hereafter, a different metaphor of blindness is used in 20:125, where it is said that those who were spiritually blind in this life will be *raised . . . blind* as a testament to their blindness in earthly life (see 20:124–27c). Even if the hearing and seeing of the disbelievers will be strong on this Day, it will be of no benefit to them, just as believing on this Day brings no benefit to those who were not believers in earthly life; see, for example, 40:84–85 (Ṭ, Ṭs).

39 Here the Prophet is instructed to warn the Quraysh of *the Day of Regret*—a descriptive reference to the Day of Resurrection and Judgment found only in this verse, although the idea that one's evil deeds will be a source of regret in the Hereafter is mentioned, for example, in 2:167 and 8:36. Some commentators explain this *regret* by saying that those whose disbelief and evil deeds earned them a place in Hellfire will first be shown the dwellings in the Garden that had been prepared for them, had they been believers (Ṭ).

*The matter will have been decreed* and similar phrases are used in several verses to indicate the coming of the Last Day and Judgment (see 2:210; 6:8; 14:22). The "matter is decreed" at that point, because after the coming of the Last Day, one no longer has the opportunity to repent and mend one's ways in a manner that would change one's fate in the Hereafter. *When the matter will have been decreed* is thus a description of the point at which final and everlasting Judgment is made. According to a *ḥadīth* often associated with this verse, after human beings have been sent to the Garden or to Hell, God will bring forth death itself in the form of a ram and "slaughter" it before the inhabitants of both the Garden and the Fire to indicate that death can no longer change or bring an end to their respective fates (Q, Ṭ).

40 One of the Quranic Names of God is the Inheritor (*al-Wārith*); see 15:23; 28:58; and also 21:89, where He is described as the *best of inheritors*. God is the *Inheritor* insofar as all things belong to Him and thus return unto Him in the end; see 57:5: *Unto Him belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and unto God are all matters returned;* and 55:26–27: *All upon it* (the earth) *passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty.*

41 *Truthful* translates *ṣiddīq*, a word that also means "sincere" or "loyal." The Quran also uses this term to describe Joseph (12:46), Idrīs (v. 56), and Mary (5:75). The plural, *ṣiddiqūn/in*, is used for those who believe earnestly in God and the prophets (57:19), and the *ṣiddiqūn* are counted together with the prophets, the witnesses (or martyrs), and the righteous as those whom God blesses (4:69). According to al-Rāzī, the term refers to those who are honest by nature and habit, but may also refer to those who are constantly confirming the truth (regarding this term, see also 4:69–70c). Abraham is said to have been truthful in his speech, his promises, and his deeds (Ṭ).

Islamic tradition makes a distinction between the title *prophet* (*nabī*), which pertains to all those given a message from God—of either glad tidings or warning, or both—to deliver to their people, and "messenger" (*rasūl*), which refers to those prophets who have brought a new revelation or religious law for their people. All messengers are prophets, but not all prophets are messengers. The two terms are more distinct in meaning in Islamic tradition than they are in the Quran, however, where certain prophets, such as Hūd and other Arabian non-Biblical prophets, who were given only a message of warning and not a new religion

was truthful, a prophet— (42) when he said unto his father, "O my father! Why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, nor can avail you in any way? (43) O my father! Verily knowledge has come unto me that has not come unto you. So follow me, and I shall guide you upon a sound path. (44) O my father! Worship not Satan; surely Satan is disobedient toward the Compassionate. (45) O my father! Truly I fear that a punishment from the Compassionate

or scripture, are referred to as "messenger" (*rasūl*) rather than "prophet" (*nabī*; see 7:67; 26:125, 143). Abraham is considered both a messenger and a prophet in Islamic tradition, but only the title "prophet" is used explicitly for Abraham in the Quran itself. That Abraham is also a messenger (*rasūl*) according to the traditional definition may be implicit in 4:163–65 and in his having been given *scriptures* in 53:36–37 and 87:19.

42 This verse begins one of several Quranic accounts of Abraham's confrontation with his father, Āzar (6:74), and his people regarding their idolatry; see also 6:76–83; 21:51–67; 26:69–87; 37:84–96; 43:26–28. In this verse, Abraham presents an argument against idolatry that is repeated in various ways throughout the Quran, namely, that it is illogical to worship something that can neither hear nor see (see 7:194–96c). Al-Rāzī elaborates further on this argument regarding the futility of worshipping idols or false deities, noting that if the idols cannot see or hear, they can neither distinguish those who worship them from those who do not nor hear the supplications of their devotees; moreover, to worship such as these is to worship something that is less capable than oneself (R). Some commentators indicate that the false objects of worship for Abraham's people were simple idols (Q, Th). Al-Rāzī suggests, however, that Abraham's people likely did not consider these idols to be powerful in themselves; rather, they may have worshipped them as representatives of the stars, which they considered to possess Divine Power, or they worshipped them as representatives of great people who they thought could act as intercessors with God on their behalf (R). The idols also cannot *avail . . . in any way;* that is, they cannot prevent or avert harm or bring benefit (Ṭ); cf. 21:66; 26:73.

43 The *knowledge* that Abraham claims to possess uniquely is the spiritual knowledge that has come to him as a prophet and by which his father and his people might be guided—specifically, knowledge of the Reality of God and the Hereafter (Q). That Abraham's father is asked here to accept spiritual guidance from his son is a clear inversion of the tribal norm and is thus one of the ways in which the Quran makes the point that spiritual authority, unlike tribal authority, is not determined by age or lineage. This point serves as an implicit response to those who would claim that their rejection of prophetic messages was done on the basis of deference to their "fathers" or to their fathers' traditions (see, e.g., 2:170; 5:104). This is also one of several places in this *sūrah* where human age is shown to be irrelevant to the manifestation of God's Will, as when the aged Zachariah and his barren wife become capable of bearing a child (vv. 4–9) and when the infant Jesus is endowed with the power to speak (vv. 30–33). The *sound path* is understood to mean the path of correct religion by which salvation may be attained (Q).

44 *Worship not Satan* is understood to mean that one should not obey Satan's promptings toward sin and evil (Q, R, Th), since Abraham's people did not "worship" Satan directly. The commentators point out, however, that obeying another being through an act of disobedience to God is tantamount to "worshipping" that being (Q, Th), a point also discussed in 9:31c.

45 *Friend* here translates *walī*, which can also mean "protector" (as it is often rendered elsewhere in this translation of the Quran) and which designates a close bond of allegiance, support, or even love. The state of being a *friend* (*walī*) of Satan may be contrasted with that of being a friend of God (*walī Allāh;* see 10:62–64c), a term used in the Islamic and especially the Sufi tradition to designate the sanctity or sainthood of those whose devotion to God has led them to

will befall you, such that you will become a friend of Satan." (46) He said, "Do you reject my gods, O Abraham? If you cease not, I shall surely stone you. Take leave of me for a long while!" (47) He said, "Peace be upon you! I shall seek forgiveness for you from my Lord. Verily He has been gracious unto me. (48) And I withdraw myself from you and that which you call upon apart from God. And I call upon my Lord; it may be that in calling upon my Lord, I will not be

attain a state of nearness to Him, even in this life, and who therefore may serve as channels of His Grace and Favor in this world, although not in the same way or to the same degree as those who are prophets. Analogously, those who are friends of Satan can thus be considered channels of Satan's influence and temptation in this world. When one becomes a friend or associate of Satan, one is dissociated from or repudiated by God (R, Ṭ), and this is the fate that Abraham fears, or according to some commentators "knows" (Q, Ṭ, Th), will befall his father if he persists in his worship of idols. Abraham's fear that his father will become Satan's *friend* may also mean that he fears that his father will end up as a companion or cohabitant with Satan in Hellfire (Q, R). It does not mean that Satan will be his friend in the literal sense, since Satan is repeatedly described as the *enemy* of human beings (see, e.g., 2:168; 6:142; 7:22) and in the Hereafter Satan will abandon his followers (14:22). Al-Rāzī notes that each argument in vv. 42–45 is preceded by the vocative *O my father,* indicating that the words he speaks are spoken out of love and earnest filial concern for the spiritual well-being of his father (R), not out of disrespect.

46 *I shall surely stone you* is understood by most to mean that Abraham's father was threatening to curse him or to "stone him with words" (Q, Ṭ, Th) rather than to stone him physically, although some mention this possibility (Q), also discussed in 26:116c. His warning, *Take leave of me for a long while,* likely means, "Take leave of me so that you will be safe from my punishment!" (Q, Ṭ, Th).

47 Abraham's response, contrasting sharply with his father's threat, is *Peace be upon you,* which the Quran identifies as the greeting of the believers, both in this world and in Paradise; see 6:54c; 7:46–47c. It is also the response the Quran enjoins toward *the ignorant* and those who engage in *idle talk,* as in 25:63: *The servants of the Compassionate are those who walk humbly upon the earth, and when the ignorant address them, say, "Peace";* and 28:55: *And when they hear idle talk, they turn away therefrom and say, "Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds. Peace be upon you! We do not seek out the ignorant."* Abraham's response is not meant as a greeting, however, but rather as an indication that he will discontinue his confrontation with his father, as he does not intend to fight him, and that his father has nothing to fear from him (Q, Ṭ). Abraham seeks forgiveness for his father here, but *when it became clear to him that* his father *was an enemy of God, he repudiated him* (9:114).

48 Abraham promises here that he will heed his father's request and take leave of him; he also removes himself from all association with the idols and false deities that Abraham's father and people *call upon apart from God.* This is understood as his taking leave of his family to migrate to the Holy Land (Th). *Wretched* translates *shaqiyyan,* which can describe one who suffers perdition in the Hereafter. But here, as with Zachariah's similar declaration in v. 4, that Abraham will *not be wretched* in his calling upon God more likely means that God will answer his prayers and supplications (Ṭ). In the context of this verse, Abraham is said to have called upon his Lord to grant him family and children who would strengthen him, now that he was alone and separated from his father and his people (Q). The answer to Abraham's prayer is then recounted in the next verse, where he is given Isaac and Jacob. If this is indeed the content of Abraham's supplication, then it would be consistent with a larger theme of this *sūrah,* namely, God's Compassion in bestowing blessed children upon prophets and other holy persons like Zachariah and Mary. Alternately, some suggest that Abraham's prayer was

wretched." (49) So when he had withdrawn from them and that which they called upon apart from God, We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, and each We made a prophet. (50) And We bestowed upon them something of Our Mercy, and ordained for them a sublime, faithful renown. (51) And remember Moses in the Book. Verily he was devoted, and he was a messenger, a prophet. (52) We called out to him from the right side of the Mount, and drew him nigh in

that his father would be guided (Q), although this seems less likely, since according to the Quran this guidance does not come to pass.

49–50 Isaac and Jacob are also described as gifts *bestowed upon* Abraham by God in 6:84; 21:72; 29:27; see also 14:39, where it is Isaac and Ishmael who are bestowed upon Abraham, and 11:71, where Abraham's wife is given *glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob* (cf. 37:101). The statement *each We made a prophet* is meant to include Abraham as well as Isaac and Jacob (Ṭ); Isaac and Jacob are also identified as prophets elsewhere; see 6:84–89; 6:84c. Here, Isaac and Jacob are gifts *bestowed upon him* to compensate Abraham for the loss of his father and his people (Ṭ), and al-Ṭabarī notes that the gift of these two prophets was far better than what he had lost.

The *Mercy* that is bestowed upon them by God is said by some to refer to bounty and provision in this world, such as wealth and children (Ṭ, Th), while others say that it also refers to the gifts of prophethood and revelation (Th); see 29:27c. *Sublime, faithful renown* is an idiomatic translation of *lisāna ṣidqin ʿaliyyan,* which literally means "a sublime tongue of truthfulness." However, commentators all indicate that the phrase refers to the high reputation and sincere praise that Abraham and his family enjoyed and still enjoy among people of many creeds (Q, Ṭ, Th, Ṭs), including not only Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but also the pre-Islamic pagan Arabs, who recognized Abraham as their venerable forefather. This is an answer to Abraham's supplication in 26:84: *And make for me faithful renown (lisān ṣidq) among later generations.*

The Sufi commentator Ibn ʿAjībah interprets this verse to mean that all those who remove themselves from worldly and created things and withdraw to the "realm of Truth" in order to witness the Truth will be rewarded with spiritual knowledge and "holy gifts." He asserts that withdrawing from creatures is a necessary condition at the beginning of the path for Sufi disciples, but when they reach a certain level, it becomes incumbent upon them to mingle with people and be in the world, for at that point their encounters with other people will increase their knowledge and understanding (Aj). He further states that Shaykh Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) cited this verse when commenting that the practice of solitude leads to "the lifting of veils, the descent of Mercy, the realization of love, and 'a truthful tongue' in speech." The reference to "truthful tongue," although used in al-Shādhilī's statement to mean honesty and veracity, appears to be an allusion to *lisāna ṣidqin* (lit. "tongue of truthfulness"), which in the present verse is used idiomatically to mean great renown.

51 For other major accounts of Moses, see 2:49–74; 5:20–26; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 18:60–82; 20:9–97; 26:10–67; 27:7–14; 28:3–46; 43:46–56; 79:15–26. Moses was *devoted* (*mukhliṣ*) to the One God, worshipping Him alone (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), without hypocrisy (Q, Z). True devotion or sincerity, especially for Sufis, means to worship God only for the sake of God, not for the sake of the blessings of this world or the next that one might attain through such worship (Aj); regarding devotion, see 7:29c; 31:32c; 98:5c. *Mukhliṣ* can also be read as *mukhlaṣ,* meaning "specially chosen" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); both can be considered correct according to al-Ṭabarī. Moses is a *messenger,* since he brings his people a new scripture (the Torah) and through it a new Divine Law; he is a *prophet* to both the Israelites and Pharaoh's people in that he brings messages of warning to both.

52 *The Mount* here, as elsewhere, refers to Mt. Sinai (*Ṭūr Sīnīn*); see 2:63–64c. *From the right side of the Mount* refers to the side of the mountain that was on the right as Moses approached it from Midian and saw the burning bush in the

intimate discourse. (53) And We bestowed upon him, from Our Mercy, his brother, Aaron, a prophet. (54) And remember Ishmael in the Book. Verily he was true to the promise, and he was a messenger, a prophet. (55) He used to bid his people to

distance (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs); see 20:10; 27:7; 28:29. The *right side of the Mount* is sometimes used in the Islamic mystical tradition as a symbol for the innermost dimension of the heart (K), which Sufis often speak of as the place of Divine Self-Revelation and the locus of *intimate discourse* with God (K). It is said by some that God *drew him nigh* until he could hear the scratching of the pen on the tablets of the Torah (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs; see 7:143c) or until he could hear God's Speech directly (Ṭs). That God *drew him nigh* may also mean that God raised him to a station of nobility and purity (Ṭs) or to the noble station in which God spoke to him outside of the context of revelation (Q). For some, the latter interpretation is preferable, since it avoids the theological impossibility of discussing physical distance in relation to God, as God does not reside or inhere in any place or location (Ṭs). Other commentators offer a mystical description of Moses' nearness to God at this moment, saying that there are seventy thousand veils of light and darkness between the Throne and the earth, and Moses came so close that there was but a single veil between himself and God (Ṭ, Th). *In intimate discourse* is likely a reference to God speaking to Moses directly, as mentioned in 4:164, which is the basis for his prophetic title *Kalīm Allāh* ("the one who speaks to God and to whom God speaks").

53 Just as John was a mercy from God to Zachariah (see 19:2–3c) and Isaac and Jacob were His gifts to Abraham (v. 49), God's gift of mercy to Moses is his brother, Aaron. Aaron was reportedly older than Moses. God's giving Aaron to Moses is understood, therefore, to mean that He gave him the gift of Aaron's prophethood (Ṭ), for Aaron was also a prophet, although not a messenger (*rasūl*), since he served to support the revelation brought by Moses rather than bringing a separate one. Nonetheless, Aaron along with Moses is said to have been given *the Criterion, and a radiant light and a reminder for the reverent* (understood as a reference to the Torah) in 21:48, and both are given *Our signs and a manifest authority* in 23:45; in 37:117, God *gave the two of them the Book that makes clear.* God's sending Aaron as a helper for Moses is said to come in response to Moses' supplication in 20:29–30, *And appoint for me a helper from among my family, Aaron, my brother* (Q, Ṭs), and in 28:34, *And my brother, Aaron, is more eloquent than me in speech. So send him with me as a helper* (IK). In certain Sufi commentaries, Aaron is said to represent the esoteric dimension of the revelation given to Moses (Rb), and his position is compared to that of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib vis-à-vis the Prophet, for example, in the famous *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says to ʿAlī, "Your position in relation to me is as the position of Aaron in relation to Moses, except that there shall be no prophet after me."

54–55 Ishmael, the son of Abraham, is identified as both *a messenger* and *a prophet,* presumably since he was responsible for bringing Abrahamic monotheism to the people of Arabia, and especially to the tribe of Jurhum (Ṭs), among whom he and his mother are said to have settled in Makkah. That he was *true to the promise* reportedly refers to his reputation for keeping his word (Ṭ, Ṭs). Many relate an account in which someone had asked Ishmael to wait for him in a specified location, and then forgot about him. Ishmael is said to have waited either several days or an entire year without moving from the spot (IK, Q, Ṭs, Z). A similar account is told about the Prophet before his prophetic mission (IK, Q). For those who consider Ishmael rather than Isaac to be the son nearly sacrificed by Abraham in 37:102, the description of Ishmael as *true to the promise* may also allude to his remaining steadfast during this ordeal (Q); see 37:102c.

He was *pleasing* (*marḍiyyan*) unto *his Lord* as a result of his obedience, righteousness, purity (Ṭ, Ṭs), and avoidance of all ugliness in his conduct (Ṭs). These qualities recall Zachariah's prayer for a son who would be *pleasing* (*raḍiyyan,* from the same Arabic root) to God (v. 6) as well as the description of John in vv. 13–14. According to the Quran, the religious duties of *prayer and almsgiving* are commanded by God for all Muslims

prayer and almsgiving, and he was pleasing unto his Lord. (56) And remember Idrīs in the Book. Verily he was truthful, a prophet. (57) And We raised him to a sublime station. (58) They are those whom God has blessed among the prophets of the progeny of Adam, and of those whom We carried with Noah, and of the progeny of Abraham and Israel, and of those whom We guided and chose. When the signs of the Compassionate were recited unto them, they would fall

(e.g., 2:110, 177; 4:77) as well as for the People of the Book more generally (cf. 2:43, 83; 5:12; 19:31). Some say Ishmael used to command his people to perform prayer at night and give charity during the day (Ṭs); the Prophet is also told to bid his family *to prayer* in 20:132.

56–57 Idrīs is identified as *truthful* (*ṣiddīq*) and *a prophet,* as is Abraham in v. 41. Idrīs is also mentioned along with Ishmael and Dhu'l-Kifl in 21:85 as *among the patient.* Some say that his name is derived from the root *d-r-s,* meaning "to study," because of his love of studying (Q, Th, Ṭs), but others, such as al-Zamakhsharī, cast doubt on this interpretation. Idrīs is most commonly considered the great-grandfather of Noah, whose Biblical name is Enoch (Q, Ṭs, Th), but Idrīs is also sometimes identified with the Quranic Elias (Ilyās), see 6:85c; 37:123c. Given his antediluvian dates, Idrīs is said to have been the first to have written with a pen, to have had knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, and to have made sewn clothing (from animal skins; Q, Ṭs, Z); he is often referred to by the epithet Abu'l-Ḥukamāʾ ("father of the philosophers [or sages]") in Islamic philosophical and metaphysical works. Some say that he was the first prophet among the children of Adam (Q) and that he was given thirty scrolls (Q, Z). That God *raised him to a sublime station* is reported to mean that God raised him either bodily or in spirit to the fourth or sixth heaven (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); in a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet reports having encountered Idrīs in the fourth heaven during his miraculous Ascension (*miʿrāj*) through the seven heavens (Q). According to others, Idrīs has not yet died, having been *raised* alive, or taken directly, by God (Ṭ), much like Jesus in 4:158. His *sublime station* may also refer simply to his being a prophet (Z).

58 *They* refers to all of the prophets and sacred figures mentioned to this point in the *sūrah* (Ṭ, Z). *Progeny of Adam* may refer to all of these figures or specifically to Idrīs (Ṭ, Z), who otherwise would not fall into any of the other groups mentioned, since he predates Noah and Abraham. *Those whom We carried with Noah* refers to Abraham and his progeny, Isaac, Ishmael, and Jacob, while the *progeny of . . . Israel* (i.e., Jacob) refers to those sacred figures among Jacob's descendants who are mentioned in this *sūrah:* Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Mary, and Jesus (Ṭ, Z). *When the signs*—that is, the indications and proofs of God—were recited to them from the revealed Books (Ṭ), *they would fall down, prostrate and weeping* in submission and humility (R). Weeping is indicated in several *aḥādīth* as the appropriate response to hearing the Quran; according to one *ḥadīth,* the Prophet enjoins, "Recite the Quran and weep. And if you do not weep, then make yourself weep" (Z).

With its reference to prostrating, this verse is one of fifteen verses known as *sajdah* (prostration) verses; upon hearing these verses recited, Muslims are enjoined to prostrate physically. (The others are 7:206; 13:15; 16:49–50; 17:107–9; 22:18; 22:77; 25:60; 27:26; 32:15; 38:24; 41:37–38; 53:62; 84:21; 96:19, though there is some disagreement as to whether the prostration after 41:37–38 and 53:62 is obligatory or supererogatory, and most consider the prostration after 38:24 to be one of thanks rather than obligation.) Prostrating and weeping in response to the recitation of the Quran can be indicative of the spiritual quality of "tenderness of heart" (*riqqat al-qalb*), which, according to al-Qushayrī, was shared by all the prophets. The bodily prostration of the prophets to the recitation of the signs of God is a reflection of the prostration of their inner selves before the spiritual truths they have realized (Qu). Ibn ʿAjībah says that such a response to the recitation of the Quran is characteristic of the first stage of the love of God (*maḥabbah*), which is later replaced by joy

down, prostrate and weeping. (59) Then they were succeeded by a generation who neglected prayer and followed base desires. So they shall meet [the reward of] error, (60) save for those who repent and believe and work righteousness. It is they who shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be wronged in the least: (61) Gardens of Eden, those which the Compassionate promised His servants in the Unseen. Verily His Promise shall come to pass. (62) They shall hear no idle talk therein, but only "Peace!" And therein they shall have their provision, morning and evening. (63) This is the Garden We shall bequeath unto those among Our servants who were reverent. (64) "We descend not, save by the

at hearing the Words of the Beloved, as one draws spiritually nearer to Him.

59 According to Ibn ʿAbbās the *generation* who succeeded the prophets mentioned in v. 58 refers to the Jews (Ṭs, Z), while Mujāhid and Qatādah claim that it refers to the Muslim community at the end of time (Ṭs). Some say that "neglecting prayer" here refers to this later generation's failure to pray at all (Ṭ, Z), but others suggest that it means that they failed to say the prayers at their appointed time or delayed in performing them (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Regarding the importance of performing prayers at their specified times, see 4:103 and commentary. That they shall *meet [the reward of] error* may be understood to mean that they will meet the requital or punishment for their error (Ṭs, Z); some thus gloss *error* (*ghayy*) here as "evil" (Ṭs). According to some, *ghayy* is the name of a valley, well, or river in Hell (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

60 Even for those people described in v. 59, the door of repentance remains open until death (see 4:17–18c). "Believing" and "working righteousness" are repeatedly paired in the Quran as the twin bases for attaining to the Garden in the Hereafter, for both Muslims and followers of other faiths (see 2:62c; 5:69c), indicating the interconnectedness and indispensability of both faith and good works (see, e.g., 2:25; 3:57; 4:57; 7:42). For other verses asserting that God does not wrong people, see 2:272, 281; 3:25, 161; 4:49, 77, 124; 6:160; 8:60; 17:71; 23:62; 39:69.

61 *Gardens of Eden* refers to the paradisal gardens of the Hereafter; see also 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50; 40:8; 98:8. They are *in the Unseen* because they remain hidden to human beings while they are in this world (Ṭ); see 32:17: *No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it as a recompense for that which they used to do.* In the present verse, *His Promise* refers to the promise that God's servants and "friends" (*awliyāʾ*) will enter the Garden (Ṭ). That *His Promise shall come to pass* is similar to repeated assertions that *God's Promise is true* (see, e.g., 4:122; 10:4; 18:21).

62–63 Cf. 56:25–26. The notion of the paradisal Garden as a place in which there is *no idle talk* is mentioned in several verses (52:23; 56:25; 78:35; 88:10–11), as is the idea that the salutation with which the people of Paradise will be greeted, and with which they greet one another, is "Peace" (*salām*) (7:46; 10:10; 13:24; 14:23; 16:32; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73; 56:26). There they *shall have their provision* of food and drink and all that they desire (Ṭ), *morning and evening.* According to some, there is no night or midday in the Garden, as there is no darkness; "night" and "day" are thus measured in terms of the lowering and lifting of veils and the closing and opening of gates (Ṭ).

64 This verse was reportedly revealed when there had been an unusually long period—reportedly twelve, fifteen, or forty nights (Ṭ, Z)—during which no revelation had come to the Prophet through the Archangel Gabriel (Ṭ); see also the introduction to *Sūrah* 93 about 93:1–3, in which the Quran responds to the Prophet's concern over an earlier hiatus in the revelation. At the time of the revelation of the present verse, the Prophet was being questioned by those around him about the inhabitants of the cave and Dhu'l-Qarnayn (the Quranic accounts of these figures are found in *Sūrah* 18) as well as about the Spirit.

Command of thy Lord. Unto Him belongs that which is before us and that which is behind us, and whatsoever lies between that, and thy Lord is not forgetful— (65) the Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them. So worship Him and be steadfast in His worship. Dost thou know any who can be named alongside Him?" (66) Man says, "When I am dead, shall I be brought forth alive?" (67) Does man not remember that We created him before, when he was naught? (68) And by thy Lord, We shall surely gather them and the

The Prophet did not know the answers to these questions and was hoping for some revelation to guide him; the fact that for a while no revelation came concerned him and caused the idolaters to suggest that God had abandoned him (Z). When the archangel returned, the Prophet reportedly asked, "What prevents you from visiting us more than you do?" (Ṭ, Ṭs). The present verse is understood to represent Gabriel's direct response to the Prophet's question; the *We* in the opening line refers to the archangel (Z). Gabriel indicates that he comes to the Prophet only upon *the Command of thy Lord;* cf. 17:85, where *the Spirit,* sometimes identified with Gabriel, is said to be *from the Command of* God; and 97:4, where it is said that the *angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord.* A minority interpretation understands this verse to convey the words of the people of the Garden, since they do not settle in the Garden save by God's Command (Ṭs).

Various interpretations are given for *that which is before us* and *that which is behind* (or beyond) *us.* Some indicate that this pair of phrases refers to the temporal distinction between the affairs of this world and the Hereafter, to the time before the creation of human beings and the time after their annihilation, or simply to the past and the future, where the future includes what remains of this life as well as the Hereafter (Ṭ, Ṭs). Others suggest that this phrase refers to the spatial distinction between earth and Heaven (Ṭs). *Whatsoever lies between* may refer to the period between the "two blowings" of the trumpet (Ṭs)—the first of which will bring the world to an end and the second will wake the dead (see 39:68c)—or to the period of our earthly lives (Ṭs). God's possession of these three temporal or spatial dimensions indicates His encompassing all time and space. *Thy Lord is not forgetful* is meant to assure the Prophet that God has not "forgotten" him (cf. 93:3, where it is said that the Prophet has not been *forsaken*); rather, any interval between the revelations is providential and for his ultimate benefit (Z).

65 *Lord of the heavens and the earth* is a title for God found also in 13:16; 17:102; 18:14; 21:56; 26:24; 37:5; 38:66; 43:82; 44:7; 45:36; 78:37. *Dost thou know any who can be named alongside Him?* means: "Is there any who is His equal or His like in generosity and bounty?" (Ṭ) or "Is there any partner or associate who can be *named alongside Him*?" (Ṭ). The question is purely rhetorical, indicating that no one should be called "God" except Him, and thus it is not right that idols or false deities should be referred to as "gods" (Z). Some commentators suggest that this verse is meant to establish that no one other than God should be called *al-Raḥmān* (R, Z), a Divine Name that, as already mentioned, is used repeatedly for God throughout this *sūrah.*

66–67 In several other verses, similar rhetorical questions are posed by the idolaters in order to dismiss the idea of resurrection after death, followed by similar responses indicating that God's ability to create human beings the first time should be sufficient proof that He can do it again: 17:49–51; 17:98–99; 36:78–79; see also 17:49–51c.

68 The Quran mentions the disbelievers as allies or associates of *satans* in several verses (2:14; 6:121; 7:30), for God has *made the satans the friends of those who believe not* (7:27). These *satans* can also be either human beings or jinn (see, e.g., 6:112). That the disbelievers and the satans who inspire them shall be brought to Hell together is consistent with other verses indicating that God will *fill Hell* with Satan and those who follow him all together (see, e.g., 7:18c; 38:85). They are brought around Hell *on their knees,* a posture reflecting their state of fear, lowliness, and powerlessness in the face of

satans, and We shall surely bring them around Hell on their knees. (69) Then indeed We shall pluck out from every group whosoever among them was most insolent toward the Compassionate. (70) Then We shall surely know those who most deserve to burn therein. (71) And there is not one of you, but that he will approach it. It is, with thy Lord, a decree determined. (72) Then We shall save those who are reverent and leave the wrongdoers therein, on their knees. (73) And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, those who disbelieve say unto those who believe, "Which of the two groups is better in station or fairer in company?" (74) How many a generation We destroyed before them who were

impending judgment and punishment (R, Z); see also v. 72, where God leaves the wrongdoers in the Fire *on their knees,* and 45:28, where on the Last Day *thou wilt see every community upon its knees.*

69–70 *From every group* means from every religious community or nation (*ummah;* Ṭ). Here and in 6:159, the reference is to communities or groups who have fallen into error or schism. Those who are *most insolent* and thus who *most deserve to burn* are said by many to be the leaders of those communities in error, who are not only astray themselves, but who lead their communities astray as well, and so are deserving of greater punishment (R, Ṭs, Z); see 11:19–20; 11:20–22c. Others suggest that the *most insolent* refers to those who are most stubborn in their rejection of God and in disobedience to Him (R, Ṭ) or to those guilty of the worst offenses, such as idolatry (*shirk*) or disbelief (*kufr*); these people will enter the Fire first (Ṭ).

71–72 Vv. 69–70 describe the disbelievers, specifically, as huddled on their knees in the Fire, but vv. 71–72 suggest that all people, both the pious and the iniquitous, will *approach it,* that is, the Fire of Hell (Ṭ). Several commentators state that when the righteous "pass through" Hell, its flames will subside or become cool for them, so that they will not even be aware of having passed through them (Bḍ, Ṭ, Z); or that they will enter the fire, but they will then emerge from it because of their good deeds (Ṭ). Others assert that the Fire will not touch the righteous at all as they pass through Hell (Mw), or that only the disbelievers are being addressed in this verse (Ṭ). According to some, the righteous approaching the Fire refers to their suffering fevers and illnesses in this world (Ṭ, Z). Still others suggest that the righteous believers are made to pass through the Fire, so that they may know the extent of God's Bounty and Favor toward them and can thus enjoy greater happiness in the Garden (Ṭs). In a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet declares that none of those present with the Muslims at the Battle of Badr (2/624) and Ḥudaybiyah (6/628) will enter the Fire. The Prophet's wife Ḥafṣah then asked him about v. 71, indicating all would approach the Fire, and he responded by continuing to recite v. 72, which states that God *shall save those who are reverent* (Ṭ).

73 In the Makkan context in which this *sūrah* was revealed, *those who disbelieve* are the idolatrous Quraysh, while *those who believe* are the Companions of the Prophet (Ṭ). The Makkan idolaters boast of their being *better in station,* that is, having better residences and living conditions (Ṭ, Ṭs), and *fairer in company,* meaning that they have wealthier or more socially prominent friends and associates. The Makkan idolaters assume that what they have enjoyed in this regard on earth they will also enjoy in the Hereafter (Ṭs); see 19:77–78c.

74 The exclamation *How many a generation We destroyed before them* is repeated in identical or similar form in several verses throughout the Quran as a warning, usually directed toward the Makkan Quraysh, that their earthly wealth and status will not keep them safe from God's Punishment. Previous generations or "towns" were destroyed for their wrongdoing, despite having a better earthly provision and material situation than the Makkans; see 6:6; 7:4; 17:17; 19:98; 21:11;

fairer in [their] furnishings and in outward appearance. (75) Say, "Whosoever is in error, the Compassionate will extend his term till, when they see that which they have been promised, be it the punishment or the Hour, they will know whose position is worse, and whose host is weaker." (76) God increases in guidance those who are rightly guided. And that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord, and better in return. (77) Hast thou not considered the one who disbelieves in Our signs, and says, "I shall be given wealth and children." (78) Has he penetrated the Unseen, or made a pact with

22:45; 28:58; 38:3; 44:37; 47:13; 50:36. In the present verse, the reference to the destruction of those *who were fairer in [their] furnishings* (or material possessions) *and in outward appearance* is a response to the implicit claim of the disbelievers in v. 73 that they were superior to the believers in *station* and in *company*.

75 If neither wealthy living conditions nor prominent associates can protect one from God's Punishment (vv. 73–74), neither can the apparent blessing of longevity. Although God may give some people long life as an opportunity for them to reflect in a way that will bring them to belief and righteousness (see 35:37), here, as in many other verses, the Quran warns that God's prolonging the lives or delaying the destruction of some disbelievers and wrongdoers may not necessarily be a blessing. Rather, it may be an opportunity for them to wander even farther astray and to increase in sin (see 2:15; 3:178; 6:110; 7:182–83). Moreover, this temporary respite will only make their being seized in the end all the more sudden and unexpected (13:32; 22:44). *Be it the punishment or the Hour* means that their sudden end may come through either the earthly destruction of their particular community or the universal onset of the events of the Last Day and Final Judgment.

76 That God *increases in guidance* those who are already rightly guided is also mentioned or implied in 18:13 and 47:17. Similarly God increases in faith those who already believe (9:124; 48:4; 74:31); yet for those in whose *hearts is a disease,* God increases *them in disease* (2:10). Such verses point to a certain nexus between the role of Divine and human will in the determination of an individual's moral destiny. This is consistent with other verses suggesting that God leads people astray who have already chosen the paths of disbelief or iniquity (see 2:26; 6:125; 40:34, 74), most explicitly by His abandoning them to their own misguidance (Z).

God may increase people in guidance by helping them in acts of obedience and granting them success in their attempts to please Him through righteous deeds (Ṭs, Z) as well as by bestowing various (spiritual or material) favors that will guide them toward virtue and virtuous deeds (Ṭs). It may also mean that God gives them greater certainty and resolve regarding the guidance that they have already been given and that He continues to increase them in guidance and certitude by revealing new signs or verses (Q). Related to this theme, some commentators interpret this verse historically, suggesting that it refers to God's guiding the believers during the lifetime of the Prophet in new ways through successive revelations, which sometimes entailed the abrogation of earlier Quranic rulings by later ones, offering new guidance on particular matters in order to meet the changing needs of the nascent Islamic community (Ṭ, Ṭs); on the question of the abrogation of certain Quranic rulings, see 2:106c.

Regarding the enduring reward and benefit of *righteous deeds* in comparison to the material goods of this world, see also 18:46; 28:60; 42:36. In the context of this verse, *righteous deeds* is sometimes glossed as a reference to obligatory prayer or to other, supererogatory prayers and forms of praising God (Z). Such deeds are *better in return* than the *station* and *company* of the idolaters mentioned in v. 73, since good deeds lead to reward in both this world and the next (Ṭs).

77–78 *Wealth and children* are mentioned repeatedly in the Quran as emblematic of the good

the Compassionate? (79) Nay, but We shall record that which he says, and We shall prolong for him the punishment. (80) And We shall inherit from him that which he claims, and he will come unto Us alone. (81) And they have taken gods apart from God, that they might be a strength for them. (82) Nay, but they will disavow their worship, and they will become an opponent unto them. (83) Hast thou not considered how We unleash the satans on the disbelievers, to incite

things of this world (see, e.g., 9:69; 17:6; 18:46), but also as one of its challenges (see 64:14). This verse was reportedly revealed in response to a Makkan leader and idolater, al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil (father of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ), who owed money to one of the Companions of the Prophet. When resurrection was mentioned to him in conjunction with a request that he repay his debt to the Companion, al-ʿĀṣ mockingly replied that if he were indeed to be resurrected, he would be resurrected possessing wealth and children and so would be able to repay his debt then (Ṭ, Ṭs, W). Some say that the disbeliever who spoke these words was al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah (Ṭs), although this statement might also be intended to convey an attitude common among other disbelievers and thus to apply generally.

The *Unseen* refers to all that is beyond ordinary and external human means of knowing or understanding (see 6:59c), that is, beyond the external senses and the conjectures based upon them. In this context, it refers specifically to the realities of the next world. Although God may reveal something of the Unseen to prophets or others, God alone possesses *the keys of the Unseen, none knows them but He* (6:59), and *None in the heavens or on the earth know the Unseen, save God* (27:65). The question about whether the disbeliever has *made a pact with the Compassionate* means, according to some, "Has he believed in God and acted upon His Commands and avoided what He has prohibited?" (Ṭ), such that he might merit such reward in the Hereafter; or "Has he made a pact that he would enter the Garden?" (Ṭs). Similar rhetorical questions about possessing knowledge of the Unseen, or having a special pact or covenant with God are found in 2:80 and 53:35, as a challenge to those who glibly assert that they expect to find bliss or escape punishment in the Hereafter.

79–80 *Nay* is the response to the rhetorical question in v. 78 and is meant to indicate that the disbeliever in that verse does not have knowledge of the Unseen or a pact with God (Ṭ). God will *prolong . . . the punishment* of the disbeliever, because he has compounded his disbelief with lies and vain claims (Ṭ). God *shall inherit from him that which he claims;* that is, God will "inherit" his wealth and his children (Ṭ, Ṭs), since God is the *Inheritor* (see v. 40; 15:23; 21:89; 28:58) and all things return to Him. In the Hereafter, the disbeliever will *come unto* God *alone,* that is, devoid of the wealth and children that were a source of honor and security for him in this world (Ṭ, Ṭs). Regarding human beings returning to God *alone,* see v. 95; 6:94c.

81–82 The disbelievers hope that the *gods apart from God* that they worship will be a *strength for them,* that is, that they will defend them against or deliver them from God's Punishment or any harm or evil that God might bring upon them (Ṭ), or that they might be their intercessors with God (Ṭs). According to the Quran, this is a vain hope, however, for in 39:38 the Prophet is told: *Say, "Then have you considered those upon whom you call, apart from God? If God desires some harm for me, could they remove His Harm, or if He desires some mercy, could they withhold His Mercy?" Say, "God suffices me; in Him trust those who trust";* and 10:107 states: *And if God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He.*

Rather than being a *strength* for the idolaters, the *gods* they have taken *apart from God* will disavow those who worshipped them and indeed become *an opponent* to their former worshippers (Ṭ, Ṭs); see 2:166–67; 6:94; 7:37; 28:63–64; 40:74, 84. Alternately, the verse may be read to mean that the idolaters will disavow and oppose their idols and false deities on the Day of Judgment in an attempt to avoid punishment (Ṭs).

83–84 That God will *unleash the satans* may mean simply that God does not hold them back

them cunningly? (84) So hasten not against them; verily We are counting for them a number. (85) On the Day We shall gather the reverent to the Compassionate as an honored delegation, (86) and We shall drive the guilty into Hell as a thirsty herd. (87) They have no power of intercession, save the one who has made a pact with the Compassionate. (88) And they say, "The Compassionate has taken a child." (89) You have indeed asserted a terrible thing. (90) The heavens are well-nigh rent thereby, and the earth split asunder, and the mountains made to fall down in ruins, (91) that they should claim for the Compassionate a child. (92) It is not fitting for the Compassionate to take a

from the disbelievers (Z) as a punishment for their disbelief. Others assert that the verse refers to God's giving the satans authority over the disbelievers (R). *To incite them cunningly* means to mislead, tempt, or seduce them into disobeying God (R, Ṭ, Z); this is similar to 17:64, where God tells Iblīs, *Incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice* (Q, R; see commentary on this verse). The Prophet and the believers should not *hasten . . . against* the disbelievers, meaning that they should not attempt to hurry their demise by seeking their punishment or destruction, for God may be postponing their destruction in order to give them the opportunity to manifest their ultimate inner character and destiny (see 19:75c). That God is *counting for them a number* means that He is taking full account of all of their deeds, so that He may recompense them accordingly (R, Ṭ), or that their breaths, years, and terms are numbered (R, Ṭ), that is, finite and ever nearing their end.

85–86 *On the Day*—that is, the Last Day—*the reverent* shall come to God as *an honored delegation*. Some describe the reverent arriving as if riding on splendid camels rather than walking on foot (IK, R, Ṭ), while the guilty shall be like beasts of burden themselves, "herded" into Hell, *thirsty* (JJ), and in search of water (Bḍ) they will never find.

87 The Quran limits the possibilities of intercession in the Hereafter in various ways. Here intercessors are those who have *made a pact with the Compassionate*—that is, those who believe in the One God and His Messenger and follow His commands (R, Ṭ, Z). Elsewhere, it is said that none may intercede except those who have received God's permission (2:255; 20:109) or *with whose word He is content* (20:109) or who have *borne witness to the truth knowingly* (43:86); regarding intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. Despite the limitations on who may intercede, the present verse also affirms that even those who are guilty of major sins may benefit from the intercession of those who have *made a pact with the Compassionate* (R).

88–91 Cf. 21:26. Throughout the Quran, various claims by different religious communities that God has a child are rejected; see 6:101–2c. That the heavens and the earth are *well-nigh rent* by such claims is meant to indicate that all creatures, except certain human beings and jinn, are rooted in the awareness of God's Oneness and are terrified of *shirk*, or the associating of partners with God (IK, Ṭ). In the face of such claims that God has a child, the mountains nearly *fall down in ruins* in anger for God's sake (Ṭ). The Quran indicates that all creatures have an existential awareness of God and a relationship with Him, even seemingly inanimate natural phenomena; see, for example, 2:74, where stones *crash down for the fear of God;* and 17:44: *The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise.* The heavens and earth are also described as split or rent asunder on the Last Day; see 50:44; 73:18; 82:1.

92 See 6:101–c as well as 112:3, which says of God, *He begets not, nor was He begotten.* That *it is not fitting for the Compassionate to take a child* is said by some to mean that such a thing is impossible and inconceivable (R).

child. (93) There is none in the heavens and on the earth, but that it comes unto the Compassionate as a servant. (94) He has taken account of them, and numbered them exactly. (95) And each of them shall come unto Him on the Day of Resurrection, alone. (96) Surely those who believe and perform righteous deeds, for them shall the Compassionate ordain love. (97) We have only made this easy upon thy tongue that thou mayest give glad tidings unto the reverent thereby, and that thereby thou mayest warn a contentious people. (98) How many a generation before them have We destroyed? Dost thou perceive even one of them, or hear from them a murmur?

93–95 That every created reality *comes unto the Compassionate as a servant* is another way of saying that God is the Lord (*Rabb*) of all things, which are therefore servants in relation to Him. That all who are *in the heavens* (the angels) *and on the earth* (human beings and jinn) are His servants is to say that they all, ultimately, worship Him; cf. 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me.*

That God has *taken account of* and *numbered* His creatures means that He knows the number of all His creatures (Ṭ) and, by implication, also their nature, their destiny, and their essence. It may also refer to His Knowledge of the finite terms of their existence, for *everything with Him is according to a measure* (13:8; see also 42:27). Some Islamic philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā, argued that God's Knowledge of things, while all-encompassing, was nonetheless a general knowledge and thus God knew the "particulars" of things only in a universal way. This view was rejected by the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), who claimed that God has knowledge of all particulars as particulars. That God "takes account of" and "numbers" all that is in the heavens and on the earth is one of several Quranic statements that speaks directly to God's Knowledge of particulars (R); see also 6:59: *He knows what is on land and sea; no leaf falls but that He knows it, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is inscribed in a clear Book.* In v. 95, *each of them*—that is, each being *in the heavens and on the earth* (v. 93)—will come unto God *alone,* in the sense that all will be resurrected without anyone to aid or defend them before God, Who will judge and do as He wills on that Day (Ṭ).

96 *Love* here translates *wudd,* rather than *ḥubb,* the word usually used elsewhere for "love" in the Quran (see 2:165c; 5:54c), but commentators generally understand these two words as synonymous (Ṭ). That God shall *ordain love* for those who *believe and perform righteous deeds* is understood to mean that God grants that such people will be loved in the world, particularly by God's other believing servants (Ṭ). Al-Sulamī states that such people are beloved by their fellow Muslims, which is none other than a manifestation of God's Love for them. Al-Rāzī favors this interpretation, but also notes that some interpret the verse to mean that God will grant righteous believers what they love, rather than the state of being loved by others, for it is well known that the believers are often despised rather than loved by the disbelievers, and that some disbelievers are much beloved among people in this world (R). Yet he favors the first interpretation, since it is supported by a *ḥadīth* that says that when God loves a servant, He calls out to the Archangel Gabriel, "Verily I love so-and-so, so love him!" Gabriel then calls upon all those in Heaven to love this person, and the inclination to love this person is then made to descend upon those on earth (see also IK, Q). Some report that this verse was revealed as a consolation to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf, who was concerned about leaving his companions in Makkah (Ṭ).

For Shiite commentators, the *love* that God ordains for the righteous believers is the love of

and spiritual attachment (*walāyah*) to ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Qm, Ṭb, Ṭs), for according to Shiites there are no true Muslim believers save those in whose hearts is the love of ᶜAlī (Ṭs). According to a Shiite report, the Prophet said to ᶜAlī, "Say, 'O God, ordain for me a pact with Thee, and ordain for me love in the hearts of the believers.'" This verse was then revealed (Ṭs). For some Sufis, the love that God ordains here is none other than the unveiling of Divine secrets. In this vein, a well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* says, in part, "Verily My servant does not cease to draw nigh unto Me through supererogatory acts until I love him, and when I love him, I am the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, and the foot with which he walks." Al-Qushayrī cites a similar *ḥadīth:* "My servant does not cease to draw nigh unto Me until he loves Me and I love him" (Qu).

97 God made the Quran *easy upon thy tongue* (cf. 44:58)—that is, on the tongue of the Prophet—by revealing it in Arabic (IK, R, Z), the native language of the Prophet and his Companions. This verse may also be read to mean, "We made this easy in thy tongue [i.e., in the Prophet's language]," referring to the revelation of the Quran in Arabic (Z). See also 54:17, 22, 32, and 40, where the Quran is said to have been made *easy to remember. Contentious* translates *luddan,* which denotes those who are intensely but vainly argumentative and who argue on the basis of falsehood (Ṭ). The term also connotes an attitude of insolence and a certain "deafness" to hearing the truth (Ṭ).

98 The rhetorical question, *How many a generation before them*—that is, before the Quraysh—*have We destroyed* also appears in v. 74 and in several other Quranic verses; see 19:74c. The verse and the *sūrah* conclude by evoking powerfully the absence and silence of these destroyed peoples and is similar in tone and affect to verses that bid the Arabs (in particular) to observe the ruins of earlier peoples, whose empty dwellings were well known to them, because of their travels through the desert; cf. 3:137; 6:11; 12:109; and 27:51–52. See also 6:11c. One no longer hears from such people even *a murmur* (*rikz*), that is, not even the slightest sound (R, Ṭ).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 20

# Ṭā Hā

## *Ṭā Hā*

*Ṭā Hā* is a Makkan *sūrah,* with the possible exception of vv. 130–31, which some consider to be Madinan (JJ), although the context of these two verses indicates that they are most likely Makkan. This *sūrah* was revealed after *Sūrah* 19, *Maryam* (JJ), and figures prominently in the famous conversion account of the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644). Shortly before becoming Muslim, ʿUmar was intent on killing the Prophet. He encountered a Companion, who was concealing the fact that he was a Muslim, and ʿUmar told him of his plan. In order to divert ʿUmar, the Companion told him to first settle affairs with his own household, as ʿUmar's sister and her husband had also accepted Islam. They were reciting the Quran when ʿUmar came to their home to confront them. The parchment from which they were reading, but which they hid when ʿUmar entered, contained some or all of *Ṭā Hā*. ʿUmar told them that he had heard them and insisted on seeing what they had been reciting. After a brief confrontation, they relented and gave him the parchment. Upon reading it, ʿUmar had a change of heart, resolved to become Muslim, and went to the Prophet to profess his faith (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah* [Beirut, 1999], 1:272). The Prophet is reported to have said concerning this *sūrah* (along with *Sūrah*s 2 and 3) that God's Supreme Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*) is to be found in it (R).

The *sūrah* begins with a consolation to the Prophet and speaks of God's all-encompassing knowledge and His Most Beautiful Names. It then segues into a lengthy account of the story of Moses (vv. 9–97) that recounts many details of his life, including his encounter with God and the charge of his mission to Pharaoh, the Israelites' escape from Egypt, and the false god that the Israelites worshipped when Moses went to Mt. Sinai. Next, the *sūrah* transitions to discuss several aspects concerning the end of time and the Last Day, and then recounts the story of Adam's creation, temptation, banishment, and forgiveness (vv. 115–24). It then encourages the Prophet to be steadfast in the face of the Makkans' insults, recounting the Makkans' disingenuous request for a sign to

be sent to the Prophet from God; and concludes with a threat to the Makkans, telling them to wait for the inevitable end, when they shall come to know who is upon the sound path and is rightly guided.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ṭā. Hā.* (2) We did not send down the Quran unto thee that thou shouldst be distressed, (3) but only as a reminder unto one who fears [God], (4) a revelation from He, Who created the earth and the high heavens. (5) The Compassionate

1 The Arabic letters *ṭāʾ* and *hāʾ* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose innermost meaning, most commentators attest, is known only to God; see 2:1c. Some have said that *ṭāʾ hāʾ* could mean "O man!" (Kl, Ṭ, Ṭs) with the Prophet as the referent (Kl, TH), or that it is one of the Names of God (M) or a name of the Prophet (Kl). Since *ṭāʾ hāʾ* can be a name of the Prophet, it has become a proper name among Muslim males. According to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, *ṭāʾ hāʾ* refers to the purity and guidance of the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt;* R). According to another interpretation, the *ṭāʾ* refers to a tree in Paradise called Ṭūbā (see 13:29c) and the *hāʾ* to an *abyss* (*hāwiyah;* see 101:9c) in Hell, which is to say that it is as if God were swearing by both the Garden and the Fire (R).

2 The Quran was not given to the Prophet to cause him to *be distressed* over its acceptance or rejection by his people, or their belief or disbelief in his message (Q; see 15:88; 18:6; 26:3). Thus this verse relates to the wider Quranic theme of God's addressing the prophets' human reactions to the trials they encountered when rejected by their people (see 2:214; 11:36; 15:97–99; 21:83–84; 26:3). According to another interpretation, the Prophet had been praying all night to the point that his legs had become swollen; so this verse was revealed, conveying that the Quran was not sent to cause him to weaken and exhaust himself in acts of worship, thereby causing undue hardship upon himself (Q).

3–4 *But* in v. 3 can mean "however," which would indicate that v. 3 does not directly follow upon v. 2, as it would then read, "However, it is only a reminder unto one who fears [God]" (R). If it is directly connected to v. 2, then v. 3 can mean that the Quran was not revealed to the Prophet in order to cause him hardship, but rather was sent down *only as a reminder unto one who fears [God]* (R). In either case, *one who fears* refers to those who reverence God (*muttaqīn*), as in 2:2: *This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent* (R). Elsewhere, "Reminder" is considered one of the names of the Quran; see 3:58; 21:2, 7, 10, 24 (cf. 38:1).

5 *The Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān;* see 1:3c; 55:1c) appears in the Quran as an adjective describing God, but also as one of His proper Names (see, e.g., 19:18, 26, 44). This verse is the only instance in the Quran where *the Compassionate* is referred to as mounting *the Throne;* for other Quranic references to God's mounting the Throne, see 7:54; 10:3; 13:2; 32:4; 57:4; cf. 25:59: *He Who created the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in six days, then mounted the Throne, the Compassionate [is He].* For the special significance of the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān,* see 17:110: *Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate. Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.* This verse clearly indicates the close connection between the Names *Allāh* ("God") and *al-Raḥmān* ("the Compassionate"), both of which, in traditional Islamic sources, are identified as Names of the Divine Essence.

mounted the Throne. (6) Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, whatsoever is between them, and whatsoever lies beneath the ground. (7) And if thou speakest aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is more hidden still. (8) God, there is no god but He. Unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. (9) Hast thou heard tell of Moses, (10) when he saw a fire and said unto his family, "Stay here. Verily I perceive a fire. Perhaps I shall bring you a brand therefrom, or find guidance at the fire"? (11) Then when he came to it, he was called, "O Moses! (12) Verily I am thy Lord. Take off thy

6 V. 5 invokes the imagery of God as King seated upon a Throne, and v. 6 continues this image as it calls attention to God's sole ownership of everything in existence (see also, e.g., 2:255; 5:17; 67:1). According to a spiritual interpretation of this verse reported by al-Sulamī, since everything belongs to God, one should ask only God to fulfill one's requests: "To Him belongs the kingdom (*mulk*). So whoever seeks out a part from the whole from other than Him has sought wrongly. Return to Him for all of the things that are of importance to you, and He will suffice you. Seek all of your requests from Him, and He will bestow them upon you." The Prophet is reported to have said, "When you ask, ask only of God; and when you seek help, seek help only from God."

7 *What is secret* refers to hidden talk (Kl), and *what is more hidden still* refers to what lies deeply hidden in the soul and is only known to God (Kl, My, Qu). According to a common Sufi psychological teaching, the *secret* (*sirr*) corresponds to the heart, which is the locus of one's consciousness of God, while *what is more hidden still* (*akhfā*) corresponds to a deeper dimension of the same reality. Al-Rāzī deduces from the second part of this verse that if God knows the innermost recesses of a person's thoughts, then, a fortiori, He also knows what he *speakest aloud*. Taken together, vv. 6–7 are in part similar to 2:284: *Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. And whether you disclose what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it;* see also 2:255; 6:3; 13:10; 21:110.

8 For God's *Most Beautiful Names* as well as their function in Islamic ritual practice, see 7:180c; 17:110; 59:24.

9 This verse introduces a lengthy account of the story of Moses that extends to the end of v. 98. For other aspects of the life of Moses elsewhere in the Quran, see 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 18:60–82; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46; 79:15–25.

10 It is said that Moses' encounter with God occurred at night, during the winter, when Moses had lost his way (Ṭ). Having seen the fire (Q), he sought warmth or perhaps some means of illumination from it; see also 27:7; 28:29; cf. Exodus 3:1–3. It is said that the fire was on Horeb, identified in Exodus 3:1 as "the mountain of God." For the symbolism of the fire perceived by Moses as representing increasing levels of certainty in the spiritual life, see 27:7c.

11–12 It is said that in the valley God *called* to Moses from a tree (Q, Ṭ) that was a kind of lycium or boxthorn (*ʿawsaj*) plant (JJ, Ṭ); see also 28:30. *It* thus refers to the tree (JJ) or, alternately, to the fire that Moses perceived (see v. 10; IK, R, Ṭ) and which consumed the tree (Bg, R). See also 27:8–10; 28:30. Cf. Exodus 3:4–6.

Moses was told to *take off* his *sandals,* either because they were made of the skin of a dead donkey (Ṭ), or out of reverence (*taʿẓīm*) for the sacred space where he was standing, just as people are commanded to remove their shoes before entering the sacred sanctuary (*ḥaram*) of the Kaʿbah (IK) or in fact any mosque. According to a more esoteric reading of this phrase, al-Ghazzālī suggests that in being asked to remove his sandals Moses was being instructed to cast aside this world and

sandals. Truly thou art in the holy valley of Ṭuwā. (13) I have chosen thee, so listen to what is revealed. (14) Truly I am God, there is no god but I. So worship Me, and perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me. (15) Surely the Hour is coming. I would keep it hidden, that every soul might be recompensed for its endeavors. (16) So let not he who believes not and follows his caprices turn thee

the next world by turning his face toward God alone (*Niche of Lights,* trans. D. Buchman [Provo, 1998], 30). In other words, for Sufis the verse means that one's heart should be free of any attachment to the things to be found in this world, and even the thought of the delights of the next world, as one should dedicate oneself solely to God (My, Qu). As Ibn ʿAjībah explains it, the phrase means, "Leave the two realms of existence (*kawn*) if you wish to witness the Presence of the Existentiator (*mukawwin*)."

The idea of taking the *sandals* off has inspired a number of artful literary works in Islamic civilization, such as the book *Taking Off the Sandals* (*Khalʿ al-naʿlayn*) by the Andalusian mystic Abu'l-Qāsim ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), and is a frequently encountered image and symbol in Sufi poetry. In a famous poem attributed to Ibn ʿArabī, the Divine intent behind the imagery is explained: "Take off the sandals if you come / to this valley, for therein is Our Holiness. / Of the two worlds divest yourself, / and lift the veils of in-betweenness" (Aj).

It is also interesting to note that the name of the *holy valley* in which Moses encounters God is *Ṭuwā,* which comes from a root that means "to fold up" and "to become enwrapped." Thus, Moses is told to rid himself of any thought of this world or the next, because he is in the place of Divine intimacy, the inner, holy sanctuary that symbolizes the Ocean of the Divine Presence above all states of existence (Aj). It is here that all of existence is "folded up" before him (Aj) and where his soul becomes "enwrapped" in the Divine Reality.

13 Moses' being *chosen* refers to God's conferral of messengerhood (*risālah*) upon him as well as the special distinction given to him of being addressed by God directly (R), which is why Moses is also referred to in the Islamic tradition as *Kalīm Allāh,* that is, "the one to whom God spoke"; see also 7:144c. According to the early Sufi figure Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), "God (Great and Glorious is He) looked into the hearts of the children of Adam and did not find a heart more humble than the one belonging to Moses (upon whom be peace). Thus, He singled out Moses from among them by speaking directly with him" (al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ* [Beirut, 1997], 4:142).

14 See also 3:18, where God testifies to His own Divinity: *God bears witness that there is no god but He.* In the present verse, *perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me* is said to refer to the act of remembering God much in the prayer (Bq). A deeper dimension of this act of remembering God is, as explained by the Sufi Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, for the servant to be the *dhikr* through which he becomes "drowned in the oceans of witnessing the One Who is Remembered (*al-madhkūr*), because the prayer is the place for witnessing secrets by means of lights (*al-anwār*), [and the place] for the disclosure of beauty (*al-jamāl*) to spirits by virtue of their ascent."

15 Commentators disagree regarding the phrase *I would keep it hidden.* For some, the modifier *akādu* can make the phrase mean, "I desire to keep it hidden" (R). Alternately, others read the phrase as a shortened version of an Arabic idiom that describes how one keeps something so hidden that it is even hidden from oneself. Through this form of poetic exaggeration, this phrase would be interpreted, "I have well-nigh kept it hidden [from Myself]," indicating how unknown the Hour is to creation (Q, R). Some read the disputed word as simply a statement of fact or assurance (Q), so that the phrase would mean, "I have indeed kept it hidden."

16 If *it* refers to *the Hour* (see v. 15), the message of this verse is not to lose faith in *the Hour* and fail to prepare for it (Kl) on account of those who do not believe in it and instead follow their

away from it, or thou wilt perish. (17) And what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?" (18) He said, "It is my staff. I lean upon it and beat down leaves for my sheep. And I have other uses for it." (19) He said, "Cast it, O Moses!" (20) So he cast it, and behold, it was a serpent, moving swiftly. (21) He said, "Take hold of it, and fear not! We shall restore it to its former way. (22) And enclose thy hand in thy side. It will come forth white, without blemish, as another sign, (23) that

ephemeral desires (Aj). Alternately, it is possible that *it* refers to *the prayer* mentioned in v. 14 (Z).

17–18 God's question to Moses is a rhetorical one intended to draw his attention to the staff so that when it becomes a serpent, Moses will know in a direct manner that it was the result of a great miracle (Bg). Al-Rāzī explains it this way: "It is as if God said, 'O Moses, do you know the reality of that which is in your hand, that it is a piece of wood which can neither harm nor benefit, but which will then turn into a mighty serpent?'"

In traditional Islamic lore, the staff of Moses is said to have belonged initially to Adam and was made from a pillar in Heaven; it was then transmitted from prophet to prophet until it ended up with the prophet Shuʿayb, who then gave it to Moses when he married Shuʿayb's daughter (ST); see also 7:106–8c. According to al-Tustarī, although Moses' words *I have other uses for it* will become true in the future because God will soon make it the means by which Moses performs several major miracles, at this point Moses is unaware of the future function of the staff. This, al-Tustarī says, was God's way of showing to Moses that even though he was to be a prophet, what even someone like him knows is ultimately very little in comparison to what God knows. See also 27:10; 28:31; cf. Exodus 4:2.

19–20 The *serpent* was long (IK) and mighty (*ʿaẓīm;* JJ), and is said to have eaten a tree and swallowed a rock (IK, Ṭ). Its swift motion is a reference to its quickly slithering about on its belly like a small snake (JJ). See also 27:10; 28:31; cf. Exodus 4:3.

21 Elsewhere in the Quran, when the staff becomes a serpent, Moses is said to have *turned in retreat without returning* (27:10; 28:31). Some say that Moses' fear was assuaged when God informed him that He would cause the serpent to return to *its former way* (R), that is, its form as a staff (Aj). Yet others say that after God told Moses not to fear, a state of tranquility and contentment overcame him so that he was no longer fearful (R); see also 27:10–11c; cf. Exodus 4:3–4. Moses then laid hold of the serpent by its mouth, grabbing it by either the teeth or the jaw, at which time God turned it back into a wooden staff (R). Al-Qurṭubī explains that God showed Moses the serpent as a way of preparing him so that when he would go to Pharaoh and cast his staff before him and his entourage, he would not be frightened.

Some philosophers and mystics read this verse as alluding to various aspects of the human being's lower nature. Moses' staff, which became a serpent, is seen as the unrefined human soul which must be conquered in order for the soul's true nature to be actualized, as explained by Mullā Ṣadrā: "There is no serpent like your soul; so slay it and purify it of the stain of its false beliefs and ugly opinions; or subjugate it until it becomes a *muslim* in your hand. First cast it aside like the staff of Moses; then pick it up with your right hand after it has returned to *its former way* and primordial disposition. It shall then live an intellectual life, striving for the Return and the Final Abode" (*Mafātiḥ al-ghayb* [Beirut, 2002], 81).

22–23 *Side* here refers to what is beneath the upper arm (Z) or, more specifically, the region directly below the armpit (Kl); see also 27:12; 28:32. It is said that Moses' skin was reddish brown and that when he removed his hand from his side, it was *white, without blemish,* meaning it was completely luminous, with no dark spots (Aj, Q); cf. 27:12; 28:32; Exodus 4:6–7. Moses' hand is said to have shone with such brilliance by night and day that it was like the sun and the moon (Bg, Q), or its light was even more intense (Q). Moses' white hand is referred to as *another sign,* which here

We may show thee some of Our greatest signs. (24) Go unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled!" (25) He said, "My Lord! Expand for me my breast! (26) Make my affair easy for me, (27) and untie a knot from my tongue, (28) that they may understand my speech. (29) And appoint for me a helper from among my family, (30) Aaron, my brother. (31) Through him, increase my strength, (32) and make

denotes the second miracle given to him (Bḍ); see also 27:12, which speaks of Moses' hand as *among nine signs* (see also 17:101c). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, Moses' white hand was the greatest of his miracles (Aj). Similar to the report in Exodus 34:34–35, it is said that when Moses later received the Torah from God on Mt. Sinai, his face shone with such radiance that he had to veil it when addressing his people (al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* [Cairo, 1951], 123–24).

24 This verse is identical to 79:17 (cf. v. 43); see also 26:10–11; 27:12; 28:32; cf. Exodus 3:7–10.

25–28 This part of Moses' prayer is commonly uttered by Muslims at times of difficulty and anxiety. Moses' prayer for his *breast* to be expanded is seen as a prayer to God to fill his being with the light of faith and certainty, or to help him carry out his message properly (R); see also 94:1c. Moses' request that God *untie a knot from* his *tongue* is thought by some Muslim and Jewish commentators (see 26:12–13c) to be a reference to a physical speech impediment (Q, Z), namely a lisp.

The commentators relate a story that, while still a child, Moses struck Pharaoh and pulled some of the hair out of his beard, an act that threatened Pharaoh, as he interpreted it to mean that Moses would one day become his enemy and cause his kingdom to perish (according to some, Pharaoh had already developed a fear that one of the sons of the Israelites would overthrow him, which is arguably why he ordered that they all be killed; see 2:49c). Pharaoh ordered Moses to be put to death, but Pharaoh's wife Āsiyah (regarding whom see 66:11c) tried to protect Moses, assuring him that Moses was just a young child and did not have the ability to discriminate between right and wrong. In order to test Moses, Pharaoh put a fiery coal and a ruby before him. If Moses took the ruby, that would mean that he could discriminate between things that look the same; but are in fact very different. In that case, Pharaoh would put him to death, since that would mean that he attacked Pharaoh intentionally and would one day be responsible for his demise. But if Moses took the fiery coal, that would mean that he could not discriminate between the objects placed before him, confirming Āsiyah's defense of him and rendering his actions not worthy of punishment. With the objects in front of Moses, Gabriel came and guided his hand to lay hold of the fiery coal, which Moses then accidentally placed into his mouth, thereby burning his tongue and impeding his speech (Q, R, Ṭ); see also 43:52c.

Al-Rāzī observes that Moses' request that God *untie a knot* from his tongue was motivated by his desire to be able to communicate effectively the message with whose delivery God had charged him. This is why Moses then says in v. 28, *that they may understand my speech,* that is, in conveying God's message (JJ). According to Ibn Juzayy, the reason Moses requested that God only loosen and not completely remove *a knot* from his tongue is that he was not asking for complete eloquence, but for enough of the speech impediment to be removed so that people would understand his message clearly; cf. Exodus 4:10–11. Moses' request was granted, for which, see v. 36c.

It is also possible that there is a connection between Moses' request that his *breast* be expanded and that *a knot* in his tongue be loosened, namely his anticipating that, upon being denied by Pharaoh and his people and being called a liar by them, he would feel constriction in his breast, which would then result in his inability to speak with facility; see 26:12–13c.

29–35 Moses asks God to *appoint* his brother *Aaron* to help him carry out his duty of delivering the message to Pharaoh and his people (Bḍ). See also 19:53; 26:12–13c; cf. Exodus 4:13–16. Moses sought Aaron's help because Aaron was older and

him a partner in my affair, (33) that we may glorify Thee much (34) and remember Thee much. (35) Truly Thou dost ever see us." (36) He said, "Thou hast been granted thy request, O Moses! (37) And We have indeed shown thee favor another time, (38) when We revealed to thy mother that which was revealed: (39) 'Cast him into the ark and cast it into the sea. Then the sea will throw him upon the bank. An enemy unto Me and an enemy unto him shall take him.' And I cast

more eloquent (Z). The word translated *helper* here is *wazīr,* which comes from a root that connotes the carrying of a weight or burden on behalf of another person, which is why many scholars assert that in Islamic political history *wazīr* came to denote the king's right-hand man or chief minister, who was responsible for discharging many of the king's duties (Bḍ, M, N). Moses' request that God strengthen him with Aaron was answered, as is evidenced by 28:35: *We shall strengthen thine arm through thy brother, and We shall grant an authority for both of you, such that they shall not reach you* (M); see also v. 36.

With the request *Make him a partner in my affair,* Moses is asking God to make Aaron a prophet along with him (IJ, Z). It is said that the intention behind Moses' words, *That we may glorify Thee much, and remember Thee much,* was so that he and his brother could work together in worshipping and remembering God, thereby increasing spiritually through their mutual encouragement (Z), which is in keeping with the Sufi concept of spiritual companionship (*ṣuḥbah*); see also 5:2: *Help one another toward piety and reverence.* In Shiite Islam, the relationship between Moses and Aaron is of special significance, since it is seen as analogous to the intimate connection between the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin and son-in-law ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, to whom the Prophet is reported to have said, "You are to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there shall not be a prophet after me." And like the Prophet and ᶜAlī in the Islamic tradition, particularly in Shiite and Sufi sources, Moses represents the function of prophecy (*nubuwwah*) and Aaron that of sainthood (*walāyah*).

36 This verse refers to the fulfillment of all of Moses' requests made in vv. 25–35 (Aj), including his prayer that *a knot* be loosened from his tongue (v. 27), enough of which was removed in order for him to convey his message effectively (R); see also 43:52c. Some of Moses' requests were actualized later, such as God's strengthening him through Aaron (see 28:35; Aj).

37 Al-Rāzī notes that the words *We have indeed shown thee favor another time* serve to assure Moses that, since God had already been protecting him and looking after his best interests before granting his requests in vv. 25–36, He would also tend to Moses' needs in the future. Alternately, these words function as an indication to Moses that God had been looking after him from the beginning, so as to prepare him for the weighty task of prophecy and the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh's control (R).

38 This verse refers to the time when Pharaoh was killing the newborn males of the Israelites (see 2:49c; 28:4c). God cast into the heart of Moses' mother, or caused her to see by means of a dream, what He wanted her to do with her infant in order to save him; see 28:7c. For the different senses of the root *w-ḥ-y,* which usually denotes "revelation" but can in certain cases also mean "inspiration" employed in the Quran, see 16:68–69c; 28:7c.

39 The *ark,* which was made from a sycamore tree (Q), is said to have been built by a person who was a member of Pharaoh's family but was a believer (Q; see 28:2; 40:28). The *sea* here is the Nile River (JJ, Kl, Q), and the *enemy* of God and Moses is Pharaoh (Kl). It is said that Pharaoh was busy supervising the Nile when he saw the ark and ordered that it be brought to him. His wife was present and saw the baby in it. Moved by compassion for the baby, she asked Pharaoh if they could keep him, and he granted her request (Kl); see also 28:7–10. *I cast upon thee a love from Me* can either mean that God loved Moses (Z), or that God caused Moses to be beloved to His servants in general (JJ, Ṭ) or to Āsiyah and Pharaoh in par-

upon thee a love from Me, that thou mightest be formed under My eye. (40) When thy sister went forth and said, 'Shall I show you one who can nurse him?' Thus We returned thee to thy mother that she might be comforted and grieve not. And thou didst slay a soul, but We saved thee from sorrow. And We tried thee with trials. Then thou didst remain some years among the people of Midian. Then thou didst come, as determined, O Moses. (41) I selected thee for Myself. (42) Go forth, thou and thy brother, with My signs, and tire not in the remembrance of Me. (43) Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled!

ticular (Ṭ). According to al-Zamakhsharī, these interpretations are not mutually exclusive, for, as he asserts, "Whomever God loves, people will also love." *That thou mightest be formed under My eye* refers to Moses' being raised and nurtured under God's protection and care (Aj).

40 Cf. 28:11–13. God is said to have caused the infant Moses to refuse to be suckled by anyone other than his mother, and thus Moses' sister, who in 28:11 is told by their mother to follow Moses and is described as watching him from a distance while the household of Pharaoh *were unaware,* directed them to someone who could suckle him, namely Moses' mother; see 28:12c. Moses' being returned to his mother is seen as a fulfillment of God's Promise that He would return him to her; see 28:7: *Surely We shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.* Read in connection with 19:24–26, which speaks of God's comforting Mary during her labor pains, the present verse is an indication of the great compassion and care that God has for the suffering of mothers. Although God's comforting Moses' mother and Mary during their labor is not directly connected to the success of the prophetic missions of their sons (Moses and Jesus respectively), it is done purely out of compassion for the pain that these mothers had to suffer for the sake of their sons.

For the incident of Moses' slaying an Egyptian and what ensued from this event, including Moses' flight from Egypt, see commentary on 28:15–20. *We tried thee with trials* refers to the many great trials by which God tested Moses, one after the other, from the time he was saved from Pharaoh's slaughtering the male children of the Israelites to his eventual escape from Egypt and his time in the wilderness, where he was without riding beast or provisions. It is understood by some that God had made Moses undergo all of these trials to prepare him to become a prophet and messenger (Aj). For the time Moses spent *among the people of Midian,* which is said to have been twenty-eight years in total (Aj, Q), see commentary on 28:21–28. The last part of this verse, where God tells Moses that he had come to the valley to meet Him *as determined,* means that God had ordained for Moses both the path that would lead to knowledge of Him and the time in which its attainment would occur; thus, Moses' arrival at the valley where he met God was in accordance with the Divine Decree (Su).

41 God tells Moses *I selected thee for Myself* as a way of honoring Moses and drawing him nearer, since it is as if God is saying to him, "I have made a place for you in My Favor and My Generosity" (Kl). This verse is similar to 7:144: *O Moses! Verily I have chosen thee above mankind through My messages and My speaking [unto thee]. So take that which I have given thee, and be among the thankful;* see also 20:13c.

42 *My signs* refers to the nine signs given to Moses (JJ; see 17:101c). *Tire not in the remembrance of Me* means to not weaken in conveying the message (Q). According to a spiritual interpretation of this verse, it means that one should not invoke God only with the tongue while the heart is not vigilant and aware of the One who is being invoked (ST); see also vv. 33–34.

43 Cf. the similar wording addressed to Moses in v. 24; 79:17; see also 26:10–11; 27:12; 28:32.

(44) Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear." (45) They said, "Our Lord! Truly we fear that he will deal hastily with us, or that he will transgress." (46) He said, "Fear not! Truly I am with you twain; I hear and I see. (47) So come unto him and say, 'Truly we are two messengers of your Lord. So send forth with us the Children of Israel and punish them not. We have brought you a sign from your Lord. Peace be upon him who follows guidance! (48) Truly it has been revealed unto us that punishment shall come upon him who denies and turns away.' " (49) He said, "So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?" (50) He said, "Our Lord is He Who gives everything its creation,

44 According to some commentators, the command here is similar to the words God tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh in 79:18–19: *Dost thou wish to be purified and that I guide thee to thy Lord that thou mightest have fear?* (Bḍ, Z). *Gently* could also be rendered "a gentle word," which some understand as a reference to the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahādah*), "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha illa'Llāh;* IK). *Gently* is also seen as a general command to Moses to communicate the message to Pharaoh in a gentle manner (IK). Al-Rāzī notes that it is customary for tyrants, when they are admonished harshly, to increase in their obstinacy and pride. Thus, by speaking gently to Pharaoh, there was a chance he would respond positively to the admonition conveyed by Moses and Aaron; see also 16:125: *Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner.* Al-Rāzī also notes that since Moses was brought up by Pharaoh, it was only fitting that Moses be gentle with him, which would be in keeping with the importance of observing the rights of one's caregivers.

*Remember* here refers to Pharaoh's taking heed of the warning given to him (JJ) and turning away from his misguidance (IK), while *fear* is understood to mean that Pharaoh would be fearful of God, return to Him (JJ), and be obedient toward Him (IK). *Haply* (*laʿalla*) conveys the sense of "perhaps," "hopefully," or "it might be that" (on *laʿalla,* see also 2:21c; 2:24c; 11:12c; 28:67c). In this case, *haply* is said for the benefit of Moses and Aaron (JJ), who could not know the outcome of delivering God's warning and admonition to Pharaoh, but should have hope in the possibility that he would *remember or have fear* (R).

45–46 It is reported that Moses and Aaron's fear that Pharaoh would *deal hastily* with them refers to his hastening their punishment (JJ); for Pharaoh's tendency to punish swiftly as evidenced by his summary execution of the sorcerers, see vv. 70–73 and 7:124; see also 7:124c. Alternately, it can refer to Pharaoh's killing them without actually pondering over the proofs they would have brought to him (Ṭs). Moses and Aaron's fear that Pharaoh would *transgress* conveys the concern that he would go beyond bounds in punishing them, or that, in his attempts to refute them, his disbelief (*kufr*) would increase (Ṭs). God's telling Moses and Aaron that He is *with* them is understood to mean that He will protect them and help them (Bḍ); cf. Exodus 3:11–12.

47–48 Moses and Aaron were inviting Pharaoh to believe in God and to free the children of Israel (Kl) who were under the control of Pharaoh and his people—Pharaoh used to kill their children and force them into labor in order to serve him, all the while humiliating them (Kl). *A sign from your Lord* is a collective reference to the miracles of Moses' staff and his white hand (Kl). *Peace be upon him who follows guidance* conveys the teaching that whoever believes in God's signs will have greetings of peace from God, the angels, and the believers, which will also entail safety in both this life and the next (Aj); *punishment* in this world and the next *shall come upon him who denies* God's signs *and turns away* (Aj).

49–50 Al-Rāzī notes that the question posed by Pharaoh here was a preliminary stage to his

then guides [it]." (51) He said, "What, then, of former generations?" (52) He said, "Knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a Book—He errs not, nor does He forget— (53) the One Who made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded paths for you therein. He sent down water from the sky, wherewith We brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation [saying], (54) 'Eat and pasture your cattle.' " Truly in that are signs for those possessed of intelligence. (55) From it We created you, and unto it We shall bring you back, and from it We shall bring you forth a another time. (56) We indeed showed him Our signs, all of them; yet he denied and refused. (57) He said, "Have you come to us in order to expel us from our land with your sorcery, O Moses? (58) But we shall surely produce for you sorcery like it. So appoint a tryst between you and us at a neutral place, which neither

deeper inquiry about God found in 26:23 (*And what is the Lord of the worlds?*); in other words, Pharaoh, in questioning Moses, was actually seeking answers to theological questions. Other commentators reject the idea that Pharaoh was making a serious theological inquiry into the Nature of God and instead interpret his questions as a form of confrontation (see 26:23–24c). If seen as a sincere inquiry, *So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?* is interpreted as a question regarding God's modality (*kayfiyyah,* lit. "howness"), or how He is who He is. When Moses answered Pharaoh by pointing to the signs of God's Being, citing Him as *He Who gives everything its creation, then guides [it],* Pharaoh realized that he would not be able to receive any further answers from Moses concerning God's Nature, and so proceeded to ask him in 26:23, *And what is the Lord of the worlds?,* which is an inquiry into essence or quiddity (*māhiyyah*); in other words, Pharaoh was asking Moses to define God's Essence (R). But God's Essence is above any and all descriptions and definitions and is completely inaccessible through human means. For Moses' reply to Pharaoh's question concerning God's Essence, see 26:23–24c; see also Exodus 3:13–15.

51–52 Pharaoh's question means, "What is the condition of the *former generations* after death, and what has God done with them?" Moses' reply confirms that knowledge of this matter is an unfathomable affair that none knows but God (Aj). By *a Book* is meant the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c).

53–54 Cf. 43:10–11. The relationship between water and vegetal life is discussed in 6:99 and 13:4. For the benefits of cattle, see 6:142c; 16:5–7c. *Intelligence* in *those possessed of intelligence* translates *nuhā,* which is derived from a root that also connotes "restraining" or "prohibiting"; here it refers to those who, through the use of their rational faculties (*ʿaql*), avoid vile actions and ways of thinking (JJ).

55 *It* here refers to the earth (*arḍ;* Ṭ) or dust (*turāb;* K), although the latter can also denote "earth." See also 43:11. This verse is often recited at Muslim funerals, as it instructs people that human beings are made of earth (i.e., clay), are buried in it when they die, and shall be resurrected from it on the Last Day.

56–58 *Our signs, all of them* refers to the nine signs that Moses brought to Pharaoh and his people (JJ, Z); see 17:101c. Pharaoh *denied* the signs *and refused* to accept the truth (Z). *Sorcery like it* means "sorcery" like the kind that Moses had come with (Ṭū). For references to similar accusations of sorcery made against Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and other prophets, see 5:110c. *A tryst* and *neutral place* refer to the fixed time of their meeting (Ṭū) and its location respectively (M).

you nor we shall fail to keep." (59) He said, "Your tryst shall be on the Day of Adornment; let the people be gathered when the sun has risen high." (60) Then Pharaoh turned away and devised his scheme. Then he came. (61) Moses said to them, "Woe unto you! Do not fabricate a lie against God, lest He should destroy you with a punishment. Whosoever fabricates [lies] has failed." (62) So they debated their affair among themselves and kept secret their intimate discourse. (63) They said, "These two are sorcerers who wish to expel you from your land with their sorcery and to do away with your exemplary way of life. (64) So gather your plot, then come in ranks. Today, whosoever gains the upper hand will surely have prospered!" (65) They said, "O Moses! Either you cast, or we shall be the first to cast." (66) He said, "Nay, you cast." Then, behold, their ropes and their staffs appeared to him, through their sorcery, to move swiftly, (67) whereat Moses conceived a fear in his soul. (68) We said, "Fear not! Truly thou art uppermost. (69) Cast that which is in thy right hand; it will devour what they have produced. They have produced only a sorcerer's trick. And the sorcerer prospers not, wheresoever he may go." (70) Then the sorcerers were

59–60 *The Day of Adornment* is considered by many to be the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ (the tenth of Muḥarram) or a day of celebration (Kl, M) on which the Egyptians adorned themselves and gathered together (JJ). *Devised his scheme* refers to Pharaoh's gathering his sorcerers together along with all those who would aid him in his encounter with Moses, as well as to the tools necessary for the sorcerers to carry out their trickery (R).

61 In this context, Moses' words *Do not fabricate a lie against God* mean, "Do not call God's signs and miracles sorcery" (Z); see also 10:77.

62–64 Upon hearing Moses' words, the sorcerers consulted one another in private concerning the best means by which they could oppose and overcome him (Aj). Al-Māturīdī, the important Quran commentator and founder of the Māturīdī school of Sunni theology, notes that the sorcerers' statement that Moses and Aaron wish to expel them from their land is taken from an identical statement by Pharaoh with regard to Moses in 26:34–35: *Truly this is a knowing sorcerer, who desires to expel you from your land with his sorcery* (see also v. 57). *Their sorcery* refers to the miracles that Moses performed for Pharaoh earlier (Aj), namely the nine signs that Pharaoh took to be sorcery (see v. 56). By their *exemplary way of life* the sorcerers were referring to their easy lifestyle, which entailed all of their needs being met by the Israelites by virtue of the Egyptians' dominance over them (M).

65–66 See 7:115–16c.

67–68 *Moses conceived a fear in his soul* means fear entered into his heart because, after the sorcerers had caused their ropes to appear as serpents and were seen by the people, Moses was apprehensive that this might prevent the people from seeing the truth of the sign with which he had come (M).

69 When Moses cast his staff, *it devoured all their deceptions* (7:117) and *whatsoever they did was shown to be false* (7:118). See also 10:77, where Moses makes a similar statement about the ultimate futility of the work of sorcerers. After the sorcerers were defeated, they *turned back, humbled* (7:119). See also 20:89c.

70 See commentary on 7:119–22.

cast down in prostration. They said, "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses." (71) He said, "Do you believe in Him before I give you leave? He is indeed your chief, who has taught you sorcery. Now I shall surely cut off your hands and your feet on alternate sides, and I shall surely crucify you on the trunks of palm trees. And you will surely know which of us [inflicts] a more severe and lasting punishment!" (72) They said, "We shall never prefer you to the clear proofs that have come to us, nor to Him who originated us. So decree whatsoever you decree; you only decree in the life of this world. (73) Truly we believe in our Lord, that He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery that you compelled us to perform. And God is better and more lasting!" (74) Verily, whosoever comes unto his Lord guilty, surely his shall be Hell, wherein he neither dies nor lives. (75) But whosoever comes unto Him as a believer, having performed righteous deeds, theirs shall be the highest ranks— (76) Gardens of Eden with rivers running below, abiding therein. That is the recompense of one who purifies himself. (77) And We indeed revealed unto Moses, "Set forth with My servants by night and strike for them a dry path through the sea. Be not afraid of being overtaken, and fear not." (78) Then Pharaoh pursued them with his hosts, and they were overwhelmed by the sea that enshrouded them. (79) Pharaoh led his people astray, and guided them not. (80) O Children of Israel! We have saved you from your enemies and have appointed a tryst for you on the right side of the Mount. And We sent down unto you manna and quails. (81) Eat of

71–73 See commentary on 7:123–26; cf. also v. 71 with 26:49. The sorcerers reached such a high degree of certainty in God that they came to see the trials and pleasures of this life as merely passing and ultimately finite in comparison to the state of eternal felicity in the Afterlife (K). The sorcerers' statement that *God is better and more lasting* means that the rewards that God can give are *better* than the rewards that Pharaoh can give, and that God's Punishment, when meted out, is *more lasting* than Pharaoh's punishment (JJ); see also 28:60; 42:36; cf. v. 131.

74–76 One *neither dies nor lives* in Hell because its inhabitants will not experience rest in it, nor will they live a kind of life from which they can draw positive benefit (JJ); see also 14:16–17; 87:13. For the various *ranks* in Paradise, see 4:96c. The *Gardens of Eden* are mentioned in several places in the Quran; see 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 35:33; 98:8.

77 The first part of this verse is identical to the first part of 26:52. Moses followed God's Command to go with the Israelites *by night,* and they were pursued by Pharaoh and his hosts *at sunrise* (26:60). See also 26:61–64.

78–79 For the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts, see 7:136c; see also 2:50; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 26:65–66; 28:40; 43:55; 44:24; 51:40. The fate of Pharaoh in particular is discussed in 10:90–92c.

80–81 Cf. 2:57, 60; 7:160. For God's sending down *manna and quails* to the Israelites and the

the good things We have provided you, but exceed not the limits therein, lest My Wrath be unleashed upon you. And he upon whom My Wrath is unleashed has been cast into ruin. (82) And surely I am most forgiving toward the one who repents and believes and works righteousness, and thereafter is rightly guided. (83) "What hast made thee hasten from thy people, O Moses?" (84) He said, "They are close upon my footsteps, and I hastened unto Thee, my Lord, that Thou mayest be content." (85) He said, "Truly We tried thy people in thine absence, and the Samaritan led them astray." (86) Then Moses returned to his people, angry and aggrieved. He said, "O my people! Did your Lord not make you a goodly Promise? Did the pact seem too long for you? Or did you desire that the anger of your Lord be unleashed upon you, such that you failed your tryst with me?" (87) They said, "We did not fail our tryst with thee of our own

command to *eat of the good things We have provided you,* see 2:57c. *Exceed not the limits therein* is a warning against excess combined with ungratefulness for the blessings that they had been given (JJ); see 2:61 for the Israelites' request for foods other than what they had been given and the subsequent Divine Response for their ingratitude. For the Israelites' asking Moses to make them an idol similar to the ones they found others worshipping, along with Moses' response, see 7:138–41c; for their taking an idol to worship apart from God while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, see vv. 87–88.

A *tryst* for the Israelites *on the right side of the Mount* refers to the reception of the Torah, which would soon be given to Moses at Mt. Sinai (JJ; see vv. 83–84); cf. 19:52, which speaks of *the right side of the Mount* in reference to Mt. Horeb, where Moses met God and was chosen as a messenger (see v. 10); see also 28:29, 46.

82 For the nature and significance of God's Forgiveness, see 7:156c; 39:53c.

83–84 Moses appointed Aaron over the Israelites while he spent forty days on Mt. Sinai in retreat, fasting and having intimate discourse with God (see commentary on 7:142–43). Then he hastened to his meeting place with God on the Mount (IK; see v. 80; 7:143). It is said that Moses rushed to his meeting place with God in order to fulfill immediately God's Command (Kl), and out of an intense desire to speak with Him (Z). Moses' words, *that Thou mayest be content,* mean that Moses also came hurriedly to their meeting so that God would be more content with him (IK, Z). God's question to Moses is not out of ignorance, but rather functions as a means of allowing Moses to articulate to himself the purpose of his haste, which engenders in him a heightened sense of awe and reverence for the One before Whom he stands. Moses' statement that the Israelites *are close upon* his *footsteps* means that they have alighted in a spot close to the Mount (IK).

85 For *the Samaritan* (al-Sāmirī), see also 7:148c. It is said that al-Sāmirī is a generic title derived from the name of the Israelite tribe (al-Sāmirah) to which this individual belonged (Z). The Samaritan is believed to have been a hypocrite who did not accept Moses' message, but appeared to do so outwardly (Z).

86 This verse is similar to 7:150 (see also 17:150c). God's *goodly Promise* refers to His Promise that He would give the Torah to the Israelites to live by (JJ; see v. 80). See also 20:80–81c, where the Israelites are warned of God's Wrath if they were to be ungrateful.

87 The Israelites' response indicates that they were tricked by the Samaritan. According to some, *the people's ornaments* refers to the heavy jewelry lent to the Israelites by the Egyptians before the latter were destroyed, and which was therefore unlawful for the Israelites to keep (Kl, R, Z). From a spiritual

will, but we were laden with the burden of the people's ornaments. So we cast them [into the pit], and thus did the Samaritan throw also." (88) Then he brought forth for them a calf as a mere body that lowed, and they said, "This is your god and the god of Moses, though he has forgotten." (89) Have they not considered that it does not respond to them with words, and that it has no power over what harm or benefit may come to them? (90) And Aaron had indeed said to them earlier, "O my people! You are merely being tested by this, and truly your Lord is the Compassionate. So follow me and obey my command!" (91) They said, "We shall not cease to be its devotees till Moses returns unto us." (92) He said, "O Aaron! What hindered thee, when thou didst see them going astray, (93) that thou didst not follow me? Didst thou disobey my command?" (94) He said, "O

point of view, *the burden of the people's ornaments* can represent worldly riches or wealth, which becomes a kind of spiritual "burden" for people by giving them a false sense of security and immortality that weakens their sense of reliance upon God and their ultimate return to Him, as in 104:1–3: *Woe unto every slandering backbiter who amasses wealth and tallies it, supposing that his wealth makes him immortal.* See also 18:7–8c; 18:46c.

Aaron told the Israelites that these ornaments were a source of religious defilement (*najas*) and thus were sinful to keep; he ordered them to throw these ornaments into a pit until Moses returned, which they all did (R). Alternately, some have said that it was the Samaritan who ordered them to throw the ornaments into the pit, telling them that they should wait to see what God wants to do with the ornaments (Kl, R). Then, without their knowledge, the Samaritan lit the pit on fire and used the now malleable ornaments to form the golden calf (Kl); see also 7:148c.

88 The golden calf made sounds as though it were a real calf. Some say it did so because it had a number of perforations and hollows in it that made a kind of whistling sound when the wind blew; others report that when the Samaritan took *a handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger* (v. 96) and cast it into the molten gold, it caused the calf to low; see 7:148c; 20:95–96c. *They* refers to the Samaritan and his followers who were already inclined to idolatrous tendencies (Q). The reference to Moses having forgotten is prompted by the Samaritan's suggestion that Moses forgot that the calf was Moses' god and thus went elsewhere in search of him (R).

89 Cf. 7:148, which mentions that the calf did not speak to them or guide them in any way. Despite the calf's unintelligible lowing sounds, it was nothing in comparison to God, Who spoke clearly to Moses; see 7:148c. It can also be said that such "senseless miracles"—that is, supposed "miracles" that are unaccompanied by meaningful spiritual guidance—are ultimately without purpose or value, and are thus actually evil in their attempt to detract from prophetic miracles that come as a support for rationally comprehensible revelation and guidance. The Samaritan's trickery also bears some analogy to the magic of the sorcerers (see 7:117–18; 10:77) who, at Pharaoh's behest, tried to undermine the religious message of Moses by challenging the uniqueness of the wonders or marvels accompanying it.

90 Aaron said this to the Israelites before Moses returned, calling them to worship the true God, and enjoining them to obey his command to worship God (JJ). Cf. Aaron's role here and in Exodus 32:1–6.

91 This means that the people insisted they would not cease worshipping the calf until Moses returned (M).

92–94 While on the mountain, Moses was informed by God that his people had gone astray. He thus returned to them in a state of anger and grief over their actions, and when he saw their

son of my mother! Seize not my beard or my head. Truly I feared that thou wouldst say, 'Thou hast caused division among the Children of Israel, and thou hast not heeded my word.' " (95) He said, "What was your purpose, O Samaritan?" (96) He said, "I saw that which they saw not. So I took a handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger, and I cast it. Thus did my soul prompt me." (97) He said, "Be gone! In this life it shall be yours to say, 'Touch [me] not!' And truly for you there is a tryst that you cannot fail to keep. Now observe your god, to whom you remained devoted: we shall surely burn it and scatter its ashes in the sea!" (98) Your only god is God, besides Whom there is no other god. He encompasses all things in knowledge. (99) Thus do We narrate unto thee some of the accounts of those who have come before. And We have given thee a Reminder from Our Presence. (100) Whosoever turns away from it, verily he shall bear it as a burden on the Day of Resurrection, (101) abiding therein. How evil a burden for them on the Day of

worship of the idol, he threw down the Tablets in anger and shock. Since Moses had left Aaron in charge of the Israelites, upon his return he rebuked Aaron for what had happened while he was absent. See also 7:150c.

95–96 *A handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger* refers to the tracks of dust or sand left behind by the "horse of life" (*faras al-ḥayāt*), upon which the Archangel Gabriel was riding when he was sent to take Moses to meet God at Mt. Sinai, an event witnessed by the Samaritan (Z). The Samaritan took some of this dust and noticed that whenever this dust was placed upon something, it would become spirit, flesh, and blood; that is, it would become a living thing (Q).

97 *In this life it shall be yours to say, "Touch [me] not!"* is understood to mean that the Samaritan was forbidden from then on to be in contact with the Israelites in any way whatsoever (Ṭ). The *tryst that you cannot fail to keep* is in reference to the punishment that the Samaritan would inevitably encounter, in either this life or the next (M). Since the idol was a living animal made of flesh and blood (see v. 96c), Moses first burned it and then cast its ashes into the sea (Ṭs). According to Ibn Kathīr, the calf was made of gold, but then turned into a living creature, which was then burned and the ashes thrown into the sea (cf. 2:93). It is also said that Moses wanted to kill the Samaritan, but that God revealed to him that he should not do so (Ṭs); cf. Exodus 32:20.

98 For God as encompassing *all things in knowledge,* which means that everything that takes place does so in accordance with His Wisdom and His Knowledge, see 40:7, which speaks of God encompassing *all things in Mercy and Knowledge,* as well as 6:80c; 7:89; 65:12.

99 *Thus do We narrate;* that is, just as We related to you the story of Moses, so too do We relate to you reports of other older communities (JJ); see also 7:107. By *a Reminder from Our Presence* is meant the Quran (JJ, R). See also 7:107; 28:44–46.

100–101 *Whosoever turns away from it*—that is, the Quran (Aj)—shall be subject to a "weighty" punishment (Bḍ) *on the Day of Resurrection. Abiding therein* means that such a person will continually be in this state of punishment (Bg); see also v. 124; 72:17.

Resurrection— (102) the Day the trumpet shall be blown, and We shall gather the guilty on that Day, blind. (103) They will whisper among themselves, "You have tarried only ten [days]." (104) We know well that which they will say, when the most exemplary of them in conduct will say, "You have tarried only a day!" (105) They ask thee about the mountains. Say, "My Lord shall scatter them as ashes. (106) And He will leave it a barren plain. (107) You will see no crookedness or curvature therein." (108) On that Day they shall follow a herald in whom there is no crookedness. And voices will be humbled before the Compassionate, and

102–4 *The Day the trumpet shall be blown* refers to the second blowing of the trumpet, which will signal the Day of Resurrection (R); the trumpet's first blowing ushers in the Last Day, when the world will come to an end; see 39:68c. For the function of the trumpet in Islamic eschatology, see 6:73c. By *the guilty* here is meant the disbelievers and the wrongdoers, namely those who ascribed partners unto God (R). For the manner in which the disbelievers will be blind on the Last Day, see vv. 124–25; see also 20:124–27c. According to some, the reason that the guilty will *whisper among themselves* is that they will be so terrified that they will barely be able to speak (R); cf. v. 108. *Only ten [days]* refers to the period of time people in the Hereafter will think they had spent in the life of this world (R), although some say that it relates to the period of time in the grave (R). Although most say that *ten* refers to a number of days (as in 23:112–13), some suggest that it refers to a number of hours (as in 79:46; R). In Arabic, the term *days* can have different symbolic meanings and may even denote entire cosmological periods; see 14:5–6c. *The most exemplary of them in conduct* refers to those who were the most just (JJ) and most knowledgeable (Kl); see also 17:52; 23:114.

According to one interpretation, people will deem their time on earth to have been slight because of their intense fear on the Last Day (JJ). From another perspective, however, the life of this world will seem so insignificant to them on the Last Day that all of their actions, in the face of eternity, would amount to only a few days or hours, much like a dream whose duration seems long, but when the dreamer awakens, he or she realizes that it took place in only a few fleeting moments. The Prophet (or, according to some, ʿAlī) is reported to have said, "People are asleep, and when they die, they awaken"; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." Meditating upon this saying, Mullā Ṣadrā explains the manner in which every soul will awaken in the afterlife: "Every soul, whether it be felicitous or miserable, when it is disengaged from the body and travels to this abode . . . its inner faculties will become powerful and piercing because of [its] perception of the matters related to the next world, as in His Most High's saying, *Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing* [50:22]."

105–7 The destruction of the mountains on the Last Day is referred to throughout the Quran; see 18:47; 52:10; 56:5; 69:14; 70:9; 77:10; 78:20; 81:3; 101:5.

108 The reference here is to the Archangel Seraphiel (Isrāfīl), who according to some traditions will be standing on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem on the Last Day or the Day of Resurrection, calling people with his powerful voice (JJ, Z). Seraphiel is also the archangel responsible for the two blowings of the trumpet, for which, see 39:68c. Some say that Seraphiel will call people after the second trumpet blast (Aj), in which case the scene of his calling would not be the Last Day, but the Day of Resurrection. That there will be *no crookedness* in the *herald* means that people will not be able to turn away from him (IK, Z). Out of awe, peoples' *voices will be humbled* (Aj). The *murmur* they will hear on this Day is said to be the slight sounds that people's feet will make (AJ, JJ,

you will hear naught but a murmur. (109) On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose word He is content. (110) He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they encompass Him not in knowledge. (111) Faces will be humbled before the Living, the Self-Subsisting. And whosoever bears wrongdoing will have failed. (112) But whosoever performs righteous deeds and is a believer, he shall fear neither wrong nor deprivation. (113) Thus have We sent it down as an Arabic Quran, and We have varied the threat therein that haply they may be reverent, or [that] it might occasion remembrance for them. (114) Exalted is God, the True Sovereign. Be not in haste with the Quran before its

Z) as they walk to the Gathering Place (*maḥshar;* Aj, Z). *Murmur* translates *hamsah,* which denotes the pitter-patter sound of a camel's hoofs (AJ, JJ, Z); cf. v. 103.

109 For a discussion of intercession on the Day of Judgment, see 2:48c; 2:255c. Some theologians say that the reference to *with whose word He is content* encompasses anyone who testifies to God's Oneness, while the Muʿtazilites restrict this status to those who believe and who also have not committed major sins; see 21:28c.

110 This verse is similar to part of 2:255: *He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His Knowledge, save what He wills;* see 2:255c; see also 21:28; 22:76. The main difference between the present verse and 2:255 is in the phrase about "knowledge." In 2:255 it says, *They encompass nothing of His Knowledge,* emphasizing creatures' inability to comprehend God's Knowledge. The present verse has *They encompass Him not in knowledge,* highlighting their inability to know Him fully. As the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, is reported to have said, "The inability to comprehend [God] is comprehension itself" (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt,* II: 619.35).

111 On the Day of Judgment, people, here symbolized by their *faces* (as in 88:8–9), will be in a lowly state like slaves, and the kingdom will belong solely to God (R); see also 40:16. For God as *the Living, the Self-Subsisting,* see 2:255c.

112 In several places the Quran couples righteous deeds and belief—that is, action and faith—as the means by which people attain salvation; see 4:124; 16:97; 17:19; 21:94; 40:40. *Deprivation* in this verse is in reference to the detraction of one's good deeds (Kl); that is, in the Afterlife, believers will not be slighted in the least in regard to the righteous actions that they have performed.

113 The Quran refers to itself variously as being *an Arabic Quran* (12:2; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3), *a judgment in Arabic* (13:37), and *[in] a clear, Arabic tongue* (16:103; cf. 26:195; 46:12); see 13:37c. *We have varied the threat therein* is to say that in the Quran *the threat* of Divine Punishment or Sanction is repeated in various ways (R). *It might occasion remembrance for them* means that those who read about the destruction of previous nations in the Quran might draw lessons from their stories (JJ).

114 This verse refers to the Prophet's fear of forgetting the verses of revelation, which led him to repeat quickly what was being revealed to him by the Archangel Gabriel while the revelation was taking place (Q, R); see 75:16–18c. Alternatively, it could be an admonishment to the Prophet not to seek to receive the revelation before its appropriate time (R).

*My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!* is commonly invoked by Muslims at various times, such as when they are students beginning their studies. The Prophet is reported to have said, "If a day comes upon me in which I do not increase in a knowledge that draws me nearer to God, may God not bless

revelation is completed for thee, but say, "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!" (115) And We indeed made a pact with Adam aforetime, but he forgot. And We found no resoluteness in him. (116) And when We said unto the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam," they prostrated, save Iblīs; he refused. (117) We said, "O Adam! Truly this is an enemy unto thee and thy wife. So let him not expel the two of you from the Garden, such that thou wouldst be wretched. (118) Truly it is for thee that thou shalt neither hunger therein, nor go naked, (119) and that thou shalt neither thirst therein, nor suffer from the heat of

me that day" (Ṭs). Thus, if the Prophet is told to pray for increase in knowledge, then, a fortiori, all Muslims are expected to do the same. Hence, Ibn ʿArabī says, "God did not say to His Prophet, *Say, 'My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!'*, nor did He allow us to hear that, except as a way of alerting us so that we would [also] say this and seek increase from God. If this were specific to the Prophet, God would not have allowed us to hear it, or He would have mentioned that it was specific to him" (*Futūḥāt,* II: 531.7). This supplication has often been a prayer of the Sufis in particular, although it is used by pious Muslims in general.

115 The *pact* that God made with Adam refers to His telling him not to approach the tree (R); see 2:35c; 7:19c. By *aforetime* is meant either before Adam's actual eating from the tree or, more generally, before the coming of the Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Quran (R). *He forgot* denotes Adam's forgetting his *pact* (Q) or abandoning it (JJ, Q); see also v. 121. The Prophet is reported to have said, "Adam forgot, and thus his progeny forgot." Adam is the model for human beings to follow, since God *taught Adam the names, all of them* (2:31). According to the close spiritual companion of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Shams-i Tabrīzī (disappeared in 644/1247), people should keep in mind that Adam only *forgot* one time, and so they also should allow themselves to forget only once. Concerning the person who constantly falls into error in the spiritual life, Shams says, "The custom of his father [Adam] was [that he only forgot] one time—once is enough!" (*Maqālāt* [Tehran, 1990], 767). On human forgetfulness, see 59:19c.

*We found no resoluteness in him* can mean that God did not find in Adam the resolve to disobey Him (R), although he and his wife did eat from the tree because they were deceived by Satan (see 7:21–22c); in other words, he erred, but did not do so intentionally (Ṭs). Or *We found no resoluteness in him* can mean that God did not find in Adam the moral resolve to obey His Prohibition against eating from the tree (R). According to this latter interpretation, some see the reference to God not finding *resoluteness* in Adam as the reason for his not being counted as one of *the resolute among the messengers* (*ūlu'l-ʿazmi min al-rusul*), for whom, see 46:35c.

116 See 2:30c; 7:11c.

117–19 For the warning to Adam and Eve that Satan is *an enemy unto* them, see 7:21–22c. *Let him not expel the two of you from the Garden* is an admonition from God to Adam and Eve that they should not obey Satan, for he will cause them to leave the Garden through his deceiving them to eat from the forbidden tree (Kl). *Such that thou wouldst be wretched* refers to the hardship and fatigue that Adam and Eve would experience because of the need to earn a livelihood in this world (M, Z). In other words, by obeying Satan, they would leave their state of comfort in the Garden and descend into the life of this world, which is filled with hardship; see also 2:36; 7:24–25. Thus, the references in v. 118 to being neither hungry nor naked, and in v. 119 to neither being thirsty nor experiencing the sun's heat, evoke the state of

the sun." (120) Then Satan whispered to him. He said, "O Adam! Shall I show thee the Tree of Everlastingness and a kingdom that never decays?" (121) So they both ate therefrom. Then their nakedness was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden. Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred. (122) Then his Lord chose him, and relented unto him and guided [him]. (123) He said, "Get down from it, both of you together, each of you an enemy to the other. And if guidance should come unto you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance shall not go astray, nor be wretched. (124) But whosoever turns away from the remembrance of Me, truly his shall be a miserable life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection." (125) He will say, "My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, when I used to see?" (126) He will say, "Thus it is. Our signs came unto you, but you forgot them. Even so, this Day shall you be forgotten!" (127) Thus do We recompense whosoever is prodigal and believes not in the signs of his Lord. And surely the punishment of the Hereafter

complete ease and comfort that Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden, which is juxtaposed to the hardships of the life of this world which they would encounter if they were to succumb to Satan's suggestions. For other accounts of Adam and Eve's being warned by God, Satan's deceiving them, their fall from Paradise, and their remorse over their actions, see 2:35–37 and 7:19–23.

120–21 See 7:21–22c. The offer made by Satan (who presents himself as *a sincere adviser* to Adam and Eve in 7:21) to show them the *Tree of Everlastingness* was an invitation to achieve immortality (Bg). According to the Muʿtazilites, the last part of v. 121, *Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred,* means that Adam committed a minor sin (*ṣaghīrah;* R). However, according to others, Adam did not commit a sin in the real sense of the term. Rather, he is metaphorically characterized as "disobeying" God because his proximity to Him dictated that he choose the most optimal of paths, whereas he ended up choosing one that was less optimal, but not actually sinful (Aj). According to al-Rāzī, Adam's actions took place before he became a prophet, an interpretation that would be favored by the majority of theologians for whom prophethood and sin are mutually exclusive. On whether prophets can sin, see also 22:52c; 27:10–11c.

122 For God's pardoning of Adam, see 2:37c.

123 This verse is understood to be an address to Adam and Eve and their future progeny, indicating their banishment from Paradise, but also the means by which they could recover their original nature while on earth—by following God's Guidance. See also 2:38–39c; 7:24–25c. For the significance of the fall of Adam and Eve, see 7:24–25c.

124–27 *The remembrance of Me* can refer to the Quran in particular (JJ), in which case it would be translated "My Reminder," or to the guidance that reminds people of God and calls them to Him in general (Aj). *A miserable life* is a life that is constricted (Kl, Ṭ), especially spiritually. Or, it may refer to a life in which one is merely given to the things of the world and lives in a state where he is fearful of their being taken away from him, which is contrasted with the life of the believer—that is, one who lives in hope for the world to come, who may be safe from evil and disbelief, and whose life is whelmed in the grace (*barakah*) of faith (Bḍ). Juxtaposing such people with the believers, al-Zamakhsharī calls attention to 16:97: *Whosoever works righteousness, whether*

is more severe and more lasting. (128) Does it not serve as guidance for them, how many generations We destroyed before them, amid whose dwellings they walk? Truly in that are signs for those possessed of intelligence. (129) And were it not for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord and a term appointed, it would be inevitable. (130) So bear patiently that which they say, and hymn the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and in the hours of the night glorify [Him], and at the ends of the day, that haply thou

*male or female, and is a believer, We shall give them new life, a good life, and We shall surely render unto them their reward in accordance with the best of that which they used to do.*

Some people are said to be raised *blind* on the Last Day and in the Hereafter, even though they could see with their physical sight while alive on earth. This form of blindness in the Afterlife is the direct result of spiritual blindness in the life of this world, as in 17:72: *And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way;* see also 17:97, and 22:46: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.* For the various types of spiritual blindness in this world, see 5:71c. From another perspective, those who were spiritually blind in this life will come to "see" the reality of things in the next life; that is, they will come to witness, in a crystal-clear manner, the truths they rejected in this life (see 20:102–4c; 50:22).

To forget *Our signs* (v. 126) means to abandon and disbelieve in God's signs (JJ), namely, the proofs brought by His messengers (Aj). For God's "forgetting" the disbelievers on the Last Day, see 7:51c and 45:34c. For the *prodigal,* see 10:12c. The promise that the chastisement of the Hereafter is *more severe and more lasting* means that the disbeliever's perpetual blindness in the Hereafter is more intense than any kind of constriction that he will experience in this life (Z). Alternately, it can mean that God's leaving the disbeliever in his state of blindness in the Hereafter is more intense and longer-lasting than the blindness that results from his turning away from God's signs (Z).

128 Along with a number of other verses (17:17; 19:74; 36:31; 38:3; 50:36), this verse refers to the generations that were destroyed for their refusal to accept the messengers sent to them by God (see also 6:6; 7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13, which speak of the destruction of towns for the same reason). For an almost identical verse, see 32:26. For the meaning of *those possessed of intelligence,* see 20:53–54c.

129 If God had not already determined to put off the disbelievers' punishment until the Day of Judgment (JJ, Sh), their destruction *would be inevitable* (JJ); see also 10:19; 11:110; 41:45; 42:14, 20.

130 Cf. 50:39–40. Before the *rising of the sun and before its setting* refers to the dawn prayer (*ṣubḥ* or *fajr*) and the late afternoon prayer (*ʿaṣr*) respectively (JJ, Q), while *in the hours of the night* refers to the night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*; Q). *The ends of the day* refers to the midday prayer (*ẓuhr*) and the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) respectively, since the midday prayer stands at the end of the first part of the day and the beginning of the second part of the day, while the sunset prayer stands at the end of the second part of the day (Q); see also 50:39–40c. *That haply thou mayest be content* means that, by virtue of glorifying God at these times, one will be content with the reward that will be given by God (JJ). It can also mean that one will become generally content with whatever is given by God in the life of this world.

According to a spiritual interpretation, this verse means that those treading the path of spiritual perfection should be patient and devoted solely to their Master. They should turn away from sins and from being concerned with people's opinions of them, occupying themselves instead with the constant remembrance and invocation (*dhikr*) of God until the false sense of self disappears in the Presence of the Knower of the Unseen, through which they will become *content* in witnessing the Beloved (Aj).

mayest be content. (131) Strain not thine eyes toward the enjoyments We have granted certain classes of them, as the splendor of the life of this world, that We may test them concerning it. The provision of thy Lord is better and more lasting. (132) And bid thy family to prayer and be steadfast therein. We ask no provision of thee; We provide for thee. And the end belongs to reverence. (133) They say, "Why has he not brought us a sign from his Lord?" Has there not come unto them the clear proof of that which is in the scriptures of old? (134) Had We destroyed them with a punishment before it, they would have said, "Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent a messenger unto us, we would have followed Thy signs before being abased and disgraced." (135) Say, "Each is waiting, so wait! For you shall come to know those who are the companions of the sound path, and those who are rightly guided."

131 In the first part of this verse, the Prophet is being admonished not to desire the things of the world that have been given to the Makkans who are rejecting him; see also 15:88c. *That We may test them concerning it* means "that We may punish them in the Afterlife on account of it" (Z). *The provision of thy Lord is better and more lasting* means that the rewards that God has promised the Prophet in the Hereafter are far better and longer lasting than the enjoyments He has given the disbelievers in this life (Ṭū); cf. 28:60; 42:36. See also v. 73, where God Himself is described as *better and more lasting* (see also 20:71–73c).

From a spiritual perspective, *the provision* of God that is being referred to here is the virtue of trust in God (*tawakkul*), since having complete trust in Him is *better and more lasting* than one's own efforts in seeking out the things one wants (Su). Alternatively, *provision* here could be a reference to both contentment with God and total reliance upon Him (Su).

132 Some say that *family* (*ahl*) refers to the Prophet's close relatives, while others say that it refers to the people of his faith (R), in which case *thy family* would be rendered "thy people" instead, since *ahl* can mean either "family" or "people." Although this injunction is addressed to the Prophet, it applies to the believers in general (Q). *We ask no provision of thee; We provide for thee* is similar to 51:57–58: *I desire no provision from them; nor do I desire that they should feed Me. Truly God is the Provider, the Possessor of Strength, the Firm.* The phrase *the end belongs to reverence* means that Paradise is for those who are reverent (see 2:2c; JJ). Elsewhere in the Quran, it also says that *the end belongs to the reverent* (7:128; 11:49; 28:83).

133 The Makkans made repeated requests for the Prophet to bring them *a sign* (6:37; 10:20; 13:7, 27; see also 6:37c; 10:20c). *The clear proof of that which is in the scriptures of old* is a reference to the various stories in the Quran that are also found in the previous scriptures, accounts that serve as clear proofs that the Quran comes from God (Kl). Alternatively, this part of the verse can be a reference to those parts of the Torah and the Gospel that mention the Prophet Muhammad (Kl); see 7:157c.

134 Some say that this verse is meant to expose the Makkan idolaters as liars who would always reject truth (IK). Al-Rāzī notes the irony of their statement: if they were punished, they would present their excuse; but now that the Prophet has come to them, they do not stand on any firm ground as they continue to reject him. See also 6:109; 28:47; 35:42.

135 That *each is waiting* means each party is waiting to see what its outcome will be, either in this life or at the time of death (R). The words *for you shall come to know* are intended to threaten and frighten the disbelievers (R); see also 10:20c.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 21

# The Prophets

## *al-Anbiyāʾ*

*Al-Anbiyāʾ*, a Makkan *sūrah* (Q), receives its name from the many stories of prophets told in it. The first section recounts the various accusations of falsehood and expressions of incredulity directed at the Prophet by the Quraysh (vv. 1–10) and offers a reminder that peoples before him had been destroyed and could do nothing to stave off their punishment (vv. 11–15). The impossibility of God taking a consort or having a child and the absurdity of more than one divinity in the universe are explained (vv. 16–29), followed by a section asking human beings to contemplate the cosmos (vv. 30–33). Human beings are reminded that all souls will taste death and will then be judged (vv. 34–47).

After a brief mention of Moses and Aaron (vv. 48–50), a longer account of Abraham is given that includes his ruse of blaming the largest of his people's idols for destroying the smaller ones to show them how empty their worship was and the attempt by his people to burn him alive in retaliation (vv. 51–73). After mentioning Lot (vv. 74–75) and Noah (vv. 76–77), the *sūrah* narrates a story of David and Solomon in which David's judgment is overturned by that of his son (vv. 78–82). This is followed by accounts of Job (vv. 83–84); Ishmael, Idrīs, and Dhu'l-Kifl (vv. 85–86); Jonah (vv. 87–88); and Zachariah, John, and Mary (vv. 89–91).

The last part of *al-Anbiyāʾ* addresses the end of the world and the coming of the Hereafter. A reminder of the tendency of religious communities to fragment when their members disagree among themselves is followed by an account of the coming of Gog and Magog, the ultimate end of idolaters and their idols in Hell, and the destruction of the cosmos and its renewal for the righteous (vv. 92–104). The *sūrah* ends with a statement that the Prophet is a mercy to all creation, and a reminder both that he has given fair warning of what is to come and that he does not know when the final doom will come to pass (vv. 105–12).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) For mankind, their reckoning draws nigh, while they turn away heedless. (2) No new Reminder came unto them from their Lord, but that they listened to it while they played, (3) with their hearts diverted. And those who do wrong confide in secret converse, "Is this not but a human being like yourselves? Will you then yield to sorcery, while you see clearly?" (4) He said, "My Lord knows that which is spoken in Heaven and on earth, and He is the

1 The first verse of *al-Anbiyāʾ* announces that the time of the reckoning approaches (R); cf. 54:1. *Reckoning* (*ḥisāb*) is a word used to signify the accounting of the Day of Judgment, which is also called the Day of Reckoning (e.g., 38:16; 40:28). Some theologians have said that the time that has passed since God created the world is greater than the time remaining until the world ends (Q, Z), a chronology based on the fact that the verb used in this verse for *draws nigh* (*iqtaraba*) ordinarily signifies that one is closer to one's destination than to one's origin (R). Some say that from God's point of view the reckoning is close—not in a temporal sense, because God knows all moments simultaneously—but rather is close with regard to His Knowledge of the reckoning; human beings, however, think of it as something distant (M); see also 70:6–7, which speaks of the *impending punishment* (70:1) in these terms: *Truly they see it as far off, but We see it as nigh.*

In addition to the fact that the Quran points out that the world as such will come to an end, some commentators observe that it should be enough for anyone that one's own death is certain, regardless of the time of the destruction of the world; this is part of what is signified by *their reckoning draws nigh* (Q). To be *heedless* means that people only care about this world (Ṭ) and pay no attention to the matters of the Hereafter (Q). It is said among the Sufis that there are those who are heedless of the Hereafter because they are engrossed in worldly affairs, and there are the righteous believers who are mindful of the Hereafter; but there are also those who are heedless of the Hereafter because they are so engrossed in the remembrance of God that they give no thought to the Garden or to the Fire (Aj).

2 See the similar verse 26:5 and commentary. The notion of "play" as a characteristic of the disbelievers and idolaters is associated with their overall state of "heedlessness," or *ghaflah;* see also 6:91; 43:83; 52:12; 70:42, which speak of the way in which the disbelievers engage in "play" instead of remembering God.

3 The practice of *sorcery* (*siḥr*), which could also be rendered "magic" or "illusion," is an accusation made against the Prophet that in the Arabian context could imply that he was a poet with a demonic muse (see v. 5) or a soothsayer; on this latter subject, see commentary on 26:224–27. What the idolaters are said to *see clearly* is that Muhammad is, from their point of view, a man like themselves who is possibly engaged in sorcery or is somehow possessed (Q). The objection voiced by opponents of the prophets that they are no more than human beings like themselves is also found in 11:27; 23:24, 33; 26:154; 26:186. However, the prophets also affirm that they are only human beings, usually in response to challenges to produce miracles or knowledge of the unseen, as in 14:11; 18:110; 41:6. On this latter point, also see 18:110c.

4 God knows secret discussions in addition to what is said openly (IK, R), as in 5:99 and 24:29: *God knows what you disclose and what you conceal* (cf. 16:19; 64:4). Some read the verb at the beginning not as *He said* but as a command "Say" directed at the Prophet (Q, Ṭ). God's Knowledge of what is *in Heaven and on earth* is mentioned many times in the Quran (e.g., 3:29; 5:97; 10:18; 25:6; 27:65; 29:52; 49:16; 58:7).

Hearing, the Knowing." (5) Yet they said, "Confused dreams! Nay, he has fabricated it! Nay, he is a poet! Let him bring us a sign like those of old were sent!" (6) No town that We destroyed before them believed; will these, then, believe? (7) And We sent no messenger before thee, but that they were men unto whom We revealed. So ask the people of the Reminder, if you know not. (8) We did not make them bodies that ate not food; nor were they

5 *Confused dreams* renders *aḍghāthᵘ aḥlām* (cf. 12:44). Some say *aḍghāth* refers to those dreams that are not meant to be interpreted (Q); that is, instead of being manifestations of one's inner spirit or inspirations from an angelic source, they are random products of the imagination without any objective meaning. Some commentators note the incoherence of the various accusations in this verse and see them as mutually contradictory: if it is a "confused dream," it can be neither sorcery nor something consciously fabricated (M).

The *sign like those of old were sent* refers to wonders produced by previous prophets, such as Moses' miraculous staff (Q). Some commentators say that the requests for signs were simply obstinate challenges: had the Prophet healed lepers, for example, the Quraysh would have said it was a kind of medicine they simply did not understand. As it happened, they rejected the Quran's eloquence and proofs, which they were unable to duplicate or surpass (Q). For another example of this type of challenge, see also 3:183, where others say to the Prophet: *Truly God has committed us to not believe in any messenger until he brings us a sacrifice consumed by fire.*

6 Earlier peoples who were destroyed, such as those of Ṣāliḥ and of Pharaoh, did not believe (Q), even though the kinds of signs that the Quraysh challenged Muhammad to produce were also brought to those people, but to no avail (Ṭ).

7 This verse is interpreted to be a consolation and support for the Prophet reminding him that God never sent angels or other types of beings to fulfill the role of prophet or messenger, only human beings like themselves (Q). Others, however, understand it to mean that messengers are male, not female, owing to the conditions and demands of messengerhood (M), perhaps specifically the physical toll. Not all commentators, however, raise the question of gender (R, Ṭ); on whether women can be considered prophets or messengers in the Islamic tradition (most say they cannot, though this is made problematic by the figure of Mary, who some consider to have prophetic rank), see the introduction to *Sūrah* 19 and 28:7c.

Some understand *people of the Reminder* (*ahl al-dhikr;* cf. 16:43) to mean the learned people among Jews and Christians—that is, the learned among the people to whom the Torah and the Gospel were revealed (Ṭ)—who would be able to tell the Quraysh that God always sent human beings as prophets and messengers (Q, R). A minority of commentators say this verse is directed toward Muslim believers and suggests they ask those who know the Quran, which is often referred to as the *Reminder* (e.g., 6:90; 7:2; 21:50; Q). Some quote the saying of the famous Sufi Junayd that *the people of the Reminder* (*ahl al-dhikr*) refers to those who know the inner realities of the remembrance and invocation (*dhikr*) of God (since *dhikr* can mean at once "invocation," "reminder," and "remembrance") and who look at things with the eyes of the unseen (Su), meaning with a vision that penetrates beyond the outward aspects and appearances to the true inner nature of things.

8 The humanity of the prophets is also affirmed in 25:20: *And We sent not any messengers before thee but that they ate food and walked in the markets;* see also 5:75c; 25:7c. *Immortal* renders *khālidūn,* meaning literally "lasting" or "abiding" forever, a word often used to describe the state of those who will inhabit the Garden or the Fire. Some point out that it is not superhuman qualities, such as being immortal or not needing food, that distinguish prophets from other human

immortal. (9) Then We fulfilled the promise unto them, and saved them and whomsoever We willed, and We destroyed the prodigal. (10) We have indeed sent down unto you a Book wherein is your Reminder. Do you not understand? (11) How many a town engaged in wrongdoing have We shattered, and then brought into being another people after them? (12) And when they felt Our Might, behold, they ran away from it. (13) "Do not run away! But return to the luxury you have been given and to your dwellings, that haply you may be questioned." (14) They said, "Oh, woe unto us! Truly we have been wrongdoers." (15) And that did not cease to be their cry, till We made them a mown field, stilled. (16) And We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is

beings, but their miracles and the absence of negative qualities in their message and character (R). By extension, this verse means that neither the prophets nor saintly people are free of the need for the lawful enjoyment of food, drink, and even sexual relations (though they may abstain from food temporarily or sex permanently; Aj).

9 The *promise* is understood to refer specifically to the remainder of this verse, meaning the promise to save the prophets and punish those who opposed them (M, Q, R). The concept of prodigality is discussed in 3:147c; 7:80–81c; 10:12c; 25:67c.

10 The Quran serves as a reminder of the promise of God to reward good deeds and punish sins or as a reminder of what is obligatory and forbidden in one's religion (R). For some, *wherein is your Reminder* (*dhikr*) can also mean "wherein is your nobility/stature," where *dhikr* is understood in its meaning of "renown" or "reputation" (Q, R, Ṭ), as in 94:4, which addresses the Prophet: *And did We not elevate thy renown* (*dhikrak*)*?* Some say that here *dhikr* means "your story or tale" (Q), or "your virtue" or "the best of your actions" (Q). For others, it refers to the act in which one finds life (Su), understanding *dhikr* to mean the remembrance of God as an action and state of being, rather than as a reminder one receives from outside of oneself.

11 Though similar verses of general import appear elsewhere (e.g., 6:6; 7:4; 17:17; 19:98; 28:58; 38:3; 50:36), some commentators connect this verse with certain towns in Yemen that were destroyed (Q, R), mentioning specifically a place called Ḥadūr, to whom a prophet was sent, though the people of Ḥadūr rejected him. As a spiritual allegory, this verse (and similar ones) can be read as saying God destroys a wicked heart through trials and deprivations and in its place brings a wholesome heart into being through a process of spiritual transformation (Aj).

12 *Felt Our Might* could also mean "sensed Our Might," so that when they saw the impending destruction (before they experienced it), they fled (Ṭ).

13 *Return to the luxury* is understood to mean, "Go back to your worldly existence (*dunyā*)" (Ṭ), that is, the lifestyle the wrongdoers flaunted and enjoyed (Q). *That haply you may be questioned* is thought to mean, "So that you will be made to understand." This command to go back to the world is understood by some to be a form of mockery or a taunt (Q, Ṭ), though it could also be a kind of rhetorical device alluding to the impossibility of escape. It is said by some that these words could have been spoken by the angels or by God (R).

14 It is thought that the wrongdoers said this when the angels began to carry out the punishment, when such an admission was too late to do them any good (Q).

15 *Stilled* renders *khāmidīn*, a word also used to express the extinguishing of a flame or more simply dying (Q).

16 Cf. 44:38. Similar language is employed where the Quran says that God did not create the world *frivolously* (23:115) or *in vain* (3:191; 38:27).

between them in play. (17) Had We desired to take up a diversion, We would surely have taken it from that which was with Us, were We to do so. (18) Nay, but We cast truth against falsehood, and it crushes it, and, behold, it vanishes. And woe unto you for that which you describe! (19) Unto Him belongs whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth. Those who are with Him are not too arrogant to worship Him; nor do they weary. (20) They glorify night and day, without tiring. (21) Or have they taken gods from the earth who resurrect? (22) Were there gods other than God in them, they would surely have been corrupted. So glory

It means that, unlike the tyrants and prodigal of the earth, whose glories and riches are for play and diversion, God creates the splendor of the heavens and the earth for a purpose (R).

17 *Diversion* in *take up a diversion* is interpreted by some to mean "consort" or "wife" (Q, Ṭ) or "[to have a] child" (Q, R). *From that which was with Us* means that if God had willed to do so, He would not have created the world at all (Ṭ), referring back to the previous verse, which states that God did not create the world *in play*. Another possible interpretation is that this verse signifies that God is transcendent beyond the kinds of commingling with His creation that is falsely attributed to Him by some.

18 *Crushes* renders the verb *damagha,* a word that can have the general sense of overcoming or vanquishing, but that also conveys the sense of crushing a skull to the point of reaching the brain (*dimāgh,* etymologically related to the verb); it can also have the meaning of an object stamping a form into softer material. *Vanishes* is understood by some to mean "is destroyed" (Ṭ). The relationship between falsehood and truth in the Quran is discussed at greater length in the commentary on 17:81: *Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished.* Also see 8:8: *So that He may verify the truth and prove falsehood to be false;* 34:49: *Truth has come, and falsehood originates naught, nor restores;* and 42:24: *God wipes out falsehood and verifies the truth through His Words.*

*That which you describe* can either refer to the lies the wrongdoers told or signify their idolatry, recalling phrases such as *Exalted is God above the partners they ascribe* (7:190; 23:92; 27:63), which exalt God above idolatrous attributions (see also v. 112, where God is said to be *the One Whose help is sought against that which you ascribe*). Some understand these descriptions to refer to the accusations made against the Prophet in vv. 3–5.

19–20 Cf. 41:38. These verses are thought to refer to the angels (R, Ṭ). *Those who are with Him* can also mean "those who are near Him." *Nor do they weary* is understood to mean that they neither tire nor become bored (Ṭ), which is possible only for angels, not human beings (R). Some note that for the angels the glorification of God is what breathing is for human beings (Ṭ); see 41:38c.

21 Rather than worship the Creator of the heavens and the earth (v. 19), such people prefer to worship earthly beings incapable of giving life (Q). The imagery of biological life renewed is also treated as a symbol of what will happen to human beings on the Day of Resurrection, as in 35:9: *And God is He Who sends the winds; then they cause clouds to rise. Then We drive them to a land that is dead, and thereby revive the earth after its death. Thus shall be the Resurrection!*

22 *Other than God* (*illa'Llāh*) can also be rendered "except for God," which is also the second half of the formula *lā ilāha illa'Llāh,* "There is no god but God." *In them,* which uses a pronoun in the dual form, refers here to the heavens and the earth. This is one of a handful of verses that argue, as it were, that the notion of a multiplicity of gods is a self-evident logical absurdity; others include 12:39–40, where Joseph asks his fellow prisoners: *Are diverse lords better, or God, the One, the Paramount? You worship apart from Him naught but names that you have named.* Similar verses include 23:91: *And neither are there any gods with*

be to God, Lord of the Throne, above that which they ascribe. (23) He shall not be questioned about what He does, but they shall be questioned. (24) Or have they taken gods apart from Him? Say, "Bring me your proof! This is the Reminder for those who are with me, and the Reminder for those before me. Nay, but most of them do not know the truth; so they turn away." (25) And We sent no messenger before thee, save that We revealed unto him, "Verily, there is no god but I; so worship Me!" (26) And they say, "The Compassionate has taken a

*Him, for then each god would take away what he created, and some of them would overcome others;* and 17:42: *Say, "If there were gods with Him, as they say, they would surely seek a way unto the Possessor of the Throne."* As a spiritual allegory, v. 22 is understood to symbolize the truth that a divided heart will become corrupted, and that a heart must be unified and detached from entanglements in the world (Su).

23 God is not answerable to creation, but creatures are answerable to Him (R). The idea of "questioning" in the sense of responsibility or answerability also arises in v. 13 as well as 2:119, 134; 16:56. See also 28:78c, which discusses the complexity of the Quran's language about being "questioned" in the Hereafter.

For some commentators *He shall not be questioned . . . but they shall be questioned* touches on teleology, or how or whether human beings can ask God why He did such and such (Q, R); indeed, the phrase could also be rendered, "He is unanswerable for what He does, but they are answerable." In regard to created things one can ask why they acted as they did, but it is by definition impossible for creatures to know why God does what He does, and theologically what is at stake is whether God stands in need of a reason outside of Himself to do anything (R). The issue of free will versus predestination also arises here, in that human beings cannot, following a strictly predestinarian reading of this verse, question God or ask why one was made a disbeliever in life (Q). This is connected to *God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning,* one interpretation of which understands it to refer to the fact that no one can bring God to account for the provisions He gives or withholds from different creatures (see 2:212c).

24 In the Quran the bringing of *proof* (*burhān*) is a "demonstration" or "evidence"; this word is used similarly in 2:111; 23:117; 27:64; 28:75. *Reminder* in both instances in this verse renders *dhikr,* a word that can also mean "invoke," "mention," "recall," "remembrance," or even "renown." Thus some understand *Reminder for those before me* to refer here to the fact that the Quran recounts the lives of those peoples who passed away before (R, Ṭ), in which case it would be rendered "Reminder of those before me." Some understand *Reminder* in *a Reminder for those before me* to refer to the Torah and the Gospel, and the content of this Reminder, like that of the Quran, to be that human beings should not take *gods apart from Him,* which is reaffirmed in v. 25 (R).

Some read *the truth* as an extended part of the subject rather than as an object, so that the verse would read, "This is a Reminder for those before me (but most of them know not), the truth." (R).

25 Even though the messengers had different commands regarding what was obligatory and forbidden, they all conveyed the same message of monotheism and devotion to God (Ṭ), confirming the self-evident existence and Oneness of God (Q). Some read part of this verse in the third person: "We sent no messenger before thee, but that it was revealed unto him." Regarding the fundamental similarities among the messages and messengers, see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

26 In the Quran, when it is said that God has taken a *child,* or children (Q), the reference is to either the belief among the idolatrous Quraysh that the angels were "daughters of God" (see, e.g., 37:149–53c; 43:16–17c) or the Christian doctrine of the Divine sonship of Jesus (see, e.g., 4:171c).

child." Glory be to Him! Nay, but they are honored servants. (27) They precede Him not in speech, and they act according to His Command. (28) He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they intercede not, save for one with whom He is content. They are wary, for fear of Him. (29) And whosoever among them would say, "Truly I am a god apart from Him," such will We requite with Hell. Thus do We requite the wrongdoers. (30) Have those who disbelieve not considered that the heavens and the earth were sewn together and We rent them asunder? And We made every living thing from water. Will they not, then, believe? (31) And We placed firm mountains in the earth, lest it shake beneath them, and We made wide tracts between

According to some, this verse was revealed specifically in connection with the tribe of Khuzāʿah, who considered the angels to be daughters of God and worshipped them in order to obtain their intercession (Q); *honored servants* refers to these angels.

Some Muslim theologians do not object to calling God "Father" in a narrow metaphorical or symbolic sense (see 2:116c), but consider it erroneous to assert that any such Divine "offspring" are not like other creatures and would have a different ontological status by virtue of being begotten by God; a similar error would be believing that they are "children of God" in an exclusive and sectarian way, as in 5:18: *And the Jews and the Christians say, "We are the children of God, and His beloved ones." Say, "Why then does He punish you for your sins?" Nay, but you are mortals of His creating. He forgives whomsoever He will, and He punishes whomsoever He will.*

27 *They precede Him not in speech* means the angels do not speak except as commanded by God and do not act except according to His Will (Ṭ). Interpreted as a spiritual allegory, this means that one should inwardly model oneself on the angels, striving to neither speak nor act except in accordance with the Will of God, adhering to the *Sunnah,* and being with God constantly (Su).

28 *That which is before them* and *that which is behind them* refer to what will take place in the future and what took place in the past (Ṭ), or they can refer to the Hereafter and this world (Q). On the concept of intercession (*shafāʿah*) in the Quran, usually framed in terms of who God allows to intercede on behalf of others on the Day of Judgment, see 2:48c; 2:255c. For some, this verse connects the debate about intercession with the dispute regarding the status of a person who perpetrates a major sin (*kabīrah;* R); that is, for some the category *one with whom He is content* includes anyone who believes, "There is no god but God," while others (i.e., the Muʿtazilites) restrict it to those who believe and who also have not committed major sins (R). For more on the question of major sin and its relationship to faith, see 2:82c and also the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy." *They are wary* also denotes the sense of being anxious and careful. The attributes of fear and wariness (the latter could also be rendered "anxiety") are not those of a Divinely begotten being, but of a creature who knows that God is omniscient and omnipotent (R).

29 Some commentators view this verse as a specific reference to Iblīs (Q, Ṭ), but others say that this verse does not necessarily describe something someone actually said; rather, it refers to what would happen if they did say this (R).

30–31 Some see this "rending asunder" as a reference to God's making the earth into seven earths and the heaven into seven heavens, as alluded to in 65:12 (Ṭ), or to God's pulling apart of the heavens and the earth, which were originally "connected" or "adjacent" (Ṭ). It may also mean that the heavens and the earth used to be a single thing, and then God separated them with

them as paths, that haply they may be guided. (32) And We made the sky a canopy preserved; yet they turn away from its signs. (33) He it is Who created the night and the day, the sun and the moon, each gliding in an orbit. (34) We have not ordained perpetual life for any human being before thee. So if thou diest, will they abide forever? (35) Every soul shall taste death. We try you with evil and

the air and wind (Q). For others this verse means that the heavens are rent asunder by rain, and the earth by the vegetation that grows as a result of that rain (Q, Ṭ). This latter interpretation is preferred by some, because of the phrase that follows, *And We made every living thing from water* (R). Another interpretation is offered by Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī: *sewn together* (*ratq*) symbolizes the state of things before the creation of the world, where in a sense "nothingness" was all of a piece and nothing could be distinguished from anything else; *rent asunder* (*fataqnā,* from *fatq*) then symbolizes the act of creation, in which realities once joined together in "nonexistence" come to be separate from each other as they take on existence and individual identity (R).

Another opinion is that this means that the heavens and the earth were at first dark and then were illuminated, signifying that night preceded day (R). As a spiritual allegory, the heavens represent the spirit and the earth represents the faculties of the soul; the waters of the spirit penetrate the earth and cause wisdom and piety to grow; the mountains are the intelligence, which anchors the soul and keeps it from going adrift; and the paths between them represent the inward spiritual life directing human beings toward God (Aj).

The creation of things from water is also mentioned in 24:45: *And God created every beast from water;* and 25:54: *And He it is Who created a human being from water.* See 24:45c. The phrase in this verse could also be rendered, "It is by water that We make things live" (R, Z). For some, water refers to reproductive fluids (M).

According to one cosmological image found in the Islamic tradition, the earth floats upon water and would move about as if it were a ship on the sea, were it not for the *firm mountains* anchoring it (cf. 16:15; 31:10; R). *Wide tracts* renders *fijāj,* which are thought to refer to wide paths (R, Z). *Between them* (referring to the mountains) renders *fihā,* which is understood by some to mean "upon it," where the pronoun refers to the earth, so that the translation would be "wide tracts upon [the earth]" (R), which are placed so that people may be guided to their destinations on earth or to an awareness of God's Oneness after reflecting upon them (R).

32 *Preserved* means preserved from the satans (R), or it connotes "upraised" (cf. 52:5; Ṭ), meaning protected from falling down to the earth (Q). The sky as *canopy* (*saqf*) is also mentioned in 2:22; 40:64; 79:28. It is said the idolaters *turn away* in the face of the signs of the heavens, including the sun, moon, and stars (Ṭ).

33 For the various elements in this verse, see 36:40c. The notion of heavenly bodies gliding in orbits is an occasion for some commentators to discuss the cosmology underlying this imagery (R). The common notion in Islamic cosmology during premodern times was that the heavenly bodies moved within spheres of an ethereal or subtle substance (Q, R), but there were a few, such as Ḍaḥḥāk, for whom "orbits" meant nothing more than the trajectories of these bodies through the heavens. Al-Qurṭubī's and al-Rāzī's concluding remarks on this verse point out that no one can have knowledge of these matters except through revelation.

34–35 *Perpetual life* renders *khuld,* a word used in the frequent refrain *they shall abide* (*khālid*) *therein,* related to the state of those in the Hereafter (e.g., 3:15; 7:36, 42), and other contexts to connote "perpetuity" or "everlastingness" (cf. 10:52; 20:120; 25:15; 32:14; 41:28). In this verse it refers specifically to this world, where every human being will die (Ṭ). *If thou diest, will they abide forever* contains the verb form of the noun rendered by *perpetual life.* This question is asked of the Prophet, signifying that if the Prophet should die, it will not change the fundamental situation of the idolaters who oppose him—they too will die (Ṭ). For some, to *taste death* (cf. 3:185; 29:57) refers not to death itself, but to the sufferings that precede

with good, as a test, and unto Us shall you be returned. (36) And whenever those who disbelieve see thee, they take thee in naught but mockery, "Is this the one who makes mention of your gods?" And it is they who are disbelievers in the remembrance of the Compassionate. (37) Man was created of haste. Soon shall I show you My signs; so seek not to hasten Me! (38) And they say, "When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" (39) If those who disbelieved but knew of the time when they shall not be able to hold back the Fire from their faces or from their backs, nor be helped! (40) Nay, but it will come upon them suddenly, and confound them. Then they will not be able to repel it, nor will

it (R). According to the Sufi Junayd, "Whosoever is between the two vanishings (*fanāʾayn*) is now vanishing (*fānī*)," implying that between the state of nonexistence that precedes earthly life and the death at the end of that life one is in a constant state of dying (Su). Some mention that this verse was revealed in relation to those who believed that the Prophet would never die (R); alternately, because the idolaters indicated they would delight at his death and misfortune, this verse was revealed as a reminder that the Prophet's death would not change the truth (Q).

Both *evil* and *good* can be trials (Ṭ), as in 7:168: *And We tried them with good things and with evil things*; that is, one can be tried with sickness as well as good health, poverty as well as wealth, error as well as guidance (Ṭ). Or people are tried as to whether they will do what is obligatory and abstain from what is forbidden (Q). The test by what is *good* is whether one will be grateful to God and be generous with what God provides, and the test by what is *evil* is whether one will be patient (R).

36 *The one who makes mention of your gods* refers to the Prophet when he disparaged and condemned the idolaters, which they took as an insult (Ṭ). Depending on the context, *mention* can be used to imply either praise or blame and censure (Ṭ). *Makes mention* renders *yadhkuru*, which is the verb form of *remembrance* (*dhikr*), the implication being that the idolaters censure the Prophet for "remembering" their idols, while they themselves refuse to "remember" and worship God. For some, *remembrance of the Compassionate* refers to the Quran (one of whose names is *al-Dhikr*, "the Reminder") rather than to remembering God or being reminded of God (Q).

37 People were created possessing the trait of being hasty, which is similar to 30:54, *God is He Who created you from weakness*, meaning created weak, as in 4:28, *Man was created weak* (Q). Others say that this verse alludes to the rapidity of creation, as described in verses such as 2:117: *He only says to it, "Be!" and it is*. See also 17:11: *Man prays for evil as he prays for good, and man is ever hasty*.

38 The question in this verse is a frequent challenge often associated with the notion of "seeking to hasten," and in this context it follows immediately upon God's Command not to *seek to hasten* the promise of punishment for the disbelievers in the Hereafter (Q). It is not the mere fact of being hasty that is condemned (since this is a part of human nature, as attested by the previous verse), but challenging God to be so, in which case people display an excess of haste (R). See the similar verses 10:48; 27:71; 34:29; 67:25.

39 This verse is a conditional clause whose completion is implicit meaning, "If they but knew [they would do otherwise]" (R, Z). For the symbolism of the punishment visited upon faces and backs, see 8:50c.

40 That God's Punishment will *come . . . suddenly* is mentioned in 6:31; 7:95, 187; 12:107; 22:55; 26:202; 29:53; 39:55; 43:66; 47:18. This unpredictability is connected with the notion that the Hour is known only to God (e.g., 79:44), which means in a sense that it will be "sudden" by definition (see 7:187c). Some note that people are confounded by something to the degree that they

they be granted respite. (41) Messengers were certainly mocked before thee. Then those who scoffed at them were beset by that which they used to mock. (42) Say, "Who will protect you, night and day, from the Compassionate?" Nay, but they turn away from the remembrance of their Lord. (43) Or do they have gods to defend them apart from Us? They cannot help themselves; nor are they given protection against Us. (44) Nay, but We granted enjoyment to them and their fathers till life grew long for them. Do they not consider how We come upon the land, reducing it of its outlying regions? Is it they who shall prevail? (45) Say, "I only warn you through a revelation." But the deaf do not hear the call however

are heedless of its Creator, but whoever is always in the Presence of God will not be confounded by anything of the world (Su).

41 Cf. 6:10. The Prophet is reminded here, as elsewhere, that he was not the first messenger of God to be mocked by his people (13:32; 15:11; 36:30; 43:7). The idea that people will be *beset by that which they used to mock* (cf. 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26) connotes being both surrounded and overcome by something. Most commentators interpret this verse to mean that those who ridiculed the idea of punishment in the Hereafter for their misdeeds in this life will eventually suffer that punishment and will not be able to escape it (Ṭ).

42 This verse serves as an implicit reminder that God is aware of the disbelievers and powerful over them by night and by day, but they are, nonetheless, oblivious (R). That is, while human beings are going about their daily affairs or sleeping, God is able to unleash His Punishment upon them at any time (Q). Some note that the name *the Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān*) is used here because it would cause one to reflect upon the fact that God encompasses all things with His Mercy (R).

43 The powerlessness of the gods of the idolaters, for both themselves and their worshippers, is also mentioned in 7:192, 197. In this verse the inability of the idols to defend the idolaters implies that the idolaters will have no defense against God's Punishment when it comes either in this world, in the form of defeat and death, or in the Hereafter, in the form of punishment (R). *Given protection against Us* renders *minnā yuṣḥabūn,* which some understand to mean, "They will not have Us as a Companion" (Q, R).

44 The idolaters were *granted enjoyment;* that is, God provided them with the goods of this world. Some commentators understand this verse to refer to the conquest of a territory, which begins on its frontiers; for others, it refers to the loss of its peoples and its blessings; for others still, it refers to the loss of the learned sages of a community. The last interpretation has a special resonance with a *ḥadīth* that states: "God does not take away knowledge by removing it from His servants, but rather takes it away by removing the learned, till, when no learned people remain, people rely on ignorant leaders who are consulted and who make judgments without knowledge. They are thus misled and mislead" (R). Reading this statement as a reference to conquest and loss seems to fit more closely with the remainder of the verse: *Is it they who shall prevail?* (R).

45 This verse commands the Prophet to remind his audience that what he says is the result of revelation (*waḥy*); see also 53:3–4: *Nor does he speak out of caprice. It is naught but a revelation revealed.* For more on the nature of *waḥy,* see 28:7c; 16:68c. They are *deaf* not in the literal sense, but insofar as they just listen to the revelation and do not act upon what is said; one is effectively "deaf" to a message if one ignores its significance (R). Spiritual deafness is an idea evoked throughout the Quran; see commentary on 2:18; 5:71; 6:25; 31:7. Some read the verb *hear* in the second person, so that it would be addressed to the Prophet, "Thou canst not cause the deaf to hear when they are warned" (Q, R).

much they are warned. (46) And if but a breath of thy Lord's Punishment were to touch them, they would surely say, "Oh, woe unto us! Truly we were wrongdoers." (47) We shall set the just scales for the Day of Resurrection, and no soul shall be wronged in aught. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it. And We suffice as Reckoner. (48) We indeed gave unto Moses and Aaron the Criterion, and a radiant light and a reminder for the reverent, (49) who fear their Lord unseen, and who are wary of the Hour. (50) This is a blessed Reminder that We have sent down. Will you then deny it? (51) And We indeed

46 *Breath* renders *nafḥah,* a word that can also mean "breeze" or "fragrance." It conveys the idea of something light and very slight, in the sense that one does not come into contact with the thing itself, but with what emanates from it. Here just a "whiff" of the punishment of the Hereafter causes exclamations of *woe unto us* (R), when it will be too late for the recognition *Truly we were wrongdoers* to do them any good (Q); see 67:10–11c.

47 By *for the Day of Resurrection* some understand "on the Day of Resurrection" (R) or "for [the people of] the Day of Resurrection" (Q). God's Knowledge of the tiniest deed is symbolized by the weight of a mustard seed (31:16) or by other very small objects (6:59; 10:61; 34:3; 99:7–8).

For some this verse seems to contradict 18:105: *Thus their deeds have come to naught, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall assign them no weight.* In this latter verse *weight* renders *wazn,* which is related to *mawāzīn,* the word rendered by *scales.* Not "assigning them weight" is understood by some to mean not that the scales will not be just, since *no soul shall be wronged in aught* (see also, e.g., 2:181; 3:25; 4:124; 16:111), but that they will not be honored or glorified on the Day of Resurrection (R).

Some commentators use physical imagery to describe what the scales or balance will be, often saying that the scales will be held by Gabriel and will actually bear some resemblance to the two-pan balance, and that one's deeds will appear in a form that weighs down one side or the other (R). Others do not see these scales literally, but as a symbolical reference to the "weighing" of actions according to the Justice of God (Q). On the concept of *mīzān* ("balance" or "scales"), see especially 42:17c; 57:25c; 101:6–9c. On what it means for God "to suffice" in such contexts, see 2:137c; 3:173c.

48 Moses is also described in 2:53 as being given *the Criterion* (see 25:1c). Here the *Criterion* is understood to be the Torah (Ṭ) or the help that God gave him in his mission (R). Some interpret the *radiant light* as referring to the Torah and consequently interpret *the Criterion* to be a reference to something else (Ṭ), though 5:44 and 6:91 treat the light and the book as one and the same.

49 *Unseen* renders *ghāʾib,* which literally means "absent" or "unseen" (related to *ghayb,* "unseen [reality]"). Some understand *unseen* to mean that the reverent here are absent from other people and pray to God in seclusion (R). Or it can refer to the fact that the worshippers are not present before God and the realities of the Hereafter, meaning that they cannot perceive God directly, but know Him through faith, reflection, and contemplation (Q), which keep them from disobedience toward God (R).

50 The *Reminder* (*dhikr*), referring here to the Quran (Q), is used several times throughout this *sūrah* in this sense of a Divine book (vv. 2, 7, 10, 24, 48, 84, 105).

51 *Sound judgment* renders *rushd* (see 2:256c; 72:2c); that it was given to Abraham *aforetime* means before Moses and Aaron (Ṭ). Some take it to mean that Abraham was rightly guided even as a child (R, Ṭ), before he was endowed with the office of prophethood (Q), though some say that it refers to prophethood itself or to the fact that God knew that He would make Abraham a prophet (R).

gave unto Abraham his sound judgment aforetime, and We knew him (52) when he said unto his father and his people, "What are these images to which you are cleaving?" (53) They said, "We found our fathers worshipping them." (54) He said, "Certainly you and your fathers have been in manifest error." (55) They said, "Have you brought us the truth, or are you among those who jest?" (56) He said, "Nay, but your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who originated them. And I am among those who bear witness unto this. (57) And by God, I shall scheme against your idols after you have turned your backs." (58) So he broke them into pieces—save the largest of them—that haply they may have recourse to it. (59) They said, "Who has done this to our gods? Verily he is among the wrongdoers!" (60) They said, "We heard a young man mention them; he is called Abraham." (61) They said, "So bring him before the eyes of the people, that haply they may bear witness." (62) They said, "Was it you who did this to our gods, O Abraham?" (63) He said, "Nay, but it was the largest of them that did

52–54 Abraham's encounter with his father and his people over the idols they worshipped is also recounted in 6:76–83; 19:42–48; 26:69–87; 37:84–96; 43:26–28. For the notion of idolaters blindly following the ways of their forefathers, see commentary on 5:104: *"Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing." What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided?* Similar injunctions are addressed to the Children of Adam (7:28), the Egyptians (10:78; 28:36), and people in general (31:21; 43:24).

55 This verse is similar to the Israelites' response to Moses in 2:67: *And when Moses said to his people, "God commands you to slaughter a cow," they said, "Do you take us in mockery?"*

56 Abraham points out that it is not the idols they worshipped who originated the heavens and the earth (M).

57 Abraham says to himself, "I shall scheme against you concerning your idols" (R, Ṭ). In other words, after having tried verbal argument, he was now planning to use a different mode of demonstration (Q).

58–59 It is said that Abraham lagged behind a group of his people on a festival day in order to accomplish his demonstration (R). Some commentators add that Abraham took the ax with which he smashed the other idols and hung it around the neck of or leaned it against the largest one (Q, Ṭ).

*That haply they may have recourse to it* means that they would turn to the idol to find an explanation for what happened. This phrase could also be translated, "That haply they may return," in which case it would be interpreted to mean that they would leave off their false worship and return to the true faith practiced by Abraham (R, Ṭ). *Save the largest* could also mean "save the greatest," that is, the most important or valued idol (R).

60–61 *Mention them* here means to mention them by way of censure and blame (Q, Ṭ); as noted in 21:36c, the verb "to mention" can, depending on context, connote a sense of disapproval or blame. They called the people to *bear witness* against Abraham, either because they did not want to punish him without some proof or because they wanted the punishment to be public (Ṭ), to serve as an example to others (R).

62–63 By *the largest of them,* Abraham means the largest idol, which he left undestroyed (see v. 58). Some see in Abraham's response here the implication that, according to his ruse, the largest idol was angered by the fact that the other idols were worshipped (Q). Some mention a *ḥadīth*

this. So question them, if they speak!" (64) So they consulted among themselves and said, "Verily it is you who are the wrongdoers!" (65) Then they reverted, "Certainly you know that these speak not!" (66) He said, "Do you worship, apart from God, that which benefits you not in the least, nor harms you? (67) Fie upon you, and upon that which you worship apart from God. Do you not understand?" (68) They said, "Burn him, and help your gods, if you would take action!" (69) We said, "O Fire! Be coolness and peace for Abraham." (70) They desired to scheme against him, but We made them the greatest losers. (71) And

attributed to the Prophet that states, "Abraham lied only concerning three things: when he said, (1) *'Truly I am sick'* [37:89]; (2) that Sarah was his sister [Genesis 20:2]; and (3) that the largest idol destroyed the others." Many commentators wrestle with the problematic notion of Abraham—a prophet—lying under any circumstances, and they do so in a manner similar to their efforts to address Abraham's apparent worship of celestial bodies in 6:76–78. Al-Qurṭubī mentions that perhaps he told these lies while he was a child, and al-Rāzī reasons that what Abraham said would not count as a lie at all, at least not in the sense of being a deception, since his purpose was to demonstrate a truth by uttering words that no one present could have believed, thus exposing their absurdity.

64 According to some, this verse means that some of the people thought they were wronging Abraham in accusing him (Ṭ).

65 *Reverted* translates *nukisū ʿalā ruʾūsihim,* which can also mean "were made to relapse" or, literally, "were turned upside down or turned over onto their heads or beginnings"; that is, the idol worshippers were overcome, albeit briefly, by Abraham's argument and demonstration and changed their minds (Ṭ). Some think the phrase means they were overcome by the "madness of evil" (Ṭ), or they "went back" (in their thinking) because they were convinced by the arguments of Abraham (Ṭ), meaning that they began to think properly about the matter (R).

66 Similar statements and questions regarding the inability of idols to help or harm can be found in 5:76; 6:71; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 20:89; 22:12; 25:55.

67 *Fie* renders the Arabic expression *uff,* also mentioned as what one should not say to one's parents in 17:23. It is an utterance meant to express annoyance (Z), and even disgust.

68 This incident is mentioned in more detail in 37:97, where Abraham's people say, *Erect a building for him and cast him into the fire.* Commentators point out that some of the popular stories attached to this incident, such as the assertion that it was Nimrod who commanded that he be burned, have no direct basis in the Quran itself (R). Some traditions mention that the structure built was so large and became so hot that if a bird flew too close it, would be incinerated in midair (Q, R). It is also reported that Abraham recited a certain prayer as he was being cast into the fire: "O God, Thou art alone in Heaven, and I am alone on earth in worshipping Thee" (Q, R).

69 Some say that, were it not for the command to the fire to be *peace,* the *coolness* would have overcome Abraham (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī mentions three possible ways the fire became *coolness and peace* for Abraham: God removed the heat and the ability to burn from the fire while leaving its illumination; God caused a change in the nature of Abraham's body so that he was not affected by the fire; God placed a barrier between Abraham and the fire that kept the fire from burning him.

70 Abraham's opponents were overcome by both the verbal argument and the miracle of Abraham's withstanding the fire unharmed (R).

71 Some say *the land that We blessed for all peoples* refers to the Levant (Shām; Ṭ), while others say it refers to Makkah (Q), where Abraham went to build the Kaʿbah with Ishmael (2:127). The land from which they were *delivered* is reputed to be Mesopotamia (ʿIrāq; Q). The idea of a blessed land also appears in v. 81 in connection

We delivered him and Lot to the land that We blessed for all peoples. (72) And We bestowed upon him Isaac, and Jacob as an added gift. And each of them We made righteous. (73) And We made them imams, guiding according to Our Command. And We revealed unto them the doing of good deeds, the performance of prayer, and the giving of alms. And they were worshippers of Us. (74) And as for Lot, We gave unto him judgment and knowledge, and We saved him from the town that was committing vile deeds. Truly they were an evil people, iniquitous. (75) And We caused him to enter Our Mercy; verily, he was among the righteous. (76) And [remember] Noah, when he cried out aforetime, We answered him and saved him and his family from great distress. (77) And We helped him against those people who denied Our signs. Truly they were an evil people; so We drowned them all together. (78) And [remember] David and Solomon, when they rendered judgment regarding the tillage, when the people's

with Solomon, in 7:137 with regard to the Children of Israel, and in 17:1 in the context of the Prophet's Night Journey (*isrāʾ*).

72 *As an added gift* (*nāfilatᵃⁿ*) is thought to refer to Jacob only (Ṭ) based on the reasoning that the initial gift was Isaac and Abraham had not prayed for a grandson (Q). Others read the first part of the verse to mean, "We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob as a gift" (Ṭ). *Each of them*—meaning all three, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was made *righteous* (R, Ṭ).

73 On the concept of *imams* or "leaders," see also 2:124c; 17:71c. That the three were made *imams* means that they were the ones who were followed and imitated (Ṭ); they taught and guided people in matters of religion and good deeds (Q, R).

74 This verse continues *and We revealed unto them* from v. 73, meaning, "And We revealed unto them and unto Lot . . ." (R). It is also read to imply, "And remember Lot. We gave unto Him judgment and knowledge" (Q). *Judgment,* or *ḥukm,* refers to the ability to decide between disputants (R); other prophets are also described as being given *ḥukm* (3:79; 6:89; 12:22; 19:12; 45:16). For the story of Lot and his people, see 11:77–83, and also 7:80–84; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 54:33–38.

75 To *enter* into God's *Mercy* is an idea also mentioned in 4:175; 7:151; 9:99; 42:8; 45:30; 48:25; 76:31. In this specific instance some interpret this *Mercy* to mean the status of prophethood, while others say that it refers to the rewards given to him by God in the Hereafter (R).

76–77 Before Abraham and his progeny, Noah was saved from the punishment meted out to his people in the form of the flood (Q, Ṭ), though the *great distress* can also be interpreted to include the mockery and insults Noah and his followers suffered (R). For the story of Noah, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; and *Sūrah* 71. *Family* renders *ahl,* which can also mean "people." *His family* can thus be understood to mean "his people," meaning those who followed the religion he taught (R).

78 *Tillage* refers to crops or an orchard (Ṭ). The animals wandered in unguarded and destroyed the vegetation. According to one account, David rendered judgment and awarded the sheep to the owner of the field as compensation, but Solomon intervened and recommended that the sheep be given to the farmer until the land returned to its previous state, to which David gladly agreed (Ṭ). In another version, Solomon recommended that the two owners exchange places: the shepherd would care for the field until it was restored to its previous state, and in the meantime the farmer would benefit from the milk and wool of the flock (Q). Some note that the Quran itself

sheep strayed therein by night. And We were Witness to their judgment. (79) We made Solomon to understand it, and unto both We gave judgment and knowledge. We compelled the mountains and the birds to glorify along with David; We did this. (80) And We taught him how to make garments for you to protect you against your own might, but are you thankful? (81) And unto Solomon, the wind blowing violently: it ran by his command to the land that We had blessed. And We know all things. (82) Among the satans are those who dove deep for

transmits none of these details, not even that there was a disagreement between David and Solomon on the matter, but they accept that the events occurred because of the testimony of the tradition on the question (R).

79 *We made Solomon to understand it* refers to the judgment he gave that was adopted by David (Ṭ). That the birds glorified God together with David is also mentioned in 27:16; 34:10; and 38:19. Here the glorification by the mountains is thought to mean that when David glorified God, the mountains would echo in response, or that David could command the mountains to do so (Q). Others say that it means that the mountains glorified God in accord with the universal sense of 17:44 (*And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise*), but that David possessed an awareness and knowledge of this glorification that intensified his own certainty and glorification (R).

Some commentators view the two judgments rendered by David and Solomon and the adoption of Solomon's through the lens of the Islamic concept of "independent judgment," or *ijtihād*. A well-known *ḥadīth* states that if judges exercise their judgment and arrive at the correct decision, they are given two rewards by God, but if they exercise their judgment and err, they still receive a single reward. That is to say, when someone performs *ijtihād* with the proper qualifications and intentions, this is in and of itself meritorious, but it is doubly so if one comes to the correct judgment.

In this context, commentators address the issue that arises from the fact that David, a prophet, had his judgment overturned in favor of another judgment. Some note that it is not impossible for a prophet to make a mistake; the "infallibility" or "protection from error" of prophets—an important tenet of Islamic theology—would only be damaged if a prophet were to persist in an error (Q). Thus some commentators opine that even prophets can exercise judgment of a normal human kind (*ijtihād*), which would not, in their view, contradict the fact that they are prophets (Q). For other commentators, Solomon's judgment amounts to a kind of "abrogation" (*naskh*) of David's judgment. Abrogation occurs where two judgments are both correct and Divinely inspired, but the one that is later in time supersedes the earlier one (Bḍ, IK); on the concept of abrogation in Islamic Law, see 2:106c. Viewing the incident in terms of Divine abrogation preserves the idea that each of the prophets in the story was inerrant and guided directly by God and avoids the issue of a possibly imperfect or erroneous judgment by a prophet.

80 *Garments* renders *labūs,* a word that can also refer to any weapon (Q, Ṭ), though the root *l-b-s* pertains more to something that is worn; see 34:11, where God says to David, *Make coats of mail, and measure well the links thereof.* The phrase *against your own might* means from your battles and wars and from your weapons (Q). See also 16:81: *He has made coats for you that protect you from the heat and coats that protect you from your own might.*

81 Solomon could command the wind to run to *the land that* God *had blessed,* where Solomon resided (Ṭ; see also 34:12c; 38:36). For more on Solomon and his miraculous court, see 27:17–44.

82 *Dove deep* refers to diving into the sea (Q, Ṭ) to extract precious gems (Th); among the *other deeds* the *satans* performed was building (Ṭ). *Guarded them* means that God ensured that

him, and performed other deeds besides this. And We guarded them. (83) And [remember] Job, when he cried unto his Lord, "Truly affliction has befallen me! And Thou art the most Merciful of the merciful." (84) So We answered him and removed the affliction that was upon him, and We gave him his family, and the like thereof along with them, as a mercy from Us and a reminder to the worshippers. (85) And [remember] Ishmael, Idrīs, and Dhu'l-Kifl—each was among the patient. (86) We caused them to enter Our Mercy; truly they are among the righteous. (87) And [remember] Dhu'l-Nūn, when he went away in anger, and

the effects of the works of the *satans* would not become corrupted (Th), since the wont of *satans* (usually understood to refer to jinn) is to do something seemingly good and then cause it to become bad (R). Regarding other tasks assigned to the satans and the punishment they receive for deviating from Solomon's commands, see commentary on 34:13–14.

83–84 On the story of Job, see commentary on 38:41–44. Many commentators transmit the background of the story of Job, which is not told in the same level of narrative detail in the Quran, from the Biblical description of his life, including Satan's seeking and receiving permission from God to test Job by destroying his property, his family, and his health. This story is sometimes combined with dimensions not found in the Biblical account, such as explicit mention of Satan's jealousy as a reason for seeking God's permission to try Job as well as the notion that Satan "overheard" God's Praise of Job (see 37:6–10c; Ṭ).

85 Idrīs is usually associated with the Biblical Enoch (Akhnūkh or Ukhnūkh; Ṭ), but also with Elias (6:85) and in later sources also with Hirmis or Hermes; for more on Idrīs and other understandings of who he was, see 19:56–57c.

Dhu'l-Kifl (who is also mentioned in 38:48) is described in many of the traditional accounts as a just and pious man, some say an Israelite, who was entrusted with the responsibility for his people from a good king or a prophet usually left unnamed (IK, Q, Ṭ); *kifl* is etymologically related to the idea of responsibility or guardianship, but it has other meanings as well. Some accounts mention that he was chosen for this responsibility on the condition that he fast during the day, pray during the night, and not display anger. Others say that he was a prophet, variously identified with Zachariah, Joshua, or Elias, and that Dhu'l-Kifl was a title or second name for one of these prophets, just as al-Masīḥ ("Messiah") was for Jesus, Israel was for Jacob, or Aḥmad (61:6) was for Muhammad (R); see also 38:48c. Some, especially Indian Muslim scholars, identify him with the Buddha.

86 *We caused them to enter Our Mercy,* that is, according to many, the Garden in the Hereafter (Q); see also 21:75c.

87 Dhu'l-Nūn, mentioned only in this verse of the Quran, is another name for Jonah (Ṭ; *nūn* means a large fish or whale, making the name Dhu'l-Nūn mean something like "the man of the fish"). The Quran does not tell the story of Jonah in full, but assumes its audience had prior knowledge of Jonah's preaching to Nineveh, his flight on a ship, and his being cast overboard and swallowed by a fish (for more, see commentary on 37:139–45; 68:48–50 is also understood to be about Jonah). It is thought that his *anger* was directed against God because He spared Nineveh after having promised to destroy it, or that he was expressing a just anger on behalf of God in the face of the disobedience of his people (see 37:142c; Q, Ṭ).

*Thought We had no power over him* has various interpretations. Either Jonah believed God would not punish him for his sins, or he did not believe God could end the punishment and affliction he was already suffering (Ṭ). Some see this as a rhetorical question meaning, "Did he think We had no power over him?" (Ṭ), while for others it means, "He thought We would not straiten him"; *had . . . power* renders the verb *naqdir* (from *qadara*), which can also have the sense

thought We had no power over him. Then he cried out in the darkness, "There is no god but Thee! Glory be to Thee! Truly I have been among the wrongdoers." (88) So We answered him, and saved him from grief. Thus do We save the believers. (89) And [remember] Zachariah, when he cried out to his Lord, "My Lord! Leave me not childless, though Thou art the best of inheritors." (90) So We answered him, and bestowed John upon him, and We set his wife aright for him. Truly they vied in good deeds. They called upon Us with desire and with fear, and they were humble before Us. (91) And as for she who preserved her chastity, We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and made her and her son a sign for the worlds. (92) Truly this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me! (93) But they have fragmented their affair among

of "straiten" or "withhold," as in 13:26: *God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (Q). This last opinion is preferred by those who refuse to believe that the thought that one could escape God's Omnipotence would ever occur to the mind of a prophet. A literal meaning would be that it is an expression of Jonah's "thinking well" (*ḥusn al-ẓann*) of God, in that he did not expect to be punished by Him (Su).

*Darkness* renders *ẓulumāt,* which is in the plural form and is thus interpreted by some to mean the darkness of the belly of the fish within the darkness of the sea within the darkness of the night (Q, Ṭ); on the significance of the plural form *ẓulumāt,* see 5:16c.

88 *We answered him;* that is, God saved him from the belly of the fish (Ṭ); see 37:143–44c. For the Sufi Junayd, this verse means that God saves the believers from their troubles through their own sincerity, an awareness of their needfulness of God, the virtues, and manifesting an attitude of surrender (Su).

89 The story of Zachariah is told in 3:37–41 and 19:2–11. Zachariah's statement that God is *the best of inheritors* means that, in the absence of an heir, God would be the only one to inherit from him, an idea alluded to also in 28:58, where God speaks of Himself as the only one left to inherit from a people who were destroyed. Interpreted at a higher level, Zachariah's prayer is that he not be left bereft of intimacy with God and without a way that would lead to Him (Su).

90 *Set his wife aright* is interpreted to mean that God made her able to bear children (Q, Ṭ), as she is described as barren in 3:40; it can also mean something like to make her physically sound and healthy in this regard. Some commentators consider *they vied in good deeds* to include not only Zachariah, his wife, and John, but also the other prophets already mentioned in this *sūrah* (Q). To *call upon Us* (i.e., to pray to God) with both *desire and fear* means that they prayed in times of both ease and hardship, out of both hope and distress (Q).

91 This verse is a reference to Mary (Ṭ), who is also described in 66:12 as one *who preserved her chastity.* Mary and Jesus together were a *sign* in the sense that the miracle of Jesus' virgin birth involved both of them (Q, R), but other signs, or miracles, are related to Mary or Jesus independently of one another, including the mysterious nourishment Mary received in the Temple (3:37) and Jesus' speaking in the cradle (19:29–30; R).

According to al-Rāzī, to breathe spirit into a human body means to cause it to have life, as mentioned in 38:72, where God says to the angels regarding Adam: *I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit.* See also 38:72c, which discusses the nuances of what it means for God's Spirit to be breathed into human beings.

92–93 Cf. 23:52. *One community* is in the accusative, which causes some to see this verse as meaning, "This community of yours will continue to be one [as long as it holds to the truth]" (Q).

themselves. Each is returning unto Us. (94) And whosoever performs righteous deeds and is a believer, there shall be no ingratitude for his endeavor, and surely We shall write [it] down for him. (95) And it is forbidden unto any town We have destroyed that they should ever return, (96) till the time when Gog and Magog are unleashed, and they rush down from every hill, (97) and the true promise draws nigh. And, behold, there shall be the fixed stare of those who disbelieved, "Oh, woe unto us! We have certainly been heedless of this! Indeed,

Others take it to mean, "This religion of yours is one" (R, Ṭ), or that, despite the multiplicity of the prophets mentioned in this *sūrah,* the doctrine and reality of God's Oneness is always the same (Q). *They have fragmented their affair* means that the communities to which the prophets were sent came to disagree over matters of religion (Ṭ) and broke up into sects and denominations (R). On the notion of *one community* and the disagreements and fragmentation that took place among earlier religious communities, see commentary on 2:213; 3:19; 5:48; 42:14.

94 For the theological issues raised by this verse, namely, what it means to be a *believer* and perform *righteous deeds* so that one is saved, see 2:62c; 5:69c; and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." The idea of gratitude on the part of God (since *there shall be no ingratitude*) is also mentioned in 2:158; 4:147; 35:30; 42:23; 64:17. *We shall write [it] down* can also be rendered, "We write [it] down," in the present tense, referring to the recording of human deeds often mentioned in the Quran (see, e.g., 10:21; 36:12c; 45:28–29c; 78:29). This phrase can also refer to God's writing these deeds down in the *Mother of the Book* (13:39) or to the book of deeds that will be presented to people on the Day of Judgment, mentioned in 18:49: *What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof.* In some respects this verse resembles 17:19: *And whosoever desires the Hereafter, and endeavors for it earnestly, and is a believer—it is they whose efforts shall be appreciated.*

95 The Arabic of this verse has an apparent double negative that commentators discuss and interpret in order to avoid the meaning, "It is forbidden unto any town We have destroyed that they shall not return," which would mean that they would necessarily return. If read as a literal double negative, it is interpreted as saying that they will inevitably and necessarily "return" in the Hereafter to God (R), as alluded to in many verses in the Quran that state, *And unto God are all matters returned* (e.g., 22:76). Some read *it is forbidden* as "It is decided or resolved that," meaning that God has determined that those who have been destroyed will not return to the world (R, Ṭ) or that they will not repent (Q); "repentance" (*tawbah*) also has the sense of turning or returning.

96 Gog and Magog are described as vicious and destructive beings locked away by the figure Dhu'l-Qarnayn in 18:94–99; see commentary on these verses. *Unleashed* renders *futiḥat,* which can literally mean "opened," referring to the opening of the rampart that was built to hold them in (see 18:95). *Hill* can mean any high place (Ṭ).

97 The coming of Gog and Magog is a sign of the impending end of the world (Ṭ). The *true promise* refers to the Day of Resurrection (R). The second phrase of this verse could also be read to mean, "The stare of those who disbelieved will be fixed" (Ṭ), which will occur because of the fear they experience in the face of this horrible event (Q, Ṭ); see also 14:42, *He merely grants them reprieve till a day when eyes will stare, transfixed,* and also 80:34–37, which speaks of how people react to their doom on the Day of Judgment. *We have certainly been heedless of this* reflects the fact that in the life of the world they paid no attention to such matters (R). Gog and Magog represent, at the level of spiritual symbolism, the preoccupations, tumult, and impressions that assault the soul, causing it to become corrupted and vulnerable to satanic influences (Aj).

we have been wrongdoers." (98) Surely you and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell. Unto it you shall come. (99) Had these been gods, they would not have come unto it. But each shall abide therein. (100) Theirs shall be groaning therein, and therein they shall hear not. (101) Surely those for whom what is most beautiful has already gone forth from Us; they shall be kept far from it. (102) They hear not the slightest sound thereof, while they abide in

98 This verse is said to be addressed to the Makkan idolaters (R). Being *fuel* for the Fire or for Hell is also mentioned in 2:24; 3:10; 66:6. Some commentators mention that when the Quraysh heard this verse directed against their gods, they become extremely agitated and responded by pointing out to Muhammad that Jesus was worshipped by Christians and that some people also worshipped angels, at which time the Prophet remained silent until v. 101 was revealed, which, according to one interpretation, made clear that Jesus, the angels, and other figures who did not invite worship of themselves would not be fuel for the Fire (Q, R). Some do not interpret the relationship between v. 98 and v. 101 in this way at all and say, rather, that v. 98 makes it clear that it is the Quraysh who are being addressed directly, and that the use of the pronoun *that which* (*mā*) rather than "who" (*man*) implies that it is inanimate objects and not living beings that will be fuel for Hell (R). Al-Rāzī thus interprets the reaction of silence on the part of the Prophet to be a signal that the response was so obviously erroneous.

Seeing the once revered idols in the Fire is part of the anguish of the punishment (R). Another possible interpretation is that "that which they worshipped" could refer to an aspect of their own souls, meaning that their very attachment to false idols will be fuel for their sufferings and in fact will be the very cause of that suffering, recalling 25:43, which speaks of one's desires as objects of worship themselves: *Hast thou considered the one who takes his caprice as his god?*

99 If the *gods* had been actual divinities, they would have been able to help their worshippers and keep them out of the Fire (Ṭ). *Each shall abide therein* means that both the worshipper and the object of worship will be fuel for the Fire (Ṭ).

100 *Groaning* (*zafīr*) is also mentioned in 11:106. *They shall hear not* is interpreted to mean that each person will experience the suffering utterly alone. Some accounts describe the denizens of the Fire being placed into a container that is placed into another that is placed into yet another, so they are unable to sense anything other than their own suffering (Q, Ṭ). For some *they shall hear not* refers to the fact that they will be resurrected deaf, as described in 17:97: *And We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces—blind, dumb, and deaf* (R).

101 This verse is understood by some to be a statement of predestination regarding those whose destination in the Garden *has already gone forth,* or has already been foreordained by God (Ṭ), while others think that it refers to those objects of worship who were falsely worshipped but did not participate in this false worship, such as Jesus and the angels (R, Ṭ), and who for this reason would not be *fuel for Hell* as described in v. 98, an interpretation that some see as gratuitous and erroneous (R). For others, this verse refers to those saints who are providentially chosen for sainthood (*walāyah*/*wilāyah*) or "friendship" with God and a life of virtue (Su).

102 Those *for whom what is most beautiful has gone forth* (v. 101) will not hear *the slightest sound* (*ḥasīs*) of the Fire (Ṭ). That the inhabitants of Paradise will have what they desire or call for is also mentioned in 16:31; 25:16; 36:57; 39:34; 42:22; 50:35; 77:41–42. Interpreted symbolically, this verse means that people of spiritual realization (*ahl al-ḥaqāʾiq*) do not hear the clamor of the world, occupied as they are with God and with the true nature of things and not distracted by what is other than true reality; the desire of the spirit is closeness with God, and the desire of the heart is vision of God (Su).

that which their souls desire. (103) The greatest terror will not grieve them, and the angels will receive them. "This is your Day, which you were promised." (104) That Day We shall roll up the sky like the rolling of scrolls for writings. As We began the first creation, so shall We bring it back—a promise binding upon Us. Surely We shall do it. (105) And We have indeed written in the Psalms, after the Reminder, that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth. (106) Truly in this is a proclamation for a worshipful people. (107) And We sent thee not, save as a mercy unto the

103 The *greatest terror* refers to the Fire as it consumes those who are in it (Ṭ). For others it refers to the second blowing of the trumpet, when souls are resurrected (see 27:87c; 36:51; 39:68c; R, Ṭ). Others say that it refers to death, since in the Hereafter no one will die (R).

104 The destruction or transformation of the cosmos is described in similar terms in 39:67: *The heavens will be enfolded in His right Hand.* Here *scrolls* renders *sijill,* understood to mean rolled-up pages upon which one writes, but which is interpreted by some to be the name of an angel (this is not unlike other normal Arabic words understood to be also the proper names of things, as described in 2:19c and 2:79c; Ṭ).

*So shall We bring it back* means that people will be brought back in the same condition in which they were created the first time—that is, barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised (Ṭ), an interpretation deriving from a *ḥadīth.* The Prophet stated, "O people! You will surely be resurrected unto God barefoot, naked, uncircumcised," after which he recited, *As We began the first creation, so shall We bring it back* (Q). This verse is similar to 6:94: *And [God will say], "Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and you have left behind that which We had bestowed upon you.* See also 18:48: *They shall be arrayed before thy Lord in ranks. "Indeed, you have come unto Us as We created you the first time."*

For some this verse signifies the destruction and new creation of the heavens and the earth, as mentioned in 14:48: *On that Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too], and they will appear before God, the One, the Paramount.* Theological disputes surrounding such verses center on whether the heavens and the earth will become nothing and a new creation will come into being from nothing, or whether in some sense the "parts" of the heavens and earth will be rearranged and reformed into a new creation (R).

105 The Psalms (*al-Zabūr*) are mentioned in 4:163 and 17:55. Some understand *zabūr* (often considered a synonym for *kitāb,* meaning "book" or "scripture") to refer not just to the Psalms of David, but to all the books of the prophets (R, Ṭ), which would include the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran (Q, Ṭ). The *Reminder* is what is in Heaven (Ṭ), the *Mother of the Book* (3:7; 13:39; 43:4), with God (R, Ṭ). For some commentators *the earth* refers to "the earth of the Garden" (Q, Ṭ), evidently meaning a kind of celestial earth, since the this-worldly earth is shared by both disbelievers and believers, while the Garden belongs to the latter only (R); others say that *the earth* refers to this world (R, Ṭ) and denotes disbelievers' lands that would be inherited by the community of Muhammad.

106 *A worshipful people* is understood to refer to those who perform the five daily canonical prayers and fast the month of Ramadan, meaning the community of Muhammad (Q, Ṭ). Others see this verse as referring to those who are especially devoted to God, who do not worship God for the delights of the Garden or to be free of the Fire, but who do so out of love for God and pride in being a worshipper of God (Su).

107 *Mercy* renders *raḥmah,* a word that can also mean "compassion," "kindness," "love," and "caring." On the concept of *raḥmah* in relation to God see 1:3c and 7:156c. The grammar of this verse allows it to be understood to mean either that the sending of the Prophet Muhammad was

worlds. (108) Say, "It is only revealed unto me that your God is one God. So will you be submitters?" (109) But if they turn away, say, "I have proclaimed to you all equally. I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh or far off. (110) Verily He knows that which is spoken openly and He knows that which you conceal. (111) And I know not; perhaps it is a trial for you, and an enjoyment for a while." (112) He said, "My Lord, judge with truth! Our Lord is the Compassionate, the One Whose help is sought against that which you ascribe."

a merciful act by God or that the Prophet is himself a mercy that God sent. It can signify that the Prophet is a possessor of mercy, is merciful, or is himself a mercy (Āl). Muslims often interpret this verse to mean that the Prophet is a mercy, because he is a cause for happiness in the "two abodes"—that is, in both the life of this world and the Hereafter—and that the prohibitions and commandments of the Law are all for the purpose of attaining mercy (Aj). The Prophet is considered by Muslims a mercy not only for believers, but for all people (Ṭ)—(for some *the worlds* here refers to both human beings and jinn; M)—though some restrict it to believers only (Q). Commentators often say that the Prophet was a mercy to disbelievers in that his opponents and enemies would not experience the same kinds of destruction and ignominy suffered by the tormentors of previous prophets (N, R, Ṭ, Th), even though all the prophets can be thought of as being sent as a mercy from God, just as all of the Divine books can be seen as a mercy (M). Some explain this point by saying that it is not necessary that the Prophet be a mercy to all people in the same way or in the same respect (R). This mercy can also refer to the privilege given to the Prophet Muhammad of intercession on the Day of Judgment (M; see 17:79c).

108 Cf. 2:163; 16:22; 22:34; 29:46; 41:6. *Submitters* renders *muslim;* see 2:128c.

109 The Prophet is enjoined to say that he has taught everyone *equally* and has not kept any part of the revelation secret from anyone (Q, R); see also 81:24: *And he does not withhold grudgingly [knowledge of] the unseen. Equally* renders *ʿalā sawāʾ*, which is rendered *in a just way* in 8:58: *And if thou fearest treachery from a people, withdraw from them in a just way.* Because of this common wording, some understand *ʿalā sawāʾ* (*equally*) to refer to fair warning that there was going to be a state of war between them (R), so that this verse would be rendered, "I have proclaimed to you all in a just way." These ideas are common themes throughout the Quran, namely, that the Prophet's responsibility is only to convey the message (e.g., 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:82; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12; 88:21–24) and that he has no knowledge of the time of the Day of Resurrection (Q), which is known only to God (e.g., 7:187; 31:34; 33:63; 41:47; 43:85; 79:42–44).

110 See also 2:284; 4:149; 27:74; 33:54; 87:7, where public statements and secret thoughts are also said to be equally known by God.

111 *Perhaps it is a trial for you;* that is, perhaps the delaying of the punishment *is a trial* and not a blessing (Ṭ). This fact is also mentioned in 26:205–7, where the Quran says that more time only gives the disbelievers more opportunity to commit evil and entrench themselves in denial. Following the alternate interpretation offered in v. 109 above, this verse refers to the impending fight or battle that would take place after fair warning was given that fighting would occur (R).

112 The verb in this verse can be read as an imperative, "Say: My Lord, judge with truth!" (Ṭ). And some read the verse to mean, "My Lord judged/judges with truth" (Ṭ); see also 7:89: *Our Lord! Decide between us and our people in truth, and Thou art the best of deciders.* Some interpret this verse to mean that the Prophet seeks God's Help against accusations that he is a sorcerer or poet (vv. 3–5), or against the blasphemous statements made about God, such as His having a child (see, e.g., 19:35; Ṭ).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 22

# The Pilgrimage

## *al-Ḥajj*

There is no general agreement as to when *al-Ḥajj* was revealed. Some say it is Madinan except for vv. 52–55, which are Makkan (IK), while others say it is Makkan except for vv. 19–22, which are from the Madinan period (Q). Most say it is a mix of Makkan and Madinan verses (Q). According to one tradition, it was called one of the most remarkable of *sūrah*s for several reasons: it was revealed both at night and during the day, while on journey and while at home, and during war and during peace; it contains both abrogating and abrogated verses; and it has both *muḥkam* (unambiguous) and *mutashābih* (symbolic or allegorical) verses (Q). It takes its name from the mention of the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage) in v. 27 and also the broader discussion of it throughout.

*Al-Ḥajj* opens with a warning of the terrors of the destruction of the world and the Resurrection (vv. 1–4), which are compared to the individual life cycle of human beings (vv. 5–7). The traits of the misguided are described and compared with those of the righteous through the parable of a garden and by describing their reward or punishment in the Hereafter (vv. 8–25). The significance of the *ḥajj* is addressed in a passage that begins with a reminder that the rituals of the *ḥajj* were begun by Abraham and goes on to note that the true meaning of the rites of pilgrimage lies in the inner state of reverence (*taqwā*) that reaches God, not sacrificial meat or other physical aspects of the *ḥajj* (vv. 26–37).

The resistance to and rejection of other prophets by their peoples is mentioned in a passage that some commentators have explained in terms of the "story of the cranes," more popularly known in the West as the "Satanic Verses," which are connected to various passages of the Quran, but are often discussed in connection with v. 52 of this *sūrah*. This *sūrah* contains an important passage thought by many scholars to be the first verses revealed giving the Muslim community permission to resort to the use of force to defend itself against persecution (v. 39–41); it also contains significant verses dealing with the relationship of Islam to other religions and the place of the Muslim community in history (vv. 17, 34, 67, 78).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O mankind! Reverence your Lord. Truly the quaking of the Hour is a tremendous thing. (2) On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman will deliver her burden, and you will see mankind drunk, though drunk they will not be. Rather, the Punishment of God is severe. (3) And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God, without knowledge, and follow every defiant satan, (4) for whom it is decreed that, should anyone take him as a protector, he will cause him to go astray and guide him unto the punishment of the Blaze. (5) O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind. (6) That is because

1 The *Hour* refers to the eschatological events at the end of the world and the Day of Judgment. The *quaking* refers to the shaking of the earth at the end of the world (see *Sūrah* 99).

2 *It* in *On the day you see it* most likely refers to the event of the quaking (Q, R). So great will the fear and shock be that women will forsake their nursing babies, pregnant women will miscarry, and people will be so affected by terror that they will appear as if drunk (Ṭ). There is disagreement among the commentators over whether this "shaking" refers to events leading up to and heralding the end of the world, to the destruction of the world itself, or to events on the Day of Judgment (Q).

3 Some commentators believe that this verse must refer to those who disputed the existence of the Hereafter or the resurrection of the dead (e.g., 37:16), while others think that it is a reference to those people who called the Quran *fables of those of old* more generally (see 8:31c; R). A *satan* can refer to one of the forces of Satan as well as to a jinn or to a human being; see 2:14c. Some commentators argue that, although this verse deplores disputation about God when done in ignorance, there is implicit approval of those who discuss theological matters on the basis of true and reliable knowledge (Q, R).

4 Some take this verse to mean that *it is decreed* for *every defiant satan* that, *should anyone take him*, namely, the defiant satan, *as a protector*, he will misguide that person. Another interpretation is that *it is decreed* for *those . . . who follow* a *defiant satan* that those followers will be misguided by that satan. (R).

5–6 That human beings are created *from dust* is an idea found in 3:59; 18:37; 30:20; 35:11 (which also mentions the *drop*); and 40:67 (which also

God is the Truth, and because He gives life to the dead, and because He is Powerful over all things, (7) and because the Hour is coming, in which there is no doubt, and because God will resurrect whosoever is in the graves. (8) And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God without knowledge, without guidance, and without an illuminating Book, (9) turning aside to cause others to stray from the way of God. Such shall have disgrace in this world, and We shall make him taste the punishment of the burning on the Day of Resurrection. (10) That is because of what your hands have sent forth, and because

mentions the *drop,* the *blood clot,* and the effects of growing old). Commentators see this verse as a reference not only to the fact that Adam, the progenitor of all human beings, was created *from dust,* but also to the fact that the animals that people eat and whose milk they drink are nourished by plants, which are themselves nourished by dust, and in this sense human beings are, in their physical bodies, made from dust (R). The *drop* is often understood to refer to semen (R), also mentioned in 32:8: *Then He made his seed from a draught of base fluid.*

The *lump of flesh, formed and unformed* is generally thought to mean that, after the *blood clot* settles in the womb, some pregnancies come to term, while others miscarry before producing fully formed human beings (R, Ṭ). This fact is thought to be indicated by *cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed.* With regard to these descriptions and *a term appointed,* some commentators mention a *ḥadīth* that states, "Your creation is such that you are brought together in your mother's belly for forty nights, then you are a blood clot for the same duration, then a lump of flesh for the same duration. Then God sends an angel who is given commands regarding four things, and thus he writes down one's provision, one's deeds, one's life span, and whether one will be wretched or joyous."

*Some are taken in death* refers to those who die before old age, while *the most abject life* refers to the weakness and loss of faculties one experiences in old age (IK). This verse is similar in theme to 30:54: *God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength;* 36:68: *And whomsoever We give long life, We cause him to regress in creation;* and 16:70: *And among you are those who are brought back to the weakest of ages, such that they know nothing after having had knowledge.* Some commentators argue that people can be spared the infirmities and weaknesses of old age in accordance with the strength of their faith (Aj, R).

*God is the Truth* (*al-Ḥaqq;* cf. 22:62; 24:25; 31:30) could also be rendered, "God is the Real/Reality." The growth of vegetation from dry earth is a common symbol in the Quran for the resurrection of the dead, as in 35:9: *And God is He Who sends the winds; then they cause clouds to rise. Then We drive them to a land that is dead, and thereby revive the earth after its death. Thus shall be the Resurrection!* See also 16:65; 25:48–49; 30:19, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11.

7 As mentioned in 22:1c, *the Hour* refers to the end of the world. The inhabitants of *the graves* are also mentioned in 35:22; 60:13; 100:9.

8 Cf. 31:20. The idea of an illuminating or luminous book is also found in 3:184 and 35:25. On disputing about God *without knowledge,* see 22:3c.

9 *Turning aside* translates an expression that literally means to turn one's side to something or to bend one's neck in pride or conceit and denotes an attitude of pride and haughtiness. *Disgrace in this world* is mentioned as a punishment throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:85, 114; 5:33, 41; 10:98; 39:26; 41:16).

10 See 3:182, an almost identical verse. Commentators note that human beings' words and deeds will be recorded in the book they will read from on the Day of Judgment (Q), to which reference is also made in 17:13–14; 18:49; 69:19, 25; 78:29; 84:7–10. "What hands have sent forth" has an idiomatic sense of what human beings have

God wrongs not His servants. (11) And among mankind some worship God upon a brink: if good befalls him, he is content thereby, but if a trial befalls him, he is turned over upon his face, losing this world and the Hereafter. That is the manifest loss. (12) He calls, apart from God, upon that which neither harms him nor benefits him. That is extreme error. (13) He calls upon one whose harm is likelier than his benefit. What an evil ally, and what an evil friend! (14) Truly God will cause those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below. Truly God does whatsoever He desires. (15) Whosoever thinks that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to Heaven. Then let him sever it and see if his scheming

wrought and also evokes the idea that one's deeds are sent, as it were, to the Hereafter, where one will meet them during judgment.

11 *Upon a brink* is understood to mean "in a state of doubt" (Ṭ) or that one's belief is superficial, on the outer reaches of one's consciousness and not in the heart (R). According to al-Ṭabarī, this refers to people like the Bedouin of the Prophet's time, who would come and embrace Islam if there were some material benefit to be had, but who would go back to their old ways once that benefit was no longer available. If their lives were going well, with material wealth and sons, they would affirm the Prophet's veracity, but if they were afflicted with bad economic conditions and having only daughters, they would go back to their former ways.

For others this verse provides a general description of hypocrites, whose religion is informed by a superficial notion of what is good for them (Ṭ). They are *upon a brink* in that the slightest discomfort topples them from faith (R). They lose both *this world*—because the material goods they thought they would attain will be lost—*and the Hereafter*—because they were heedless of the true nature and rewards of faith (Ṭ). In this regard, when a man lamented to the Prophet that his new religion had brought him no good, the Prophet said, "Islam is not something spoken. Islam melts, as fire melts away the impurities of iron, gold, and silver" (R).

12–13 These verses are usually thought to refer to idols and false gods, which are often described as something that neither harms nor benefits (cf. 6:71; 10:18, 106, 20:89; 21:66; 25:55; 26:73). Some say v. 13 refers to the help one seeks from worldly powers, but this could also refer to idols, because the worship of idols, far from being innocuous, is considered, from a religious perspective, to be harmful in itself, as it diverts one's attention from the worship of the One God (R).

14 On *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c.

15 Although this verse may be general in import, many commentators believe that *him* in *not help him* refers to the Prophet (R). It is also thought that this verse could refer to a group of believers who were so full of anger at the idolaters that they found the promised victory against them to be slow in coming; some believe it refers to the tribes of Asad and Ghaṭafān, who thought that the Prophet would not ultimately achieve victory; it can also refer to the Prophet's enemies in general, who did not believe he would overcome them (R).

According to one interpretation, this verse alludes to individuals who are driven to hang themselves (Aj, Q, R) and are asked to see if this will cure their rage; the word translated *Heaven* (*samāʾ*), which also means "sky," can also refer to the ceiling of a house. According to this interpretation, the absence of hope that God's Help will come is a manifestation of the deep despair characteristic of those whose faith is *upon a brink* (v. 11), and the victims of this despair and lack of hope are asked to meditate upon whether hanging

removes that which enrages. (16) Thus do We send it down as clear signs, and thus does God guide whomsoever He desires. (17) As for those who believe, and those who are Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, indeed God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Truly God is Witness over all things. (18) Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the beasts, and many among mankind? But for many the punishment has come due. Whomsoever God disgraces, none can ennoble. Truly God does whatsoever He will. (19) These two adversaries

themselves will change anything—the implied answer being that God's relationship with the Prophet, and by extension the believers, will remain the same *in this world and the Hereafter.*

According to another interpretation of the imagery of this verse, the doubting or hostile ones are here being invited, since they believe that God is preparing to sever the victory He promised the Prophet, to seek some *rope,* or "means" (*sabab*), to Heaven, to try to sever it themselves, and then to see if their scheme (i.e., the scheme to sever that help to the Prophet) will assuage their anger and impatience (Q, Th). In another interpretation it is the very revelation from God that these persons are invited to try to sever (Th), and some say the imagery is meant to imply that no matter how far one goes or what bounds one passes, nothing can come between God's Help and the Prophet (R).

16 The concept of *clear signs* also appears in 2:99; 17:101; 24:1, 34, 46; 28:36; 57:9; 58:5; 65:11.

17 On the identity of the Sabeans, see 2:62c. *Magians* translates *majūs,* the only instance of this word in the Quran. It likely comes from the Greek *magos,* which comes from the Old and Middle Persian *mugh;* it was originally a reference to a line of Persian priests (from which the word "magic" derives as well as "Magi," the three who came from the East to visit the newly born Christ, as the use of sorcery was attributed to them by the ancient Greeks). To this day, however, *majūs* is understood by most Muslims to be a reference to Zoroastrians in general, not just the special class of priests. Historically, there has been debate, especially among Arabs, as to whether the Zoroastrians could be considered People of the Book, and it was common for different ritual and legal matters to be judged differently; for example, many jurists forbade intermarriage with Zoroastrians but permitted the consumption of meat purchased from them, while others debated whether one could use their animals to hunt (Q); see also 9:29c, which addresses the legal treatment of the People of the Book. During Islamic history, many jurists (such as al-Shāfiʿī) accepted Zoroastrians as People of the Book, as we also see very generally in Persia and among Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

For God's judgment or disclosure of the truth in matters of religious disagreement on the Day of Judgment rather than in this world, see 2:113c.

18 The prostrating of the whole created world, not just human beings, is also mentioned in 13:15: *And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth* (see 13:15c). The worship of God by beings other than angels and human beings is mentioned in 13:13; 17:44; 34:10; 55:6. Prostration signifies not only the physical action, but also the very state of humble worship that prostration suggests (R).

*The punishment has come due* means that it is deserved (Ṭ). The structure of *Whomsoever God disgraces, none can ennoble* is similar to such other Quranic statements as 18:17: *Whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protector to lead him aright;* and 3:160: *If God helps you, none shall overcome you. And if He forsakes you, who then can help you thereafter?*

dispute concerning their Lord. As for those who disbelieve, garments of fire shall be cut for them, and boiling liquid shall be poured over their heads, (20) by which their innards and their skin will be melted. (21) And for them shall be hooked iron rods. (22) Whensoever they desire, in their grief, to leave it, they shall be returned unto it, while [being told], "Taste the punishment of the burning!" (23) Truly God will cause those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below, adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearl, and therein their clothes will be of silk. (24) And they shall be guided unto that which is good in speech, and be guided unto the path of the Praised. (25) Truly those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, and the

19 Many commentators prefer to read this verse as a general description of any two disputing parties, but others record different opinions about the specific individuals to whom this verse may refer. Some say that it refers to the six warriors who began the Battle of Badr at the front of their respective armies: ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's uncle Ḥamzah, and ʿUbaydah ibn al-Ḥārith on the Muslim side and three fighters from the Quraysh on the other (Q, R, Ṭ). Others believe that this verse refers to arguments between the Muslims and the People of the Book, because the latter claimed to be closer to God, an older community, and superior in other ways. Some commentators say the *dispute* refers to a conversation between the Garden and the Fire regarding the purpose for which they were created, and some mention a *ḥadīth* in which the Fire says, "The proud and the haughty enter me," the Garden says, "The weak and poor enter me," and God says, "Thou art My Mercy, I show mercy by thee. And Thou art My Punishment, I punish by thee whomsoever I will" (Q).

20–22 It is understood that the *iron rods* are those with which they will be beaten (IK). Although this passage is a concrete description of the fate of some in the Hereafter, it is also interpreted as a spiritual allegory: the malicious soul, unable to see beyond the ephemeralities of this world and understand the true nature of things, is beaten down from rising spiritually by the *hooked iron rods* of false belief in its own power to control its fate and continuously *returned* to a state of suffering by its pride and self-glorification (Aj). *Taste the punishment of the burning* is thought to be spoken by the custodians of the Fire (Ṭ).

23 Cf. 35:33. On *Gardens with rivers running below*, see 2:25c. Other references to the raiment and ornaments of the inhabitants of the Garden include 18:31; 44:53; and 76:21. The *rivers running below* and *bracelets of gold and pearl* contrast with the *boiling liquid* and *garments of fire* mentioned in v. 19.

24 That they *shall be guided* means that they will be inspired toward these things (Ṭ). The idea of a good word or good speech is also mentioned in 14:24: *A good word is as a good tree: its roots firm and its branches in the sky*. In the present verse *that which is good in speech* is seen as referring to many things, including the testimony of faith, "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāha illa'Llāh*), or "Praise be to God" (*al-ḥamdu li'Llāh*), or the Quran itself. These words may also refer to what is spoken in the Hereafter, including the glad tiding and welcome that the believers will hear from God (see *Sūrah* 89) and the words of the angels, as in 39:73, when they say to inhabitants of the Garden, *Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein]* (cf. 7:46; 10:10; 13:23–24; 14:23; 19:62; 25:75; 33:44; 36:58; R). Goodness in word and speech is an aspect of the paradisal state, as indicated by 78:35: *They hear therein neither idle talk nor lying* (cf. 19:62; 56:25; 88:11). *The path of the Praised* means the path of God, that is, the path to the Garden (Q).

25 *Turn from* renders *ṣadda ʿan*, which can mean either to be diverted oneself or to divert

Sacred Mosque which We have appointed for mankind—equal are those who dwell there and those who come from abroad—whosoever desires to deviate wrongfully therein, We shall cause him to taste a painful punishment. (26) And [remember] when We assigned for Abraham the place of the House, [saying], "Ascribe no partners unto Me, and purify My House for those who circumambulate, and those who stand, and those who bow and prostrate. (27) And proclaim the *ḥajj* among mankind: they shall come to thee on foot and upon all [manner of] lean beast, coming from all deep and distant mountain highways, (28) that they may witness benefits for them and mention the Name of God, during known days, over the four-legged cattle He has provided them. So eat thereof, and feed the wretched poor. (29) Then let them be done with their

others. *Those who dwell there* refers to the local inhabitants of Makkah, and *those who come from abroad* to people who travel to Makkah to visit. This statement is interpreted to mean that neither has a greater right to be in Makkah and visit the Sacred Mosque than the other (IK, R, Ṭ). *To deviate wrongfully* is understood by many to mean idolatry and the worship of anything other than God (IK, Ṭ), though others believe it refers to certain kinds of economic transactions in the sacred precincts (IK).

26 Cf. 2:125. On the account of Abraham and the Kaʿbah, see commentary on 2:125–27. *Purify My House* is understood to mean keeping it free from doubt and idolatry (Ṭ). To circumambulate the Kaʿbah is an essential part of the rite of the *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah* (see 2:203c) and standing, bowing, and prostrating are all components of the Islamic canonical prayer in addition to symbolizing worship in general. For other instances where bowing and prostrating are mentioned, see also 2:43, 125; 3:43; 9:112.

27 Commentators mention accounts that Abraham did not know how he could announce the pilgrimage to people; so God told him to speak the words and they miraculously echoed far and wide and settled into the hearts of all men and women (Ṭ). Some have understood the mention of going on foot to indicate that it was more meritorious to walk than ride when going on pilgrimage (IK, Ṭ). By *lean beast* some have understood camels (Ṭ), whose leanness is interpreted by some as an indication of their having come from *deep and distant mountain highways* (Q).

28 The *benefits* were those of both this world and the Hereafter; that is, people benefited from both the markets and trade that accompany the pilgrimage and the attainment of God's Contentment and Reward in the Hereafter (Ṭ). Some understand *known days* to be the first ten days of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah (the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, during which the *ḥajj* takes place), while others see it as the days of *tashrīq* (the eleventh through the thirteenth days of that month; see 2:203c). *Mention the Name of God . . . over the four-legged cattle* refers to saying "In the Name of God" as one slaughters them for sacrifice. It is said that the idolaters would not eat the meat they slaughtered themselves, and this verse gave Muslims permission to eat the meat that they themselves had slaughtered if they wished, without making it obligatory (IK, Q). *Wretched poor* means those who are hungry and poor, unable to provide for themselves, and who are to be fed from the sacrifice (Ṭ).

29 To *be done with their untidiness* is, according to some, an expression referring to the cutting of fingernails or the shaving or cutting off of hair associated with ending the pilgrimage and leaving the state of *iḥrām* (Q, R, Ṭ); that is, it refers to entering into a state of bodily cleanliness (see 2:196c). Al-Rāzī points out that the word *tafath,*

untidiness, and fulfill their vows, and circumambulate the Ancient House." (30) Thus it is. And whosoever magnifies the sacred things of God, that is better for him in the eyes of his Lord. Cattle are permitted you, save that which is recited unto you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false speech, (31) as *ḥanīfs* before God, not ascribing partners unto Him. And whosoever ascribes partners unto God, it is as if he fell from the sky and the birds snatched him, or the wind swept him away to a place far off. (32) Thus it is. And whosoever magnifies the rituals of God, truly that comes from the reverence of hearts. (33) You shall have benefits in them, for a term appointed. Thereafter their lawful place of sacrifice

rendered here as *untidiness,* is unknown outside of the exegetical literature (*tafsīr*) and that when a Bedouin was asked about it, he equated it with filth. Others say *be done with their untidiness* refers to conditions related to the rites of the *ḥajj* as a whole (Ṭ). *Fulfill their vows* means to perform the pilgrimage (IK). *Ancient* renders *ʿatīq,* which in addition to "very old" (it is mentioned as the *first house established for mankind* in 3:96) also means "freed," and some commentators refer to a *ḥadīth* that says, "It was named the Free House, because no tyrant ever triumphed against it," meaning that the Kaʿbah has withstood the assaults of tyrants and attackers throughout the ages (IK, Ṭ); the most well known attack is recounted in *Sūrah* 105, when the Kaʿbah was said to have been defended against a Yemeni army by a swarm of birds sent by God. *ʿAtīq* can also mean that something is excellent or beautiful.

30 The *sacred things* are the *ḥajj,* the *ʿumrah,* Makkah and its environs, and indirectly whatever is prohibited there (Ṭ); *sacred things* (*ḥurumāt*) can also be rendered "forbidden things," meaning those things that cannot be violated (cf. v. 32, where it is *rituals* that are magnified). *Cattle are permitted* refers to the different kinds of animals that can be sacrificed and consumed, and *save that which is recited unto you* indicates the prohibitions in the Quran against carrion, blood, pork, and anything that is consecrated to other than God (Ṭ). One should *shun the filth of idols* by not worshipping them and *false speech* by rejecting assertions about the idols, such as *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God* (39:3) and assigning daughters to God (16:57; Ṭ).

31 On the meaning of *ḥanīf,* that is, someone who is devoted to the One God, but not through a narrow sectarian focus, see 2:135c. The imagery of one who has fallen *from the sky* (or the heavens) is meant to convey helplessness (Q) and, according to one interpretation, symbolizes the fall of the soul from faith into a state where it is vulnerable to being snatched away by Satan and further swept along by its own caprice and base appetites (R).

32 *Rituals* translates *shaʿāʾir,* which means not only the rituals themselves, but also the sacred things with which or places at which those rituals are performed. Since the rote *sh-ʿ-r* connotes the sense of "knowledge" or "consciousness," al-Qurṭubī describes them as "that in which God has something by which He makes known or teaches." The verse places *reverence* in the heart, and the Prophet is reported to have said, "Reverence (*taqwā*) is here," and pointed to his heart. To "magnify" the rituals means that one believes that worshipping God through the rites of pilgrimage is an important and weighty matter (R). Others interpret the "magnification" to mean that the sacrificial animals should be well fed and beautiful, and one should not use sick or injured animals (IK, Ṭ). This latter interpretation evokes the spiritual interpretation given to 2:71, where the sacrificial cow is likened to the soul that needs to be made ready and worthy for its spiritual death.

33 By most accounts this verse refers to the benefits derived from the sacrificial animals, such as their milk and wool and the ability to ride them (see, e.g., 36:71–73), as there apparently was reticence on the part of the pre-Islamic Arabs to make use of sacrificial animals in this way; see also 5:103,

shall be at the Ancient House. (34) For every community We have appointed a rite, that they might mention the Name of God over the four-legged cattle He has provided them. Your God is one God; so submit unto Him, and give glad tidings to the humble, (35) whose hearts quiver when God is mentioned, and who bear patiently what befalls them, who perform the prayer, and who spend of that which We have provided them. (36) And We have placed the sacrificial camels for you among God's rituals. There is good for you in them. So mention the Name of God over them as they line up. Then when they have fallen upon their flanks, eat of them, and feed the needy who solicit and those who do not. Thus have We made them subservient unto you, that haply you may give thanks. (37) Neither their flesh nor their blood will reach God, but the reverence

where these idolatrous prohibitions against riding or eating the meat of certain animals considered sacred are mentioned and rejected. Jurists have pointed out that it is permissible to ride the sacrificial animals if this is necessary (Q). One has these benefits for *a term appointed,* meaning until the animals are sacrificed in the pilgrimage rites (IK, Q). Regarding *Ancient House,* see 22:29c.

34 Cf. v. 67. On each community being given its own religious way, see also 5:48: *For each among you We have appointed a law and a way;* 10:47: *For every community there is a messenger;* and 16:36: *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community. Your God is one God* (cf. 2:163; 16:22; 21:108; 41:6) means both that God is one and that He is unique, since *one* (*wāḥid*), as in English, can also mean "the same"; that is, not only is God one, but also each community worships the same God. See the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." Some commentators understand *rite* (*mansak*) to refer here specifically to sacrifice, while others give it the more general meaning of religious ritual (Q), and some understand it to refer to the physical place of religious ritual (R); on the concept of *nusuk,* to which *mansak* is related by root, see 6:162–63c.

35 Other verses also speak of the physical manifestations of knowledge and faith, as in 39:23: *Their skin and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God;* and 5:83: *Their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize.* Al-Qushayrī notes that the quivering of one's heart increases to the degree one is conscious of God's Self-Disclosure in the world.

36 *Sacrificial camels* translates *budn,* whose meaning some jurists restrict to camels, while others say that it can refer to other animals such as cows (Q). The *needy who solicit* refers to people who request help or money, while *those who do not* are those who refrain from asking; see 2:273, which also mentions poor people who do not ask for help. *Mention the Name of God* refers to saying the formula "In the Name of God" as one slaughters an animal, and *when they have fallen upon their flanks* refers to when they die, since traditionally camels are slaughtered while standing (Q, R). In the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah;* see 3:154; 5:50; 33:33; 48:26c) the idolaters would not eat the meat they sacrificed, and most jurists interpret this verse to mean that eating the sacrificial animal's meat oneself is permissible and desirable though not obligatory, whereas it is religiously obligatory to feed others (Q).

The notion that all created things in the heavens and on the earth are "made subservient" to human beings appears many times throughout the Quran (e.g., 14:32–33; 16:12; 22:65; 31:20; 43:13; 45:12–13), although some commentators see this as a specific reference to animals that have been domesticated for such purposes (R).

37 It is reported that the idolaters used to smear the blood of the sacrificed animals on the

from you reaches Him. Thus has He made them subservient unto you, that you might magnify God for having guided you. And give glad tidings to the virtuous. (38) Truly God defends those who believe. Truly God loves not any ungrateful traitor. (39) Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged—and truly God is able to help them— (40) who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God." Were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches,

Kaʿbah and that some Muslims wanted to do the same, but then this verse was revealed (Q). *Reverence* (*taqwā*) is mentioned in v. 32, and here is mentioned again to shed light on the inner reality of the ritual of sacrifice. In the last sentence of this verse, the voice switches from the second-person plural to the singular, thus signifying a direct address to the Prophet.

38 The word translated *defends* here is the same word, with a different preposition, that is translated as *repelling* in v. 40. In this verse it means literally something like "God repels [others] from those who believe." The notion that God does not love the *traitor* (*khawwān*) is similar to the message of 4:107: *Surely God loves not the one given to treachery and sin.* It is reported by some that this verse was revealed in connection with certain believers who, while still in Makkah and suffering from the persecutions of the idolatrous Quraysh, desired to fight against them using perfidious and deceitful means (Q). In this connection al-Qurṭubī mentions a *ḥadīth*, "A flag will be hoisted for every perfidious person on the Day of Judgment, which will read, 'This is the perfidy of this person.'"

39 This is the verse most frequently thought to be the first in permitting the believers to use force to defend themselves. *Permission is granted* refers to permission to fight. Previously, Muslims had been required to deal with the persecution and violence against them with patience and forbearance and in two notable cases through emigration from Makkah: the first was the emigration of some Companions to Abyssinia in 615, where they received the protection of the Negus; and the second was the major emigration of the Prophet and his Companions from Makkah to Madinah in 622.

According to some, this verse was revealed at the time of the emigration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah, and it is said that upon hearing this verse Abū Bakr said, "I knew that fighting would come to pass" (Q). Others say that it was revealed in connection with a group of believers who desired to emigrate from Makkah, but were hindered and overtaken by the disbelievers, and permission was given to them to fight back (Ṭ). In connection with v. 38, it is understood by some that initially a group of believers asked the Prophet for permission to fight back secretly using techniques like assassination, to which the revelation said, *God loves not any ungrateful traitor* (v. 38), after which permission was given to fight openly (Ṭ); see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

With slightly different voweling, the verse can be read to mean, "Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged" (Ṭ), and also, "He [God] gives permission to those who fight because they have been wronged" (R).

40 The expulsion of the believers from their homes in Makkah, mentioned also in 2:191, 217, 246; 3:195; 8:30; 9:40; 8:30; 60:9, is one of the most often cited grievances of the Muslim community against the Quraysh. The believers were given permission to use force because of the wrongs committed against them: persecution and being forced to leave because of their faith, *for saying "Our Lord is God."* The use of force is further contextualized by mentioning the protection of other houses of worship *wherein God's Name is mentioned much.* Muslims are permitted to use force because of a prior use of force, namely, the expulsion from their homes. Likewise, *God's repelling people, some by means of others* is also a justified use of force, because

synagogues, and mosques, wherein God's Name is mentioned much, would have been destroyed. And God will surely help those who help Him—truly God is Strong, Mighty— (41) who, were We to establish them upon the earth, would perform the prayer, give the alms, and enjoin right and forbid wrong. And unto God is the end of all affairs. (42) And if they deny thee, the people of Noah denied before them, as did ᶜĀd and Thamūd, (43) and the people of Abraham, and the people of Lot, (44) and the inhabitants of Midian, and Moses too was denied. But I granted the disbelievers a respite; then I seized them in punishment. And how, then, was the change I wrought! (45) How many a town

houses of worship *would have been destroyed* unless this "repelling" took place. By implication, such defense or "repelling" should take place in the future under similar conditions; that is to say, in this verse the use of force is conditioned by the actual expulsion of people from their homes and the potential destruction of different kinds of houses of worship.

Opinions differ regarding the religious communities to which each of these houses of worship corresponds. *Monasteries* renders *ṣawāmiᶜ*, usually understood to be houses of Christian monks, but also associated by some with the Sabeans; *churches* renders *biyaᶜ*, which most have understood to refer to Christian houses of worship, but which may also refer to Jewish temples; *synagogues* renders *ṣalawāt*, usually understood to mean Jewish houses of worship but linked by some with the Sabeans (see 2:62); and *mosques* renders *masājid*, a word meaning "place of prostrations" and associated by most commentators with the houses of worship of Muslims themselves, although another opinion sees *masājid* as a general term referring to the previous three types of houses of worship (Ṭ); see 72:18c.

For many commentators and jurists, in keeping with their general theory of Islam's supersession of all other forms of religion, this verse refers to the houses of worship in the past before the advent of Islam. Muslims, however, are prohibited from damaging or destroying the houses of worship belonging to peoples with whom there is a treaty (*ahl al-dhimmah*) both within and outside of Islamic lands (Q); for more discussion of these issues, see 9:29c and the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

*Those who help Him* is understood to mean those who help God's religion and His Prophet (Q, R).

41 Here, *who* follows upon and is to be identified with *those who help Him*, and according to some also corresponds to those referenced by the *who* mentioned in the first sentence of the previous verse (*who were expelled;* Ṭ). According to one opinion, this verse describes the conditions laid upon those whom God "establishes on the earth," meaning those to whom God gives sovereignty and political power (Q, R). Others say that it is a description of the Emigrants or simply of all Muslims in general (Q, Ṭ). On the concept of enjoining right and forbidding wrong, see 2:207c and especially 3:104c.

42–45 As occurs frequently in the Quran, the Prophet is reminded that the trials he undergoes, whether they consist of denial, mockery, or violence, were experienced by previous prophets as well and that the final end of their opponents was defeat and destruction (e.g., 14:9–13; 35:25–26; 40:5, 22). The commentators explain the imagery of *fallen upon their roofs* as meaning that the roofs first collapsed and then the walls fell upon them afterward (R).

The prophet sent to Midian was Shuᶜayb (see, e.g., 7:85; 11:84); Hūd (see, e.g., 11:50) was sent to the ᶜĀd, and Ṣāliḥ (see, e.g., 7:73) was sent to the Thamūd. *Change* in *And how, then, was the change I wrought* (cf. 34:45; 35:26; 67:18) renders *nakīr*, which carries the sense of altering some-

have We destroyed while it did wrong, laying thus fallen upon their roofs! And [how many] an abandoned well and lofty palace! (46) Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind. (47) They bid thee to hasten the punishment, though God will not fail His Promise. And truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of that which you reckon. (48) And how many a town did I grant respite while it did wrong. Then I seized it [in punishment], and unto Me is the journey's end! (49) Say, "O mankind! I am only a clear warner unto you!" (50) And as for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be forgiveness and a generous provision. (51) But those who endeavor to thwart Our signs, they shall be the inhabitants of Hellfire. (52) And no messenger or prophet did We

thing, especially from a state one likes to a state one dislikes (it is also the name traditionally given to one of the two angels who question and sometimes torment the dead while they are still in the grave). It is derived from the same root as *inkār,* "denial," and hence some commentators understand this phrase to mean, "And how, then, was My Denial [of them]!" (R).

46 Traveling *upon the earth* to see the vestiges of previous civilizations is mentioned throughout the Quran, including in 3:137; 6:11; 12:109; 16:36; 27:69; 30:9; 35:44; 40:21; 47:10; see 30:9c.

The blindness of hearts is alluded to throughout the Quran, in addition to deafness and dumbness. As discussed in the commentary on 2:7 and the introduction to *Sūrah* 47 and as exemplified in this verse, the heart is the seat of knowledge and the organ of spiritual understanding. This is further explicated in the *ḥadīth:* "In the body there is a lump of flesh: when it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and when it is rotten, the whole body is rotten. Yea, it is the heart."

47 Different interpretations are given to *is as a thousand years of that which you reckon* (cf. 32:5). The *day* is understood to mean one of the six days in which God created the heavens and the earth (see 25:59; 32:4; 50:38) or as the period of reckoning on the Day of Judgment itself, as "one of the days of the Hereafter" (Q, Ṭ). For others this verse means that a day of the punishment and fear that the disbelievers will experience in the Hereafter will feel like a thousand years to them (Q, R). It is also interpreted to mean that for God a day or a thousand years are the same and that to Him it is immaterial whether they are punished soon or granted respite, which respite is mentioned in the subsequent verse (R).

48 Cf. v. 45. The idea of God as the *journey's end* also appears in 2:285; 3:28; 5:18; 24:42; 31:14; 35:18; 40:3; 42:15; 50:43; 60:4; 64:3.

49 These words form a common refrain uttered by the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets in the Quran (e.g., 11:25; 26:115; 29:50; 38:70; 46:9; 51:50; 67:26; 71:2).

50 *Forgiveness and a generous provision* appears also in 8:4, 74; 24:26; 34:4. *Generous* (*karīm*) could also be rendered "honorable" or "noble."

51 *Those who endeavor to thwart Our signs* (cf. 34:5, 38) are understood to be those who deny them, call them sorcery, or consider them to be "tales of those of old" (R), denying realities such as the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment (R). Other examples of the disbelievers directing their hostility at the signs of God include those who *dispute regarding the signs of God* (40:4, 35, 56, 69; 42:35), conceive *a plot regarding Our signs* (10:21), or *deviate with regard to Our signs* (41:40).

52 Al-Rāzī notes, with approval, an opinion that interprets this verse as saying that all prophets are indeed mortal human beings, not angels, and

thus not emotionless or impervious to temptation; yet because they are protected by God, these outside promptings have no influence. The Quran describes the Prophet as not unaffected by people's rejection of his message, as described in 35:8: *Let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them;* and also 26:3: *Perhaps thou dost torment thyself that they are not believers* (cf. 18:6).

Some commentators connect this verse, and also 53:19–20 and 17:73–75, with an account referred to as the "story of the cranes" (*qiṣṣat al-gharānīq*), which in Western literature has come to be known as the "Satanic Verses." According to this story, which has several different versions, the Prophet, while in the company of the Quraysh near the Kaʿbah, was reciting *al-Najm* (*Sūrah* 53). The accounts state that after reciting vv. 19–20, which mention three of the goddesses worshipped by the Quraysh, Satan cast words into the Prophet's recitation, or "onto his tongue," during a moment of inattention or drowsiness on the part of the Prophet. The Prophet then recited or was heard to recite (different versions are offered), "They are the exalted cranes, and their intercession is to be hoped for," and continued his recitation through to the end of the *sūrah*. At the last verse of that *sūrah,* which mentions prostration, the Prophet prostrated. The Quraysh, apparently pleased that their goddesses had been exalted, gladly joined in the prostration and then celebrated Muhammad's embrace of their religion. Afterward, Gabriel corrected the Prophet or, according to some accounts, Muhammad realized the error himself, and v. 52 was then revealed to give him comfort after the sadness and apprehension he felt as a result of the incident.

Many of the early commentators transmit this account with significant differences in setup, wording, and import. Based on these accounts, it seems likely that many Muslims of the early centuries accepted that something like this incident actually happened or at least were comfortable enough with the story to pass it along as a subject of interest, as was often the case in the early *tafsīr* genre, which often registered material of varying quality that was sometimes at odds with a commentator's own convictions. Once it is analyzed more closely, however, the incident appears highly implausible for several reasons.

Commentators who reject the account tend to begin by pointing out that the often contradictory versions of the story are poorly sourced and poorly corroborated (IK, Q), not unlike some other material to be found in the biographical and exegetical literature of the early centuries. As al-Qurṭubī points out, commentators on the Quran and historians did not employ consistently rigorous filters for what they would record and transmit, and often strange and baseless material is to be found in their works.

The story has also been attacked as incoherent on what might be called psychological grounds. The Prophet was a man known for his honesty and trustworthiness who had, for several years before this incident occurred, along with his followers suffered terribly for condemning the idols of the Quraysh. He had also resisted several offers of money and power to relinquish his mission. To have made such an enormous concession to idolatry would have undercut his message and authority and would have certainly destroyed his credibility in the eyes of his followers. As al-Rāzī observes, the Prophet's greatest struggle was against the idols; in a sense, it defined his mission. Al-Māturīdī asks, if he could not distinguish Satan from Gabriel the first time, how could he do so when Gabriel came to correct him?

Chronological considerations also cast doubt on the story, or at least its connection with 22:52 and 17:73–75. *Sūrah* 22 is considered by some to have been revealed in Madinah, while *Sūrah* 17 was revealed after the Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension in the tenth or eleventh year of the revelation, in Makkah. Many of the versions of the story place the "story of the cranes" in the fifth year of the revelation, at the time when some Muslims had sought refuge in Abyssinia. *Sūrah* 17 would have been revealed five or six years later, while *Sūrah* 22 would have been revealed at least eight years later, according to some chronologies. If either 22:52 or 17:73–75 were meant to give comfort or explanation to the Prophet, such a time lag would be highly unusual. Did the so-called verses of the cranes remain in circulation during that time? Some accounts also mention that the refugees to Abyssinia returned to Makkah, because they heard the news that the idolaters had reconciled with the Prophet as a result of the incident of the cranes. Aside from the illogic of refugees from idolatry returning because their leader had embraced idolatry, their return is more easily explained, according to critics of the story,

by the conversion of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, one of the most prominent adversaries of the young community, to Islam, bringing with him a level of political support that made it safe for the refugees to return. Moreover, the Negus of Abyssinia was himself embroiled in a rebellion, which would have contributed to the refugees' desire to leave.

There are also theological grounds for rejecting the incident as an explanation of v. 52. Al-Qurṭubī rejects the very possibility of Satan's taking control of a human being (much less a prophet) in such a manner, citing the words of Satan in 14:22, *And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me,* and further argues that if Satan had this power to control a person's speech, no human being could withstand it. From the point of view of the Islamic tradition, among both Sunnis and Shiites, the prophets are *maʿṣūm,* or "protected [from sin]," and from this perspective such an incident by definition would have been impossible.

Moreover, from what might be called a literary or thematic point of view, the verses in question do not necessitate this story as their basis. The thematic elements in 22:52 and 17:73–75 are not unique to those verses. In the case of 22:52, the context is that of those who *endeavor to thwart* the signs of God, which, as discussed in the commentary on 22:51, is a common description of the activity of the disbelievers as recounted in the Quran. In 22:52 *had a longing* renders the verb *tamannā,* and *longing* in *his longing* translates *umniyyah,* a word that can mean "desires" or "false hopes." The noun *umniyyah* also appears in 2:78 (*hearsay*); 2:111 (*hopes*); 4:123 (*desires*); 4:119 (*desires*); 57:14 (*false hopes*). The verb *tamannā* also appears in 2:94–95; 3:143; 4:32; 28:82; 53:24; 62:6–7. Some commentators gloss *umniyyah* as "recitation," which, though not linguistically incorrect, is a rare secondary usage that stands in stark contrast to the Quranic usage of the term. The idea of "casting," when it does not refer to the physical action of throwing, as when Moses casts his staff, is used in various ways in the Quran; examples include the casting of *terror* (3:151), *love* (20:39), *Spirit* (40:15), *hearing* (as in "to give ear"; 50:37), *enmity and hatred* (5:64), and *peace* ("to offer peace"; 4:91). Furthermore, the two parts of this verse are not connected in the way the story of the cranes would suggest, because in the text God first *effaces what Satan casts,* and *then* makes His signs firm. This means that the "making firm" of the signs of God is not brought about by means of effacing what Satan casts, but comes afterwards. Moreover, this "making firm" most logically connects with the previous verse, which mentions those people who *endeavor to thwart Our signs,* to yield the meaning, "They endeavor to thwart them, but God makes them firm." Finally, the allegedly interpolated verses would directly contradict the explicit message of the remainder of the *sūrah* into which they were allegedly inserted, which argues against such intercession (53:26) and reproaches those who assign daughters to God (53:21–23), the way the three goddesses were thought to be daughters of God by the Quraysh. As for those versions of the story that view 53:21–23 (the verses following those mentioning the names of the idols) as "replacements" for those that Satan cast, see comment on "abrogation," or *naskh,* below.

Some accounts of the story of the cranes attach 17:73–75 to this verse. Against this view, many commentators relate, in connection with that passage, that the Prophet was apparently tempted to make some kind of compromise with the tribes of Quraysh and Thaqīf by offering some token of respect to their idols in the form of turning his face toward them as he walked by, which he did not do. This encounter is thematically not unrelated to the incident, described in *Sūrah* 80, in which the Prophet frowned at the pious persistence of a blind man while he (the Prophet) was talking to high-level members of the Quraysh. In the case of the frowning, the Prophet (incorrectly) made a practical judgment that it was more worthwhile to persuade the leaders of the Quraysh of the truth of Islam. In the matter of showing respect to the idols, he considered whether it was worthwhile to make some gesture that might reduce the Quraysh's antagonism and even gain their assent, but ultimately he did not do so. In 17:74 it says that the Prophet would have *inclined toward them a little,* though in 17:73 it is clear they wanted more than that, namely, they wanted him to *falsely ascribe* something to God, so they could become friends. The danger of being lured by the desires of others is mentioned elsewhere, often where the Prophet is warned against following their caprices after the *knowledge that has come to* him (2:120, 145; see also 5:48; 13:37); none of these incidents are connected with the notion of Satan

introducing something into the recitation of the Quran.

As for how the "story of the cranes" found its way into Islamic literature, in his commentary on 22:52 al-Māturīdī speculates that perhaps the Prophet uttered words like those reported in the story, but that he was registering the belief of the Quraysh themselves, as the Quran does in 10:18: *And they say, "These are our intercessors with God."* Al-Rāzī doubts that words like this were spoken by anyone at all, arguing that no such formulation using the word *gharānīq* ("cranes") was commonplace, but in fact at least one source from the second Islamic century reports that the phrase "Those are the exalted cranes whose intercession is desired" was part of a pre-Islamic prayer formula of the Quraysh. If that were the case, some type of miscommunication or misattribution would be more plausible.

Some of the credibility attached to the account stems from the assumption that Muslims would not invent a story that was so potentially embarrassing, but there are reasons to believe that the early community might not have been troubled by the account. It is conceivable that the historians and exegetes passing on the story might have in hindsight seen the end result—namely, Gabriel's correction of the Prophet—as sufficient Divine protection against error and indeed as evidence of active participation by God in the life of the community and a warning against the promptings of Satan. Such a view is generally rejected by mainstream theologians and commentators, as described above. There are also interpretive reasons why such a story would have been transmitted, which is to say that the means by which it is employed to explain 22:52 actually serves exegetical purposes. First, it provides an "occasion for revelation" (*sabab al-nuzūl*) for this verse. Second, it supports the use of the word *naskh,* here rendered *effaces,* as referring to the technical sense of a later revelation replacing the wording or legal import of something that existed previously (on *naskh* as "abrogation," see 2:106c). (In the *tafsīr* literature, *naskh* was not limited to one Quranic verse replacing another, though this came to be the accepted legal definition. It was also sometimes employed to refer to God's overturning or replacing previous practices that were not originally Divinely ordained, and in rare cases it was thought by some to refer to the actual disappearance or forgetting of Quranic verses as determined by God.)

Some versions of the story indeed interpret 53:21–23 as the verses with which God "replaced" the words about the exalted cranes. Al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr, perhaps detecting this issue, note that in 22:52 one is dealing with "linguistic" *naskh* and not "technical" *naskh,* meaning that it is *naskh* in the plain Arabic sense of wiping away something rather than the legal definition, which combines both the revocation and the replacement of verses in the Quran. It is entirely plausible that, since some versions of the story provided a clear case of the removal and replacement of some verses, and since this is only one of two verses using the word *naskh,* the story was kept in circulation as evidence or support for the theory of *naskh* as "abrogation; for these issues, see 2:106c.

It is far from likely that the lore attached to the idols would have vanished immediately upon the conquest of Makkah and other towns controlled by idolaters. Indeed, the denizens of Ṭā'if bargained for the right to temporarily worship their idols as part of an agreement to become Muslims and were much aggrieved when the Muslims destroyed those idols. It is conceivable that the story of the "exalted cranes" survived as an invention of bitter former idolaters, out of a kind of tribal pride that had yet to die out, possibly as the result of a misremembered incident related to the Prophet, the Quraysh, and the mention of their idols. Such a situation could have led to a series of stories that came down to the early commentators in the various forms of the story discussed above. The early transmitters of this story either saw no great theological or logical problem with the story or simply passed on a story they had heard without taking a firm position on it, as happens countless times in the early *tafsīr* tradition. Many commentators, in attempting to move the *tafsīr* genre from a collection of opinions to a normative account of the Quran, took great pains to demonstrate the baseless nature of the story.

The incident of the goddesses obscures rather than explains the verses it claims to be connected with by taking common themes in the Quran and giving them an explanation that is in discord with how those elements are understood elsewhere; the accounts offer a strained and implausible chronology based upon revelations taking place years

send before thee, but that when he had a longing, Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast. Then God makes firm His signs—and God is Knowing, Wise— (53) that He might make what Satan casts to be a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease, and those whose hearts are hard—and truly the wrongdoers are in extreme schism— (54) and so that those who have been given knowledge might know that it is the truth from thy Lord, and thus believe in it, and that their hearts be humbled before Him. And truly God guides those who believe unto a straight path. (55) Yet those who disbelieve remain in doubt over it, till the Hour comes upon them suddenly or there comes upon them the punishment of a barren day. (56) Sovereignty that Day shall be God's; He will judge between them, and those who believe and perform righteous deeds shall be in Gardens of bliss. (57) And as for those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, theirs shall be a humiliating punishment. (58) And as for those who emigrate in the way of God and are then slain or die, God will surely

apart from one another; and the accounts themselves contradict one another in substantial ways, since some interpret the words as having been uttered by the Prophet, and others interpret them as merely heard by the idolaters.

53 *What Satan casts,* that is, into the hearts of disbelievers (M). That God should make certain matters *a trial* is an idea found throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:102; 10:85; 17:60; 25:20; 37:63; 39:49; 54:27; 60:5; 74:3). The idea of hearts with disease (*maraḍ*) is mentioned also in 2:10; 5:52; 8:49; 9:125; 33:12, 32, 60; 47:20, 29; 74:31. Such *disease* is often understood by commentators as a reference to hypocrisy, doubt, ignorance, and lack of faith (IK). The idea of hard or *hardened* hearts is also mentioned in 2:74; 57:16; and 39:22: *Woe unto those whose hearts are hardened to the remembrance of God!* The word *schism* renders *shiqāq* (also in 2:137, 176; 38:2; 41:52), which has the basic meaning of "fracture" or "separation" and connotes an attitude of opposition and hostility to the truth (R).

54 *Those who have been given knowledge* also appears in 16:27 and 30:56 describing those who speak truths to the disbelievers in the Hereafter, while in other verses *those who have been given knowledge* are contrasted with various kinds of disbelievers (e.g., 17:107; 28:80; 29:49; 34:6; 47:16; 58:11). The contrast between those who are given knowledge and disbelievers or those with weak faith links knowledge (*ʿilm*) with belief (*īmān*). Here *humbled* renders a word that can also mean "at peace" or "content" (Aj, Q).

55–57 The *barren day* is interpreted by some to refer to the Day of Judgment, called *barren* (*ʿaqīm*) because there are no days after it (Q), an interpretation supported by the mention of God's Judgment in the subsequent verse. Others see it as a reference to the Battle of Badr, because it would be a day when mothers would lose their children to battle and there would be no blessing in it for the disbelievers (R). The idea of the end of the world coming suddenly or while human beings are unaware is also mentioned in 6:47; 7:187; 16:45; 21:40; 26:202; 29:53; 43:66; 47:18.

58 It is reported that this verse was revealed when two Emigrants died in Madinah, and some people said it was better to die fighting in the way of God than of natural causes (Q). Others

provide them with a beautiful provision. And truly God is the best of providers. (59) He will surely cause them to enter an entrance with which they shall be content. And truly God is Knowing, Clement. (60) Thus it is. And whosoever retaliates with the like of that which he has suffered, and is then aggressed upon, God will surely help him. Truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving. (61) That is because God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and because God is Hearing, Seeing. (62) That is because God is the Truth and what they call upon apart from Him is false, and because God is the Exalted, the Great. (63) Hast thou not considered that God sends down water from Heaven, and then the earth becomes green? Truly God is Subtle, Aware. (64) To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. And God is truly the Self-Sufficient, the Praised. (65) Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you—and the ship sails upon the sea—by His Command? And He maintains the sky lest it fall upon the earth, save by His Leave. Truly God is Kind and Merciful unto

generalize the meaning to include those who leave their homes to help the religion (R). Some mention 4:100: *Whosoever forsakes his home, emigrating unto God and His Messenger, and death overtakes him, his reward will fall upon God.* One could also mention 3:169, *And deem not those slain in the way of God to be dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, provided for,* as this latter verse shares the language of God's Provision for those who are slain. That God is the *best of providers* is also mentioned in 5:114; 23:72; 34:39; 62:11.

59 The *entrance* is the entrance into Paradise, which will not be preceded by any difficulties for the Emigrants (R). A description of entering Paradise in contentment is also mentioned in 89:28–30: *Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting. Enter among My servants. Enter My Garden.*

60 This verse is understood as a general description of the plight of the believers who were persecuted and expelled from their homes in Makkah and forced to migrate to Madinah (Ṭ). Some commentators believe it refers to an incident in which some Muslims encountered idolaters during the month of Muḥarram, considered by the Arabs even before the advent of Islam one of the sacred months during which fighting was forbidden. The idolaters pressed to fight despite the tradition, and the Muslims responded in kind, but felt remorseful for having done so (Q, R, Ṭ); on the sacred months of the Islamic calendar, also see 9:36–37c.

61 Some interpret this verse in combination with the previous one as an explanation of God's Power; God has power over the day and night and thus has the power to grant help and victory (R).

62 See 31:30, a nearly identical verse, and commentary.

63 The revival of the dead earth by rain is a common theme in the Quran (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:24; 41:39), often interpreted as a symbol of the ease with which God will raise the dead in the Hereafter or of the revival of dead hearts by the water of the spirit; see 2:72–73c.

64 *Self-Sufficient* translates *al-Ghanī,* rendered in 47:38 as *Rich;* see 47:38c.

65 Cf. 31:31. The imagery of seafaring as a blessing bestowed by God is also mentioned in 14:32; 17:66; 30:46; 31:31; 43:12. In this context, where the sea wind is made *subservient* to the purposes

mankind. (66) And He it is Who gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Truly man is ungrateful. (67) For every community We have appointed a rite they are to perform; so let them not argue with thee over the matter. And call to thy Lord. Truly thou art following straight guidance. (68) And if they dispute with thee, say, "God knows best what you do. (69) God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein you used to differ." (70) Knowest thou not that God knows whatsoever is in Heaven and on earth? Truly that is in a Book. Truly that is easy for God. (71) And they worship, apart from God, that for which He has sent down no authority, and that whereof they have no knowledge. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. (72) And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, thou seest denial upon the faces of those who disbelieve. They well-nigh pounce upon those who recite Our signs unto them. Say, "Shall I inform you of what is

of humanity, that God *maintains the sky* (*samāʾ*) is understood to mean that the natural order is Divinely maintained so that such travel is possible (R) and that the sky remains stable enough for ships to take to the sea (Z). It could also be understood as a metonym for whatever falls from the sky, such as rain, as in 11:52 and 71:11: *He will send the sky upon you with abundant rains.*

66 On the cycle of life, death, and then life again, which is understood to mean the life of this world, followed by death, followed by the life of the Hereafter, see 2:28c, which also mentions the state of "death," or nonexistence, that precedes life in this world.

67–69 For the statement *For every community We have appointed a rite,* see 22:34c; on the general question of the Divinely ordained differences among religions, see 5:48c and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." Here, as in v. 34, the word rendered *rite* (*mansak*) can mean both a ritual act and a place of ritual significance.

*Let them not argue with thee* is understood to mean that the Prophet, and by extension all believers, should not engage in debate with members of other communities over such questions, although some understand this to mean that those who would argue with the Muslims should themselves stop their dispute and embrace Islam (R). If the disputants continue, the believers are to remind them of God's Knowledge and that God will judge the differences between religions not in this world, but in the Hereafter (e.g., 2:113; 3:55; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:92, 124; 32:25; 39:3, 46).

70 God's Knowledge of the heavens and the earth is also affirmed in 3:29; 5:97; 29:52; 58:7; 64:4; but this is the only instance in the Quran where the singular form of "heaven" (*samāʾ*) is used in such a context; see also 31:16: *If it be but the weight of a mustard seed, be it in a rock, in the heavens, or on the earth, God will bring it forth.*

71 The concept of *authority* (*sulṭān*) being sent down appears many times in the Quran (e.g., 7:71; 11:96; 12:40) and is often understood to mean a Divine revelation or message. However, it can also refer to the authority of intellectual demonstration and in this respect is related to *that whereof they have no knowledge* (R). *Sulṭān* is also used for the influence or power of one thing over another (hence its use to mean a ruler), as in Satan's words to his followers in 14:22: *I had no authority* (*sulṭān*) *over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me.*

72 Many verses speak of the negative reactions of the disbelievers to the recitation of God's signs, including 8:31; 19:73; 31:7; 34:43; 42:25;

worse than that? The Fire God has promised to those who disbelieve. What an evil journey's end!" (73) O mankind! A parable is set forth, so hearken unto it! Truly those upon whom you call apart from God will never create a fly, even if they gathered together to do so. And if the fly should rob them of aught, they could not rescue it from it. Feeble are the seeker and the sought! (74) And they did not measure God with His true measure. Truly God is Strong, Mighty. (75) God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among mankind. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing. (76) He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them. And unto God are all matters returned. (77) O you who believe! Bow, prostrate, and worship your Lord! And do good, that haply you may prosper. (78) And strive for God as He should be striven for. He has chosen [for] you—and has placed no hardship for you in the religion—the creed of your father Abraham. He named you *muslims* aforetime, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind. So perform the prayer and give the alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a Master, and how excellent a Helper!

46:7; 68:15; 83:13. The disbelievers' *denial* manifests itself in the form of anger (R). Here the word *pounce* carries the sense of gripping something violently (Q, Ṭ). *Worse than that* means worse than the feeling of anger at the signs of God that they hear recited to them (Q, R).

73 The parable in this verse is commonly understood to refer to the idols that the Makkans took as objects of worship. The imagery of the idols being unable to retrieve something taken by a fly echoes the story of Abraham in 21:57–66, where Abraham destroys all the idols except one and blames the remaining idol. When blamed for the crime, he suggests that his accusers ask the remaining idol that destroyed the rest, and the accusers themselves point out that the idols are unable to do that. Cf. 7:191: *Do they ascribe as partners those who created naught and are themselves created?* Parables describing the powerlessness of the idols also appear in 7:194; 34:22; 35:13.

74 Cf. 6:91 and 39:67. This could also be translated, "They did not estimate God as He ought to be estimated." Some understand the phrase to mean that they did not give God the honor due to Him, because they assigned partners unto Him that were nothing but stones (R), and they did not know Him as He ought to be known (Ṭ).

75 God sends angels, such as Gabriel and Michael, as well as human beings as messengers (Ṭ). This verse is seen also as a reaffirmation that God's sending of a man or an angel is not something novel (Q).

76 *That which is before them* is interpreted by some to refer to the Hereafter, and *that which is behind them,* to this world (R); see also 2:255c; 20:110; 21:28. *Unto God are all matters returned* also appears in 2:210; 3:109; 8:44; 35:4; 57:5 and refers to the ultimate return of all things to their origin with God.

77 Bowing and prostrating are mentioned together also in 2:43, 125; 3:43; 9:112.

78 In Arabic, the structure of *strive for God as He should be striven for* is similar to that in *they did not measure God with His true measure* from v. 74. This is understood to mean striving (*jihād*) to do what God commands and striving against

what God has forbidden, and to do both for neither worldly purposes nor renown (Q). Others say it means that one who strives for God should not fear the reproach of the reproachful (Ṭ). Many understood this to mean that the Muslim community should strive in later times as they did in the earliest battles (R), while others say this as a call to spiritual effort, citing the *ḥadīth* in which, upon returning from the Tabūk campaign, the Prophet is reported to have said, "We have returned from the lesser striving to the greater striving."

*Hardship* (*ḥaraj*) is understood to mean "confinement" or "straitening" (Ṭ). That God *has placed no hardship for you in the religion* can be interpreted as a reference to the concessions granted by God when it comes to fulfilling religious obligations in certain circumstances, such as shortening the prayers while traveling and praying while seated or lying down if one is ill (R). It is also thought to refer to the opportunity to make expiation for one's sins (Bḍ). More generally, it is thought to emphasize that there is no sin or fault for which God does not provide a *way out* (65:2; Ṭ). A verse of related import is 2:185: *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you.* In this connection some mention the *aḥādīth:* "The best of your religion is that which is easiest of it," and, "When I command you to do a thing, accomplish that which you can of it."

The *creed of Abraham* is also mentioned in 2:130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:123, and in all cases except two is mentioned together with the concept of being a *ḥanīf,* or a primordial monotheist (see 2:135c). It is thought by some that *he named you muslims* refers to Abraham's prayer with Ishmael in 2:128, *Our Lord, make us submit unto Thee, and from our progeny a community submitting (muslim) unto Thee,* where the *community* refers to the Prophet and his followers (Q, R), that is, the Islamic community as a whole. The other common opinion is that it is God Who named them *muslims* ("submitters") *aforetime* (before) and *herein* (in the Quran), so that this verse becomes a kind of foretelling of the formation of the Muslim community (Q, R).

In 2:135–36, the Prophet and his community are directly linked to Abraham and his descendants, and in other verses Muslims are commanded to follow his "creed" (*millah;* 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:123). In this sense the *you* in *He named you* can refer not only to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, but also to all those throughout history who followed *the creed of Abraham, a* ḥanīf (16:123), which would also include other prophets as described in 2:136.

The statement that the community will serve as *witnesses for mankind* is similar to 2:143: *Thus did We make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you.* Al-Rāzī notes that God wants *witnesses for mankind* to be upright and just, so that others can come to faith. Ibn Kathīr understands *witnesses for* to mean that they are "that which is witnessed" (*mashhūd*) as upholders of justice, and the Prophet is similarly "witnessed" by his community for his exemplary qualities; see also 2:143c. Some have understood *middle community* as a community that establishes a just mean between the inward and outward aspects of religion, between the law and the spirit. Others have pointed to the providential positioning of the Islamic world in the middle belt of the world geographically. Others have emphasized Islam's preservation of the balance between the life of this world and otherworldliness.

The idea of holding fast to God is also mentioned in 4:146 and 4:175, and elsewhere the believers are also commanded to hold fast to the rope of God (3:103) and the tablets of Moses (7:145).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 23

# The Believers

## *al-Muʾminūn*

Considered to be from the Makkan period (Q), *al-Muʾminūn* begins by describing the virtues and righteous actions of those who believe; it then moves to a reminder of humanity's origin from clay and, reminiscent of 22:5, recounts a human being's development starting from a clot of blood and culminating in *another creation* (vv. 12–14). After several verses describing the blessings of the world, the *sūrah* narrates the story of Noah, his struggles with the denial and rebuke of his people, and his journey in the ark (vv. 23–41). Brief mention of Moses and Jesus follows, after which the *sūrah* dwells upon the human tendency to divide into religious groups (vv. 42–54).

Having mentioned the difficulties presented to previous messengers, *al-Muʾminūn* turns to the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad; their reasons for opposition are similar to those voiced by the people of Noah, and the Prophet's people are reminded that he is no stranger to them (vv. 55–69). The opposition to prophets by the affluent and powerful is a recurrent theme in this *sūrah,* something also seen elsewhere in the tendency of the "notables" to oppose the prophets (see also 7:59–136; 7:60–62c).

The idolaters are addressed in a passage consisting of questions and answers regarding the relationship between God and creation (vv. 84–89); this passage provides a linear argument, a form uncommon in the Quran in general, against believing in multiple gods. The *sūrah* concludes by warning of the impending Day of Judgment and the punishment of disbelievers who, upon coming face-to-face with the reality of their perdition, will desire to go back to the world in order to do good instead of evil, though it will be too late for them (vv. 99–118). The grand and awesome nature of the Hereafter will make their life in the world seem to them as *a day or part of a day* (v. 113).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Truly the believers have prospered, (2) who are humble in their prayers, (3) and who turn away from idle talk, (4) and who give the alms, (5) and who guard their private parts, (6) save from their spouses or those whom their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy— (7) and as for those who seek beyond that, it is they who are transgressors— (8) and who keep their trusts and their covenant, (9) and who are mindful of their prayers.

1 Commentators record a tradition that says that God created Adam with His Hand, wrote the Torah with His Hand, and planted (the Garden of) Eden with His Hand, and then said, "Truly the believers have prospered" (Ṭ) or that God said this when He created the Garden (Ṭ). "To prosper" has the literal sense of being successful or thriving and is also related to the notion of "cultivation" in an agricultural context; it is used in the Quran (e.g., 3:104; 6:21; 10:17; 30:38) to distinguish between those who thrive and flourish and those who do not do so in this life and especially in the Hereafter; see 2:5c.

2 In relation to one's inward state, this verse is said to refer to an attitude of self-effacement and obedience (R). Al-Rāzī quotes two *ḥadīths*: "How many a worshipper stands to pray whose share is only toil and weariness," and, "The servant has of his prayer only that which he understands." With respect to one's outward actions, it is said by some that before this verse was revealed the believers would look up toward the sky or elsewhere when standing in prayer, and that afterwards (as is common for worshippers to this day) the believers would keep their eyes on the place where they would touch the ground in prostration (R, Ṭ), though in some places worshippers look forward and slightly downwards. That they *are humble* is also interpreted to refer to the stillness with which one should perform the prayer, or else it refers to an attitude of fear during the prayer (Ṭ). *Humble* renders *khāshiʿ*, from a root that evokes the sense of eyes being lowered or cast down and also has the sense of physical lowliness and withering, as in 54:7; 68:43; 70:44; and 79:9. In the Islamic spiritual tradition, the attainment and maintenance of a state of humility in prayer is an essential part of spiritual discipline; it is intimately connected with the practice of the virtues outside of prayer, as described in the subsequent verses, together with the contemplation of God's Qualities and one's own infirmities (Aj).

3 *Idle talk* is also described as a practice to be avoided in 25:72 and 28:55, and its absence reflects a dimension of the felicity of the Hereafter as described in 19:62; 52:23–25; and 78:35. It is described as talk that is forbidden, undesirable, or permissible but unnecessary, though some limit its definition strictly to talk that is forbidden (R).

4 *Alms* (*zakāh*) can refer to charity in general, but in the Islamic context the term came to denote the required yearly alms paid from accumulated liquid wealth; see 5:12c; 6:141; 9:60, 75–76, 103; 73:20; 98:5.

5 Guarding one's *private parts* (*furūj*; cf. 24:31; 33:35; 70:29) refers to abstaining from illicit sexual relations; see commentary on 24:30–31.

6–7 On the concept of what *right hands possess* and related issues, see 4:24c.

8 See the nearly identical verse in 70:32. On *trusts* (*amānah*), see also 2:283; 4:58; 8:27. The concept of *covenant* (*ʿahd*, e.g., 2:40; 6:152; 36:60) and related terms such as pact/covenant (*mīthāq*, e.g., 2:63; 5:70; 57:8) and promise/tryst (*miʿād*) are significant aspects of the Quran's language relating to the relationship between human beings and God; see 70:32–33c.

9 Being *mindful* (*yuḥāfiẓūn*) of one's prayers is also mentioned in 2:238; 6:92; and 70:34. In addition to being linked to the attitude of humility

(10) It is they who are the heirs, (11) who shall inherit Paradise, abiding therein. (12) And indeed We created man from a draught of clay. (13) Then We made him a drop in a secure dwelling place. (14) Then of the drop We created a blood clot, then of the blood clot We created a lump of flesh, then of the lump of flesh We created bones and We clothed the bones with flesh; then We brought him into being as another creation. Blessed is God, the best of creators! (15) Then indeed you shall die thereafter. (16) Then surely you shall be raised up on the Day of Resurrection. (17) And indeed We created above you seven paths, and We were not heedless of creation. (18) And We sent down water

mentioned in v. 2, it is also interpreted to mean that one should pray in a timely manner, that is, pray each of the five canonical prayers in the prescribed period of time during the day (R, Ṭ); see 70:34c. It can also mean to concentrate on and be present in the prayer.

10–11 The inheritance of Paradise by the believers is also mentioned in 7:43 and 26:85; the inheritance of the earth is mentioned in 21:105 and 39:74. Here *Paradise* renders *firdaws,* a word with similar etymology as the word "paradise" in English, both derived from the Old Persian word for "garden." A *ḥadīth* states, "When you ask God for something, ask Him for *firdaws,* for it is the middlemost part of the Garden, and the highest part of the Garden, whence flow the rivers of the Garden."

12 For some, *man* (*insān*) here refers to the creation of Adam, while for others it refers to human beings in general (Ṭ); some add that *clay* is a reference to Adam himself (R). Elsewhere human beings are described as created *from dried clay, made of molded mud* (15:26, 28), a *base fluid* (32:8; 77:20), or *dried clay, like earthen vessels* (55:14), in addition to many references simply to *clay* (e.g., 6:2; 7:12; 17:61; 32:7; 38:71).

13 The *drop* refers to seminal fluid (see also 16:4; 18:37; 22:5; 35:11; 36:77; 40:67; 53:46; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19), and the *secure dwelling place* is the womb (R, Ṭ).

14 On the *blood clot* and *lump of flesh,* see 22:5–6c, which also discusses the stages of the physical growth of human beings. *Brought him into being as another creation* is interpreted variously as the inbreathing of the spirit into what was previously only a form (Ṭ), the act of being born (Ṭ), or one's development into mature adulthood and the full realization of one's faculties (Q, R).

15–16 Cf. 7:25: *He said, "Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and thence shall you be brought forth."*

17 The *seven paths* are interpreted by many commentators to mean the seven heavens (R, Ṭ). *Paths* renders *ṭuruq* (sing. *ṭarīqah*), and some commentators note that the verb *ṭāraqa* (from the same root, *ṭ-r-q*) means to place one thing over another, which would coincide with the traditional cosmology of the seven heavens being above one another as described in 71:15: *Have you not considered how God created the seven heavens one upon another.* For the seven heavens, see also 14:12; 65:12; 67:3–4c. Others say *paths* refers to the paths of the planets, meaning the five visible planets plus the sun and the moon (R), or to the celestial spheres in which, according to some traditional cosmologies, the planets move (*aflāk;* M). As a spiritual allegory, this verse is interpreted to refer to the veils or coverings upon the heart, which are constituted by human ignorance and vice and which must be overcome through spiritual discipline and the growth of virtue, so that the rains of spiritual blessings (v. 18) can reach the heart (Aj). That God is *not heedless* is a theme found also in 2:74, 85, 140, 149; 3:99; 6:132; 11:123; 27:93.

18 For *in due measure,* see also 43:11. The concept of *measure* (*qadar*) also appears in 13:17; 15:21; 42:27; and 54:49: *Truly We have created everything according to a measure;* see also 54:49c. Verses such as these are often interpreted as a spiritual allegory in which the earth symbolizes

from Heaven in due measure, and settled it in the earth, and We are able to make it disappear. (19) And thereby We brought into being for you gardens of date palms and grapevines, wherein you have many fruits and whereof you eat, (20) and a tree issuing forth from Mount Sinai that produces oil and a seasoning for eating. (21) And truly in cattle there is a lesson for you: We give you to drink from that which is in their bellies, and in them you have many uses, and some of them you eat. (22) And upon them, and upon ships, are you carried. (23) And We indeed sent Noah to his people, and he said, "O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. Will you not be reverent?" (24) But the notables who disbelieved among his people said, "This is only a human being like yourselves, desiring to set himself above you. And had God willed, He would have sent down angels. We heard not of this from our fathers of old. (25) He is but a man possessed. So wait concerning him, for a time."

the receptive heart and the water symbolizes the blessings of knowledge and spiritual insight. On the spiritual interpretation of these natural phenomena, see 7:58c; 5:66c.

19 Date palms and grapevines, symbols of bounty and blessing, are also mentioned in 2:266; 13:4; 36:34; see also 36:34c.

20 The *tree* in this verse is understood to be the olive (Q). A *seasoning* (*ṣibgh*) is generally understood to be a liquid condiment such as olive oil or vinegar; it is related by root to the word for "dye" and "baptism." Some commentators believe that the word rendered *Sinai, saynāʾ*, simply means "blessed" or "beautiful" and is not the proper name of the mountain associated with Moses and the Israelites (Ṭ), though al-Ṭabarī argues that there is no such adjective in Arabic. On Mount Sinai, see also 2:63–64c; 4:154c; the introduction to *Sūrah* 52; 95:2c.

21–22 On the meaning of *cattle* (*anʿām*), see 5:1c; 6:143–44c. The benefits of cattle are also mentioned in 16:5–8; 36:71–73; 40:79–80; 43:12–13. The imagery of seafaring as a blessing bestowed by God is also mentioned in 14:32; 17:66; 22:65; 30:46; 31:31; 43:12. Seafaring as a symbol for the spiritual state of human beings is also discussed in 2:164c; 10:22c; 22:65c; 30:46c; 35:12c.

23 The refrain *Worship God! You have no god other than Him* also appears in v. 32. It is also spoken in *Sūrah* 7 in succession by Noah (v. 59), Hūd (v. 65), Ṣāliḥ (v. 73), and Shuʿayb (v. 85), and similarly in *Sūrah* 11 by the last three prophets in vv. 50, 61, and 84, respectively (in which *sūrah* the story of Noah also precedes these three). This sequential arrangement in the stories of these prophets is evoked by v. 44: *We sent Our messengers in succession.*

24 Cf. 11:27. Objections based upon the fact that prophets were mere human beings rather than angels is also described in 14:10; 21:3; 26:154, 186; 36:15. *Notables* renders *malaʾ*, which can also mean *assembly* (as in 2:246; 38:69) or "leaders/leadership." The Quran also discusses the notables of Pharaoh (23:46), the queen of Sheba (27:29), the Quraysh (38:6), the people of Hūd (7:65), the people of Shuʿayb (7:88), and the king in the story of Joseph (12:43). Elsewhere the disbelievers explicitly wonder why an angel has not been sent with the prophet (6:8; 6:158; 11:12; 15:7; 17:92; 25:7, 21; 41:14; 43:53); see 6:8–9c.

25 The idea of being *possessed* (*bihi jinnah*) or mad is also mentioned in 23:70 and 34:8. The term used here is related to the more common term *majnūn* (also rendered "possessed"), which evokes the word "jinn" and the notion of being possessed by them. Both Arabic terms can also mean "insane" without reference to supernatural influences.

(26) He said, "My Lord! Help me, for they deny me." (27) So We revealed unto him, "Build the Ark before Our Eyes and by Our Revelation. Then when Our Command comes and the oven gushes forth, place therein two of every kind, and thy family except those against whom the word has already gone forth. And address Me not concerning those who did wrong; surely they shall be drowned. (28) And when thou mountest the Ark, thou and those with thee, say, 'Praise be to God, who has saved us from the wrongdoing people.' (29) And say, 'My Lord! Harbor me in a blessed harbor, for Thou art the best of harborers.' (30) Truly in that are signs, and truly We put [mankind] to the test." (31) Then after them We brought into being another generation. (32) And We sent among them a messenger from among themselves, [saying], "Worship God! You have no god other than Him. Will you not be reverent?" (33) And the notables of his people who disbelieved and denied the meeting of the Hereafter, and unto whom We had given luxury in the life of this world, said, "This is but a human being like you, eating of what you eat, and drinking from what you drink. (34) So if you obey a

26 Cf. v. 39.

27–28 On Noah's Ark, see 7:64c; 11:37c; the Ark is also mentioned in 10:73; 26:119; 36:41. *The oven gushes forth* (*fār al-tannūr;* cf. 11:40) is interpreted to mean either the break of dawn or that the face of the earth would gush forth; according to some, *tannūr* refers to the highest and best place on earth (Ṭ), while others say it refers to a literal oven, and when water comes out of it, that will be a sign that the flood is coming (R, Ṭ). *And address Me not concerning those who did wrong* (cf. 11:37) is similar to 11:46, where God responds to Noah's lament about his son's being drowned with the rest of his people. It is also related in theme to 9:113, which prohibits the Prophet and the believers from praying for forgiveness for those idolaters whose destiny as inhabitants of the Hellfire has become clear; all of these verses place a limit on the extent of one's concern for those who have made their own decision to oppose God's Will; see 9:113–14c.

29 *Harbor* in this verse renders a word derived from the root *n-z-l* and refers to God allowing the Ark to settle in a blessed place. The phrase could also be rendered, "Cause me to disembark in a blessed place," in the sense of disembarking from the Ark (Q).

30 The fact that God *put [mankind] to the test*—that is, tried previous peoples (Q)—is meant to show the Prophet that other prophets also experienced what he did (Ṭ). Putting human beings to the test is inherent in God's Nature, since He *created death and life that He may try you as to which of you is most virtuous in deed* (67:2); see commentary on 29:2–3.

31 The notion of a *generation* (*qarn*) succeeding other generations appears repeatedly in the Quran (6:6; 10:13; 11:116; 19:74, 98; 20:128; 25:38; 28:43, 45, 78; 32:26; 36:31; 38:3; 46:17; 50:36), and 17:17 mentions Noah specifically, *How many a generation have We destroyed after Noah!* The generations of the past are often mentioned as proof of the world's ephemerality and as reminders of God's Ability to destroy those who do not heed His message. Some commentators attempt to speculate which people are being discussed in this verse—some say the ʿĀd, others the Thamūd—but as al-Qurṭubī notes, there is no explicit identification given in this verse.

32 See commentary on 23:23, which is similar in wording.

33–34 See v. 24, where the notables' fear is that Noah desires to rule over them. *Whom We had given luxury in the life of this world* refers to

human being like yourselves, then surely you will be losers. (35) Does he promise you that when you are dead and are dust and bones, you shall indeed be brought forth? (36) Far-fetched, far-fetched is that which you are promised. (37) There is naught but our life in this world: we die and we live, and we will not be resurrected. (38) He is but a man fabricating lies against God, and we do not believe him." (39) He said, "My Lord! Help me, for they deny me." (40) He said, "In a little while they shall become remorseful." (41) So the Cry seized them rightly, and We made them into dross; so away with the wrongdoing people! (42) Then after them We brought into being other generations. (43) No community can hasten its term, nor delay it. (44) Then We sent Our messengers in succession. Whenever there came unto a community its messenger, they would deny him. So We caused them to follow one another, and made them the objects of stories.

those who were granted ease and privilege (see also 11:116; 17:16; 21:13). See also 25:7, where the disbelievers reportedly say of the Prophet Muhammad, *What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?*

35 The notion of the revival of human beings who have become mere *dust and bones,* usually invoked in the form of an objection posed by those who balk at the possibility of bodily resurrection, is also mentioned in 17:49, 98; 23:82; 37:16, 53; 56:47; the revival of dead bones is also mentioned in a different context in 36:78 and 79:11. *Brought forth* is literally "caused to leave [it]", meaning caused to leave the earth in which they lie when they are given life on the Last Day.

36 *Far-fetched, far-fetched* renders *hayhāt hayhāt*, literally signifying "far away, far away," evoking the sense of something unlikely, ridiculous, or impossible (Q, Ṭ).

37 This verse is similar to 6:29, but it adds *we die and we live,* meaning that there is only the life and death of this world (R) and that some die and others take their place (Ṭ).

38 Even the idolatrous Arabs who worshipped idols and acknowledged the existence of God still denied the Hereafter and the Resurrection, which is to say that they limited the scope of reality to this life even though they did, in a way, affirm the existence of a higher power. Here the people espouse the same belief; they accuse the messenger of telling falsehoods about God and deny any importance to God for human beings beyond this world.

39 Cf. v. 26.

40 *Remorseful* can also mean "regretful"; see also 5:31–32; 26:157; 49:6.

41 The Cry (*ṣayḥah*) is understood to be the literal shout of Gabriel that causes death itself, a great quaking, or the death and punishment themselves (R); see also 11:67, 94; 15:73, 83; 29:40. *Rightly* indicates it was a just punishment (R). On *dross,* which is usually understood to mean leaves or grass that are borne on a torrent of water, also see 87:5.

42 See 23:31c.

43 *Term* (*ajal*) most often refers to the end of something and is normally understood to refer to the event of someone's death, but al-Rāzī also speculates that it could refer to the period when these peoples are to live on earth. The idea of people not being able to *hasten* or *delay* God's Will appears also in 7:34; 16:61; 34:30.

44 God *caused* those communities *to follow one another* (R) and *made them the objects of stories* (*aḥādīth,* sing. *ḥadīth* or *uḥdūthah*), meaning that God either caused them to be spoken about (*ḥadīth*) or caused them to be something spoken about with amazement or wonder (*uḥdūthah;* Q, R), but not in a positive sense (Q).

So away with a people who believe not! (45) Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron with Our signs and a manifest authority (46) to Pharaoh and his notables. But they waxed arrogant and were a haughty people. (47) They said, "Shall we believe in two human beings like us, while their people are slaves we possess?" (48) But they denied them, and so were among the destroyed. (49) And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book, that haply they may be guided. (50) And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and We gave them refuge in a high place of stillness and a flowing spring. (51) O messengers! Eat of the good things and work righteousness. Truly I know what you do. (52) And truly this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so reverence Me. (53) But they made their affair to be founded upon different scriptures, each party

45–46 By *signs* some understand Moses' various miracles, such as his white hand (20:22), his staff turning into a serpent (20:69), and the plagues wrought on Pharaoh's people (R). The *manifest authority* refers to the clarity and persuasive power of the signs with which Moses and Aaron came (R). The idea of Moses bringing a *manifest authority* also appears in 4:153; 11:96; 40:23.

47 *Slaves* describes the material relationship between the two peoples—the Egyptians literally owned the Israelites—but it also evokes the worshipful attitude expected from the underlings when Pharaoh says, *I am your lord most high* (79:24; R). The disdain expressed by Pharaoh and his people echoes that in the words spoken by the notables of Noah's community in v. 34.

48–49 Moses was given the Torah after the destruction of the Egyptians; as evidence for this al-Rāzī employs 28:43: *And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book—after We had destroyed the former generations.* The *they* in *that haply they may be guided* refers to the Children of Israel.

50 For the account of Jesus and Mary, see 3:35–55 and *Sūrah* 19. They were made *a sign* through the miraculous birth of Jesus (R). The *high place of stillness and a flowing spring* is understood by some commentators to refer to the twelve-year period of time when Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived in exile away from their home (R). *High place* (*rabwah*) is rendered *hill* in 2:265; see 2:264–65c.

51 That this verse is addressed to the messengers as a group is interpreted to mean that each messenger was given this message (R), or it is addressed to the Prophet himself, but it is done so in the plural form in order to signal that this is a message common to all the messengers (R). *Good things* renders *ṭayyibāt,* a word that appears especially in connection with the Blessings God bestows upon human beings (e.g., 2:57, 172; 5:4; 20:81).

52 This verse is very similar to 21:92, differing only in the command *so reverence Me* rather than *so worship Me.* The phrase *one community* (*ummah*) is understood to mean a religious community whose unity is based on a common belief in the One God, but does not preclude differences in "laws" (*sharāʾiʿ*), which refers to obligations specific to the different religious communities, such as fasting and canonical prayers (R); in this interpretation this *community of yours* refers to all revealed religions. Different descriptions and categories of the community of believers are also given in 2:143; 3:110; and 22:78. On related questions, also see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

53 On the question of differing over the interpretations of scriptures, see 3:19c; 6:65c; and 98:4c, which discuss how each religious community split into factions after it had been given unitive knowledge in the form of Divine Revelation; on this question, see also 3:105; 30:32; 42:14. Here *scriptures* renders *zubur* (different from *zabūr* but related by root; see 35:25c), and according to this

exulting in what it had. (54) So leave them in their heedlessness for a time. (55) Do they reckon that, [on account of] the wealth and the children that We have provided them, (56) We hasten unto good for them? Nay, but they are unaware! (57) Truly those who are in awe for fear of their Lord, (58) and those who believe in the signs of their Lord, (59) and those who ascribe not partners unto their Lord, (60) and those who give what they give while their hearts quake with fear that they shall return to their Lord— (61) it is they who hasten toward good deeds, and are foremost in them. (62) And We task no soul beyond its capacity, and with Us is a Book that speaks in truth. And they shall not be wronged.

reading these communities split, and each followed its own scriptures or religious books, so that it led to a proliferation of scriptures, evoking for al-Rāzī the image of pieces of iron, which is also related to the root *z-b-r*. However, *zubur* is interpreted by others to simply mean "pieces," in which case it refers to the splitting off of a religion into various sects.

54 *Heedlessness* renders *ghamrah,* which in its most literal sense refers to water deeper than the height of a person and which is understood to indicate ignorance and confusion (R). The phrasing of this verse is similar to 6:91: *Say, "*Allāh,*" then leave them to play at their vain discourse;* and 6:110: *We shall leave them to wander confused in their rebellion.*

55–56 These verses deny that God would hasten good for those who disbelieve by giving them wealth and children; the same phrasing is used in v. 61 to describe those who hasten toward good works themselves. *Hasten unto good for them* alludes to the goods of this world possessed by the disbelievers but not by the believers (R); this verse is meant to convey that *they* who *are unaware*—the idolaters or disbelievers—should not take such possessions as a sign of Divine Favor. Some commentators note that this means that all worldly wealth and possessions are given to human beings as a trial, and that in the case of disbelievers such wealth and children only serve to entrench them in their folly and worldliness; that is, far from blessing them, God is "leading them," through these possessions, toward their own ruin (Q).

57 *In awe* renders *mushfiq,* which al-Rāzī describes as fear combined with weakness and tenderness, and he notes an interpretation that sees this awe or anxiety as the pinnacle of the true fear of God, as it is a result of vigilance and persistence in obedience to Him (R).

58 Here *signs* refers to created things, all of which point to God (R) through their symbolic meaning and in fact their very existence; for a description of the different kinds of signs in the Quran, see 2:106c.

59 "Ascribing partners unto God" is understood to encompass not only outright idolatry, but also the hidden ascription of partners to God, meaning a preoccupation with things other than God that prevents one from being devoted to God with complete sincerity (R). On the notion of hidden idolatry, see also 3:31c.

60–61 *Give what they give* can refer to both religious and spiritual obligations, such as the giving of alms, and any transaction between people, such as the payment of debts (R). According to a *ḥadīth,* ʿĀʾishah asked the Prophet, "Does *give what they give while their hearts quake with fear* refer to those who commit fornication, drink wine, and steal while fearing God on account of it?" The Prophet responded, "No, O Daughter of [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq. Rather, it is the man who prays, fasts, and gives charity and fears God on account of it." Being *foremost* (*sābiq*) appears in 9:100 and 56:10 and refers to those of the highest level of virtue and the most illustrious spiritual station in the Hereafter; see 56:10c.

62 That no soul is tasked *beyond its capacity,* an idea important in both spirituality and the practice of Islamic Law, is also mentioned in 2:233, 286; 6:152; 7:42; see commentary on 2:284–86.

(63) Nay, indeed their hearts are engrossed away from this, and they have other deeds besides which they undertake, (64) till, when We seize those of them who lived in luxury with the punishment, behold, they shall implore! (65) Implore not today! Truly you will not be helped by Us! (66) My signs were recited unto you, but you used to turn on your heels, (67) waxing arrogant on account thereof, talking foolishly by night. (68) Have they not contemplated the Word, or has there come unto them that which came not unto their forefathers? (69) Or do they not know their Messenger, and so deny him? (70) Or do they say, "He is possessed?" Rather, he has brought them the truth, but most of them are averse to the truth. (71) Were the truth to follow their caprices, the heavens and the

This verse is similar to 45:29, which also mentions the Book that *speaks in truth* (*bi'l-ḥaqq*), and similar in message to the record of deeds from which human beings will read in the Hereafter, mentioned in 18:49: *What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof.*

63 *Their hearts* is understood to refer to the hearts of disbelievers (R). Some read *other deeds besides which they undertake* in the future tense, so that it would be rendered, "other deeds besides which they will undertake" (R), referring to their intention to continue in their bad behavior.

64–65 On those *who lived in luxury* (*mutraf*), see 34:34c. This verse is usually interpreted as referring to the punishment of the Hereafter, though some commentators connect it with the defeat suffered by the idolaters at the Battle of Badr (R).

66–67 The idolaters opposed the Quran in three ways: by distancing themselves from it, acting arrogantly, and *talking foolishly by night,* a phrase that refers to their gathering in the environs of the Kaʿbah at night to call the Quran the product of magic or poetry and to insult the Prophet (R). In connection with *talking foolishly by night,* al-Qurṭubī mentions that the Prophet did not like to sleep before the night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*) or engage in conversation afterwards, saying that the prayer covers over the sins of the day and engaging in foolish talk at night seals the day with idleness and falsehood.

68 The *Word* is the Quran (Q); see also 4:82: *Do they not contemplate the Quran?* Some interpret the second question in this verse to mean, "Do they have some promise against punishment that their fathers did not have, and indeed no one has?" (Q). Others say this question points out that they have received a revelation that their fathers did not receive and they should thus be all the more grateful for it (IK, Ṭ), as alluded to in one interpretation of 36:6: *That thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were not warned; so they were heedless.*

69 An important aspect of the biography (*sīrah*) of the Prophet is to point out that, far from being a marginal or unknown figure in his community, he came from a noble (though not wealthy) lineage and was famous for his honesty and trustworthiness, having earned the epithet al-Amīn, or "the Trustworthy." Commentators explain that this verse reminds Muhammad's people that the man they deny is no stranger to them (IK, Q, R, Ṭ).

70 On *possessed* (cf. 34:8), see 23:25c. The disbelievers are said to be averse to the truth out of jealousy and hidebound devotion to their customs (Q).

71 *Were the truth to follow their caprices* is understood to mean, "If the truth were in accord with their desires" (Q) or "If the upholder of truth were to obey their desires" (Q). It may also be interpreted metaphysically to mean that if reality were to be as they desired, the order of the heavens and earth would be corrupted because the desires of human beings are chaotic and most often at odds with one another, as described in

earth and those therein would have been corrupted. Nay, We gave them their reminder, but they turned away from their reminder. (72) Dost thou ask any recompense of them? For thy Lord's recompense is better, and He is the best of providers. (73) Surely thou callest them unto a straight path. (74) And truly those who believe not in the Hereafter are deviating from the path. (75) And were We to show them mercy and remove whatever evil was upon them, they would surely persist, wandering confused in their rebellion. (76) And We already seized them with the punishment, but they did not yield to their Lord, nor are they humble, (77) till, when We open upon them a gate of severe punishment, behold, they despair therein. (78) He it is Who brought into being for you hearing, sight, and hearts. Little do you give thanks! (79) He it is Who created you on the earth, and unto Him shall you be gathered. (80) And He it is Who gives life and causes death, and unto Him belongs the variation of the night and the day. Will you not, then, understand? (81) Nay, but they say the like of that which was said by

21:22, where it is said of the heavens and the earth: *Were there gods other than God in them, they would surely have been corrupted.* The *reminder* refers to the Quran and the truths it contains (R).

72 The theme of messengers asking no *recompense* appears often in the Quran (e.g., 11:29, 51; 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180; 34:47; 36:21; 38:86).

73–74 On the *straight path,* see 1:6c.

75 *Whatever evil was upon them* can refer to hunger and other worldly afflictions or to trials such as warfare (R). This is similar to 43:50: *And when We removed the punishment from them, behold, they reneged.* The phrase *wandering confused,* describing those who are trapped in a state of spiritual blindness, also appears in 2:15; 6:110; 7:186; 10:11; 15:72; 27:4.

76 The *punishment* in this verse is understood to refer to afflictions of hunger and drought, to which the disbelievers responded with haughtiness and obstinacy rather than humility, patience, and obedience (Ṭ). Some understand the punishment mentioned in this verse to refer to the story of a certain Thumāmah ibn Uthāl, the chief of Banū Ḥanīfah, who embraced Islam and then—because, according to some, he was mistreated by Quraysh on his visit to Makkah—placed a boycott on the Quraysh that caused them considerable suffering. The Quraysh asked the Prophet to have the embargo lifted on the grounds that it violated the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48), which he did. Other verses relating to the idea that one must humble oneself in affliction include 6:42–43; 7:94, 130.

77 Commentators say this verse refers to the gates of Hell (R), or the eventual conquest of Makkah by the Prophet (Q), or the triumph of the Muslims at the Battle of Badr (Q, R, Ṭ).

78 *Hearing, sight,* and *hearts* are all in their inward reality organs of knowledge and spiritual consciousness mentioned together in several Quranic verses (6:46; 32:9; 46:27; 67:23); they are subject to being sealed, covered over, and rendered blind (including *hearts*); see 2:7c; 6:46c; 32:9c.

79 Commentators point out that the verb translated by *created* (*dharaʾa*) also has the sense of "to spread out" or "to scatter" (Q, R), thus contrasting with humanity being *gathered* on the Day of Resurrection even from the far-flung corners of the earth (IK).

80–81 On giving life and causing death, see 2:28c and 53:44, and on the variation of the night and day, also see 2:164 and 3:190.

those of old. (82) They say, "What, when we have died and are dust and bones, are we to be resurrected? (83) We and our fathers were certainly warned of this before. These are naught but fables of those of old." (84) Say, "Whose is the earth and whosoever is upon it, if you know?" (85) They will say, "God's." Say, "Will you not, then, take heed?" (86) Say, "Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the great Throne?" (87) They will say, "God's." Say, "Will you not then be reverent?" (88) Say, "Who is it in Whose Hand lies the dominion of everything, who protects but is not protected against, if you know?" (89) They will say, "God's." Say, "How then are you bewitched?" (90) Nay, We brought them the truth, and indeed they are liars. (91) God has not taken any child, and neither are there any gods with Him, for then each god would take away what he created, and some of them would overcome others. Glory be to God above that which they ascribe! (92) Knower of the Unseen and the seen! Exalted is He above the

82–83 The denial of the resurrection of *dust and bones,* namely, bodily remains, is mentioned frequently in the Quran (e.g., 17:49, 98; 36:78; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 56:47; 79:11). The disbelievers' attempts to dismiss the claims set forth in the Quran as nothing more than *fables of those of old* is also mentioned in 6:25; 8:31; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15.

84–89 The series of questions and answers in this passage point to the paradox that many of the disbelievers accept that the heavens and the earth all belong to God, yet do not believe that God could create them anew or that God could create and sustain the heavens and the earth without "helpers" (R). In some manuscripts the word *God* (*Allāh*) in vv. 87 and 89 is read so that there is no preposition (Q, R, Ṭ), in which case, the answer to the questions posed in v. 86 and v. 88 would both be rendered, "They will say, 'God.'" According to this reading, the questions are answered directly, since they begin with the interrogative "who." But according to the reading reflected in this translation, the answer *God's* means, "These belong to God," and refers in v. 86 to the *seven heavens* and the *great Throne* and in v. 88 to the *dominion of everything* and the description *who protects but is not protected against.* For al-Rāzī, the meaning in either case is the same.

*Dominion* renders *malakūt,* a word that commentators understand as an intensive form of *mulk,* or "sovereignty" (Q, R; see 67:1c), interpreted here to mean the "treasuries" (*khazā'in*) of things (Ṭ); for the relation between the two, see 36:83c. *Protects but is not protected against* means that none can hinder God and none should expect to find security against God, in either this world or the Hereafter (Q). *Bewitched* refers to being misled or fooled by Satan (Q, R).

90 The *truth* is understood to mean the religion God sent through His Prophet (Ṭ).

91 The assertion that God does not have offspring (see also, e.g., 10:68; 18:4; 19:88; 21:26; 112:3) is thought here to pertain to the idolaters' assertion that the angels were the daughters of God (see 16:57; 37:149–53; 43:16; 52:39; 53:19–23). The present verse highlights the relativity introduced when one speaks of multiple gods and points out that a god that can be overcome could not be logically called a god (Q). This verse resembles the structure of the argument offered in 21:22: *Were there gods other than God in them* (the heavens and the earth), *they would surely have been corrupted.*

92 God is also referred to as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen,* meaning of what is perceivable by the physical senses and what is not, in 6:73;

partners they ascribe! (93) Say, "My Lord! If Thou showest me what they are promised, (94) my Lord, then place me not among the wrongdoing people!" (95) And surely We are able to show thee what We promise them. (96) Repel evil by that which is better. We know best what they ascribe. (97) And say, "My Lord! I seek refuge in Thee from the incitements of the satans. (98) And I seek refuge in Thee, my Lord, lest they should be present with me." (99) Till, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord! Return me, (100) that haply I may work righteousness with regard to that which I left." Nay, indeed these are words that he speaks. And behind them is a barrier till the Day they are resurrected. (101) And when the trumpet is blown, there shall be no kinship between them that Day,

9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 34:3; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18; see 9:94c; 59:22c.

93–95 *What they are promised* refers to the punishment promised the wrongdoers, and thus the supplication *place me not* is a plea to not be among them if the punishment comes to them (Q, R, Ṭ). *We are able to show thee* refers to the punishment that God can deliver at any moment (Ṭ), which some consider to be the sufferings the idolaters experienced on account of their rejection of the truth (Q), either in this world or the Hereafter (R).

96 This universal commandment (Q) means that in the face of the idolaters' lies and taunts one should reply with words of peace and greeting (Ṭ), reminding them of the Blessings of God and using beautiful discourse based on evidence and persuasion (R). See also 41:34: *Repel [evil] with that which is better;* and 29:46: *And dispute not with the People of the Book, save in the most virtuous manner;* see commentary on 41:34.

97 The *incitements of the satans* can refer to their whispering to the soul or to their goading an enemy to cause one harm (R); see 114:4c. Such incitements distract from the remembrance of God (Q). Some commentators even describe these incitements in terms of "choking" or "throttling" by Satan (Ṭ).

98 The idea of a satan being *present* to a human being does not imply some extraordinary state of possession, but rather the typical state of affairs in which human beings find themselves. In traditional Islamic psychology, human beings are subject to both satanic and angelic influences while retaining the power of will to resist or conform to either. On the influence of Satan, also see 4:38, 119; 14:22c; 43:36–37c.

99–100 *Till* is understood to follow the end of v. 83, which recounts the dismissive words of the disbelievers; that is, they will persist in such rejection until death comes (Q). This verse has subject matter similar to that of 63:10: *And spend of that which We have provided you before death comes upon one of you and he says, "My Lord, wouldst that Thou grant me reprieve until a term nigh, that I may give charity and be among the righteous!"* The desire of those who have died to return to the world is also mentioned vividly in 32:12: *Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard; so send us back that we may work righteousness;* see also 2:167; 26:102; 35:37; 39:58.

Some commentators understand the plea for return in this verse to be uttered while one is still alive; after an exclamation to God (*My Lord!*), *return me* is addressed to the angels who come to take the soul at the moment of death (R, Ṭ). Others understand this request to be spoken after death, after beholding the Fire (R). *Behind them is a barrier* refers to the truth that they will not return to the life of this world (Ṭ). *Barrier* renders *barzakh,* a word that connotes either a barrier or an isthmus between two things; see commentary on 3:169–71 and also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." Some commentators understand *These are words that he speaks* to mean, "These are words that he could not but speak" (Ṭ).

101 The *trumpet* that signals the end of the world and the impending Judgment is also

nor will they question one another. (102) As for those whose scales are heavy, it is they who shall prosper. (103) And as for those whose scales are light, it is they who shall lose their souls, abiding in Hell. (104) The Fire will smite their faces, and they shall grimace therein. (105) "Were not My signs recited unto you, and you used to deny them?" (106) They will say, "Our Lord! Our wretchedness overwhelmed us, and we were a people astray. (107) Our Lord! Remove us from it! Then if we revert, we shall be wrongdoers." (108) He will say, "Be gone therein, and speak not to Me." (109) Verily there was a group of My servants who would say, "Our Lord! We believe; so forgive us and have mercy upon us, and Thou art the best of those who are merciful." (110) But you took them in mockery, till it made you forget My remembrance, and you used to laugh at them. (111) Truly

mentioned in 18:99; 20:102; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68; 50:20; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18; see also 6:73c; 39:68c. The breaking of worldly bonds is also mentioned in such verses as 22:2: *On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses;* and 80:34: *That Day when a man will flee from his brother.*

Regarding *nor will they question one another* (cf. 28:66), al-Rāzī raises the point that some verses say people will not question one another, while other verses say they will (e.g., 7:44–50; 37:27–32, 50; 52:25). He responds to this apparent incongruity by saying that the Day of Judgment is itself a long period of time (fifty thousand years according to him) composed of multifarious states, some of which are so overwhelming and terrifying that people are prevented from caring about anyone else and others allow people to pay attention to something beyond their own situation.

102–3 For a discussion of the *scales* of deeds, see 101:6–9c. *Lose their souls* could also be rendered "lose themselves."

104 *Smite* renders a verb that also means "to burn or scorch." Other verses that contain a description of the Fire or punishment being meted out to human beings and manifested on human faces include 8:50; 10:27; 14:50; 17:97; 18:29; 25:34; 27:90; 33:66; 54:48; 67:27. According to some commentators, the *grimace* results from the disfigurement of the lips by the flames (Q, Ṭ).

105–6 The verb phrase rendered *overwhelmed* has the sense of taking possession or ownership of or dominion over something (R, Z). The disbelievers' statement is understood to mean that they are describing God's role in making them wretched, meaning that God destined in the *Mother of the Book* that they should be so (43:4; Ṭ). In this sense, it is not understood as a plea, but as a statement of fact (Q).

107 The disbelievers will ask to be removed from the Fire (Ṭ). They will ask to return to the world to have a chance to perform good works, attesting that if they fail the second time, they will indeed be doers of wrong (R); on the desire to return to the world, see 23:99–100c.

108 On the deeper significance of God's not speaking to human beings, understood as both a sign of disapproval and a punishment itself, see 2:174c.

109 God as *the best* or *most Merciful* of *those who are merciful* also appears in 7:151; 12:64, 92; 21:83; 23:118.

110 On the concept of forgetting to remember God, see 9:67c; 45:34c. On the central practice of remembering (*dhikr*) God, see 4:103c; 13:28c; 33:41c; 29:45c; and the essay "The Quran and Sufism." The mockery carried out by the disbelievers is a common trait ascribed to them (see, e.g., 2:14–15; 4:140; 5:57–58; 6:5; 31:6; 45:9, 35).

111 On the concept of *triumph* (*fawz*) and the *triumphant* (*fā'iz*), often connected with the attainment of felicity in the Hereafter as well as victory over the world in a spiritual sense, see 5:119c.

today I have rewarded them for having been patient. Truly they are the triumphant. (112) He will say, "How many years did you tarry on earth?" (113) They will say, "We tarried a day or part of a day. But ask those who keep count." (114) He will say, "You tarried but a little, if you but knew." (115) Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously, and that you would not be returned unto Us? (116) So, exalted is God, the True Sovereign; there is no god but He, Lord of the noble Throne. (117) Whosoever calls upon another god along with God, for which he has no proof, his reckoning is with God. Truly the disbelievers will not prosper. (118) Say, "My Lord! Forgive and show mercy, for Thou art the best of those who are merciful."

112–14 On the experience of the Hereafter causing people to think of their entire life of this world as nothing more than a day or an hour, see 79:46c; see also 10:45; 17:52; 18:19; 30:55; 46:35; 79:46.

115 The Quran often asserts that God created the world *in truth* (e.g., 29:44; 30:8; 39:5; 44:39), not *in play* (e.g., 21:16; 44:38) or *in vain* (3:191). The question about returning to God (cf. 28:39) is posed in the context of the frequent assertion in the Quran that human beings will indeed return to God (e.g., 2:245; 6:36; 28:70) and that in fact all things return to God (e.g., 2:210; 3:83; 8:44; 11:123).

116 *True Sovereign* can also be translated, "the Sovereign, the Truth." *Sovereign* renders *malik,* which is typically translated "king," but which directly links to "sovereignty" (*mulk*) and "dominion" (*malakūt*); see 36:83e and *Sūrah* 67. On the *noble Throne,* see 2:255c.

117 A *proof* (*burhān*) is a "demonstration" or "evidence" (Ṭ) that is clear and whose foundations are firm; the term is used similarly in 2:111; 21:24; 27:64; 28:75. *Reckoning* (*ḥisāb*) refers to the Judgment by God. The fact that it is a Divine responsibility to bring human beings to account and not a human one is also mentioned in 88:26: *Then truly with Us lies their reckoning.* Noah says in 26:113: *Their reckoning is only by my Lord.*

118 This verse echoes the prayer of the believers in v. 109.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 24

# Light

## *al-Nūr*

*Al-Nūr* is universally considered to be a Madinan *sūrah* (Q), although some say v. 58 is Makkan (Āl). Its title comes from the parable in the famous Light Verse (v. 35), a passage that has given rise to numerous mystical and symbolic interpretations throughout Islamic history. In addition, parables of a mirage (v. 39), the darkness beneath the waves of the sea (v. 40), and lightning (v. 43) employ the symbolism of light to describe the nature of human beings' inner reality.

*Al-Nūr* also is extremely significant not only for Islamic metaphysics and art but also for certain social and legal questions. Its opening verses deal with the punishment for adultery and lay out in detail the evidentiary standards for finding a person guilty of this crime (vv. 1–9). It is followed by a passage that deals with an accusation of adultery leveled against ʿĀʾishah, the youngest wife of the Prophet, and the response of the Muslim community to what was eventually declared to be a baseless slander (vv. 11–26).

Another important aspect of this *sūrah* is its focus on various rules of etiquette, such as those governing the visiting one another's homes (vv. 27–29, 61) and the proper comportment between men and women who are not related to one another, which includes rules on dress and modesty (vv. 30–31) as well as proper decorum with regard to privacy in one's home (vv. 58–60).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) A *sūrah* that We have sent down, and ordained, and in which We have sent down clear signs, that haply you may remember. (2) As for the adulterer and the adulteress, flog them each one hundred lashes, and let not pity for them overcome you concerning God's Judgment, if you believe in God and the Last Day.

1 An implied subject at the start of this verse would have it begin, "This is a *sūrah* . . . " For some, *ordained* refers to the many important rulings that are legislated in this *sūrah* (R). The verb rendered by *ordained* (*faraḍa*) also means "to allocate" or "to apportion," in which case it is interpreted to mean that the Quran is revealed portion by portion (Q).

2 *Adulterer* and *adulteress* render *zānī* and *zāniyah,* respectively, which are derived from *zinā,* meaning unlawful sexual intercourse (by both married and unmarried persons; Q). *Zinā* is also mentioned in 17:32; 25:68; 60:12. A related word is *faḥshā'* or *fāḥishah,* usually rendered "indecency," which often, though not always, refers to sexual misconduct in the Quran; for example, 4:15 refers to a *fāḥishah* ("indecency") that is usually understood to mean *zinā* ("adultery").

According to most jurists, 4:15–16 promulgated the first punishments for adultery: *As for those of your women who commit an indecency, call four witnesses among you to bear witness against them. And if they bear witness, then confine them to their houses until death takes them, or until God appoints for them another way. And if two of those among you are guilty thereof, punish them both; but if they repent and make amends, then let them be.* These punishments were then considered abrogated by 24:2. It is thought by many jurists and commentators that 24:2 was further abrogated or delimited by the punishment of stoning to death—established by the Prophet, but not in the Quran—for married adulterers (both male and female), while some believe that 24:2 had always been understood as applicable only to unmarried people.

Upholders of the penalty of stoning to death point to *aḥādīth* describing the Prophet enforcing a penalty of stoning to death for married adulterers, a practice also said to have been followed by the first caliphs. They also mention a verse from the Quran that prescribed the punishment of stoning whose "recitation" (*tilāwah*) was abrogated, while its legal status (*ḥukm*) remained; that is, although it is not found in the Quran, its ruling is still binding—a highly contested idea. These sources regarding stoning merit consideration in some detail.

*The Jewish couple:* In one account, often mentioned in the commentaries on 3:23 and 5:43–44, two Jews in Madinah of high station who were guilty of adultery came to the Prophet to decide their case. According to most accounts, they did so hoping to avoid the punishment of stoning recorded in the Torah by relying upon the reportedly more lenient law being brought by Muhammad. According to some accounts, the Prophet asked for the Torah and had the relevant passage read for him, while in others he asked the expertise of a learned Jew of Madinah. In some versions the couple confessed, and in other versions the sentence depended upon the testimony of eyewitnesses. In all accounts of the Jewish couple the Prophet resolutely vowed to follow the dictates of the Torah, and the couple were stoned to death.

*Mā'iz ibn Mālik:* In another account, a man identified as Mā'iz ibn Mālik, or simply "a man from [the tribe of] al-Aslam," came to the Prophet to confess adultery, and at this initial confession the Prophet rebuffed him and sent him away. Undaunted, the man returned a second and then a third time and received the same reaction from the Prophet. After he confessed a fourth time, the Prophet ordered him stoned. In some versions, the Prophet thoroughly interrogated the man, asking if perhaps he only engaged in passionate acts other than intercourse, and then made inquiries about

whether the man was known to be sane. According to some versions, the man asked the Prophet directly to stone him, while in other versions the man attempted to run from the stoning, crying that his people fooled him into confessing and that he never thought the Prophet would kill him. In these versions, when the Prophet heard of this, he asked why they did not let him go when he said that, so that perchance he could repent. In other versions, the Prophet met him and was the first to ask if it were true that he had committed the sin of adultery, to which the man replied in the affirmative, after which the Prophet warned the man that if he confessed a fourth time, he would be stoned.

*The pregnant woman:* In another account, a pregnant woman, sometimes identified as from the tribe of Juhaynah (or its subtribe Ghāmid), came and confessed her adultery, and even wondered if the Prophet would try to turn her away as he did with Mā$^{c}$iz. The Prophet ordered her to go away until she gave birth; when she came back after the baby had been weaned, the Prophet ordered her stoned.

*The* ḥadīth *of double punishment:* According to this *ḥadīth,* the Prophet is reported to have said regarding adulterers, "God has come with a way pertaining to them: for the virgin with a virgin (*bikr*), one hundred lashes and a year's exile, and the nonvirgin with the nonvirgin (*thayyib*), one hundred lashes and stoning." Other versions exist with similar wording.

*The employer's wife:* In yet another account, a man attempted to give a kind of compensation for his virgin son's crime of adultery with his employer's wife through a large payment of livestock. The Prophet ordered the virgin's father to take back the goods. He then had the son lashed and exiled, and told the people to go to the woman and ask if she would confess; if she did, they were to stone her. She confessed, and they stoned her to death.

*Sayings attributed to the Companions:* In variations of an account attributed to $^{c}$Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, $^{c}$Umar affirmed the penalty of stoning, warning others not to be led astray by the absence of such a penalty in the Quran; he maintained that he saw the Prophet enforce it and that "we" (presumably referring to the first Caliphs) also practiced it. The versions of what is attributed to $^{c}$Umar vary significantly in their content, and some allude to a verse in the Quran that describes stoning (see below). Some accounts describe $^{c}$Alī as having both lashed and stoned a woman and then saying, "We lashed in accordance with the Book of God and stoned in accordance with the wont of the Messenger of God."

*The "stoning verse":* According to some reports attributed to $^{c}$Umar, there was a verse in the Quran that read, "And the *shaykh* and *shaykhah,* stone them outright," with some variation in wording, such as the inclusion of "when they commit adultery." *Shaykh* and *shaykhah* mean "old man" and "old woman," respectively, which those jurists who accept the stoning verse interpret to mean nonvirgins or married people. This "stoning verse" is often cited as an example of "abrogation of the text but not the ruling," unlike the usual kind of abrogation in which the text remains, but its legal status is overruled by another verse (see 2:106c).

The central legal problem pertaining to stoning to death for adultery is that 24:2 lays out a clear and detailed punishment for adultery, describing how and by whom the punishment is to be carried out, while making no mention of stoning or distinguishing between married and unmarried persons. In Islamic jurisprudence, abrogating or partly overturning an unambiguous text of the Quran requires a high standard for evidence—and it is only possible if one accepts that a *ḥadīth* can abrogate a part of the Quran, a view rejected by most religious authorities. The penalty of stoning is much more than an explanation or elucidation through the Prophet's *Sunnah* of a general Quranic concept, as are, for example, the descriptions of how to pray or fast, which are not found detailed in the Quran, but which are transmitted in detail through *Sunnah* as recorded in the *Ḥadīth.* Rather, stoning is a more severe and different kind of punishment—indeed the harshest of all—applied to a class of people (married persons) not specified in the Quran. Elsewhere the Quran does explicitly assign different punishments for sexual misconduct, but these are to make the punishment of a slave half that of a free person (4:25) and to make the punishment of any wife of the Prophet—should she commit such an act—double that of an ordinary person (33:30; though this latter verse is not necessarily always interpreted in this way).

The text of the Quran does not, however, distinguish between the categories of married and unmarried as they relate to *zinā* ("adultery") or

*faḥshā'* ("indecency"). Nor is there any other area in Islamic Law in which a distinction is made between young and old (*shaykh*); the nearest such distinction is between prepubescent children and adults, the latter of which are identified as those bearing full legal responsibility for their actions if they are sane. Thus, even if one can accept the existence of a verse that is no longer present in the Quran but is still legally binding, which notion does not rest on solid textual evidence, the use of *shaykh* and *shaykhah* ("old man," "old woman") only serves to confuse the issue, since an old person can be a virgin and a young person can be married. Furthermore, the doubling (33:30) and halving (4:25) of the punishment for adultery is incongruous with the punishment of stoning to death, which unlike lashing can by definition be neither doubled nor halved. The stoning punishment would also complicate the interpretation of *the punishment shall be averted* in v. 8. Since v. 8 refers unambiguously to married women, the punishment would be stoning according to the widely accepted interpretation, but the only punishment mentioned in the passage is lashes.

With respect to the relevant *aḥādīth*, the various versions of individual stoning accounts—such as that of Mā'iz ibn Mālik—often contradict each other on important details and contain errors and inconsistencies, such as misquotations from the Torah that amount to paraphrases of later Islamic legal maxims or the Quran itself (such as mention of four eyewitnesses seeing the act "as if seeing a kohl stick going into a kohl container," referring to a stick used to apply kohl, a black substance sometimes rubbed around the eyes, being inserted into its container). There are, moreover, substantial incongruities between the different accounts. For example, in the cases of Mā'iz and the pregnant woman, the Prophet is portrayed as sparing no effort to give the confessor an opportunity to recant, while in the case of the Jewish couple no such efforts are made. In the case of Mā'iz, he investigates the matter thoroughly, while in the case of the employer's wife, he simply sends a delegation to ask if she will confess and has her stoned with no similar stream of questioning. Some *aḥādīth* mention lashes and stoning combined, while others do not. Furthermore, some accounts mention banishment, but it is absent from other accounts. Though 'Umar is said to have spoken of stoning, there is no record of either Abū Bakr or 'Umar stoning anyone in the traditional histories. None of these *ḥadīth* accounts taken singly would seem to rise to the level of abrogating an unambiguous Quranic text, especially because they contradict each other, do not reinforce each other when they are taken together, and indeed seem to nullify each other. Despite this fact, many commentators and jurists do make the claim that the penalty of stoning to death is *mutawātir*, or "widely transmitted," a technical term that refers to something so widely transmitted from disparate sources that it would be inconceivable for it to have been falsified.

Beyond such ambiguities, some basic logical questions arise, which are mentioned by al-Rāzī as objections on the part of the Khārijites. The Quran describes many kinds of transgressions including theft and murder, but does not go into the same level of detail for them as it does for adultery, and thus it is implausible that, in the midst of this detail, stoning, which is a more grievous punishment than all others mentioned in the Quran, would go unmentioned. It is also argued that no solitary *ḥadīth* could overturn the plain sense of the Quran, much less on a question as momentous as imposing the severest of penalties.

Jurists typically place the penalty of stoning for adultery in the category of *ḥudūd* (sing. *ḥadd*), referring to those corporal punishments that are mandatory once guilt is established. Another category of punishments, called *ta'zīr*, are those discretionary actions that can be taken by a legitimate political authority but that do not constitute Divinely mandated punishments. This distinction is not necessarily rigid, however, as it is widely accepted that 'Umar suspended the *ḥadd* punishment for theft during a time of famine. Some have speculated that if indeed the Prophet did have people stoned, it was a *ta'zīr*, not a *ḥadd*. Among these jurists, some speculate that those incidents of stoning, even if taken as historical events, took place before the revelation of 24:2, and thus 24:2 is the final and abrogating punishment for adultery and stoning is at a maximum a possibility of *ta'zīr*. In one account, when the jurist al-Shaybānī asked the Companion 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Awfā about stoning, he affirmed that the Prophet did stone, but he did not know whether it was before or after the revelation of *al-Nūr* (the present *sūrah*).

Regarding the requirement that the lashing be *witnessed by a group*, there are disagreements

And let their punishment be witnessed by a group of the believers. (3) The adulterer shall marry none but an adulteress or idolatress, and the adulteress shall marry none but an adulterer or idolater. And that is forbidden to the

over the minimum number required, some saying one or more, others saying four (corresponding to the number of witnesses necessary to ascertain the guilt of adultery), others saying two (a usual number for witnesses), and others saying three, which is the minimum number for being called a "group" (Q, Ṭ).

Al-Qurṭubī, surveying the legal rulings, describes the punishment of lashes as follows: The lashes should land upon one's back, but not the head; men are to expose their skin (according to some), but women retain a layer of clothing. They remain standing and are not bound. The whip to be used is described as neither too hard nor too soft, and the blows, although meant to cause pain, should not be so hard as to draw blood. The person administering the lashes is not to raise his arm high up so as to deliver a harder blow and should never let his armpit become visible (from raising his arm to strike). Some say that this limitation is realized by requiring the person to hold an object in his armpit while delivering the lashes. The punishment should be carried out by the most respected members of society and only under the aegis of a legitimate political and legal authority.

In cases where a person's health cannot withstand the blows, the conditions are modified. In one account, a very frail man was presented for punishment, but it was clear he would not survive it; so the Prophet ordered that a number of twigs corresponding to the number of lashes be tied together, and the man was struck once with the bundle (Q).

More than one crucial dimension of the interpretation of the Quran comes into discussion regarding the punishment of stoning for adultery, including abrogation (see 2:106c), the relationship between the Quran and the *Ḥadīth*, the authentication and comparison of competing accounts within the *Ḥadīth*, and the status of religious laws other than those of Islam. In contemporary discussions of stoning several Islamic authorities have raised serious doubts about the authenticity of those accounts that attribute stoning to the Prophet or to the early leadership of the Muslim community, basing this conclusion not only upon the punishment's incongruity with the actually existing text of the Quran (setting aside the question of "abrogation of the text but not the command"), but also based upon the improbable nature of some of the *aḥādīth* adduced in its favor as well as their mutual contradiction. It is not implausible that the stoning punishment was a holdover from other local traditions (such as that of the Jews) that then came to be considered normative practice in Islam. Some jurists may have reasoned that since stoning is a part of Jewish Law and was not explicitly cancelled by Islamic Law, it could be employed in some conditions, and this act of discretion may have, over the course of time, risen to the level of general obligation; such a position would be supported by the account that describes the Prophet executing Jewish Law against the Jewish couple. One could further speculate that, for reasons of social cohesion, early authorities (after the death of the Prophet and the first generation) felt that the punishment of lashes was not sufficient a check on adultery (indeed, some contemporaries of the Prophet deemed the standards of evidence far too demanding, as mentioned in 24:6–9c) and believed that penalty of stoning to death had to exist as a disincentive on licentiousness, which could lead to social disintegration. Such speculation about the origins of this punishment is justified and worthwhile in the face of the evidence in favor of stoning to death—evidence that is equivocal at best and contradictory and untenable at worst. It is also important to mention that the condition set for the proof of adultery—four eyewitnesses to the very act—was such that this punishment was very rare in Islamic society.

3 Some interpret this verse as highlighting the enormity of adultery by forbidding adulterers to marry believers (Q). For others, it means that those who are inclined to adultery would only want to marry adulterers or idolaters (R). Others interpret it to mean that the only people who would assent to the actions of an adulterer would

believers. (4) And as for those who accuse chaste women, but then do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty lashes, and never accept any testimony from them. And it is they who are the iniquitous, (5) save those who repent thereafter

be other rebellious adulterers or idolaters who had no qualms about such conduct (IK). *Marry* renders the verbal form of *nikāḥ,* which according to context can also refer to sexual intercourse (IK, Q, Ṭ). If read as a reference to intercourse, this verse is understood to mean that there is no one-sidedness in adultery; that is, if one of the two can be considered an adulterer, both must be considered adulterers. Some commentators object to this reading on the grounds that *nikāḥ* only appears in the Quran to describe marriage (Q), though in fact some commentators on 4:22 interpret the same verb as referring to sexual relations (see 4:22c).

According to another set of opinions, the verse refers to certain believers who wished to marry women who were known to be prostitutes. Others mention an account where some of the People of the Veranda (see 2:273c), who were homeless except for the mosque and who were extremely poor, desired to marry certain women of Madinah who were known prostitutes, but who could at least provide them food and shelter (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). Some prefer this reading, because those who commit adultery are generally not hindered from marrying later, and indeed taking the verse in the literal sense would seem to allow believers to marry idolaters, which is categorically forbidden. Interpreting this verse as a reference to certain women would then not hinder a believing person once guilty of adultery from marrying again. A variant opinion is that this verse refers to those upon whom the *ḥadd* punishment (i.e., lashes) has been rendered (Q), that is, those who had been judicially convicted of adultery and received the punishment. But al-Qurṭubī rejects this interpretation on the grounds that it would then allow the believing adulteress to marry an idolater, something that was already forbidden to her before she was an adulterer.

4 *Chaste* renders *muḥṣan,* which can also mean free (as opposed to slave) or married; see 4:24c. This verse applies equally to men and women (IK, Q). It refers to the crime of slander (*qadhf*) with regard to the accusation of adultery (*zinā*). Some believe this verse was revealed in the context of the accusation made against ʿĀʾishah (see 24:10–22c), while others believe that it is a general ruling that was not occasioned by any particular incident (Q, Ṭ).

Al-Qurṭubī describes the various conditions under which the accusation of adultery becomes a punishable offense: the accuser must be a sane adult; the alleged crime must be a punishable offense, such as adultery or sodomy; and the accused must be a sane, free adult. The witnesses must see the act of penetration directly, in one place and at one time, meaning that four people each witnessing a separate occasion would not be admissible (Q); on the necessity of four witnesses for prosecuting such offenses, see 4:15c.

Some say that the command to *never accept any testimony from them* applies only to those who gave false testimony regarding matters whose punishment would be a *ḥadd* punishment (a Divinely ordained capital or corporal punishment), not other matters. Some also say that if someone repents sincerely for having given false testimony, that person's testimony can be accepted without restriction in the future (Q).

5 The issue of repentance in connection with punishable offenses arises in each context where the Quran prescribes punishment for such an offense. For some, the possibility of repentance mentioned in v. 5 applies only to freeing oneself from being considered *iniquitous* (v. 4), while others believe that this repentance also applies to the possibility of having one's testimony restored to the status of being acceptable by the community (v. 4; Q). Some thus interpret the word *never* (*abadᵃⁿ*) in v. 4 to mean "never as long as they are committing the adultery slander" (Q). For similar verses that suggest that repentance might avert the consequences or punishments prescribed for major crimes, see 4:93c; 5:34c. To *make amends* refers to living for a period of time in an honorable way and perhaps even being required to perform acts such as giving charity (R) to make one's repentance manifest to others (Q).

and make amends, for truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (6) And as for those who accuse their wives and have no witnesses but themselves, then the testimony of one of them shall be four testimonies, swearing by God that he is among the truthful, (7) and the fifth shall be that the curse of God be upon him if he is among the liars. (8) And the punishment shall be averted from her should she give four testimonies, swearing by God that he is among the liars, (9) and the fifth that God's Wrath shall come upon her if he is among the truthful. (10) And were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy, and that God is Relenting, Wise! (11) Truly those who brought forth the lie were a

6–9 Several reports are widely associated with the revelation of this passage dealing with "mutual condemnation" (*liʿān*), that is, the swearing of oaths pertaining to the accusation of adultery by one spouse against another. In some of these reports, a man came to the Prophet to accuse his wife of an act of adultery in progress, but balked at the requirement that he bring four witnesses (4:15; 24:4), arguing that by the time he collected four witnesses and returned, the adulterer would have had ample time to cease the act of penetration, which the witnesses were required to see. The Prophet, described as immovable on the question of four witnesses, then commanded the husband to testify as described in this passage. The wife was given an opportunity to do the same. This procedure saves the accusing spouse from the punishment of eighty lashes for false accusation, while allowing the accused spouse to declare his or her innocence; that is, only a spouse can make an accusation of adultery that is unsubstantiated by four witnesses and emerge without being lashed.

There are a range of opinions regarding several questions pertaining to the accusation of adultery on the part of a spouse, including whether the marriage thereby comes automatically to an end; whether the couple can ever remarry; the status of any child that the husband might deny as his own (since one form of the accusation of adultery is to declare that a child to whom one's wife has given birth is not one's own); how long a man has to renounce the child before his silence becomes acceptance; whether the renunciation can be taken back; and whether and how these rules apply to free, slave, Muslim, and non-Muslim individuals. The mutual condemnation must take place in public, preferably in a large "congregational mosque," where the Friday prayers are held (Q, R).

10–22 This passage relates to an incident involving the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah. According to the traditional accounts, while on a journey ʿĀʾishah's necklace fell from her neck two times. The first time, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to make camp to look for it, and eventually the verse related to ritual purification by dust was revealed (for the full account, see 4:43c). The second time, ʿĀʾishah again realized that her necklace had fallen, and she left the enclosed tentlike saddle atop her camel to go look for it. At the time, it was said that ʿĀʾishah was still fourteen and slight of build, and those who led her mount did not detect that the covered saddle was empty. ʿĀʾishah, expecting that the group would not leave without her, returned to the campsite to find that everyone had left. She waited, expecting that sooner or later they would realize their oversight and return, and fell asleep. Eventually a man named Ṣafwān ibn Muʿaṭṭal found her and brought her back to the main group, leading her on his mount. Ṣafwān is described in the sources as having been a valorous, chaste man who tended the Prophet's camel during battles and was later killed in battle during the caliphate of ʿUmar (Q). Soon after Ṣafwān brought ʿĀʾishah back to the encampment, rumors began to spread accusing ʿĀʾishah of committing adultery with Ṣafwān.

11 The *group among you* was reported to consist mainly of three people, Ḥassān ibn Thābit, Misṭaḥ ibn Uthāthah, and Ḥamnah bint Jaḥsh,

group among you. Do not suppose it to be an evil for you. Rather, it is a good for you. Unto each man among them is the sin he committed. And he among them who undertook the greater part of it, his shall be a great punishment. (12) Why, when you heard it, did not the believing men and women think well of their own, and say, "This is a manifest lie"? (13) Why did they not bring forth four witnesses thereto? For when they brought not the witnesses, it is they who were then liars in the Eyes of God. (14) And were it not for God's Bounty upon you,

though others report that the group consisted of ten or even up to forty persons (Q). *Who undertook the greater part of it* is thought to refer to Ḥassān ibn Thābit; this phrase is meant to refer to the person who began the rumor and therefore carried the greatest blame for it (Ṭ). According to some reports, Ḥassān later went blind, which was interpreted by some as his recompense (Q, Ṭ); it is also recorded that Ṣafwān struck a nonlethal blow to his head with his sword (Q, R). Others interpret the one *who undertook the greater part of it* to refer to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, usually thought of as the leader of the hypocrites and described as having had an important role in the scandal (Ṭ).

There are also differing reports as to whether the Prophet beat or lashed these three scandalmongers. In one account, only Ḥassān received a corporal punishment; other reports indicate that all three did; and still others report that none of them did, because such punishments require clear evidence in order to be carried out, and the evidence of guilt was insufficient in this case (Q). For al-Qurṭubī this gap between moral culpability and criminal liability is reminiscent of the fact that, though the hypocrites are mentioned frequently in the Quran, they are not named in such a way as to bring a legal claim against them. He reports that in the most well known account these three were lashed, but that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy was not.

*Rather, it is a good for you* is interpreted to mean that the "bringing forth" of this lie was a good thing for the community, either because, rather than leaving the people suspicious and uncertain, the matter was resolved openly and put to rest, or because it resulted in the revelation of these Quranic verses about the issue (R). When the *good* that comes from this development is understood to be for the benefit of the false accusers rather than the victims of the scandal (ʿĀʾishah and Ṣafwān and by extension the Prophet and ʿĀʾishah's family), it can be seen as preventing them from carrying on in sin or as providing a punishment in this life that would avert a harsher punishment in the Hereafter (R).

12 This verse encapsulates the ethical principle of erring against suspicion and not repeating something one has heard if its source is unreliable or unknown (Q). In this connection al-Rāzī quotes the *ḥadīth*, "In their togetherness and compassion for one another and what God placed between them, the Muslims are like unto a single body. When one part is afflicted, the whole will be afflicted by fever and wakefulness." Islamic ethical writings make frequent mention of "positive presumption" or "thinking well [of others]" (*ḥusn al-ẓann*), which can apply to human beings as well as on another level to God. In the former case, it refers to the presumption of innocence and good character in others, and in relation to God it refers to belief in God's Compassion and Mercy.

13 This verse refers to the requirement that accusations of sexual misconduct be supported by four eyewitnesses, as mentioned in 4:15 and 24:4. Al-Rāzī discusses the possibility that a person might be truthful in his or her accusation of adultery, but fail to produce four witnesses. He suggests that it could mean that, as a matter of law and dealing with such an accuser, such an accuser must be treated as a liar in the absence of the requisite witnesses, regardless of the merit of the claim.

14 Empty or vain talk about subjects without benefit is a vice frequently condemned in the Quran, as in 4:140; 6:68; and 9:65.

and His Mercy, in this world and the Hereafter, a great punishment would have befallen you for having engaged [in vain talk] concerning it, (15) when you accepted it with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, supposing it to be slight, though it is great in the Eyes of God. (16) And why, when you heard it, did you not say, "It is not for us to speak of this! Glory be to Thee! This is a tremendous calumny!" (17) God exhorts you, lest you ever return to the like of it, if you are believers. (18) And God makes clear unto you the signs, and God is Knowing, Wise. (19) Truly those who desire that indecency be spread among those who believe, theirs shall be a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. God knows, and you know not. (20) And were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, and that God is Kind, Merciful! (21) O you who believe! Follow not the footsteps of

15 *Accepted it with your tongues* could be translated literally, "You met it with your tongues," meaning that they received and transmitted the lie readily (Ṭ). The verb *you accepted* renders *talaqqawna* (from the root *l-q-y*), which some read as *taliqūna* (from the root *w-l-q*), meaning to penetrate as with a weapon, to quickly follow upon something, or to do something quickly in succession. In such a reading, the phrase could be rendered, "You propagated it quickly with your tongues." *Slight* is understood to mean that they thought no sin would attach to them on its account (Q, Ṭ).

16 In traditional Islamic ethics gossip and backbiting are considered serious vices, even when what is being said is true; see also 49:12c. In this verse, *calumny* renders *buhtān,* which signifies backbiting by telling lies (Q), since one can also backbite by relating that which is factually true but still damaging to a person. *Glory be to Thee!* is understood as an expression of astonishment, or as an implicit declaration that the wife of God's chosen Messenger could not do such a thing, or as an exclamation that God is too Glorious to leave this matter unattended (R). In the context of this verse discussing calumny, al-Rāzī mentions several *aḥādīth* pertaining to it, such as, "A Muslim is he from whose tongue the Muslims are safe, and the Emigrant is he who emigrates from what God has forbidden."

17–18 *If you are believers* means if the accusers heed God's Exhortation (Ṭ) and never repeat the same type of accusation in the future (IK). *God makes clear the signs* is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran (e.g., 2:187, 221, 242; 3:103; 5:89; 24:59), and in this case *the signs* can be understood as referring to the laws and rulings that benefit His servants (IK).

19 *Those who desire that indecency be spread among* believers shall be punished unless they make sincere repentance (Q). This verse, and indeed this entire passage, is understood as a warning against such slander-mongering and a reminder to the believers that their inner thoughts are not hidden from God (R). In this connection Ibn Kathīr mentions the *ḥadīth,* "Do not insult the servants of God, and do not reproach them, and do not look for their faults. Whosoever looks for the faults of his Muslim brother, God will look for his faults so much so that He will expose him in his home."

20 The result contingent upon *were it not* is implied (cf. v. 10), meaning that were it not for God's Bounty, the slanderers would have been worse off, either through their own ultimate perdition or because the slander would have spread even farther (R). It could also refer to the result contingent upon the similar phrase in v. 21 and thus to their inability to be purified without God's Bounty.

21 To be *pure* is understood here to mean to be upright or righteous (*ṣāliḥ;* Q), or to be rightly

Satan! And whosoever follows the footsteps of Satan, truly he enjoins indecency and wrong. And were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, not one of you would ever be pure. But God purifies whomsoever He will, and God is Hearing, Knowing. (22) And let not the men of bounty and means among you forswear giving to kinsfolk and the indigent and those who emigrated in the way of God. And let them pardon and forbear. Do you not desire that God forgive you? And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (23) Truly those who accuse chaste and heedless believing women are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and theirs shall be a great punishment (24) on the day their tongues, their hands, and their feet bear witness against them as to that which they used to do. (25) On that Day God will pay them their just due in full, and they will know that God

guided, or to follow Islam (Ṭ). Other verses that mention following in the footsteps of Satan include 2:168, 208; 6:142. That Satan commands to evil or indecency is also mentioned in 2:169, 268.

22 Some connect this verse to Abū Bakr, who used to give charity to his impoverished maternal cousin, Misṭaḥ ibn Uthāthah. But when it became clear that he was one of the three main culprits in propagating the lie against ʿĀʾishah, Abū Bakr vowed not to give Misṭah charity ever again (Q, R, Ṭ). Others say this verse was revealed in connection with all such persons (Q). It is reported that after this verse was revealed, Abū Bakr said, "Yea, by God I desire, O Lord, that Thou forgivest us!" returned to Misṭaḥ, and promised not to withhold charity from him (IK). Some commentators speak of this verse as the "most hopeful" in the Quran, as it shows God's Kindness even to those who commit slander (Q). Other verses listed as being among those that are "most hopeful" include 2:260; 33:47; 39:53; 42:19, 22; 93:5 (Q); see also 2:260c. Al-Rāzī notes the great moral challenge that this verse presented to Abū Bakr, who was thereby enjoined to continue giving regular charity to a man who had defamed his own daughter ʿĀʾishah—that is, to respond to evil with good, not in kind. See 13:22 and 28:54 for the injunction to *repel evil with good*.

23 Here *heedless* means the women are without guile or cunning (Z). Though this passage was reportedly revealed in connection with ʿĀʾishah, it is considered to have a general application (Ṭ). Some commentators think this verse referred specifically to the wives of the Prophet, since this and the following verses do not mention the possibility of repentance, whereas the discussion of slander in vv. 4–5 does address the issue of repentance (R); that is, some commentators placed such accusations against the Prophet's wives in a more egregious category, one in which the consequences could not be averted through repentance (Q). However, since it is widely acknowledged that all sincere repentance is accepted by God (9:104; 39:53), this passage would refer, according to some authorities, to those who persevered in their offense without contrition (Q, R).

24 Similar verses describing how objects incapable of speech will speak in the Hereafter include 41:21: *And they will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will reply, "God, Who makes all things speak, made us speak";* and 36:65: *On that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn.* In a famous verse, the Sufi poet Rūmī, in referring to inanimate objects, writes that they are silent here but speak there, meaning in the Hereafter.

25 *Just due* renders *dīn*, a word usually translated as "religion," but which is also etymologically related to the words "recompense" and "debt." "Day of Judgment" renders *yawm al-dīn* (lit. "Day of Religion"); see 1:4c.

is the Manifest Truth. (26) Vile women are for vile men, and vile men are for vile women, and good women are for good men, and good men are for good women. They are innocent of what they say. Theirs is forgiveness and a generous provision. (27) O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you inquire and greet the dwellers thereof. That is better for you, that haply you may remember. (28) But if you find not anyone therein, then enter them not until permission is granted you. And if it is said to you, "Turn back," then turn back. That is purer for you, and God knows what you do. (29) There is no blame upon you for entering uninhabited houses wherein there is some good for you. And God knows what you disclose and what you conceal. (30) Tell the believing men

26 As translated, this verse can be understood to be similar to v. 3 (Q, R). However, this verse could also be translated, "Vile things are for vile people, and vile people are for vile things, and good things are for good people, and good people are for good things." In this reading, preferred by al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, and many others, the vile and good things are usually interpreted to mean vile and good words or speech, recalling that the context of this passage is the matter of false accusations of adultery (Q, R, Ṭ); that is, vile things are only said by vile people, or else vile things are only truly said about vile people (R). *They are innocent* means that good people are innocent of the vile things said about them (R), which many commentators see as a specific reference to ʿĀʾishah and Ṣafwān (IK, Q).

27 Some say *inquire and greet the dwellers* refers to a signal like clearing one's throat or knocking at the door to let the occupants inside know that someone is there (Ṭ), meaning there is no sense in greeting unless you know someone is inside (R). The greeting here is the formula "Peace be upon you" (*al-salāmu ʿalaykum;* Q, Ṭ).

28 Traditionally one is limited to seeking permission to enter three times, after which one should leave (Q, R). Many commentators mention the *ḥadīth,* "If one of you asks permission three times and permission is not given him, let him go back." They also note that it was the wont of the Prophet not to stand immediately in front of the doorway when asking permission to enter, but to stand off to the side, as doorways did not necessarily have actual doors or covers (Q, Ṭ). This verse holds whether the door is locked or unlocked and even if there is no door at all (Q). Al-Qurṭubī records a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet rebukes severely a man who peered through a hole in the Prophet's door and saw him combing his hair. The right to privacy became an important and much discussed subject in Islamic Law.

29 *Uninhabited houses* are thought to refer to way stations on the road for travelers, way stations that are not anyone's permanent domicile; others say that they refer to ruins (Q, Ṭ). It is permissible to enter them without permission, because there is no risk of exposing anything inside that should be kept private (Q).

30 The same command for men to be modest and chaste in this verse is repeated for women in the next verse. Since one cannot "lower one's eyes" against everything, this verse is interpreted to mean that men should not look at things with passion or at those things that are forbidden or that God dislikes (Ṭ). Al-Qurṭubī quotes a *ḥadīth:* "Let not a glance follow a glance. The first is yours, but not the second." This saying means that one is not responsible for the first glance at something forbidden, but is responsible if one continues to look at it. In another *ḥadīth* the Prophet said, "Give the road its rights." When asked what these rights were, he added, "Lowering the eyes, removing harmful obstacles, sharing greetings, and enjoining right and hindering wrong." "Guarding one's private parts," referring to abstaining from sexual misconduct, is also mentioned in 23:5; 33:35; 70:29.

to lower their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely God is Aware of whatsoever they do. (31) And tell the believing women to lower their eyes and to guard their private parts, and to not display their adornment

31 The command to women to be modest and chaste mirrors the command for men in the previous verse. *Kerchiefs* renders *khumur* (sing. *khimār*), and *breasts* renders *juyūb* (sing. *jayb*). A *khimār* can mean a cloth that covers the head or neck; a scarf; a flowing garment; a garment without stitching; or a man's turban. According to commentators, before the advent of Islam women would wear the *khimār* and it would drape behind their backs, exposing their upper chests (and, according to some accounts, their breasts as well). Some say this was done after the manner of "the Nabateans"(M, Q), presumably a reference to the tribes of northern Arabia or the inhabitants of the marshlands of southern Iraq. It was in any event a common feature of women's dress in the ancient Near East. Beyond describing that it was worn atop the head or neck, no precise details are available for the dimensions or coverage of the *khimār*. A *jayb* can refer to the heart or chest, the beginning of a woman's cleavage, the place where the chest meets the neck, the opening of a shirt through which one places one's head, a pocket, or the shirt itself. *Jayb* is also used to describe that into which Moses places his hand and pulls it out white in 27:12 and 28:32, where it is rendered *bosom* (referring to the chest area of his garment; it thus could also mean "pocket" or "enclosure").

The only other place in the Quran where garments are discussed is 33:59, which mentions the *jilbāb*, or cloak women draw around their bodies as a way of identifying themselves so as not to be accosted (see 33:59c). As will be seen below, most jurists interpreted the command in this verse to mean that a free woman's hair, ears, throat, and chest should be covered (IK, Q, Th). Beyond these general requirements, certain special rules of seclusion applied to the wives of the Prophet (see commentary on 33:32, 33, 53), but these did not extend to other Muslim women; *ḥijāb* comes from the veil or partition mentioned in 33:53 meant to shield the Prophet's wives from petitioners and those displaying excessive familiarity.

A handful of reports attributed to some of the Companions describe the women of Madinah responding to the revelation of this verse by cutting cloth from their skirts and "covering" with it (using the verb *ikhtamara*, related by root to the word *khimār*), but how this was done and what was covered are not described, though it was later often mistranslated as "covering the face." In some accounts the women are described as appearing "as if crows were on their heads," but this is of ambiguous meaning as well. Similar metaphors in Arabic of birds above one's head can also describe a mood of solemnity. Al-Ālūsī, for example, interprets these *aḥādīth* as merely communicating that the women of Madinah were responsive to the revelation of v. 31. A relevant *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet describes to his sister-in-law Asmāʾ (the daughter of Abū Bakr) the parts of the body that a woman should cover (everything but the face and hands) is of weak authenticity.

It was typical for jurists to discuss the question of dress, for both men and women, in terms of what must be covered in order to perform the canonical prayer, which was usually taken as equivalent to what had to be covered in the presence of those not listed in this verse. This area to be covered was usually referred to as one's *ʿawrah* ("private area") and generally fell into one of three categories as classified by jurists: the *ʿawrah* of men, of female slaves, and of free women. A man's *ʿawrah* was typically described as the area from his navel to his knees. The *ʿawrah* of a free woman was almost always everything but the hands (and sometimes the forearm), face, and sometimes feet (and sometimes part of the calf), though some early minority opinions, such as that of Saʿīd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714), disapproved of uncovering the hair while noting that the hair was not mentioned explicitly in this verse. Other jurists considered a free woman's entire body to be *ʿawrah*. For most jurists the *ʿawrah* of a female slave (or even a female servant) was similar to that of a man, though some jurists, such as the Ḥanafīs, preferred that they cover their chests and backs as well. Many jurists stated plainly that the female slave's *ʿawrah* was appropriate to her obligations of carrying out her work without being overly encumbered.

except that which is visible thereof. And let them draw their kerchiefs over their breasts, and not display their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of desire, or children who are innocent of the private areas of women. Nor let them stamp their feet such that the ornaments they conceal become known. And repent unto God all together, O believers, that haply you may prosper. (32) And marry those who are single among you, and the righteous among your male slaves and your female

Though jurists considered it forbidden and sinful to look upon women with lust and to stare at female slaves not one's own, they did not demand any change in women's dress or prevent them from going about actively in society. Some jurists cite a tradition that ʿUmar actually forbade female slaves from covering their hair, lest they be mistaken for free women. It is reasonable to assume that early jurists saw dress at least partly as a signifier of rank or communal identity (as it seems to be in 33:59) rather than solely in connection with indecency and temptation. In any case, the rules on slave and servant women seem to indicate that the mere fact of women being exposed was not a motivating concern separable from their social status, at least in the formative period of Islamic Law. Jurists who allow uncovering of the face for free women and other parts of the body for slave women still note that looking upon such areas with passion is forbidden; that is to say, the mere fact that it is forbidden to stare at something does not render it *ʿawrah,* or an area that must be covered (Āl).

*Adornment* renders *zīnah,* a word that also means "decoration," "embellishment," "finery," or something that beautifies. *That which is visible thereof* renders *mā ẓahara minhā,* which can mean "that which shows" or "that which is exterior," referring to what could be seen under normal circumstances (Z). For some the *adornment* that *is visible* refers to the face and hands, clothes, eye makeup (*kuḥl*), rings, and bracelets (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī notes that for some jurists this means whatever usually appears in customary practice (*al-ʿādah al-jāriyah*), which in the case of women refers to the face and hands. As a woman could not be expected reasonably to cover her face and hands and the ornaments upon them without hardship and difficulty, they could not be part of her *ʿawrah* (R). Al-Zamakhsharī notes that this ruling can extend to the feet as well, especially for poor women. For nearly all jurists, these guidelines did not apply to female slaves (see above).

*Their women* refers to Muslim women, and many note that it is also prohibited for them to be exposed to female idolaters (IK, Ṭ); others interpret this as a reference to Muslim women's female attendants or companions (R). *Those whom their right hands possess* is thought by some to refer to any slave, male or female, though some jurists limited it to female servants (R). *Male attendants free of desire* is understood to refer to certain kinds of mentally disabled men uninterested in women's sexuality, those who are impotent, eunuchs, or old men (Q, Ṭ). *Children who are innocent of the private parts of women* refers to young children who do not see women as sources of sexual attraction (Ṭ). The *ornaments they conceal* refers to the anklets, sometimes described as having small bells, that women would wear under their skirts; women were not to reveal the presence of these ornaments by stamping their feet (Ṭ).

32 Depending on how the verb is read, this verse can be seen as addressing those who will themselves *marry* or those who "give in marriage"—that is, legal guardians (Q)—whose permission, according to many jurists, is required for a woman to marry (unless she has been married previously, in which case the guardian's permission is not required). Some believe that the *single*

slaves. If they are poor, God will enrich them from His Bounty. And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing. (33) And let those who are unable to marry be chaste till God enriches them from His Bounty. And as for those among the ones whom your right hands possess who seek a contract [of emancipation] with you, contract with them if you know of any good in them, and give unto them from the Wealth of God, which He has given you. And compel not your female slaves into prostitution if they desire to be chaste, for the sake of seeking after the ephemeralities of the life of this world. And whosoever compels them, then truly God, after their having been compelled, will be Forgiving, Merciful. (34) We have indeed sent down unto you clarifying signs and a description of

*among you* refers to free persons (Q), because the remainder of the sentence concerns slaves (on the marriage of slaves, see 4:25c). Some commentators are careful to say that this verse is not interpreted as an absolute command to reduce the single population, such that it would be a sin for there to be marriageable men and women who were not married (R).

*God will enrich them* is not interpreted as a promise of wealth after marriage, but as a general statement about God's Power over giving (R). However, some accounts do speak of marriage in these terms. Al-Rāzī mentions sayings of Companions such as Abū Bakr and Ibn ʿAbbās that encourage marriage and say that marriage will bring material blessings with it.

33 Commentators recognize that poverty can hinder one from marrying, though they acknowledge that a woman could willingly marry a man of meager means, accepting a small bridewealth and living modestly (Q).

A *contract of [emancipation]* (*kitāb,* also *mukātabah*) refers to an agreement by which slaves can purchase their freedom for an agreed-upon sum. Once the master agrees to emancipation, slaves can then begin to earn money to make the payments. Some consider it obligatory to contract emancipation with slaves if one knows *any good in them* (Q, Ṭ), while others read this as a recommendation, a kind of guidance, so that an owner cannot be compelled by the request of the slave for freedom (Q). The *good* refers to being trustworthy or honest or having the capability of working to pay the sum (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). Jurists discuss many ancillary issues regarding this matter, such as the advisability of contracting such emancipation with a slave who has no expertise or profession by which to earn an income, some reasoning that this could lead to burdening society with a helpless individual dependent upon charity (Q). Some understand the command to *give unto them from the Wealth of God* to mean that some of the *zakāh* funds should be given to slaves after their emancipation (IK), pointing to 9:60, the verse that lists the freeing of slaves as one use of *zakāh;* the freeing of slaves is also encouraged in 5:89 and 90:13. Al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr mention the *ḥadīth:* "There are three who have a right with God to be helped: the slave contracting his emancipation; he who desires to marry chastely; and he who strives in the way of God." Others say that the *Wealth* mentioned here refers to a portion of the sum from the contract of emancipation that would be given back to the slave after his or her emancipation (IK, R, Ṭ).

*Compel not your female slaves* refers to the practice before Islam of forcing female slaves into prostitution. Many commentators mention that the chief hypocrite, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, compelled his female slaves in this fashion and collected the payments (R, Ṭ). *God, after their having been compelled, will be Forgiving, Merciful* refers to the fact that God will not hold such female slaves responsible for what they were forced to do (Ṭ).

34 *Description* renders *mathal,* which depending on context can mean a parable, allegory,

those who have passed before you, and an exhortation for the reverent. 35 God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. Light upon light. God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for mankind,

example, or illustrative case. For variations of the refrain *an exhortation for the reverent,* also see 2:66; 3:138; 5:46.

35 This is the Light Verse (*āyat al-nūr*), one of the most famous and often recited verses of the Quran, from which this *sūrah* takes its name. "Light" is considered a Name of God. Many independent treatises have been composed on the Light Verse, perhaps the most famous of which is Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-anwār*), which contains a meditation on the meaning of the symbolism of this verse as well as a metaphysical treatment of the concept and reality of light in general. The verse is often found inscribed on the lamps that hang in many mosques in the Islamic world, and the design of some mosques has been based on its symbolism.

Al-Qurṭubī mentions that the Prophet was asked, "Did thou seest thy Lord?" and he replied, "I saw Light." Ibn Kathīr cites a *ḥadīth* evoking the content of this verse in which the Prophet prays, "O God! Praise be to Thee! Thou dost sustain the heavens and the earth. Thou art the Light of the heavens and the earth and all therein." That *God is the Light* is interpreted also to mean that God guides or directs the affairs of the heavens and the earth (Ṭ). Most commentators on this verse focus their reflections not on the initial phrase *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth,* but rather on the second phrase, *the parable of His Light,* and the meaning of light itself. *The parable of His Light* is typically understood to refer to the light in the heart of the believer placed there by God (Ṭ), although it is also interpreted by some to refer to the Quran (Ṭ), which, like other Divine books, is described in terms of its light and luminosity (see 4:174; 5:15, 44, 46; 6:91; 7:157; 21:48; 22:8; 31:20; 64:8). For other uses of light in the Quran, see 2:17, 257; 6:1, 122; 9:32; 13:16; 14:1, 5; 28:71; 33:43; 39:22; 39:69; 42:52; 57:9, 12, 19, 28; 61:8; 65:11; 66:8.

*Niche* translates *mishkāh,* which is usually described as a recess in a wall within which to set or hang a lamp. There are, however, others who understand it to mean the body of the lamp itself, the metal by which the lamp is hung, or the piece that holds the wick (IK, R, Ṭ). *Lamp* renders *miṣbāḥ,* which refers here to the lighted wick, but some have interpreted it to be the whole lamp itself. Combined with the reading of *mishkāh* as the lamp or the piece of the lamp that holds the wick, this phrase could be read, "The parable of His Light is a lamp wherein is a lighted wick." The *glass* would then refer to the enclosure around the wick, and *kindled from a blessed olive tree* refers to the special olive oil that is the lamp's fuel; in one reading, the *glass* is understood to be a window-pane that covers the niche (Ṭs). Some read a syntactical inversion of *lamp* and *niche* in the two sentences: *The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp* (or lighted wick). *The lamp* (or lighted wick) *is in a glass.* According to this reading, the lines actually mean, "The parable of His Light is as a lamp in a niche," since that is the source of the light as ordinarily understood (R). It is pointed out that *parable . . . is* does not restrict the comparison to the *niche* alone, but includes everything that follows (Ṭb).

*A blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West* is interpreted to mean that it is a heavenly tree, since any earthly tree would necessarily be eastern or western (R), or it is a symbolic tree (Ṭ). In one opinion attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, it means the tree is on a high mountain or open plain, such that the sun strikes it as it both rises and sets (IK, R, Ṭ); in this sense, it can mean that the tree is of both the East and the West because it is neither exclusively (R). According to these interpretations, *of the East* (*sharqiyyah*) and *of*

*the West* (*gharbiyyah*) can also mean "easterly" and "westerly" or "east-facing" and "west-facing," because the words for "east" and "west" in Arabic refer directly to the rising and setting of the sun. The *blessed olive tree* can also be seen as referring symbolically to the *axis mundi*.

The imagery created by the first part of this verse is of a light radiating from a lamp fueled by oil, shining through a glass that covers the niche holding the lamp (alternately, the light simply radiates through the glass that is part of the lamp body). These phrases, which symbolize the Light of God or the light in the heart of a believer, have been interpreted as a description of the nature of cosmic reality itself or as a symbolic account of human spiritual realization or both. For some commentators this symbol applies to all believers: the *niche* is the breast of the believer, the *lamp* (lighted wick) is the Quran and faith, and the *glass* is the heart (Ṭ). For others this verse is a symbol of the reality of the Prophet: the *niche* is the breast of the Prophet, the *glass* refers to his heart, and the *lamp* refers to the faith within it; the *blessed olive tree* is Abraham, and God placed the same light within the Prophet that He put within Abraham (R, Su). For others, the *niche* is the tongue and mouth, the *lamp* (lighted wick) is the Quran, the *glass* is the heart of the believer, and the *tree* is the tree of revelation (Ṭṣ). Still others describe the *niche* as referring to the body, whose dark nature is illumined by the *lamp* of the Spirit, while the *glass* is the heart lit by the Spirit (K).

*Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it* is interpreted to mean that the Prophet shone even before revelation had touched him (IK), that his light was clear to people even before he spoke, or that he was possessed of wisdom even before the onset of his mission as prophet (R). Alternately, the *oil* may refer to the proofs in the Quran, which would well-nigh shine forth even if they were not recited (Ṭṣ). Al-Rāzī says that the oil of the olive tree, when it is pure and viewed from afar, looks as if it has rays coming from it, and fire only increases that; likewise, the heart of believers acts according to right guidance before understanding comes to them, after which their inner illumination increases.

Many spiritual, ontological, and cosmological interpretations have been given for the Light Verse throughout the ages. According to Junayd, God illuminates the hearts of the angels so that they glorify Him, the hearts of the prophets to attain true knowledge and to worship with true worship, and the hearts of believers to attain guidance and knowledge. He interprets *neither of the East nor of the West* to mean desiring neither this world nor the Hereafter, but being detached from both and desiring only God. For him, the oil that would *well-nigh shine forth* means that light shines forth from the heart unto the tongue when one remembers God, wherever one happens to be between the East and West. He interprets *light upon light* to refer to the light of certainty combined with the light of faith (Su). For al-Kashānī, the oil symbolizes the soul in its state of readiness to receive illumination from the Spirit; when light does strike the soul (when it comes *upon* the light lying there in a potential state), it becomes actualized light (K). For some, the oil is sincerity, and as one's sincerity increases, so does one's light (ST). Ibn ʿAjībah, like many other Sufis, interprets the verse through the lens of ontology and says that all elements of creation are aspects of the Light of God: the niche is like a window into a subtle treasure from which earthly lights radiate, and indeed every part of creation is a niche for a light from the Light of lights, a view that interprets light as the inner reality of the cosmos.

For some Shiites, the *niche* symbolizes Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter, while the *lamp* represents Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and *light upon light* refers to the succession of Imams who were her progeny (Qm).

In commenting on *light upon light*, some see a symbol for the faith of a believer, and many commentators transmit an opinion attributed to Ubayy ibn Kaʿb that describes the five kinds of light a believer possesses: speech, deeds, entrance (into the grave at death), exit (from the grave on the Day of Judgment), and return (to the Garden; Ṭ). For some *light upon light* refers to faith and action (Ṭ) or to the light of the Quran together with the light of the believer (IK).

For al-Ghazzālī, the niche, glass, wick, tree, and oil all represent levels of perception and consciousness, which he describes as lights in the sense that they are that by which things are known. The *niche* represents the physical senses that receive light passively; the *glass* represents the imagination, which, like clay transformed into glass, is purified through spiritual discipline; the lamp (lighted wick) symbolizes the soul's power

and God is Knower of all things. (36) [It is] in houses that God has permitted to be raised and wherein His Name is remembered. He is therein glorified, morning and evening, (37) by men whom neither trade nor buying and selling distract from the remembrance of God, the performance of prayer, and the giving of

to understand meanings and ideas; the *blessed olive tree* represents the power of meditation, each branch giving rise to two branches, which each give rise to more; the *oil* that *would well-nigh shine forth* is the knowledge and consciousness possessed by the prophets and great "friends of God" (*awliyāʾ*), which is almost self-awakening, though it does require the kindling of revelation and inspiration from God. These levels of perception and consciousness are *light upon light.*

The concept of light became the scriptural basis for an entire current of Islamic philosophy called the School of Illumination, which describes all of reality as composed of varying grades of the same reality, which is light and which becomes mixed with darkness as it is removed from its luminous Source, or God, Who is called the Light of lights (*Nūr al-anwār*). The symbolism of light is, moreover, employed in many schools of theology, philosophy, and Sufism as a most powerful symbol for the nature of God's relationship with the various levels of creation down to this world. Light is visible in itself and grants visibility to everything else; it thus symbolizes the truth that God is the most evident Reality in Himself and is also That by which all things are known. Just as sensory objects become manifest to the eye by physical light, so too are inward realities made manifest to the inner eye through the Light of God. In al-Rāzī's words, one can imagine sunlight disappearing, but God's Light could not disappear without the heavens and the earth ceasing to exist. The mystery of God's Light is that it is so manifest in all things that He is hidden. Ibn ʿArabī once wrote, "Glory be unto Him who is hidden by that which is none other than Himself."

The Light Verse has been commented upon over the ages metaphysically, cosmologically, cosmogonically, epistemologically, and psychologically. Moreover, it has been a major influence in the Islamic arts in domains ranging from poetry to miniature painting to architecture, where it has played a central role in the understanding of the relation of light to space in Islamic sacred architecture. Some of the greatest works of Islamic metaphysics, such as the already cited work of al-Ghazzālī or Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary on this verse, attest to the central significance of this verse in Islamic thought, just as so many works of architecture and painting provide evidence of its importance for Islamic art. This verse, quoted so often in daily life by Muslims, has been influential in determining, along with certain other Quranic verses, the general attitudes and sensibility of Muslims to light and its ever-present spiritual and psychological impact upon the soul.

36 This verse is usually read as a continuation of the previous verse, meaning that the *lamp* or "lighted wick" is in a *niche* within *houses* (Ṭ) or, similarly, that the light is *kindled* in the houses (R). It could also be read as a new sentence: "In houses that God has permitted to be raised and wherein His Name is remembered, He is therein glorified morning and evening." By *houses* many understand mosques, while others extend it to mean all houses (R, Ṭ) or else specific places such as the Kaʿbah, the Holy Sanctuary (in Jerusalem), the Prophet's mosque in Madinah, or the Qubāʾ mosque (see commentary on 9:107–8; Q, R). That the houses are *raised* refers to either the building of such houses, their exaltation, or both (R, Ṭ). Many commentators believe that the glorification (*tasbīḥ*) mentioned here refers to the Muslim canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*; Q, R, Ṭ). Continuing the symbolism from the previous verse, *houses* is understood here by Sufis to be a symbol for the illumination of the hearts of human beings in which the Name of God is remembered (Aj). The juxtaposition of the general word *houses* and the remembrance of God's Name is also suggestive of the different kinds of houses of worship mentioned in 22:40, which speaks of *monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God's Name is mentioned much.*

37 The language here is similar to that in 63:9: *Let neither your property nor your children divert*

alms, fearing a day when eyes and hearts will be turned about, (38) that God may reward them for the best of that which they have done, and increase them from His Bounty. And God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning. (39) As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage upon a desert plain which a thirsty man supposes is water, till when he comes upon it, he does not find it to be anything, but finds God there. He will then pay him his reckoning in full, and God is swift in reckoning. (40) Or like the darkness of a fathomless sea, covered by waves with waves above them and clouds above them—darknesses, one above the other. When one puts out one's hand, one can hardly see it. He for whom God has not appointed any light has no light.

*you from the remembrance of God;* and 62:9: *When you are called to the congregational prayer, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off trade.* The phrase *when eyes and hearts will be turned about* refers to the terror and awe experienced on the Day of Judgment (Ṭ), and related imagery is used to describe eyes and hearts in 14:42–43: *He merely grants them reprieve till a day when eyes will stare, transfixed, running with necks outstretched and heads upraised, their glance returning not to them, their hearts vacant.* Continuing the symbolism of the previous verse, the houses can be said to symbolize the hearts of those who are afraid of their eyes and hearts being turned away from the remembrance of God (Aj).

38 On what it means to be rewarded for *the best of that which they have done,* see 9:121c; 29:7c. *Increase them* is understood by al-Rāzī to mean that there is an element of deserving in one's reward in the Hereafter beyond which God grants an added bounty. On God's providing *without reckoning,* see 2:212c; 3:27c.

39 The *mirage* discussed here is based on the physical phenomenon caused by the difference in temperature between the warm air immediately above the hot desert floor and the cooler air above it. The warm air close to the ground refracts the light from distant objects slightly upward, giving the appearance of water reflecting the sky or other objects. Since the apparent "water" is actually the inverted light of distant objects or the sky, one can never actually reach it; the inversion effect will gradually disappear, the closer one gets to it.

*Their deeds are like a mirage* is thought to refer to the good actions of disbelievers such as acts of filial piety, maintaining good family relations, and acting well toward one's neighbor (Q); that is, they believe there is some reward or benefit from their deeds, but ultimately there is not, because they exclude God. *Finds God there* is understood to mean "finds the Recompense of God" or "finds the Judgment of God" (Aj, Q, R) or "finds the path to Him" (Su). It also means that their deeds are not ultimately good even in this world and that what they believe to be good leads to greater corruption and error (Aj). *God is swift in reckoning,* because such reckoning is easy for Him (R) as He has infinite Power and need not consult anyone (Aj).

40 For some, this verse continues the description of the *deeds* of the previous verse, meaning that the disbelievers' *deeds* are *like the darkness of a fathomless sea* (Ṭ); alternately, this verse is likening their disbelief to darkness, since disbelief can also be viewed as an action or deed (Q). *Darknesses* renders the plural form *ẓulumāt,* implying that there are levels of darkness (see 5:16c). Remarks similar to those attributed to Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb with regard to light in v. 35 are also mentioned here by several commentators, when they state that a person's "darknesses" are five: speech, actions, entrance (into the grave at death), exit (from the grave at the Resurrection), and return (in this case, to the Fire rather than to the Garden; R, Ṭ). The three kinds of darkness mentioned here—the *sea,* the *waves,* the *clouds*—are interpreted to be

(41) Hast thou not considered that God is glorified by whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, and by the birds spreading their wings? Each indeed knows its prayer and its glorification, and God knows that which they do. (42) And unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and unto God is the journey's end. (43) Has thou not considered that God drives the clouds, then joins them together, then makes them as a heap, and then thou seest the rain come forth from amid them? And He sends down from the sky—from the mountains [of clouds] therein—hail, wherewith He smites whomsoever He will, and which He turns away from whomsoever He will. The flash of His lightning well-nigh takes away sight. (44) God alternates the night and the day. Truly in that is a lesson for those possessed of sight. (45) And God created

the darkness of one's heart, one's sight, and one's hearing (R); see 2:7c for the notion of hearts and spiritual faculties being sealed or covered. Others interpret this verse to refer to the compound ignorance of the disbeliever: he does not understand, he fails to know that he does not understand, and he thinks that he does understand (R). The imagery is meant to show how he is surrounded, since he is struck by the terror from below (sea), the terror from around (waves), and the terror from above (clouds; Q). For some, the notion that he can barely see his hand in front of his face shows the profundity of his ignorance (R). With his heart he cannot see the light of faith (Q). The final phrase shows that all light, guidance, and understanding come from God (Q, R). That the disbeliever can *hardly see* his hand suggests that human beings can never be left in total darkness, and the light of guidance is available as long as they are still alive.

41 The worship and glorification of God by all beings is a common theme throughout the Quran (e.g., 17:44; 38:18–19; 21:19–20; 22:18); see also 2:74c; 30:26c; 64:1c. This verse is noteworthy in describing that prayer and glorification are differentiated, because everything *knows its prayer and its glorification*. According to some, *prayer* (*ṣalāh*) refers to the activity of human beings, while *glorification* (*tasbīḥ*) refers to this activity in all other beings (Ṭ). Some say that the beating of their wings is the birds' prayer, while their song is their glorification (Q).

There are those who interpret these verses to mean not that the beings of the heavens and the earth consciously glorify God, but that God is glorified through their very being; that is, they are in themselves testaments to God's Glory and their existence points to His Transcendence (R). This interpretation is offered because some beings appear to oppose openly and abstain from prayer and glorification—specifically, disbelieving human beings (Q). This is similar to the apparent paradox that all things submit to God *willingly or unwillingly,* a distinction discussed in 3:83c; see also 13:15c.

42 The concept of *sovereignty* (*mulk*) is discussed in 67:1c; 36:83c. The *journey's end* (*maṣīr*) refers to one's return to God in the Hereafter, an idea present throughout the Quran in various forms.

43 Some read *from the mountains [of clouds] therein* as a reference to the appearance of the clouds, while others read the grammar of the phrase to mean that a "mountain's worth of hail" comes down (Q, R). The *hail* is interpreted here as an instrument of destruction (Th). Other destructive clouds are mentioned in 46:24. Often, however, in the Quran clouds are beneficial givers of rain (7:57; 35:9), and this symbolizes spiritual blessings raining down upon the heart of the believer (Aj). The image of lightning snatching away sight is also mentioned in 2:20.

44 Cf. 3:190; 10:6; 23:80; 39:5; 45:5.

45 *Beast* renders *dābbah,* which means an animal that ambulates on the surface of the earth

every beast from water: among them are those that go upon their bellies, and among them are those that go upon two legs, and among them are those that go upon four. God creates whatsoever He will. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (46) We have indeed sent down clarifying signs, and God guides whomsoever He will unto a straight path. (47) And they say, "We believe in God and in the Messenger, and We obey." Then a group of them turn away thereafter, and believers they are not. (48) And when they are called to God and His Messenger, that He may judge between them, behold, a group of them turn away. (49) But if the right is theirs, they come unto Him submissively. (50) Is there a disease in their hearts? Or do they doubt, or fear that God and His Messenger will deal unjustly with them? Nay, but it is they who are the wrongdoers. (51) The only words of the believers when they are called unto God and His Messenger, that he may judge between them, will be to say, "We hear and we obey." And it is they who shall prosper. (52) Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, and

(which would therefore exclude fish; Q). Some commentators such as al-Rāzī seem to understand water to be a reference to reproductive fluids and interpret the verse on that basis. Similar verses are 21:30: *And We made every living thing from water;* and 25:54: *And He it is Who created a human being from water.* In the Quran different kinds of beings are described as made from different substances. Human beings are described as made from *clay* (6:2; 32:7), *water* (25:54), and *dust* (22:5; 30:20; 35:11). Iblīs was created from *fire* (7:12), and the jinn from a *smokeless fire* (55:15). In the *Ḥadīth* the angels are described as beings created from light (see 2:30c; 55:31c).

46 The word *clarifying* (*mubayyināt*) here is etymologically closely related to *clear* (*bayyināt*) in other instances of the similar phrase *clear signs* (e.g., 3:97; 22:16; 28:36), the former being a more intensive form. On *straight path,* see 1:6c.

47 This verse is understood to refer to the hypocrites of Madinah (Q, Ṭ).

48 According to some, this verse was revealed in connection with a land dispute between Mughīrah ibn Wā'il and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. When ʿAlī proposed that they bring the dispute to the Prophet to judge, Mughīrah reportedly said, "I fear Muhammad will deal unjustly [see v. 50] with me." In another account, it was a hypocrite named Bishr who had a dispute with a Jew. When the latter suggested bringing the dispute to the Prophet, Bishr proposed Kaʿb ibn Ashraf instead, saying, "Muhammad treats us unjustly" (Q, R).

49 According to this verse, the hypocrites submit to judgment whenever they think the outcome will be in their favor or when they think that they are truly in the right (R).

50 Al-Rāzī ponders the fact that the three categories mentioned here—having a diseased heart, doubting God, and being a wrongdoer—are not always distinct, since hypocrisy, doubt, and disbelief can be seen as overlapping or even synonymous, and people can harm themselves through these attitudes. Other verses that refer to a diseased heart include 2:8–11; 5:52; 33:12, 60; 47:20, 29; 74:31.

51 Some read *that he may judge* in the passive voice, so it means "that it may be a judgment rendered" (Z). *Hear and . . . obey,* used to express loyalty and faith (in either the positive or the negative), also appears in 2:93, 285; 4:46; 5:7.

52 On the question of obeying God and the Prophet, see 3:32c; 4:59c.

who fears God and reverences Him, it is they who shall triumph. (53) And they swear by God with their most solemn oaths that, wert thou to command them, they would surely go forth. Say, "Swear not! [But give] honorable obedience! Surely God is Aware of whatsoever you do." (54) Say, "Obey God and obey the Messenger." But if they turn away, he is only accountable for that wherewith he has been burdened, and you are accountable for that wherewith you have been burdened. But if you obey him, you will be rightly guided, and naught is incumbent upon the Messenger save the clear proclamation. (55) God has promised those among you who believe and perform righteous deeds that He will surely make them vicegerents upon the earth, as He caused those before them to be vicegerents, and that He will establish for them their religion, which He has

53 For similar false oaths sworn by the hypocrites and disbelievers, see 5:53c.

54 *Burdened* refers to what one is commanded to do and for which one is responsible (Ṭ; cf. 2:286: *Our Lord, lay not upon us a burden like Thou laid upon those before us*). The Prophet is only tasked with the *clear proclamation* of the message, while the believers are tasked with following him and acting in accordance with the Commands of God (R, Ṭ). That the Prophet is not responsible for anything beyond conveying the message (3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12) is also discussed in 88:21–26c.

55 To *make . . . vicegerents* renders the verb *istakhlafa*, which in addition can also mean "to cause to inherit" or "to cause to become successor to." Some interpret this verse as a response to the laments of the Makkan Emigrants regarding their long struggle with their enemies in Makkah and see the vicegerency mentioned in this verse as referring to their inheriting the land of Makkah (Q, Ṭs; in which case *earth, arḍ*, would be rendered "land"). In these accounts, it is said that the Companions, having lived through many years of conflict and persecution, asked whether a time would come when they could put their swords away and live without fear, and this verse was then revealed (Q, R, Ṭ). For some this land over which *He will surely make them vicegerents* refers to the Arabian Peninsula (Ṭ). For others it refers to the lands of the Arabs and Persians (Q, Ṭs). *Those before them* who became *vicegerents* is thought to refer to the Children of Israel and triumph and state of security granted to them (Q, R).

This verse has also served as the locus for reflections on the question of the successors to the Prophet. For some Sunni commentators, it describes some or all of the period of thirty years subsequent to the death of the Prophet when the Muslim community was led by the four rightly guided Caliphs (*al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn*): Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī (Q, R). Some have posed the question whether this inheritance or vicegerency refers only to the Companions or also to later caliphs and in fact to all believers in general (R, Ṭs). For some Shiites, this verse refers to the coming of the Mahdī (Ṭs) and the *vicegerents* are the People of the House (*ahl al-bayt*), meaning the descendants of the Prophet. Alternately, some say that it describes the period of the reign of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar specifically, since after their rule Muslims became divided among themselves (IK, Q).

On *their religion, which He has approved for them*, see also 5:3: *This day I have perfected for you your religion, and completed My Blessing upon you, and have approved for you as religion, Submission (Islam).* For some the change from a *state of fear to [one of] security* refers not to a change in status

approved for them, and that He will surely change them from a state of fear to [one of] security. They will worship Me, not ascribing any partners unto Me. And whosoever disbelieves thereafter, it is they who are iniquitous. (56) And perform the prayer, and give the alms, and obey the Messenger, that haply you may receive mercy. (57) Do not suppose that the disbelievers thwart [aught] on the earth. The Fire will be their refuge—what an evil journey's end! (58) O you who believe! Let those whom your right hands possess and those who have not come of age ask your leave three times: before the dawn prayer, when you doff your garments at noon, and after the night prayer—three times of privacy for you. Beyond these, there is no blame upon you or upon them should you go about [visiting] one another. Thus does God make clear unto you the signs, and God is Knowing, Wise. (59) And when the children among you come of age, let them ask leave as those before them asked leave. Thus does God make clear unto you

in this world, but the move from this world to the Hereafter (Ṭs). *They will worship Me, not ascribing any partners* is an adverbial phrase in the Arabic, meaning that it is a description of the believers' state as they live in security (R).

56 Cf. 3:132; 6:155; 7:63, 204; 27:46; 36:45; 49:10.

57 The idea of the disbelievers not being able to thwart or frustrate God or His signs appears several times in the Quran, including 8:59; 9:2–3; 11:20; 29:22; 35:44; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12.

58 Many jurists note that the Command to *ask your leave,* or ask permission to enter, is not abrogated and is an obligation for all men and women; a view that al-Qurṭubī says is the opinion of most jurists, though he also mentions other opinions that understand it as a recommendation or advice or as an obligation upon one gender or the other. It seems that the question of abrogation of this verse arose because the action mentioned in this specific verse fell out of practice, and many people bemoaned the fact (IK, Ṭ). Al-Qurṭubī mentions that Ibn ʿAbbās was asked by the people of Iraq (usually a reference to the towns of Basra and Kufa) about this verse, which was no longer followed. Ibn ʿAbbās replied that God loves modesty and explained that, because servants or children would walk in on people without announcing their presence and many of the houses did not have partitions or separate chambers, this verse was revealed as an act of compassion and generosity by God. Al-Qurṭubī opines that the conditions in non-urban areas still made the verse relevant, even though for many people the situation addressed by this verse did not normally arise.

*Three times* is thought by most to refer to the three periods of time mentioned in this verse, though others interpret it to mean that when one asks, one should do so thrice (Q). It is aimed at those who normally would go back and forth in one's house, not people outside of the household (IK). *When you doff your garments at noon* refers to the traditional midday rest taken at the time of greatest heat, while *before the dawn prayer* and *after the night prayer* refer to the beginning and end of the day, after rising in the morning and going to bed at night.

59 *As those before them asked leave* means that those children who, before coming of age, only had to ask permission during the three times mentioned in the previous verse would now have to ask permission at any time, as is the case for adults (IK).

His signs, and God is Knowing, Wise. (60) As for elderly women who no longer anticipate marriage, there is no blame upon them to doff their garments without displaying any ornament. And it is better for them to be modest, and God is Hearing, Knowing. (61) There is no fault against the blind, nor fault against the lame, nor fault against the sick, nor upon yourselves in that you eat from your

60 *Elderly* renders *qawāᶜid* (sing. *qāᶜid*), which evokes the sense of someone who is now "sitting out" or "sitting back" from marriage and childbearing or from a busy life (M, R). *Garments* (*thiyāb*) is interpreted as the *jilbāb,* the garment mentioned in 33:59 (IK, M, Q, Ṭ); the kerchief (*khimār;* R, Ṭ); the "wrap" (*ridāʾ* or *milḥafah;* M, Ṭ, Z); or simply one's garments (R). Al-Qurṭubī mentions the opinion of some jurists that if the hair of an old woman—one who is a free woman, see 24:31c—shows, there is no problem, but he still thinks it refers to the *jilbāb,* which goes over the kerchief. For al-Qurṭubī himself, this is because women of the age mentioned in this verse are beyond the dangers of passion and do not have to comply with "inconvenient" obligations.

*Ornament* (*zīnah*) is interpreted here to mean what is ordinarily supposed to be covered as described in 24:31 (Z). As in 24:31, those areas that women are supposed to cover are not clearly specified in the text and the reference to not *displaying any ornament* appears to mean that, although the rules governing elderly women are different, those rules still remain in effect to a degree. Al-Māturīdī says that no woman can show her *zīnah* in any case; so he is against the opinion that *garments* refers to the kerchief (*khimār*). He interprets it as a wrap they wear when they go out. *It is better for them to be modest* is thought to refer to the preference that they wear the kerchief (*khimār*; Ṭ).

61 There are diverse opinions as to what is meant by saying that there is no *fault* on the *blind, lame,* or *sick* in this verse. According to some, the weaker members of society mentioned here were distressed when people would take them not to their own houses to eat, but to other people's houses, and this verse was then revealed to set them at ease (IK). Others say that it means that sometimes the Companions would not have food in their own houses; so they would take the needy to other houses to eat, but the needy would be uncomfortable with that arrangement, and this verse was meant to comfort them (Ṭ). For still others it refers to those who went to war, leaving the keys of their home with someone, and the needy were unsure whether they could eat such food as was offered to them from the houses of those who were away (Ṭ). Some believe that it means that when they were told by the owners of the houses, "Eat as you need," they feared or perceived that this was said grudgingly (Q). For some, it refers to pre-Islamic times when people would not like to eat with those suffering from misfortunes, because they found their afflictions inconvenient or distasteful (Q, Ṭ), or it refers to these people's reticence to cause trouble or discomfort for other people because of their own afflictions (Q). In the opinion of Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, however, this verse refers to non-Muslim relatives (R). Some commentators note the custom in some tribes of never eating alone—a person might even wait an entire day for someone with whom to share a meal—and this verse clarifies that there is no sin in eating *together or separately* (R, Z).

*Your houses* is thought to include the houses of one's children (R, Z), since the structure in the Arabic allows for the reading, "The houses of your own." *Those whose keys you possess* refers to those houses that have been entrusted to the care of others, who are allowed to partake of the food and gardens of the house (Z).

Regarding the mention of *your friends,* some commentators report a saying attributed to Ibn ᶜAbbās in which he notes that friends are in a sense more important than parents, because on the Day of Judgment people will call out not to their parents, but to their friends, as in 26:100–101: *So now we have no intercessors, nor any loyal friend* (Z). For some the Quran elevates the status of friends by mentioning them with others with whom one has intimacy in this verse (Z). The salutation is made in a manner that is *blessed and good,*

houses, or your fathers' houses, or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or those whose keys you possess, or [those of] your friends. There is no blame upon you whether you eat together or separately. So when you enter houses, greet each other with a salutation from God, blessed and good. Thus does God make clear unto you the signs, that haply you may understand. (62) Only they are believers who believe in God and His Messenger and who, when they are with him in a collective affair, go not forth until asking his leave. Truly those who ask thy leave, it is they who believe in God and His Messenger. So when they ask thy leave in some matter of theirs, give leave unto whomsoever thou wilt, and seek forgiveness for them from God. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (63) Do not deem the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling to one another. Indeed, God knows those among you who steal away under shelter. So let

because a believer is praying to God that He bless and give good provision to other people (Z).

One possible way of understanding this verse is that people had various scruples about sharing meals or food with each other, and the verse was meant to put them at ease and to discourage them from being overly officious or formal to the detriment of enjoying the meals in blessing and wholesomeness. Alternately, in the situations described the level of permission and formality is different, as the settings are more intimate.

62 A *collective affair* refers to the congregational prayer or to people sitting together for the purposes of consultation (IK). More generally it can refer to a gathering for defense or similar purposes that requires the leader to call people together (Q). Ibn Kathīr notes that just as the previous verse teaches the *adab,* or courtesy, of entering houses, this verse addresses the *adab* of leaving them; that is, when in a gathering with the Prophet, one should ask his permission to leave. Ibn Kathīr quotes the *ḥadīth:* "When one of you comes upon a gathering, let him offer greetings, and when he wishes to leave, let him offer salutations, for the former is not worthier to do than the latter." Others interpret the verse to mean that people steal and slink away within their souls from the Book of God and from His remembrance (R).

63 It is said that the Prophet used to be addressed, "O Muhammad," or "O Abu'l-Qāsim," the former being his given name and the latter the common Arab sobriquet (*kunya*) formed by calling a man the father of his son; Abu'l-Qāsim means "Father of Qāsim," referring to the Prophet's son, who died as a child. Believers were commanded instead to honor and respect him by saying, "O Messenger of God" or "O Prophet of God" (IK, Ṭ). According to another interpretation, the *calling* (*duʿāʾ*) refers not to a hail, but instead to supplicatory prayer, in which case it means that the prayers of the Prophet have a status greater than those of ordinary believers. Still others interpret it to mean that when the Prophet calls, one should respond with urgency and obedience (R, Ṭ). Others say that it means one should not raise one's voice when calling him, as in 49:2 (R).

*Those who steal away* refers to the hypocrites who did not want to stay for the entire Friday sermon or who actually left from the back rows dur-

those who contradict his command be wary, lest a trial befall them or a painful punishment befall them. (64) Behold! Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. God certainly knows [the state] you are in. On the day they will be returned unto Him, He will inform them of that which they did. And God is Knower of all things.

ing prayer (IK); others see it as an attempt to plead an excuse to other Companions for having done so (R). *Contradict his command* can have the general meaning of "go against him" and can refer to spurning the Prophet's example and teachings and not following his way, the punishment for which can come in either this life or the Hereafter (R).

64 *[The state] you are in* renders a phrase that can also mean "what you do" or "what you follow." For many, the implication of this verse is that, in addition to knowing individuals' state and actions in life and informing them of them, God will also then give their just recompense (R, Ṭ, Z). The shift from *you are in* (second person) to *they will be* (third person) can serve more than one purpose, and al-Zamakhsharī offers the view that it could mean that the third person refers to the hypocrites specifically. The common idea of *the heavens and the earth* belonging to God is repeated in 2:284; 3:109, 129; 4:126, 131, 170; 53:31. That God will inform human beings of their every action on earth is a pervasive dimension of the Quran's message, stated explicitly in this and similar passages (see 6:60c) and also implicitly in those verses describing the Day of Judgment more generally.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 25

# The Criterion

## *al-Furqān*

Most commentators consider *al-Furqān* to be a Makkan *sūrah,* although some believe that vv. 68–70 are from the Madinan period, while a minority consider most of the *sūrah* to be from the Madinan period and vv. 68–70 to be from the Makkan period (Q). It takes its name from the mention of *the Criterion* (*al-Furqān*) in the first verse, a word that could also be rendered "the Divide," and which is also a name of the Quran.

Beginning with the disbelievers' accusation that the Quran was taught by a human being to the Prophet or that he was simply rehearsing old legends (vv. 4–5), this *sūrah* goes on to elaborate on one of its main themes, namely, the inability of the Quraysh to accept Muhammad as a prophet because of his humanity. It lists their objections: he walks in the market like any other human being, is given no great treasure, and is not accompanied by an angel (vv. 7–10, 20–21). Moreover, the Quraysh wonder why the Quran was not sent down all at once, rather than being revealed gradually over years (v. 32), and part of their denial is manifest in their aversion to the use of the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān* (*the Compassionate;* vv. 59–60).

Several verses describe the horror of the disbelievers as they call out to be destroyed rather than suffer the punishment of the Fire and as they are rebuked and denied by the objects of their worship in this world (vv. 11–19, 22–29). Moses and Aaron, Noah, and the messengers sent to al-Rass are mentioned as previous examples of prophets who were rejected by their people (vv. 35–40). The latter part of the *sūrah* includes several verses that describe how the believers should conduct themselves in the face of vain talk and insults and addresses the true meaning of repentance and supplication to God (vv. 63–77).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion upon His servant that he may be a warner unto the worlds, (2) He unto Whom belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and Who took not a child, and Who has no partner in sovereignty, and Who created everything, then measured it out with due measure. (3) But they have taken gods apart from Him, who create naught and are

1 The root from which *blessed* derives carries the sense of the growth and increase of what is good (IK, Q). Therefore, some commentators prefer to understand *blessed* to mean "holy" or "transcendent" in order to avoid the theological problem of associating God Himself with the change implied in the concept of growth or increase (Q).

On *Criterion* (*Furqān*), a word that appears also in 2:53, 185; 3:4; 8:29, 41; 21:48, see 3:3–4c and 8:29c. *Criterion* could also be rendered "divide" or "boundary" in the sense that it can mean both "that which distinguishes" and "that by which things are distinguished." It is referred to in this way because it separates the believers from the disbelievers and truth from falsehood, and teaches believers how to live by delineating what is lawful and what is prohibited (Q). In this verse, *al-Furqān* is another name for the Quran; see also 21:48, where Moses and Aaron are also given a *furqān,* or a revelation in a more universal sense.

On *warner,* see 35:23c; 4:165c. See also 21:107, where the Prophet is described as *a mercy unto the worlds. Worlds* (*ʿālamīn*) can also mean more specifically human worlds or "nations," that is, various human collectivities (see 2:47c). Here it is understood by some to refer to the human beings and jinn to whom the Prophet was sent (Q); see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72 for a discussion of the jinn and their reception of the Prophet's message. For some, *warner unto the worlds* means that the Prophet was sent to all creatures until the Day of Judgment (R). Certain Muʿtazilite theologians have argued that this verse means that God desires all creatures to have faith and to do good and avoid evil, while Ashʿarite theologians countered this argument by citing 7:179: *Certainly We have created for Hell many among jinn and men* (R).

2 For God's *sovereignty,* see *Sūrah* 67, "Sovereignty"; see also 67:1c; 36:83c. For a discussion of the Quran's rejection of the notion of God having a *child,* which includes both Arab pagan beliefs concerning "daughters of God" and the Christian doctrine of Jesus as son of God, see 2:116c; 6:101–2c. *Measured it out with due measure* (cf. 76:16) renders a phrase composed of a verb (*qaddara*) and the verb's corresponding verbal noun (*taqdīr*). It is a word that encompasses both knowing the measure of a thing and bestowing a measure upon a thing and thus also has within its range of meaning the sense of "estimation" and also "ordainment." This range of meaning has implications for the theological questions surrounding the order found in creation as well as both God's Knowledge of things and His Power over them, which is to say that it has bearing on questions of God's Omniscience and Omnipotence. Al-Rāzī notes that, as it concerns human beings, *taqdīr* is an act of estimation or assessment, but because God's Knowledge is eternal and unchanging, the Divine *taqdīr* refers to God's Knowledge of a creature's entire existence from beginning to end. Other commentators emphasize the sense of *taqdīr* as ordainment or "predestination," referring to the bestowal and ordainment of everything a creature was, is now, or ever will be (IK, Q). In this latter sense *taqdīr* is similar to *qadar,* or one's "lot" or "measuring out," a concept that in the theological tradition often refers to the doctrine of Divine predestination; see 54:47–49; 6:60c; 17:13–14c; 17:30c; 65:3c; 68:1c; 91:8c, and the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy."

3 This verse is widely thought to refer to idolaters in particular, and would not necessarily include Christians, as the assertion in the previous

themselves created, and who have no power over what harm or benefit may come to themselves, and who have no power over death, or life, or resurrection. (4) And the disbelievers say, "This is naught but a lie that he has fabricated, and another people have helped him in it." They have indeed produced a wrongdoing and a calumny. (5) And they say, "They are fables of those of old which he has had written down, and they are recited to him morning and evening." (6) Say, "He has sent it down Who knows what is secret in the heavens and on the earth. Truly He is Forgiving, Merciful." (7) And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him, (8) or no treasure cast unto him, or no garden for him from which to eat?" And the wrongdoers say, "You follow naught but a man bewitched." (9) Look how they set forth descriptions of thee,

verse might (R). The dismissal of false objects of worship as things that are created, but cannot themselves create, is also found in 7:191 and 16:20, and the criticism that they have no power over *harm or benefit* appears in 5:76; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 21:66. The Quran points out frequently that idols are incapable of numerous things, including granting provision (16:73; 29:17), speech (78:37), and intercession (30:13; 39:43; 43:86), indicating that they are unworthy of worship.

4–5 These verses describe the accusation leveled against the Prophet that he was taught what to say by certain Jews and Christians (Q, Ṭ), and was merely rehearsing old stories; see also 16:103: *He has merely been taught by a human being.* Some commentators name specific people who were learned in the Torah, but then became followers of the Prophet, and it was alleged that he took stories from them (R). Many commentators connect these verses with a certain Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith of the Quraysh, a storyteller who would recite stories from Persian history and myth; the disbelievers would compare his stories with the Quran and announce in the Prophet's presence that al-Ḥārith's stories were better (Ṭ). *Fables of those of old* are also mentioned in 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13.

6 According to this verse, God knows all that is hidden *in the heavens and on the earth,* and so the Prophet does not need to be taught by another (Q). Also, the implicit threat in the idea that God knows all *secret* things would mean that He is aware of the thoughts and plots of those who oppose the Prophet (R).

7 A major theme of the Quran is the incredulity of the disbelievers that God would send an ordinary human being to be His messenger. On the disbelievers' desire to see an angel appear as a messenger, see 6:8–9c; also see 11:12; 15:7; 17:92–95; 21:3; 25:21; 43:53. Some note that the disbelievers employed this kind of insult against the Prophet because they knew that the great kings, rulers, and notables considered themselves above walking with ordinary people in the markets (Q). A response to this question comes in v. 20: *And We sent not any messengers before thee but that they ate food and walked in the markets.*

8 Similar questions are posed by the disbelievers about the Prophet in 11:12 and about Moses in 43:53: *Why, then, have armlets of gold not been cast upon him, and why do angels not accompany him?* They believed that a messenger who was not wealthy and did not have lands from which to sustain himself could not be superior to them; so they felt no imperative to follow him (R). Similar arguments were made by the Israelites against Saul in 2:247.

9 For al-Rāzī, since it is not necessarily a problem that miraculous or extraordinary phenomena—such as those mentioned in v. 8—are not

and then go astray and cannot find a way. (10) Blessed is He Who, if He will, shall appoint for thee what is better than that—Gardens with rivers running below, and He will appoint for thee palaces. (11) Nay, but they deny the Hour, and We have prepared a Blaze for those who deny the Hour. (12) When it sees them from a place far off, they will hear its raging and roaring. (13) And when they are cast bound together into a narrow place thereof, they will, there and then, call to be destroyed. (14) "Call not this Day for one destruction, but call for

associated with prophets, perhaps this is meant to express astonishment that the wrongdoers would waste time making such useless comparisons or descriptions. For al-Qurṭubī, they offer such comparisons for the purposes of denying the Prophet. They *then go astray and cannot find a way* to accomplish their denial of the Prophet, meaning their parables or descriptions are of no avail (Q), which some interpret to mean that they can find no way out of the comparative descriptions they have given of the Prophet (Ṭ), presumably because this traps them, in a sense, in their state of rejection.

10 This verse states that the rewards of the Hereafter are greater than the *treasure* and *garden* that the disbelievers mention in v. 8 (Ṭ). For some this means that if God willed, He could bestow both gardens in the Hereafter and palaces in this world (R). On the meaning of *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c. *Palaces* renders *quṣūr,* which according to some commentators meant for the Quraysh any dwelling that was made of stone, regardless of size (IK, Q, Ṭ). See also 7:74, which mentions the *castles* (*quṣūr*) built by the Thamūd, the people of Ṣāliḥ, and also 22:45.

11 *The Hour* refers to the end of the world and the Day of Resurrection (Q). *Blaze* renders *saʿīr,* which means a flame or kindled fire and is in this sense a rough synonym for *nār,* usually rendered "fire." Some consider it one of the names of Hell (R). For *saʿīr* (*Blaze* or *blazing flame*), see also 4:10, 55; 17:97; 22:4; 31:21; 33:64; 34:12; 35:6; 42:7; 48:13; 67:5, 10, 11; 76:4; 84:12. Because of the term *prepared,* some theologians understand this verse to support the idea that one's ultimate end is predestined and that "those who are saved were saved in their mother's womb" (R), though the verse can also be read as saying that Hell is prepared as a destination for those people who choose freely to *deny the Hour.*

12 *When it sees them* means when Hell sees them (Q) or when the custodians of Hell see them; here Hell is a metonym, as when one says, "Ask the town," meaning, "Ask the people of the town" (R). Al-Qurṭubī glosses this verse with a *ḥadīth* describing the Fire that will come upon the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection as having a neck sprouting out of it with two eyes that see, two ears that hear, and a tongue that speaks, declaring that it has been entrusted with those who associated others with God and that it will swallow them as a bird swallows a sesame seed. Some theologians (such as the Muʿtazilites) disallow the notion of such attributes, but others see no problem with God's granting the Fire such faculties (R).

13–14 In a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, the constriction of the *narrow place* is described using the metaphor of a spearhead forced into the shaft of a spear (Q). *Bound together* is interpreted by some to mean that people will be chained to their individual satans; for others, their hands will be chained to their necks (Q, Z). *To be destroyed* renders *thubūr,* which is also thought of as a kind of lamentation (Ṭ). According to this understanding, these verses would be rendered, "They will, there and then, call out 'Woe!' 'Do not call out "Woe!" once, but call out "Woe!" many times!'" *Call for many destructions* refers to the fact that the punishment will not be a solitary event; it will be enduring and come in many forms, and there will be no relief from it, so that those experiencing it will call out to be destroyed (or call out "Woe!") over and over again (R, Z). Other verses that mention the unremitting punishment include 4:56: *As often as their skins are*

many destructions!" (15) Say, "Is that better, or the Garden of everlastingness which is promised to the reverent?" It is for them a reward and a journey's end. (16) Therein they shall have whatsoever they will, abiding. It is a binding promise upon your Lord. (17) And on the Day He gathers them and that which they worship apart from God, He will say, "Was it you who caused these servants of Mine to go astray, or did they [themselves] go astray from the way?" (18) They will say, "Glory be to Thee! It does not befit us to take protectors apart from Thee! But Thou didst grant them and their fathers enjoyment until they forgot the Reminder. And they were a people ruined. (19) They have denied you

*consumed, We shall replace them with other skins;* and 20:74: *His shall be Hell, wherein he neither dies nor lives.*

15–16 *Everlastingness* renders *khuld,* from the same root as *abiding* (*khālid*) in v. 16, which is often used in the Quran to describe the denizens of Paradise and Hell as *abiding therein* (e.g., v. 76) and which means literally "to stay" or "to remain," by implication in an everlasting manner. When understood in relation to the Hereafter, to "stay" or "remain" in a place can be interpreted as tantamount to being there forever, or as it is said here everlastingly. That this Garden is *promised* to the reverent and that this promise is characterized as *binding* (*masʾūl*) raises theological issues related to whether human beings deserve Paradise and whether God is in any sense obligated to bestow it as a gift from Him. Some understand the word *masʾūl* in a more literal way to mean "something asked for" by human beings rather than "what one is obligated to do" (Ṭ), while others see in this a reference to the angels' supplication to God in 40:8: *Our Lord, make them enter Gardens of Eden that Thou hast promised them* (R). *Binding* (*masʾūl*) is interpreted to signify obligation in the sense of a promise that one keeps rather than a debt that one owes (Q). Although *binding* reflects idiomatic Arabic, such notions of God's being "obligated" often fall outside of what is theologically acceptable for many commentators, especially those who subscribe to the Ashʿarite school, for whom God's absolute Will and Omnipotence are always paramount. This extends to questions of how Paradise and Hell constitute a promise or threat that He will carry out. Some theologians maintain that God is not "obligated" to fulfill a promise or act upon a threat, since His Will is supreme. For other theologians, such as the Muʿtazilites and many others, these verses indicate that those who receive Paradise are indeed those who deserve it (R). Receiving and having free access to what one desires in Paradise or with God is also mentioned in 16:31; 39:34; 42:22; 50:35.

17–18 The *Day* refers to the Day of Judgment, while *that which they worship* refers to other beings who become objects of worship such as the angels, jinn, idols, or even Jesus (Q); the idols will be made to speak just as the parts of the human body will be made to speak, as in 36:65 (Q, R). This question posed by God to the objects of worship is similar to that posed to Jesus in 5:116: *And when God said, "O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?'" he said, "Glory be to Thee! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right."* *Protectors* renders *awliyāʾ,* which can also mean "friends," "allies," or "saints" (see 3:28c; 4:88–90c; 5:55c). To be granted *enjoyment* refers to being given the opportunity to indulge in the goods of the world. Forgetting of the reminder (or remembrance) of God is described in similar terms in 23:110: *But you took them in mockery, till it made you forget My remembrance.* The forgetting of God is also mentioned in 7:51; 23:110; 45:34; 58:19; 59:19; see 9:67c; 45:34c.

19 *They have denied you* is spoken to those who *worship* things *apart from God* in v. 17; it is they who *cannot avert* the Punishment of God or

in what you say; so you cannot avert [it] or [find] help." And whosoever among you does wrong, We shall make him taste a great punishment. (20) And We sent not any messengers before thee but that they ate food and walked in the markets. And We made some of you a trial for others; will you be patient? And thy Lord is Seeing. (21) And those who hope not to meet Us say, "Why have not the angels been sent down unto us, or why have we not seen our Lord?" Indeed, they have waxed arrogant in their souls and were greatly insolent. (22) On the Day they see the angels, there shall be no glad tidings for the guilty that Day. And they will say, "A barrier, forbidden!" (23) And We shall turn to whatever work they have done, and make it scattered dust. (24) That Day the inhabitants

find any *help* against God (Q). Another opinion is that these words are spoken to the Prophet and refer to the disbelievers' rejection of him and the truths about which he and his followers speak (Q); in keeping with this understanding, *so you cannot avert [it]* is read by some in the third person, "so they cannot avert [it]," where the "they" refers to the idolaters (Q, Z). *Avert* is also read without an implied object, so that it would mean "to turn oneself," that is, to turn in repentance; or it means that they will be unable to engage in any kind of ruse or trick to escape the situation (R).

20 This verse is understood as a response to the questions posed in v. 7 regarding the humanity and natural limitations of the Prophet. The *trial* is understood by some to refer to the scorn exhibited by the haughty Quraysh toward the impoverished Companions, as described in 46:11: *Had it been good, they would not have outstripped us in [attaining] it;* that is, the low social status and poverty of some of the Companions kept the socially superior Quraysh from embracing the faith (R); see commentary on 6:52–53. It can also be extended to refer to human beings in general with respect to their being given different physical, intellectual, and spiritual gifts. *Will you be patient?* is understood to be addressed to the believers, encouraging them to bear the taunts of the disbelievers and to endure the poverty and weakness they suffer; it is also understood implicitly as the command "Be patient" (Q).

21 Similar questions are posed to Moses in 2:55: *O Moses, we will not believe thee till we see God openly.* In other passages, including 6:8 and 17:90–93, the Quraysh demand that the Prophet produce marvels before they will believe in him; see also 25:7c.

22 *No glad tidings for the guilty* refers to the fact that the guilty will only see the angels upon death or on the Day of Resurrection (Q, R), which are two possible meanings for the word *Day.* The phrase *A barrier, forbidden!* renders an idiomatic Arabic exclamation used when one encounters an enemy or attacker and wants the attack to be stopped or hindered (R). According to one interpretation, these words are spoken by the disbelievers who, upon seeing the fearsome sight of angels, desire to be protected from them, while others understand these to be the words of the angels keeping the disbelievers out of the gates of the Garden (R). The warning to the "guilty" about meeting the angels is expressed in a different way in 2:210: *Do they wait for naught less than that God should come in the shadows of clouds, with the angels, and that the matter should have been decreed?;* see also 6:158 and 16:33.

23 The works of filial piety that the guilty believed to constitute good deeds will come to naught because of their disbelief (Q), though *work* may also be understood to refer to any action of theirs (R). *Dust* renders *habāʾ*, which is typically thought to refer to the particles floating in the air that are made visible by a shaft of light. Regarding the broader Quranic discussion of deeds coming to naught, see 2:217; 3:21–22; 5:5, 53; 6:88; 7:147; 9:17; 11:16; 18:105; 33:19; 39:65; 47:9, 28, 32.

24 Some read this verse as a response to the question in v. 15: *Is that better (khayr), or the*

of the Garden shall have the best dwelling place and the most beautiful rest. (25) And the Day when the heavens are split open with clouds and the angels are sent down in a descent, (26) that Day the true sovereignty will belong to the Compassionate, and that will be a difficult Day for the disbelievers. (27) And that Day the wrongdoer will bite his hands, saying, "Would that I had taken a way with the Messenger! (28) Oh, woe unto me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend! (29) He did indeed cause me to go astray from the Reminder after its having come to me, and Satan is a forsaker of man." (30) And the Messenger will say, "O my Lord! Truly my people have taken this Quran for foolishness." (31) Thus did We make for every prophet an enemy from among the guilty, and thy Lord suffices as a Guide and a Helper. (32) And the disbelievers say,

*Garden of everlastingness?* In this verse *best* (also *khayr*) can be read as the superlative ("best") or the comparative ("better"). *Rest* (*maqīl*) is understood to refer specifically to a place where one takes the midday sleep (*qaylūlah;* see also 24:58), raising questions for some commentators about whether one sleeps in the Garden or whether there will be a kind of intermission during the Day of Judgment (occurring in the middle of the "Day" like the ordinary midday sleep) when the reckoning of deeds will be suspended (Q, R, Z).

25 The splitting or opening of the heavens when the world is destroyed is also mentioned in 42:5; 55:37; 69:16; 78:19; 82:1; 84:1. The descent or coming of the angels at the end of the world is also mentioned in 2:210; 6:158; 89:22.

26 Some take *true sovereignty* to mean that on that Day there will be no illusion of any sovereignty other than God's, even though true sovereignty was always God's, and all other claims to sovereignty over anything will disappear (Q, R). On the concept of *sovereignty* (*mulk*), see 67:1c; 36:83c.

27–29 Although some commentators tie these verses to a specific person who was said to have been misled by his friend away from Islam and from following the Prophet (IK, Q), others do not consider it to be specific at all (R), as such expressions of regret over one's conduct in the world also appear in 6:27; 33:66; 68:29–31; 78:40; 89:24.

*The Reminder* can be a reference to the Quran itself (one of whose names is the Reminder) or the remembrance of God, as the latter is also part of the lexical meaning of *dhikr* (R). *Satan* can refer to Iblīs himself, but the Quran also uses the word *shaytān* in a more extended sense to refer to the helpers of Satan and to certain human beings (see 2:14c; 6:112c), so that this phrase could also be read as referring to that false friend ("the satan" rather than "Satan") who misleads one away from the truth (R).

30 These words are understood to be spoken by the Prophet in the Hereafter, but they also can have occurred during his earthly life (R). The people took it *for foolishness* when they either thought it was sorcery (cf. 37:15) or simply called it a lie (Ṭ).

31 That the Prophet Muhammad had obstacles in common with previous prophets is a major theme of the Quran, as in 6:112: *Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn, who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive.* Elsewhere it is mentioned that all the prophets were in some way mocked by their peoples or opposed by the affluent and powerful among those to whom they were sent; see the stories of the prophets Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, Shuʿayb, and Moses in 7:59–136. On the concept of God's Sufficiency, see 4:137c; 3:173c. For some commentators the subsequent mention of several prophets and their enemies in vv. 31–39 is a direct continuation of the message of this verse.

32 The Quran was revealed over the course of the Prophet's entire mission of twenty-two or twenty-three years; see the essay "The Islamic

"Why was the Quran not sent down upon him as a single whole?" It is so, that We may make firm thine heart thereby. And We have recited it unto thee in a measured pace. (33) And they come not to thee with any parable, but that We bring to thee the truth and a better explanation. (34) [As for] those who are gathered upon their faces to Hell, their place is worse and they are further astray from the way. (35) And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book and placed with him his brother as a helper. (36) Then We said, "Go to the people who have denied Our signs." Then We destroyed them completely. (37) And Noah's people: when they denied the messengers, We drowned them and made of them a sign for mankind. And We have prepared for the wrongdoers a painful punishment. (38) And ᶜĀd and Thamūd and the inhabitants of al-Rass, and many generations

View of the Quran." The message of this verse is connected with 11:120: *All that We recount unto thee of the stories of the messengers is that whereby We make firm thine heart.* Some understand *We have recited it unto thee in a measured pace* to mean, "We have explained to thee its interpretation" (IK, Ṭ). Many commentators highlight the relationship of the Quran to the events of the life of the Prophet, the gradual legislation of commands and prohibitions, and the manner in which successive revelations were both necessary for the establishment of the Islamic community and a source of support and help for the Prophet during his struggles with his enemies (IK, Q, R). Al-Rāzī understands the gradual application of the commands and prohibitions, the memorization and understanding of one part at a time, and the responsiveness of the revelation to the questions and states of the believers to be among the benefits of the successive revelation of the Quran; see also commentary on 17:106: *And [We sent it down] as a recitation We have divided in parts, that thou mayest recite it unto men in intervals, and We sent it down in successive revelations.* At the same time, some commentators describe how the Quran descended all at once from the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) or *Mother of the Book* (13:39) into the highest state of the cosmos ("the heaven of this world") and, once established there, descended gradually over time to the Prophet (IK).

33 *Parable* renders *mathal,* which also means "symbol" and which can in this context also convey the meaning of "comparison" or "description"; here the term refers to arguments or challenges the disbelievers used in order to try to discredit the Prophet and the Quran (IK). *Explanation* renders *tafsīr,* a word that in its later technical usage refers to the genre of the exegesis of the Quran, but that here refers to an explanation or clarification of the truth that is always better than the challenges presented by the Prophet's opponents (IK, Q).

34 That those who are astray are *gathered upon their faces* in the Hereafter, as a consequence of disbelief and evil actions, is also mentioned in 17:97 and 54:48. The significance of punishment in connection with the human face is discussed in 33:66c, which also refers to such verses as 8:50; 14:50; 23:104; 27:90.

35–36 Sometimes the command to *go* to Pharaoh is addressed to Moses in the singular (20:24), while in other verses, such as v. 36, the command, in the dual form, is addressed to Moses and Aaron. Al-Qurṭubī points out that the dual can be used even though the command was directed at Moses only, or it means that Moses was commanded first and then, as described in 20:29–32, Moses asked God to make Aaron his *helper,* after which they were both commanded to go to Pharaoh. *Destroy* renders *dammara,* also used in 7:137; 17:16; 26:172; 27:51; 37:136; 47:10.

37–38 These various peoples are also mentioned together in 50:12–13. For the Quranic account of Noah and the destruction of his people, see 7:59–64; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–22; and

between them, (39) for each We set forth parables, and each We ruined utterly. (40) And indeed they passed by the town upon which fell the evil rain. Have they not seen it? Nay, but they hope not for a resurrection. (41) And when they see thee they do naught but take thee in mockery: "Is this the one whom God sent as a messenger? (42) He would indeed have nearly led us astray from our gods, had we not been steadfast to them." They will know, when they see the punishment, who is further astray from the way. (43) Hast thou considered the one who takes his caprice as his god? Wouldst thou be a guardian over him? (44) Or do you suppose that most of them hear or understand? Truly they are but as

*Sūrah* 71. For the account of the ʿĀd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16; 54:18–21. For that of the Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31. There is no agreement as to the identity of the people of *al-Rass* or even if the term is a proper name, since the word can also mean "the well" or "the pit" (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī lists several possibilities for the geographical location of these people and the prophets who were sent to them, including one that says the people of al-Rass were descended from or were part of the people of the Thamūd and another that says the name comes from the fact that these people threw their prophet into a well or pit; on *al-Rass,* also see 50:12–14c. Al-Rāzī prefers the opinion that none of these details are ascertainable and the significance of the story lies in the fact that these were people who, like the ʿĀd and the Thamūd, were destroyed because of their disbelief.

39 *Set forth parables* means that God provided them with exhortations and proofs (R, Ṭ). *Parable* renders *mathal,* a form of descriptive comparison used to convey a message that can encompass forms of address broader than metaphor or allegory; on *mathal,* also see 16:60c; 25:33c. The verb phrase rendered by *ruined utterly* also connotes the sense of something crumbling.

40 This verse is understood to refer to the people of Lot (Ṭ). The *evil rain* (cf. 27:58) is a rain of stones (R, Ṭ), causing destruction of the town. This verse is alluding to the fact that the Quraysh, in their journeys for purposes of trade, would have passed by such ruins (R). This is also connected to another Quranic theme repeated in the question, *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end?* (e.g., 12:109; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10). *They hope not for a resurrection,* referring to the Quraysh, can mean both that they are not hopeful for such a reality and that it is something they do not believe will happen ("hope" in the sense of "anticipate"; R). Such language of "not hoping" to meet God or be resurrected also appears in 4:104; 10:7, 11, 15; 25:21; 45:14; 71:13; 78:27.

41 On the disbelievers' incredulity regarding God's choice of Muhammad and his followers instead of them, see 46:11c; 6:53c. Cf. 43:6–7: *How many a prophet did We send to those of old? Yet never did a prophet come unto them, but that they mocked him.* The mockery carried out by the disbelievers is a common trait ascribed to them (see, e.g., 2:14–15; 4:140; 5:57–58; 6:5; 31:6; 45:9, 35).

42 For al-Rāzī, this verse alludes to the seriousness and diligence with which the Prophet continually presented proofs and evidence, but the disbelievers were *steadfast* to their gods, kept themselves loyal to them (Q), and remained firm (R).

43 The idolaters obey their passions to the point of worshipping them (Aj, Z). In this context some commentators relate that some were so fickle that, upon seeing a better or more beautiful idol than the one they were worshipping, they would quickly abandon the first and begin worshipping the second (Aj, Q, R). This verse suggests to the Prophet that those who act on impulse and respond to their passions cannot be persuaded to worship the One God (Aj, Q). See also 88:22: *Thou art not a warder over them.*

44 The disbelievers are like cattle in that they do not think and restrict their concerns to eating and drinking; they are even *further astray,*

cattle. Nay, they are further astray from the way. (45) Hast thou not considered thy Lord, how He spreads out the shade—and had He willed, He could have made it still—and then We make the sun an indicator of it; (46) then We withdraw it unto Ourselves, a gentle withdrawal. (47) And He it is Who made the night a garment for you, and made sleep repose, and made day a resurrection. (48) And He it is Who sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy.

because cattle are not condemned for acting like this, but human beings are (Q). Also, cattle follow their natures, know how to obey their herders, and can hear and understand insofar as they are animals, but disbelievers disobey God and have neither eyes nor ears for the truth (IK, Ṭ). For some, this verse means that, although cattle do not possess knowledge, they are not guilty of the compound ignorance of both not knowing and not knowing that they do not know. Cattle, moreover, know what is good and bad for them, whereas some human beings do not understand how good God has been to them and that Satan is their enemy (Z), and thus they do not know how to seek the greater good of the Hereafter and avoid its punishments (Aj). Other verses that compare human beings to animals include 2:65; 7:176; 29:41; 31:19; 62:5; see 2:65c.

45 Here the *shade* refers to the time from the break of dawn until sunrise (Ṭ), a state between total illumination and total darkness (R). According to this interpretation, *shade* (*ẓill*) could also be rendered "twilight." On *ẓill,* also see 56:30c, where *shade* is discussed in connection with the Garden. *He could have made it still* refers to the fact that God could cause the twilight to last without the sun overtaking it and causing it to disappear (IK). *We make the sun an indicator of it* is interpreted to mean that it is through opposites that things are known, and thus the shade is known and understood in contrast to the shining of the sun (IK, R). In a sense, it is through knowing the sun's shining state that one knows the twilight (Z). Just as the sun moves gradually through the sky, so too does the shade or twilight gradually change (Ṭb).

46 *It* refers to the *shade* (*ẓill*) or twilight from the previous verse. The twilight is withdrawn as the sun rises and the light erases the shade (Ṭb). Some interpret *gentle* (*yasīr*) to mean "quickly" or "in a hidden way" (Ṭ), while others take it to mean that the withdrawal is gradual (Z). This verse also has connotations of the coming of the Hour (the end of the world and the Resurrection), which is spoken of as being *easy* (also *yasīr*) for God to accomplish, as in 29:19 and 50:44 (R). As a spiritual allegory, vv. 45–46 are understood to mean that the human soul (and indeed every created thing) is a shadow cast from the Unseen; the sun of sacred knowledge points to its ultimate nature, and God draws it gradually to Himself until the soul is annihilated (*fanāʾ*) in Him (Aj).

47 In connection with waking as a *resurrection* (*nushūr*), some mention the proverb, "Sleep is the brother of death" (Ṭ). Sleep is also associated with death in 6:60: *He it is Who takes your souls by night,* and also 39:42: *God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not during their sleep;* see commentary on these two verses. The *night, sleep,* and *day* are described using similar language in 78:9–11.

48 For *sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy,* referring to the gathering of a rainstorm before the water starts to fall, see 7:57c. *Winds* as signs of God and blessings are also mentioned in 2:164; 7:57; 15:22; 27:63; 30:46; 45:5. *Pure* can mean both something that is pure and something by which other things are purified; hence the phrase could also be rendered "purifying water" (IK, R), an idea found in 8:11: *He . . . sent down upon you water from the sky to purify you thereby.* This latter verse is generally connected with an incident where an unexpected rain allowed the Muslims to perform their ritual ablutions with water before a battle, and several commentators use the present verse to discuss the details of the purifying properties of water and whether other substances share those properties.

And We send down from Heaven pure water, (49) that We may revive a dead land thereby and give drink to many cattle and men We created. (50) And indeed We have distributed it among them, that they may reflect. But most of mankind refuse to be aught but ungrateful. (51) And had We willed, We would have sent a warner to every town. (52) So obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them by means of it with a great striving. (53) And He it is Who mixed the two seas, one sweet, satisfying, the other salty, bitter, and set between them a divide and a

49 The revival of a *dead land* is also mentioned in 43:11 and 50:11.

50 *Distributed it* means that the rain does not always fall in the same place, coming down on different lands at different times (IK, R); even though rain falls every year, God chooses to bless certain lands with it some years and other lands with it in other years (Aj). As in many verses that mention water in its various forms, water also symbolizes spiritual blessings that provide life to the soul through knowledge and wisdom (Aj). The lack of gratitude in the face of beneficent rain is interpreted to refer specifically to human beings attributing blessings like rain to astrological events such as the setting of a star, rather than to the Mercy and Power of God (IK, Q).

51 This verse is understood as a magnification and praise of the Prophet Muhammad, implying that God singled him out and deemed him to be worthy to carry out the task of establishing God's final religion alone (IK, R). Al-Ṭabarī reads it to mean that God is telling the Prophet that it may have been easier on him if more messengers were sent to other towns, but now Muhammad has to bear a greater burden himself, and v. 51 reminds him not to obey the desires of the disbelievers. According to al-Qurṭubī, it implies that, unlike the rain that descends upon all lands (v. 50), the Prophet is sent to one land, and Ibn ʿAjībah notes that the Prophet was necessarily possessed of exceptional wisdom and insight to be able to convey a message that would give the different people of the world all that they needed. The plain sense of the verse also allows an interpretation that singles out the town of Makkah.

52 *Strive against them by means of it* is understood to mean striving (*jihād*) with the help of the Quran (IK, Ṭ) or of Islam (Q, Ṭ). Al-Qurṭubī and others dismiss the opinion that this refers to the use of force, since this is a Makkan *sūrah* and the permission to use force had not been granted yet. See the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

53 That God *mixed the two seas* means that one flows into the other (Ṭ), though some understand the verb to mean "to allow to flow" (Q), so that the phrase would then be translated, "God caused the two seas to flow." By *sweet* is understood the water of rivers and streams, and by *salty* the water of the oceans (Ṭ), although these terms also have symbolic meanings. The idea of the *two seas* is also mentioned in 18:60; 27:61; 35:12; 55:19. For the range of interpretation of the *two seas,* see 35:12c; 55:19–20c. Symbolically, some interpret the sweet water to be a reference to the Law (*Sharīʿah*), because it is easy to attain, while the salty water is ultimate truth (*ḥaqīqah*), which can only come through spiritual effort and courage (Aj); alternately, in the heart of a believer there is both hope and fear of God, corresponding to the sweet and salty water, respectively, and neither should overpower the other in one's soul (Qu).

*Barrier* renders *barzakh,* which also appears in 23:100 and 55:20 and which connotes a barrier or an isthmus between two things as well as purgatory when considered eschatologically; see 3:169–71c and also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." Here it is coupled with *forbidden,* forming a phrase identical to the exclamation spoken by either the angels or the disbelievers in the Fire in v. 22 (*A barrier, forbidden!*), though in the present verse it is descriptive rather than imperative.

barrier, forbidden. (54) And He it is Who created a human being from water, and made of him lineages and [kinships through] marriages. And thy Lord is Powerful. (55) And they worship apart from God that which neither benefits them nor harms them. And the disbeliever is a partisan against his Lord. (56) And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. (57) Say, "I ask not of you any reward for it, save that whosoever will may take a way unto his Lord." (58) And trust in the Living, Who dies not, and hymn His praise. And God suffices as One Aware of the sins of His servants, (59) He Who created the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in six days, then mounted the Throne, the Compassionate [is He]. So ask, regarding Him, One

54 *Lineages and marriages* refer to kinship by blood and kinship through marriage, respectively (Q, R, Ṭ). The creation of every living thing from water is mentioned in 21:30 and 24:45. On the nature of all human beings' common origin, see commentary on 4:1: *Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women.*

55 The common motif of disbelievers worshipping what *neither harms nor benefits* them is also found in 6:71; 7:192, 197; 10:18, 106; 13:16; 22:12. *Partisan* (*ẓahīr*) is understood to mean that they help or support Satan against God (R, Ṭ). Some understand *ẓahīr* to connote the sense of being "left behind" or "disregarded," in which case the verse would mean, "And the disbeliever deems his Lord unimportant" (Q, R).

56 This is one of several passages to refer to the Prophet as *a bearer of glad tidings* and as *a warner* (5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 33:45; 34:28; 35:24; 48:8); in other verses these functions are attributed to all prophets (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56).

57 The Prophet is asking people to believe for their own sake, not his (R); all the Prophet desires is for them to receive what he is giving them (Z). Alternately, he does not ask them for any reward, but rather is asking them to spend their wealth in the way of God (R). For some, to *take a way unto* God means to do so through charitable giving (R). According to some, the word rendered by *save* (*illā*) forms a grammatical break, such that the verse would read, "I ask not of you any reward for it, but [let] whosoever wills take a way unto his Lord [by giving in the way of God]" (Q). References to messengers of God not asking for a reward from people, but only expecting their reward from God can also be found in 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180; 34:47; 36:21; 38:86; 42:23.

58 On God as *the Living*, see 2:255c. On the concept of God's "sufficiency," see 2:137c.

59 On the creation of the heavens and the earth *in six days* (cf. 7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 32:4; 50:38; 57:4) and God's "mounting" the Throne (cf. 7:54; 10:3; 32:4), see 7:54c; 11:7c; 32:4c. Some commentators, such as al-Rāzī, prefer to interpret the days here literally and not to delve into symbolic interpretations, considering superfluous those interpretations that understand these *days* as like the days mentioned in 22:47: *Truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of that which you reckon.* They consider questions like the nature of these *six days* to be among the inquiries that are essentially imponderable and unknowable, since God could just as easily have created the heavens and the earth in an instant; other such questions include why there are specifically five daily prayers (R).

The final part of this verse is read in several ways. As translated, *the Compassionate* is read as the subject of the sentence, and the predicate is everything that precedes it. Others read *the Compassionate* as an appositive following *the Living* from the previous verse. Still others read *the Compassionate* as the start of a new sentence; so that it would read, "[As for] the Compassionate, ask, regarding Him, One Who is aware" (R).

Who is aware. (60) And when it is said unto them, "Prostrate before the Compassionate," they say, "And what is the Compassionate? Shall we prostrate before that [to] which you command us?" And it increases them in aversion. (61) Blessed is He Who placed constellations in the sky and placed therein a lamp and a shining moon. (62) And He it is Who made the night and the day

Some read the final phrase as, "So ask, regarding it"; that is, ask about the creation of the heavens and the earth; in this case the *One Who is aware* is thought to refer to God Himself and the Prophet is being commanded to rely on God for knowledge of such matters (R). Others say *One Who is aware* refers to Gabriel (Bḍ) or to a person who is wise in such matters, though the latter seems unlikely if this command is addressed to the Prophet.

60 It is said that the idolatrous Arabs were unfamiliar with using *the Compassionate* (*al-Raḥmān*) as a way of referring to God. For example, at the signing of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah (see 2:190–94c; and the introduction to *Sūrah* 48), the Prophet instructed that it be written, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," but the Qurayshī negotiators objected and said they did not know of either name; they wanted it to read, "In Thy Name, O God" (*bi'smika Allāhumma;* IK). Some note that the idolaters said that they only knew of one *raḥmān,* namely, Musaylimah, a contemporary of Muhammad who also claimed to be a prophet, who had taken on the title Raḥmān al-Yamāmah, or "the Compassionate One of [the region of] Yamāmah" (Q, Z). Most commentators believe this meant that the idolaters were questioning the name *al-Raḥmān,* not the existence of that to which it referred (R). Some read *command* in the third person, so that it would be translated, "Shall we prostrate before that [to] which he commands us?" (Q, Z). According to some reports, upon the revelation of this verse the Prophet and other Companions prostrated, and the idolaters imitated them in mockery, which is what is meant by *and it increases them in aversion* (R).

61 *Constellations* (*burūj;* see also 15:16; 85:1) is usually considered to refer to the twelve constellations of the zodiac, which are found in that band of the sky through which the sun, moon, and planets move. *Burūj* is connected by some to *tabarruj,* meaning a "display of adornments," because of the radiance of the constellations (Z). *Burūj* can also mean "towers" (cf. 4:78), and in this sense *burūj* refers to the "houses" where the seven astrological planets (the five visible planets plus the sun and moon) "reside" (IK, Z). The planets are mentioned or alluded to, according to some commentators, in 23:17; 51:3; 70:40; 79:5; 81:15–16; see commentary on those verses, and also 2:102, in which some have seen a reference to the origins of the astrological tradition. However, although the cosmological sciences, of which astrology is a part, were common in Islamic civilization, and the practice of astrology in its descriptive and predictive aspects is practiced by some people throughout the Islamic world, Islamic Law forbids predictive (but not symbolic) astrology and astrological magic. The zodiacal signs and constellations, which are associated with different cosmological qualities (and have both a macrocosmic and a microcosmic significance), are sometimes interpreted to symbolize the states of being and stations of the soul, including the attainment of various kinds of virtue and wisdom (Aj).

Most commentators interpret the *lamp* to be the sun, which is what it is called in 71:16 and 78:13 (Q), although some read *lamp* (*sirāj*) in the plural as "lamps" (*suruj*) and understand it to mean the stars (Q). *Lamp* can also be understood as an allusion to the Prophet Muhammad, who is called *a luminous lamp* in 33:46.

62 For some, this means that whatever one could not accomplish (by way of worship or good deeds) in the day one could accomplish at night, and vice versa (R, Ṭ). In this vein, Ibn Kathīr mentions the *ḥadīth:* "God, glorified and resplendent is He, extends His Hand by night so that He might forgive the one who sinned during the day, and He extends His Hand by day so that He might forgive the one who sinned during the night." *Succesive* renders *khilfah,* which some understand to mean "opposed," so that this verse would mean, "He it is who made the night and the day opposites," that

successive, for whosoever desires to reflect or desires to be thankful. (63) The servants of the Compassionate are those who walk humbly upon the earth, and when the ignorant address them, say, "Peace," (64) and who pass the night before their Lord, prostrating and standing [in prayer], (65) and who say, "Our Lord! Avert the punishment of Hell from us! Truly its punishment is inescapable. (66) What an evil dwelling place and station!" (67) and who, when they

is, one dark and the other light (Q, Ṭ). The alternation of the night and day is cited in the Quran as a sign of God (see 3:190; 10:6, 23:80; 45:5), as is the passing of the day into the night and of the night into the day (see 3:27; 22:61; 31:29; 35:13; 57:6); see 36:40c. One *desires to reflect* on *or desires to be thankful* for the blessings of the day and night (Ṭ).

63 To walk *humbly* is interpreted to mean with dignity, tranquility, and forbearance (IK, Ṭ) and refers not only to walking, but also to the general conduct of one's life (Q); see 17:37c, which discusses the manner in which the Prophet walked. Ibn Kathīr mentions an incident in which ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb encountered a younger man walking meekly and leisurely and asked him if he was ill, to which the man replied no. ʿUmar then commanded him to walk with strength, indicating that humbly does not mean weakly. Ibn Kathīr also mentions a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said, "When you come to the prayer, do not do so in a state of haste. Come to it with tranquility and pray whatever you can of it, and whatever you miss, make it up." On saying, *Peace,* see also 43:89, where the believers are instructed to respond with "Peace." Here it is interpreted to mean that, though they are subjected to ignorant behavior, they should not respond in kind (Ṭ). Some interpret it to mean that they should speak appropriately and correctly (*sadād;* Q, Ṭ). The saying of "Peace" is associated with the paradisal state in 10:10; 13:24; 14:23; 19:62; 33:44; 36:58; 56:26.

Some commentators point out that this "peace" (*salām*) is not a greeting or declaration of peace, but must mean something like "to be free of" (*tasallama min*), so that the believers are being commanded to say, "I am free of or disassociated from you," meaning, "There is neither good nor bad between us" (Q). This interpretation is associated with the opinion that this verse (and other verses similar in their peaceful message) are abrogated (i.e., have had their binding effect overturned) by later verses that command the believers to fight the disbelievers. This interpretation would, if applied to identical uses of *salām* throughout the Quran, entail unacceptable meanings; for example, it would mean that God, instead of saying *Peace!* to believers in the Garden, would be saying, "I am free of you" (36:58), or that the believers would say this to God (33:44), or Abraham would be declaring himself "free of" the angelic visitors (51:25). Elsewhere other words related to "peace" (*salām;* such as *silm* in 2:208) are understood by some to mean something other than their plain sense by citing the meaning of a word that also derives from the root *s-l-m* in order to understand such verses as abrogating those verses that command peace or reconciliation with nonbelievers. Al-Qurṭubī, after mentioning the opinion regarding abrogation, states, however, that no question of abrogation need arise in this case, since the verse is commanding one to have a certain attitude of restraint and forbearance, which is not a legal command or prohibition and hence not subject to abrogation according to any mainstream understanding of that concept; regarding the issue of abrogation see 2:106c.

64 Praying at night is an important supererogatory practice in Islam. The Prophet would rise to pray most nights before dawn (to the point where some authorities considered it a prescribed act of worship specific to him), and many pious Muslims continue to do so to this day; see 17:79c; 73:1–2c.

65–66 *Inescapable* renders *gharām,* a word that is etymologically related to being infatuated or enamored with something, which the commentators connect to the sense that one cannot free oneself from the object of one's infatuation

spend, are neither prodigal nor miserly—and between them is a just mean— (68) and who call not upon another god along with God, and slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right, and who fornicate not—for whosoever does that shall meet requital, (69) and the punishment shall be multiplied for him on the Day of Resurrection. He shall abide therein, humiliated, (70) save for those who repent and believe and perform righteous deeds. For them, God

(Z) and also to the notion of a debt or penalty, since a *gharīm* is a debtor. Some understand it to mean a lasting evil (Ṭ).

67. This verse is similar in message to 17:29: *And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open.* There are different conceptions of what prodigality or waste (*isrāf*) means in Islamic thought. For some any expenditure in disobedience to God is waste (R, Ṭ), and they sometimes cite a proverb: "There is no doing good in waste, and no waste in doing good" (*lā khayr fi'l-isrāf wa lā isrāf fi'l-khayr;* Z). Opinions on what constitutes "waste" range from expenditure on what is bad to being excessive when it comes to even what is good (R). See also 3:147c; 7:80–81c; 10:12c.

*Just mean* renders *qawām,* which carries the sense of a normal state or of uprightness. More than one commentator cites the ethical tradition that a virtue lies between two vices or two extremes or that a good lies between two evils (Ṭ, Z). The idea that the best part of a thing is its "middlemost" or center is common in Islamic thought; see 2:143c (regarding *middle community, ummah wasaṭah*); 23:10–11c.

68 *Requital* renders *athām,* which some say is the name of a valley in Hell, similar to the way in which *woe* (*wayl*) in 2:79 is interpreted as a valley in Hell (see 2:79c), even though both words have idiomatic Arabic meanings as reflected in the translation. The prohibition on slaying any soul *save by right*—that is, when it is warranted as a punishment for a capital transgression according to the Law—is also mentioned in 4:29, 92–93; 5:32; 6:151; 17:33.

69 The multiplication or doubling of the punishment in the Fire is also mentioned in 11:20 and 33:30. Some understand this to mean that the idolaters are guilty of the compound sin of disobedience and rejection of faith, leading to multiplication of punishment (R), or it is interpreted to mean that the punishment will be unremitting and intense (IK). The doubling of punishment can also be intended for those who do evil themselves and lead others toward evil as well.

70 It is reported that some idolaters were inclined to embrace Islam, but they felt they could never escape the weight of previous sins, such as those enumerated in v. 68, and wanted to know if there were some kind of expiation for them; this verse was then revealed (Ṭ). In one account, Abū Hurayrah, a prominent transmitter of *aḥādīth,* was approached by a woman who asked if there was any chance of repentance for her: she had committed adultery, given birth, and killed the child. Abū Hurayrah replied emphatically in the negative. When he told the Prophet, the Prophet rebuked him and asked him whether he knew vv. 68–71. Abū Hurayrah then sought out the woman to convey what the Prophet had said (Ṭ).

For some this verse is abrogated by 4:93: *Whosoever slays a believer willfully, his recompense is Hell, abiding therein* (R, Ṭ). Some have said that a person who enters Islam, learns its commands, and then purposefully kills another believer has no chance at repentance, although even those who hold this opinion make an exception for those who truly regret it and repent (Ṭ). This latter opinion would be in keeping with the universal principle that no sin is unforgivable in an absolute sense. According to most Muslim theologians, God accepts all sincere repentance and can forgive all sin even without repentance except in the case of idolatry (*shirk*), for which one must repent; see 4:48c.

*Replace their evil deeds with good deeds* is understood to mean, not that evil can become good (Ṭ), but that through repentance one's evil deeds are wiped away and one has a good deed recorded for one's soul (R), or that one's evil deeds will

will replace their evil deeds with good deeds, and God is Forgiving, Merciful. (71) And whosoever has repented and works righteousness does indeed repent to God with true repentance. (72) As for those who do not bear false witness, and who, when they pass by some idle talk, pass by with dignity, (73) and who, when they are reminded of the signs of their Lord, fall not deaf and blind against them, (74) and who say, "Our Lord! Grant us comfort in our spouses and our progeny, and make us imams for the reverent," (75) it is they who shall be rewarded with the lofty abode for having been patient, and they will be met therein with salutations and [greetings of] peace, (76) abiding therein. What a beautiful dwelling place and station! (77) Say, "What weight would my Lord give you, were it not for your supplication? But you have denied, and it will be inevitable."

be transformed into good ones in the Hereafter (Ṭ). Others hold that it means that punishment will be replaced by reward (R). For still others, it means that after one's repentance, God will lead one from idolatry to faith, from adultery to wholesome marriage, and from bad actions to good ones in this life and one will then be granted the reward of those righteous deeds (R).

71 This verse can be interpreted to mean that the first mention of repentance, *has repented,* refers to "turning away" (the literal sense of "repentance," or *tawbah*) from idolatry, while the second, *does repent,* refers to turning toward God (R). The verse could also be rendered, "Whosoever repents and performs righteous deeds, truly repents to God with [real] repentance," indicating a present or future action. On repentance (*tawbah*), also see 2:37c; 2:128c; 9:14–15c.

72 *Bear false witness* (cf. 22:30, *false speech*), meaning to testify to a lie (IK), is interpreted by some to mean "to witness what is false (*zūr*)," which would include such things as idolatry, lewd talk, and lascivious song; that is, one should not look at or listen to such false things (R, Ṭ). Praise for those who turn away from *idle talk* (*laghw*) is also mentioned in 23:3 and 28:55. *Dignity* renders *kirām,* a word that also carries the sense of nobility, generosity, and high-mindedness.

73 Spiritual deafness and blindness are mentioned throughout the Quran, as in 22:46, *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind;* see also 2:7c; 2:18c; 5:71c.

74 *Comfort* (lit. "coolness of the eyes") is understood to be of a spiritual nature, not mere worldly enjoyment of children and spouses, regarding which the Quran warns the believers (R; e.g., 64:14); that is, they pray that their families will join them in worship and obedience to God. Moreover, the "coolness of the eyes" will be perfected when they join their families in the Garden in the Hereafter (R); also, they experience joy in seeing them worship God and perform acts of obedience (Ṭ).

Desiring to be imams *for the reverent* means that they desire to achieve a level of devotion that will become a standard for others, and in this respect some understand imām to mean something like "proof" or "example" (R). Here al-Rāzī cites the words of Abraham in 26:84, *And make for me faithful renown among later generations,* and notes that some consider a desire to be exalted in matters of religion to be a positive thing, since such leadership or renown comes through both true knowledge and righteous action.

75–76 *Lofty abode* renders *ghurfah* (cf. 29:58; 34:37; 39:20), which means the uppermost part of a dwelling and here refers to the Garden (R); see 39:20c.

77 The first part of the question is an idiom that, when used declaratively, indicates that one

considers another of no consequence or importance; so the whole question asks, "Of what consequence or importance would you be, were it not for your supplication?" Commentators understand this verse to mean that a human being's purpose is to worship God (R), in keeping with other verses such as 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me.* Here *supplication* (*duʿāʾ*) is also understood to refer to one's worship, prayer, and gratitude to God (R) or one's faith (IK).

The *it* in *it will be inevitable* is understood to refer to death; to battle in general; to the Battle of Badr, where the idolaters suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Muslims (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 8; Ṭ); or to punishment in the Hereafter (R). *Inevitable* renders *lizām,* which also means something that adheres, and some read this to mean, "But you have denied, and that [denial] will cl ing to you," in the form of punishment in the Hereafter (IK).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 26

# The Poets

## *al-Shuᶜarāʾ*

According to most commentators *al-Shuᶜarāʾ* is a Makkan *sūrah,* although some think a small number of verses (vv. 224–27) are Madinan (Āl, Q, Ṭs), and others include v. 197 among the Madinan verses (Āl). It takes its name from v. 224, which mentions *the poets* (*shuᶜarāʾ*) who played a significant role in pre-Islamic Arab culture, a role that endured during the Islamic era, but in a different form and with an altered meaning.

Much of this *sūrah* recounts the stories of previous prophets. It begins with a partial telling of the account of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, his duel with the sorcerers, and the flight from Egypt with the Israelites (vv. 10–66). This section is followed by an account of Abraham (vv. 69–89) and his idolatrous people, and Abraham's prayer of forgiveness for his father. Next told is Noah's story (vv. 105–21), with emphasis on his people's aversion to the individuals of low social status who followed him. This is followed by the stories of Hūd (vv. 123–39), whose people are condemned for their pursuit of domination and worldly glory, and Ṣāliḥ (vv. 141–58), whose people are characterized by their material attachments, and brief accounts of Lot (vv. 160–73) and Shuᶜayb (vv. 176–89).

The last section of the *sūrah* begins with an affirmation that the Quran is indeed revealed from a spiritual source (v. 193), and notes that it was revealed in Arabic to a people who are meant to understand and comprehend it (vv. 197–200). The *sūrah* concludes by saying that no satan or jinn could have brought the Quran (vv. 210–212), and levels an attack at poets, whose words were often considered to have a magical or supernatural origin in satans or jinn (vv. 224–227), unlike the Quran, whose origin is God and which was revealed through the Archangel Gabriel.

A significant formal aspect of *al-Shuᶜarāʾ* is its rhythmic and poetic nature and the repetition of certain verses as refrains at the start and end of the stories of each prophet (see vv. 8–9, 107–9), linking them together by showing that the fundamental teachings (and challenges) of the prophets were the same.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ṭā. Sīn. Mīm.* (2) These are the signs of the clear Book. (3) Perhaps thou dost torment thyself that they are not believers. (4) If We will, We will send down a sign from Heaven and their heads would remain bowed before it in humility. (5) Yet no new reminder comes to them from the Compassionate, but that they turn away from it. (6) Indeed, they have denied it, but there shall come

1 For a discussion of the separated letters that appear at the beginning of some *sūrah*s, see 2:1c. Some suggest that the *ṭāʾ* here represents the joy (*ṭarab*) of the hearts of those who know God, the *sīn*, the happiness (*surūr*) of the lovers of God, and the *mīm*, the intimate discourse (*munājah*) of those who desire God (R). Other interpretations say that the *ṭāʾ* is for God's Might (*ṭawl*), the *sīn* for His Resplendence (*sināʾ*), and the *mīm* for His Sovereignty (*mulk;* Q), or that they stand for Names of God *al-Ṭāhir* (the Pure), *al-Salām* (Peace), and *al-Majīd* (the Glorious; Q). Others suggest that they represent a name for this *sūrah*, are a name of the Quran itself, or constitute an oath that God swears (Ṭ).

2 The *clear Book* is the Quran (R; cf. 12:1; 28:2; 43:2; 44:2). *Clear* renders *mubīn*, an adjective related to *bayyin* (usually rendered "clear," but also meaning "that which makes clear"); *bayyin* is a common description of the verses (lit. "signs") of the Quran (e.g., 10:15; 22:16; 24:34; 28:36; 57:9; 65:11).

3 *Torment* renders *bākhiʿ* (cf. 18:6), which literally means to "fight" or "destroy," meaning that the Prophet is being warned against harming his soul through worry and concern over whether his people will embrace his message (Q, Ṭ). Some note that for the Prophet to fight his own soul is as useless to him as the Quran's message is to those who refuse to hear and benefit from the *clear Book* (v. 2; R), and this verse is meant to comfort the Prophet (IK). Instead of tormenting himself, the Prophet should remember that the state of the souls of those whom he is ordered by God to address is a matter for God to determine and is not the Prophet's concern (Su).

4 *Sign* (*āyah*) is the same word used for a verse of the Quran, but in this case refers to a miraculous event or wonder (Q). *Heads* renders *aʿnāq*, which literally means "necks," but which in this case refers to the act of bowing one's head in effacement, a gesture of humility (R). *Aʿnāq* also can connote the leadership of a group, in which ease this phrase could also be understood to mean, "And their leaders [i.e., the possessors of *aʿnāq*] would be humbled" (Q, R). *Aʿnāq* can, moreover, signify "groups," in which case this phrase is understood to mean that the tribes and clans of the Arabs will be humbled (Ṭ).

5 *New* renders *muḥdath* (cf. 21:2), which also carries the sense of "recent," referring to the way in which the Quran was revealed gradually and each new revelation was a new *reminder* or remembrance (*dhikr*) for them (R). The significance of the revelation coming in parts rather than all at once is also discussed in the commentary on 25:32: *And the disbelievers say, "Why was the Quran not sent down upon him as a single whole?";* see also 17:106c. *Muḥdath* would come to be understood as a technical term in Islamic theology and philosophy signifying the fact of something being created in time.

6 That they will receive *tidings of that which they used to mock* means that they will finally come to see the true nature of those things they ridiculed, by implication accompanied by a punishment for it (Q), in either this world or the next (R). Other dimensions of the consequences of mocking the truth are also discussed in 39:48c, which says of the experience on the Day of Resurrection for those who do evil: *That which they used to mock will beset them* (cf. 11:8; 45:33).

to them the tidings of that which they used to mock. (7) Have they not considered the earth, how much of every noble kind We have caused to grow therein? (8) Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (9) And truly thy Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (10) And [remember] when thy Lord called out to Moses, "Go to the wrongdoing people, (11) the people of Pharaoh. Will they not be reverent?" (12) He said, "My Lord, truly I fear that they will deny me. (13) And my breast will be straitened, and my tongue will not be unfettered; so send unto Aaron. (14) And they have a crime against me; thus I fear that they

7 Here *noble* (*karīm*) also means good and beautiful, and these verses refer to the vegetation of the earth from which people and animals can eat (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī notes that *kind* here can refer to both what is beneficial and what may not appear to be so; he in fact says that every growing thing has some benefit, though one may be unaware of it. Another meaning of growth appears in a saying attributed to Sufyān al-Thawrī: "Human beings are among the growing things of the earth; whosoever enters the Garden is noble, and whosoever enters the Fire is wretched" (IK, Th). *Kind* renders *zawj,* which also means "pair." When read with this meaning, the verse can be understood as a reference to Adam and Eve, "the most noble pair," who gave rise to all the prophets and saints (Su).

8–9 These verses are repeated throughout this *sūrah,* at the end of the story of each of the various prophets cited (vv. 67–68, 103–4, 121–22, 139–40, 158–59, 174–75, 190–91). *Most of them* is generally thought to refer to the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad (R). Most of those to whom the Prophet was preaching were not believers, and this refrain is intended as a comfort to him, reminding him that he is not alone in that situation; earlier prophets had also encountered it (R).

10 Moses' initial call is mentioned in greater detail in 20:9–48 and 28:29–35, which describe him seeing a fire on the mountain from a distance, going to it, speaking with God, and being invested with the mission of going to Pharaoh.

11 Some understand this verse to mean that God is commanding Moses to ask them, "Will you not be reverent?" (Q). Depending on how the end of this verse is vocalized, it could also mean, "Will they not reverence Me?" (R). As in most uses of the verb "to reverence," it connotes being mindful or on guard, and thus some understand this verse to mean that they should be mindful of the punishment of the Hereafter (Ṭ).

12–13 Some say it is precisely being denied and called a liar that can cause one's breast to be straitened, which in turn makes it difficult to speak with facility (R). Because of his sincere desire to fulfill his service to God, Moses was concerned that he would not be able to execute properly his responsibilities alone, as he feared that people would deny that he was a prophet (Q). Although the Quran does not specify the nature of Moses' difficulty in speaking (cf. 20:27, where Moses prays, *Untie a knot from my tongue*), some Muslim commentators accepted the idea—also present in the Jewish tradition—that Moses may have suffered from either a tongue injury or a form of stuttering or stammering (see 20:27c). In light of the Quran's use of other faculties such as the heart and sight and hearing (2:7; 16:108; 22:46) in a spiritual rather than biological sense, it is plausible that "tongue" refers not to a physical limitation, but rather to an inward or psychological obstacle. Cf. Exodus 4:10–16.

Aaron's appointment as a helper to Moses is also mentioned in 19:53 and 20:29–30. As in the English, the Arabic phrase rendered by *send unto Aaron* is condensed and lacks an explicit direct object (Z). Commentators mention that Moses' desire to *send unto Aaron* means either that Moses himself encountered him directly and informed him of it or that God sent Gabriel to announce his mission to him (R); that is, Moses was asking God to bestow prophethood upon Aaron (Q).

14 The *crime* refers to Moses' striking and killing an Egyptian who was fighting with an Israelite, as described in 28:15–21 (cf. Exodus 2:11–

will slay me." (15) He said, "Nay! Go forth, then, with Our signs. We shall be with you, listening. (16) So go to Pharaoh and say, 'Verily we are sent by the Lord of the worlds, (17) that you may send with us the Children of Israel.' " (18) He said, "Did we not raise you among us as a child, and did you not stay among us for years of your life? (19) And you did your deed which you did, and you are one of the ingrates." (20) He said, "I did it then, when I was one of those who are astray. (21) So I fled from you when I was afraid of you. Then my Lord granted me judgment and placed me among the messengers. (22) And that blessing you recount to me is that you have enslaved the Children of Israel." (23) Pharaoh said, "And what is the Lord of the worlds?" (24) He said, "The Lord of the heavens and the earth and

14), which was the reason he fled Egypt. God's response in v. 15 is interpreted as a promise of protection (Q).

15 *Our signs* usually is understood to mean the miracles by which Moses proves his veracity. *We shall be with you, listening* is understood to mean that God will be on Moses' side, supporting him and Aaron against Pharaoh (R).

16–17 *Send with us* means release the Israelites and allow them (Q, R) to go to the land of Palestine (Th).

18 Pharaoh's words allude to the fact that Moses lived in Pharaoh's household as a boy, regarding which see 28:8–13.

19 *Ingrate* renders *kāfir,* which is ordinarily translated "disbeliever," and indeed some interpret this to mean that Pharaoh is calling Moses a disbeliever with respect to Pharaoh's religion (Q, Ṭ). Some commentators dismiss the idea that Pharaoh would take a position on disbelief (*kufr*), since he would not be motivated by such theological matters (Th). *Kāfir* means *ingrate* (cf. 2:276; 31:32; 43:15) insofar as it connotes the "covering over" of a blessing one received from another and behaving as though one had not received anything, and in this case it refers to what Pharaoh gave to Moses while Moses lived among the Egyptians (Q, Ṭ, Th). *And you are one of the ingrates* could also be translated as an adverbial clause, "while you were an ingrate," meaning that the act of killing the Egyptian was done in that state (R).

20 By *astray* many commentators understand "ignorant" (IK). Al-Rāzī notes that Moses struck the Egyptian not with the intention of killing, but in order to "discipline" him, but did so in an incorrect way. As mentioned in the 27:10–11c, some theologians, though not most, admitted the possibility that a prophet could "err" or commit a small kind of sin before being invested with his mission, but after becoming a prophet or messenger he is protected from sin, having thereafter the attribute of *ʿiṣmah,* meaning "protected [from sin]" or "inerrant [with respect to sin]"; see also 4:59c; 4:105–7c; 7:151c; 33:33c; 48:2–3c.

21 This verse refers to Moses' flight to Midian (see 28:21–22). *Judgment* renders *ḥukm,* a word that can also mean "power" in the sense of power to make a decision, and some commentators understand it to mean something other than prophethood (denoted by *placed me among the messengers*), such as knowledge and intelligence (R) or understanding (Th).

22–24 *Recount* renders *mannā,* which has a rich range of meaning, including the sense of giving, counting, and also preening and reminding others of the charity one has given, as in 2:264: *O you who believe! Do not annul your acts of charity through preening and injury.* Here it refers to the so-called benefaction that Pharaoh had once bestowed upon Moses, who reminds Pharaoh that the latter enslaved and persecuted the Children of Israel. Moses is saying in effect, "Is this blessing you have given me that you enslaved the Children of Israel?" (Ṭ).

Al-Rāzī uses this exchange between Moses and Pharaoh to discuss the impossibility of actually

whatsoever is between them—would that you were certain." (25) He said to those around him, "Do you not hear?" (26) He said, "Your Lord, and the Lord of your fathers of old." (27) He said, "Truly your messenger who has been sent to you is possessed!" (28) He said, "The Lord of the East and the West and whatsoever is between them, if you understand." (29) He said, "Truly if you take a god apart from me, I shall place you among the imprisoned!" (30) He said, "And if I bring you something manifest?" (31) "Bring it, then, if you are among the truthful." (32) So Moses cast his staff, and behold, it was a serpent manifest. (33) Then he drew out his hand, and behold, it was white to the beholders. (34) He said to the notables around him, "Truly this is a knowing sorcerer, (35) who desires to

giving a definition of God, which Pharaoh's first question in v. 23 seems to request. Instead, Moses responds by describing God's acts: the creation of the heavens and the earth, of Pharaoh himself and his forefathers, and of the East and West. Pharaoh's responses (vv. 25, 27, 29) exhibit amazement or incredulity, either because he does not like the answers or because he does not understand that he is, in a sense, asking the question insincerely, as he already presents himself as a god to his people (see 28:38; 79:24; Q, Ṭ). Ibn Kathīr dismisses the interpretation of those such as al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī that Pharaoh was asking about the essence or quiddity (*māhiyyah*) of God, since Pharaoh believed in no such thing; he was simply being confrontational and argumentative.

25 Pharaoh responds mockingly, as if to say, "Are you not amazed at what he is saying?" (IK).

26 Moses' mention of Pharaoh's forefathers is understood to highlight the truth that human beings come from origins that are themselves ephemeral, since the forefathers of Pharaoh have come and gone just as Pharaoh would (Q).

27 Pharaoh is effectively saying, "There is nothing to his allegation that there is a Lord other than me" (IK).

28 This response, a continuation of the ongoing description of what God has created and is Lord of, is understood to differentiate Pharaoh's limited and finite dominion from the all-encompassing sovereignty of God (Q). Moses' threefold answer to Pharaoh's question in v. 23 is not meant to convey knowledge of God as such—impossible since God's ultimate nature is not knowable—but rather to suggest the means by which one can attain that knowledge (Q).

29 Sensing the futility of his argument, Pharaoh resorts to tyranny and coercion (IK, Q) and threatens to throw Moses in prison.

30 *Something manifest* (*mubīn*), usually connotes something that serves as evidence and proof.

31–33 Cf. 7:106–8.

34 *Notables* (*malaʾ*) can also mean "council" or "group of leaders," referring here to Pharaoh's advisers and intimates. The Quran also discusses the notables of the queen of Sheba (27:29); the Quraysh (38:6); the people of Hūd (7:65); the people of Shuʿayb (7:88); and the king in the story of Joseph (12:43). That the prophets are rejected by the "notables" of their communities is found throughout all the prophetic accounts in *Sūrah* 7 and elsewhere in the Quran (e.g., 34:34; 43:23).

35 Pharaoh's statement suggests that Moses will create enmity among the Egyptians leading to their dissolution as a community (R). Al-Ṭabarī understands it to mean, "He will expel your servants, the Children of Israel, from here," but this strains the plain sense, which is that, rather than address the issue at hand, Pharaoh resorts to accusations that Moses intends something other than freeing the Children of Israel. *What would you command?* means, "What is your opinion?" (R) or "What would you have me do?" See also 7:110.

expel you from your land with his sorcery. What would you command?" (36) They said, "Leave him and his brother a while, and send marshalers to the cities (37) to bring to you every knowing sorcerer." (38) So the sorcerers were brought together for the tryst of an appointed day. (39) And it was said unto the people, "Will you gather, (40) that haply we may follow the sorcerers if they are the victors?" (41) Then, when the sorcerers came, they said to Pharaoh, "Shall we truly have a reward if we are the victors?" (42) He said, "Yes, and you shall then be among those brought nigh." (43) Moses said to them, "Cast what you would cast!" (44) So they cast their ropes and staffs and said, "By the might of Pharaoh, we shall surely be the victors!" (45) Then Moses cast his staff, and behold, it devours what they make falsely! (46) Then were the sorcerers cast down, prostrating. (47) They said, "We believe in the Lord of the worlds, (48) the Lord of Moses and Aaron." (49) He said, "Do you believe in Him before I give you leave? He is indeed your chief, who has taught you sorcery. You will surely know! I shall surely cut off your hands and your feet from opposite sides, and I shall surely crucify you all!" (50) They said, "It is no harm. Truly unto our Lord do we turn. (51) Truly we hope that our Lord will forgive us our sins for our having been the first of the

36–37 On this act to bring sorcerers who would best Moses' miraculous feats, see 7:112–13c (cf. 10:79). As mentioned in 7:111–12c, some interpreted this to mean that Pharaoh had Moses and Aaron temporarily imprisoned or delayed their departure.

38 The day is spoken of in 20:59: *He said, "Your tryst shall be on the Day of Adornment; let the people be gathered when the sun has risen high."*

39–40 Some commentators point out that what is missing from this statement is the possibility that the people would follow Moses if he were the victor, since it would have pitted them against the religion of Pharaoh (IK, Ṭ). Others interpret this to be an ironic, mocking statement, in which the *sorcerers* are Moses and Aaron, and the people are joking about following Moses and Aaron, should they win (Th).

41–42 Here the reward is one of increased status, connoted by *you shall then be among those brought nigh,* meaning that the sorcerers will be close to Pharaoh, which would entail other benefits that come with a position close to power (R). For others this nearness can have a spiritual connotation as well; see 7:113–14c.

43–45 See commentary on 7:115–17, which discusses the sorcerers' tactics in trying to overcome Moses' miracle and how Moses defeated them.

46–48 See commentary on 7:119–122, which discusses the nature of the new faith of the sorcerers, who, above all others, realized that Moses' miracle was true.

49–51 See commentary on 7:123–26. *The first of the believers* can have the literal meaning that the sorcerers were the first of the Egyptian people to believe (Ṭ), that they were the first to believe in that particular sign (Ṭs), or that they were the first sorcerers to do so (R); in other contexts *first* also has the sense of "foremost," as when Abraham refers to himself in 6:163 as the *first of those who submit.*

believers." (52) Then We revealed unto Moses, "Set forth with My servants by night; you shall indeed be pursued." (53) Then Pharaoh sent marshalers to the cities [saying], (54) "These indeed are a small band, (55) and indeed they have enraged us, (56) and we are a host at the ready!" (57) So We expelled them from gardens and springs, (58) and treasures and a noble station. (59) So it was, and We made the Children of Israel to inherit them. (60) Then they pursued them at sunrise. (61) And when the two hosts saw one another, the companions of Moses said, "We are overtaken!" (62) He said, "Nay! Truly my Lord is with me; He will guide me." (63) Then We revealed unto Moses, "Strike the sea with thy staff!" and it parted, and each part was as a great mountain. (64) And thither We brought the others nigh. (65) And We delivered Moses and those with him all together. (66) Then We drowned the others. (67) Truly in that is a sign, though

52 After the plagues and events described in 7:133–35, Moses was commanded to *go by night* with the Children of Israel; cf. 44:23.

53–56 *Small band* (*shirdhimah*), referring to the fleeing Children of Israel, is a word that connotes the remnant of a larger group or thing (Ṭ). *They have enraged us* is a declaration of enmity (Th) and refers to the Egyptians' response to the plagues that had been brought down upon them as well as to the rejection of their religion by Moses and the Israelites (Q, R). *Host at the ready* has the connotation of being equipped and prepared (Q), in this case with weapons and mounts (Ṭ).

57–58 *Expelled* (lit. "made to leave") refers to God's making the Egyptians leave behind their possessions and high rank (Ṭ), which were of a worldly kind since they did not have faith (R). Some understand it to mean that God placed in their hearts the desire to leave these things in order to pursue the Israelites (R).

59 The Children of Israel were made to possess those things mentioned in vv. 57–58 (R), not that they were a direct inheritance. Other commentators mention opinions that this could refer to some of the wealth that the Israelites took with them by God's Command (Q). According to another opinion attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, after the destruction of Pharaoh and his people, the Israelites returned to Egypt, though this latter interpretation would seem to conflict with the Quran's own account of what happened to the Israelites after their exodus (e.g., 7:138); cf. 44:28.

60 The Egyptians pursued the Israelites.

61 The *two hosts* are the Egyptians and the Israelites (R).

62–63 When Moses parted the sea, each side of the gap that was created was *as a great mountain* (cf. Exodus 14:21–22). The Quran does not identify the body of water that was parted, but it is traditionally considered by Muslims to be the Red Sea, as it is for Jews. It is pointed out by some Muslim sources that the miracle lay not so much in the parting of the waters, since water can disappear from its usual place for natural reasons such as the presence of currents or evaporation, but that the water was made to stand tall like a mountain (R).

64 The *others* refers to the Egyptian host, which were literally being brought closer to the sea and in an ultimate sense closer to their death (R).

65–66 Moses and those with him reached the other side of the sea, and then the gap was closed and those who pursued them were drowned. The saving of the Israelites and the drowning of the Egyptians are mentioned in 2:50: *And when We parted the sea for you and so delivered you, and drowned the House of Pharaoh as you looked on.* The drowning of the Egyptians is also mentioned in 7:136; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 20:77–79. In addition to in the story of Noah (11:36–48 passim),

most of them are not believers. (68) And truly thy Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (69) And recite unto them the story of Abraham, (70) when he said to his father and his people, "What are you worshipping?" (71) They said, "We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them." (72) He said, "Do they hear you when you call? (73) Or do they benefit or harm you?" (74) They said, "Nay, but we found our fathers doing so." (75) He said, "Have you considered what you worship, (76) you and your ancestors? (77) For they are all enemies unto me, save the Lord of the worlds, (78) Who created me, and guides me, (79) and Who feeds me and gives me drink, (80) and Who, when I am ill, heals me, (81) and Who causes

drowning is also mentioned as a punishment in 17:69 and 36:43.

67–68 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

69–70 This question is also stated in 6:74, where Abraham addresses his father and his people, saying, *Do you take idols for gods?* and in 21:52, where he says, *What are these images to which you are cleaving?* Ibn ʿAjībah notes that the Abrahamic *ḥanīf* (see 2:135c; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161), the ideal of a follower of a pure and primordial monotheism unaffected by sectarian tribalism, is brought to the foreground in this story, where Abraham renounces all lords but God and names as enemies those things that occupy the heart in place of God and those people who follow their egotistical passions.

71–73 Similar language is used in 20:91, where the Israelites tell Aaron regarding their new idol: *We shall not cease to be its devotees till Moses returns unto us;* and 20:97, where Moses says to them: *Now observe your god, to whom you remained devoted: We shall surely burn it and scatter its ashes in the sea!*

74–76 The idolaters admit that the idols do not have the power to harm or benefit (IK). This is, for al-Rāzī, a clear argument against belief based on conformity with authority (*taqlīd*) and in favor of belief based upon sound reasoning and proof. Abraham's reply shows that error, whether recent or entrenched, is error regardless of the authority to which one defers in upholding it (Q, R). For the notion of idolaters blindly following the ways of their forefathers, see commentary on 5:104: *"Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing." What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided?* Similar injunctions are addressed to the Children of Adam (7:28), the Egyptians (10:78; 28:36), and people in general in 31:21 and 43:24.

77 Another interpretation is that the *they* refers to those who worship the idols and not the idols themselves (R). In this interpretation, the subsequent phrase would be understood to mean, "except those who worship the Lord of the worlds" (Q). Abraham's statement seems to suggest that the *Lord of the worlds* was among those beings or things worshipped by his people along with their idols (much like the Quraysh), and Abraham wanted to make clear that he was only expressing enmity toward the idols and false objects of worship and not *the Lord of the worlds* (Q). At a spiritual level, this means that in a sense one has to make the things of the world one's enemy before one can truly love God (Su). Al-Rāzī reasons that *enemies unto me* can also mean that, because of the worship afforded to the idols by his people, they took on the status, in the eyes of those who worshipped them, of destructive and corruptive living beings, and it is in this sense that they could become *enemies unto* Abraham.

78–81 Only a being capable of the acts listed in these verses is worthy and deserving of worship (R, Ṭ). Interpreted symbolically, these verses can mean that God feeds and nourishes the soul, heals the ailments of the soul, and enlivens the spirit by causing death to the passionate ego. A saying attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq states, "When I am ill through sin, He heals me with repentance" (Th). Others say that the food is faith, and the drink is trust in God and contentment (Su). Al-Thaʿlabī

me to die, then gives me life, (82) and Who I hope will forgive me my sins on the Day of Judgment. (83) My Lord! Grant me judgment, and bind me to the righteous! (84) And make for me faithful renown among later generations. (85) And place me among the heirs of the Garden of bliss. (86) And forgive my father—he is one of those who are astray. (87) And disgrace me not on the Day

summarizes the spiritual dimensions of these verses by saying that God brings death through justice and life through grace; death through disobedience and life through obedience; death through separation and life through meeting Him; death through ignorance and life through knowledge. Others note that one is caused to die outwardly, but is given life inwardly, dies through forgetfulness of God, and lives through remembrance of Him (Su). Some quote Junayd, who says that when human beings are resurrected on the Day of Judgment, everyone will be naked except for those given the raiment of reverence, and everyone will be hungry except for those given the food of gnosis, and everyone will be thirsty except for those given the drink of love (Aj, Th).

82 Practically all Muslim theologians espouse the principle that the prophets are without sin or are promised forgiveness for their sins. Thus some have difficulty with the idea that Abraham might *hope* for forgiveness, which expresses an aspiration rather than certitude of the realization of what one hopes for, while others wrestle with Abraham's apparent attribution of sin to himself (R). For some it means that, in the case of Abraham, "hope" is a kind of certainty, but for believers it is a yearning (Q), while others say that Abraham's words are meant to be an example and provide Muslims with a way to make proper supplications (R). Mujāhid says that it could refer to 21:63, where Abraham "lies" and tells the people the largest idol destroyed all the others, when in fact Abraham had done it himself; and 6:76 and 37:89, which both deal with Abraham's looking to the stars, which seems outwardly to mean that he did not demonstrate faith in God alone.

83 *Judgment* (*ḥukm*) is thought to refer here to wisdom and understanding or to prophethood (Q); the latter interpretation is rejected by some who point out that Abraham was a prophet already (R). *The righteous* refers to the prophets, to the inhabitants of the Garden (Q), or to those who are content in all states and conditions (Su). *Bind me to the righteous* can refer to being with the righteous in both this life and the Hereafter (IK).

84 The request for *faithful renown* has various meanings: religious communities will unite around Abraham; that he will be praised beautifully and have high rank for all time; that he will have descendants who will uphold the truth until the end of time; or that he desires prayers on his behalf until the Day of Judgment (Q); see also 19:50, which can in a sense be seen as a fulfillment of this prayer. *Renown* renders *lisān,* which literally means "tongue" and which some understand to signify "word," and *faithful* renders *ṣidq,* which can also mean "sincere" or "true," so that the core meaning here is that Abraham desires that good and sincere words be uttered on his behalf (Q). Another way of interpreting Abraham's request is that he is asking for good qualities that would be worthy of remembrance in later times (R) or that he desires not to be lied about in later times (T). Others understand this verse to be a prayer whose fulfillment is the Prophet Muhammad himself, meaning that Abraham was praying for a descendant who would call others to God (Q, R).

85 *Bliss* renders *naʿīm,* a word that evokes tranquility, ease, and blessing. Other verses speak of *Gardens of bliss* (e.g., 5:65; 10:9; 22:56; 31:8; 37:43; 56:12; 68:34); see 56:11–12c; 56:88–89c.

86 For Abraham's prayer for his father, see 9:114, *Abraham's plea for forgiveness of his father was only due to a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him,* and 9:113–14c, which refers to 19:47: *I shall seek forgiveness for you from my Lord.* Some interpret *a promise he had made to him* (9:114) to be a promise made by Abraham's father to Abraham to become a believer (Q), but this is a minority position.

87 *Disgrace* is often discussed as part of the spiritual dimension of suffering in the Hereafter; see 3:192c; 3:194c. Disgrace in this world is also

they are resurrected, (88) the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, (89) save for him who comes to God with a sound heart." (90) And the Garden will be brought nigh unto the reverent, (91) and Hellfire will become apparent to the errant. (92) And it will be said unto them, "Where is that which you worshipped (93) apart from God? Are they helping you or helping themselves?" (94) Then they shall be toppled into it, they and the errant, (95) and the hosts of Iblīs all together. (96) They will say, as they dispute with one another therein, (97) "By God, indeed we were in manifest error, (98) when we made you equal with the Lord of the worlds. (99) And none caused us to go astray but the guilty.

mentioned as a punishment throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:85, 114; 5:33, 41; 10:98; 39:26; 41:16). Some cite, in connection with this verse, a *ḥadīth* that describes Abraham seeing his father on the Day of Resurrection in a wretched state covered in dust. When he asks God, "Didst thou not promise me that Thou wouldst not disgrace me on the day they are resurrected?" God replies, "I have forbidden the Garden to the disbelievers" (IK).

88 The uselessness in the Hereafter of wealth and children, which exalt human beings and are a source of security, status, and comfort in this world, is a prevalent Quranic theme; see 3:10c; 3:116c; 9:55c; 31:33c; 34:35–37c; 58:17c; 60:3c; 64:15c.

89 *A sound heart* is also associated with Abraham (see 37:84c); it refers to knowing that God is real, that the Hereafter will come, and that God will resurrect what is in the graves (Q). It can also mean a heart without doubts and one that is sincere (Ṭ) and free of polytheism (IK), ignorance, vices, and attachments to the life of this world (R). Moreover, it refers to the heart that is spiritually healthy as opposed to one that is sick (Th), a heart that is empty of all but its Lord and only happy with Him (Su).

90–91 Part of the joy of the *reverent* will be to see the Garden when they are brought near to it (cf. 50:31), but before they enter it, while the *errant* will suffer from the sight of Hell (R).

92–93 The inability to help or be helped by any but God, especially as it relates to one's fate in the Hereafter, also appears in 7:192, 197; 14:22; 18:43; 28:81. Rhetorically these verses resemble such verses as 16:20–21: *And those whom they call upon apart from God create naught, and are themselves created. [They are] dead, not living, and they are not aware of when they will be resurrected.*

94 This verse is understood to mean that the *errant* will be hurled into Hell along with the idols they worshipped (Ṭ, Z), an interpretation that seems to fit the context, but others say this could mean that the errant will be thrown in with their leaders (IK) or with the satans (Ṭ) they followed; however, this last opinion would seem to be what is explicitly mentioned in v. 95, *the hosts of Iblīs*. The word *toppled* (*kabkaba*) evokes the sense of tumbling upside down and also being gathered together (Q, Ṭ).

95 Though some interpret this verse as referring to the jinn only (Q), it could refer to anyone who was a follower of Iblīs, including human beings (Ṭ); some among both human beings and jinn are referred to as satans in the Quran (see 2:14c; 6:112).

96–97 *They* refers to the aforementioned group that was cast into the Fire (Q). Here they admit their manifest error, and in related verses it is stated that human beings will, on the Day of Judgment, *admit their sin* (67:11; cf. 40:11).

98 The idolaters say the words of this verse to the idols they worshipped, not because they still believe that idols can hear them, but because the idolaters wish to express that they now recognize these idols for what they are (R). Or they are saying this to those whom they followed into idolatry, making such people equal to God by obeying them whereas they should have obeyed God (IK).

99 The *guilty* could refer to the aforementioned *errant* and the hosts of Iblīs, or it could refer to their forebears who bequeathed idolatry

(100) So now we have no intercessors, (101) nor any loyal friend. (102) If we had another turn, we would be among the believers." (103) Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (104) And truly thy Lord is indeed the Mighty, the Merciful. (105) The people of Noah denied the messengers, (106) when their brother Noah said unto them, "Will you not be reverent? (107) Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you. (108) So reverence God and obey me. (109) And I ask not of you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds. (110) So reverence God and obey me." (111) They said, "Shall we believe you, when the lowliest follow you?" (112) He said, "What knowledge have I of what they used to

to them (Q); according to ᶜIkrimah, it refers to the son of Adam (Cain) and Iblīs, who inaugurated disbelief and sin (Q, Ṭ).

100 On the concept of intercession in the Hereafter, see 2:48c; 2:255c. Part of the idolaters' belief was that the idols had the power of interceding with God on their behalf, which is then shown to be false (R).

101 *Loyal friend* translates *ṣadīq ḥamīm*. *Ḥamīm* (cf. 40:18; 41:34; 70:10) is someone who cares about what the other person cares about and feels pain when the other feels pain (R). Some understand *ṣadīq* to be the plural (R) or an intensive form denoting someone with whom one has a particularly strong bond of friendship (Q). Some say that *ṣadīq* refers to one who is merely helpful, while *ḥamīm* connotes one who intercedes on one's behalf (IK, Th). The loneliness of the reckoning before God and the absence of friends or support for those who disbelieve are discussed in the 69:35c, and this issue ties in with the broader Quranic theme of the fact that people have no helpers (e.g., 3:22, 90, 192) or protectors (e.g., 2:120; 33:65) other than God.

102 *Another turn* refers to the idolaters' desire to return to the world in order to live their lives differently; see also 2:167c; 6:27–28c; 23:99–100c; 32:12c.

103–4 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

105 For the story of Noah, also see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; and *Sūrah* 71. The plural *messengers* is used here even though Noah is being discussed, because the people's denial of him would include the rejection of all messengers, since the path to recognizing and affirming a messenger is universal and does not change according to historical circumstance (R); in this sense every messenger calls upon his people to affirm all messengers. It may also mean that they rejected Noah's prophecy that messengers would come after him; or it may be an example in which a category stands for a specific individual (Q).

106 *Their brother* means that he was one of them (R). On the concept of reverence (*taqwā*), see 2:2c. Here being *reverent* is also interpreted as being mindful or careful, meaning, "Will you not be mindful of disobedience toward Me?" (R).

107–9 Noah was *trustworthy* because being one of his people, he was known to them all his life, just as Muhammad was among the Quraysh and he had given them no reason to mistrust him (R), as he had been truthful all his life (Q). The call to reverence God precedes the call to obey Noah, because the latter depends upon the former (R). The people were to obey Noah when he enjoined them to faith (Q). A common theme in the Quran is that the messengers do not seek enrichment or status in return for being instrumental in bringing the message of faith to their people.

111 In his opponents' eyes, that Noah was followed by people of low social status was a barrier to their having faith in his message (Ṭ). A similar dynamic is mentioned in 25:20c in connection with verses such as 46:11, where the Quraysh say of the Prophet's impoverished Companions that they were the reason they rejected the new religion: *Had it been good, they would not have outstripped us in [attaining] it.*

112 This could also be rendered, "No knowledge have I of what they used to do" (Z). That

do? (113) Their reckoning is only by my Lord, were you but aware. (114) And I shall not drive away the believers. (115) I am but a clear warner." (116) They said, "Truly if you cease not, O Noah, you shall indeed be among the stoned." (117) He said, "My Lord, verily my people have denied me. (118) So decide between me and them, and deliver me and the believers who are with me!" (119) So We delivered him and those who were with him in the full-laden Ark. (120) Then afterwards We drowned those who remained. (121) Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (122) And truly thy Lord is indeed the Mighty, the Merciful. (123) ᶜĀd denied the messengers, (124) when their brother Hūd said unto them, "Will you not be reverent? (125) Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you. (126) So reverence God and obey me. (127) And I ask not of you any reward for

is, Noah claims no responsibility for what his followers once did; he only looks to their actions now (Ṭ). He may also be saying that he is tasked only with calling them to faith, and their occupation or trade is not relevant (Q). Some commentators see in the opponents' position an implicit accusation that Noah's followers are motivated by material enrichment rather than spiritual conviction (Q, R), as if to say there must be a reason other than religion for why only the lowly follow Noah (see also 6:52c). Implicit in Noah's response is that he is not responsible for deciphering whatever intentions they may have in following him, since it is for God to judge them (v. 113), not Noah (Q, R, Ṭ).

113 The restriction of ultimate judgment and reckoning to God, to the exclusion of human beings, angels, and even prophets, is also mentioned in 6:52, 69; 13:40; 88:26.

114 The implication in the disbelievers' statement in v. 111 is that Noah should dissociate himself from people of low social status (IK), as the Quraysh also desired the Prophet Muhammad (see 6:52c) to do, but Noah's statement reaffirms that he was sent to all human beings, not only the rich or the poor (Q), that he will never deny those who speak the truth, no matter which social class they belong to, and that he will protect the friends of God (Su).

115 This phrase is also attributed to Noah in 7:184; 11:25; 71:2 as well as to the Prophet Muhammad in 15:89; 22:49; 29:50; 38:65, 70; 46:9; 51:50; 67:26; see 38:65–66c. On the concept of prophets being warners (*nadhīr*), often combined with being bringers of glad tidings (*bashīr*), see 4:165c.

116 The disbelievers say they will stone Noah to death (R) for denigrating their gods and their religion (Q). Some say that *stoned* (*marjūm*) does not mean literal stoning, but abuse and vilification (Q, Ṭ), as in the phrase "the accursed Satan" (*al-shayṭān al-rajīm*), which literally means "the stoned Satan," but which is usually understood to mean the former. Al-Qurṭubī points to the example of "stoning" in the words spoken by Abraham's father to him in 19:46 (*If you cease not, I shall surely stone you!*) as an example of metaphorical rather than literal stoning.

117 Noah was denied in the sense that he was declared a liar; so he turned to God in sadness that his people would not accept faith in Him (Q).

118 A similar prayer is uttered by Shuᶜayb in 7:89: *Decide between us and our people in truth.*

119–20 These verses refer to the flood, which is also mentioned in 7:64; 10:73; 11:37; 21:77; 23:27; 25:37; 29:14; 37:82; 54:11–12.

121–22 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

123–27 These five verses form a pattern that opens the story of Noah and each of the prophets who follow; cf. vv. 105–9, 141–45, 160–64, 176–80. See commentary on 26:105–9.

it; my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds. (128) Do you frivolously build on every high place a sign? (129) And do you occupy castles, that haply you may ever abide? (130) And when you strike, do you strike as tyrants? (131) So reverence God and obey me. (132) And reverence Him who has succored you with what you know, (133) succored you with cattle and children, (134) and gardens and springs. (135) Truly I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day!" (136) They said, "It is the same to us whether you exhort us or whether you are not among those who exhort. (137) This is naught but the ethos of those of old, (138) and we shall not be punished." (139) So they denied him, and We destroyed them. Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (140) And truly thy Lord is,

128 *High place* renders *rīᶜ*, which can also refer to a path or road (Ṭ). Different accounts are given describing what the ᶜĀd built, such as structures on high places in order to display a *sign* of their wealth and power for everyone to see. What was built may also have been baths (Q). Ibn Kathīr adopts the position that the specifics of what they built are not significant in this account.

129 *Castles* renders *maṣāniᶜ*, which may refer to fortresses (Th), aqueducts, or other water-conveyance structures (R). *May ever abide* implies that the people did not contemplate their own deaths, but built structures as though they would live forever (Q).

130 *Strike* here is to strike a blow with a weapon such as a whip or sword (Ṭ), which the ᶜĀd do as *tyrants*. "Tyrant" renders *jabbār*, a word that can mean one who dominates or controls (cf. 5:22; 11:59; 14:15; 19:14, 32; 28:19; 40:35; 50:45; 59:23). The verse thus means that when they have dealings with other people, they do so in a heavy-handed and domineering fashion (R). For al-Rāzī the three qualities the ᶜĀd seek for themselves—glory, everlastingness, and domination—are only appropriate for God; indeed, *al-Jabbār*, "the Compeller," is a Divine Name.

131 Cf. v. 108.

132–34 God made the things mentioned in this verse subservient and useful to human beings; so He should be thanked for them (Q).

135 Similar words are spoken by prophets to their peoples in 7:59; 11:3, 26, 84; 40:30; 46:21.

136 In this verse the disbelievers say about themselves what the Quran says about them in 2:6: *Truly it is the same for the disbelievers whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe* (cf. 36:10); and 7:193: *And if you call them to guidance, they follow you not. It is the same for you whether you call them or whether you remain silent.*

137 *Ethos* (*khuluq*) is taken to mean the religion, the fables (*asāṭīr*), the customs (*ᶜādah*), or a thing invented or concocted by *those of old* (Q, Ṭ); this is related to the idea held by disbelievers that the Prophet's religion was made up of *fables of those of old* (see 25:4–5c). Others interpret these words as referring not to the message of Hūd, but to what the ᶜĀd were actually doing; that is, it is as though they were saying, "What we are now doing, O Hūd, is the same as the actions of those of old, people who were not punished for it, and so neither shall we be punished" (Q, Ṭ). If read as *khalq* ("creation") instead of *khuluq*, as some do, it would mean that these are matters that those of old created or invented or that the ᶜĀd created these objects (vv. 128–29) as did those before them (R).

138 Commentators note that, although the people believed in a Creator in the manner of the Quraysh (who accepted the idea of a creator deity), they did not believe they would be held accountable in any Hereafter (Ṭ).

139–40 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

indeed, the Mighty, the Merciful. (141) The Thamūd denied the messengers, (142) when their brother Ṣāliḥ said unto them, "Will you not be reverent? (143) Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you. (144) So reverence God and obey me. (145) And I ask not of you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds. (146) Will you be left among that which is here, secure, (147) amid gardens and springs, (148) sown fields, date palms with ripe stalks? (149) And you skillfully hew dwellings in the mountains. (150) So reverence God and obey me. (151) And obey not the commands of the prodigal, (152) who work corruption upon the earth, and do not set matters aright." (153) They said, "You are but one of the bewitched. (154) You are naught but a human being like us; so bring a sign, if you are among the truthful." (155) He said, "This is a she-camel; she shall have

141–45 For a similar opening to other prophets' stories, cf. vv. 105–9, 123–27, 160–64, 176–80. See commentary on 26:105–9.

146–48 The question indicates that the Thamūd are living as if they expect to be *left* on the earth, as if there will be no abode of recompense for them (R). Though v. 147 mentions *gardens,* some think that the mention of *date palms* specifically shows the superiority of the date palm over other fruit (R). *Ripe* renders *haḍīm,* which some understand to mean "slender"; or it means that the fragile stalks are crushed or crumbled, so that they nearly snap because of the weight of the ripe fruits piled on top of one another (Ṭ).

149 *Skillfully* renders *fārih,* which some read with the shorter vowel as *farih. Farih* means something more like "nimbly" or in another sense "exulting" or "exuberantly," though some commentators consider *fārih* and *farih* synonymous (Q, Ṭ). Al-Rāzī observes that this *sūrah* shows how the ʿĀd were overcome by their desire for domination and glory, while the Thamūd were seduced by the material comforts of the world, deviations that represent the two sets of vices present in the irascible and concupiscent soul, respectively.

150 Cf. v. 108.

151–52 On the vice of prodigality or wastefulness in the Quran, see 3:147c; 7:80–81c; 25:67c; and especially 10:12c. The warning against being *prodigal* means that one should not be seduced by those who seek excessively the things of this world and that one should seek, rather, contentment (R). On the meaning in the Quran of the opposing concepts of working *corruption* (*fasād*) and setting *matters aright* (*iṣlāḥ*), see 2:220c.

153 Rather than meaning one who is under the influence of sorcery (*siḥr;* Q), *bewitched* (*musaḥḥar*) is understood by some to mean merely a creature who consumes food (related to *saḥr,* referring to the lungs or upper part of the gut). The Thamūd are making the point that Ṣāliḥ, who eats food, is a being just like themselves and therefore commands no special authority (R, Ṭ); this would be consistent with the following verse; see 25:7c, which discusses how the disbelievers balk at the fact that the Prophet is a human being like them who eats and walks among people.

154 *A human being like us* is a phrase that also appears in connection with other prophets, as in 11:27; 14:10; 21:3; 23:24, 33–34. It is spoken as a form of accusation by those who refuse to follow a mere human being, but is also said by prophets about themselves (e.g., 18:110; 41:6) as a means of emphasizing their humanity and the powerlessness they share with others before God.

155 The story of the she-camel of the Thamūd is told more fully in 7:73 (also 11:64; 17:59; 54:27; 91:13). Some understand this verse to mean that there was a certain day on which the she-camel

drink and you shall drink on an appointed day. (156) And touch her not with harm, lest you be taken by the punishment of a tremendous day." (157) But they hamstrung her, and then became remorseful. (158) So the punishment seized them. Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (159) And truly thy Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (160) The people of Lot denied the messengers, (161) when their brother Lot said unto them, "Will you not be reverent? (162) Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you, (163) so reverence God and obey me. (164) And I ask not of you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds. (165) Among all creatures do you come unto males, (166) leaving your spouses your Lord created for you? Nay, but you are a transgressing people." (167) They said, "If you cease not, O Lot, you will be among those who are expelled." (168) He said, "Truly I am of those who detest what you do. (169) My Lord! Deliver me and my family from what they do." (170) So We delivered him and his family all together, (171) save for an old woman among those who lagged behind. (172) Then We destroyed the others. (173) And We rained a rain upon them. Evil was the rain of the warned! (174) Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (175) And truly thy Lord is indeed the Mighty, the Merciful. (176) The inhabitants of the thicket denied the messengers, (177) when Shuʿayb

would drink, while others interpret it to mean that the people and the she-camel would have a certain portion of drink (Q, Ṭ), so that it would mean, "She shall have an amount of water, and you shall have an amount of water."

156–58 The sending of the miraculous she-camel to the Thamūd is mentioned also in 7:73–77; 11:64–65; 54:27–29; 91:13–14 and constituted a sign in response to challenges that Ṣāliḥ prove he was a prophet.

158–59 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

160–64 For a similar opening to other prophets' stories, cf. vv. 105–9, 123–27, 141–45, 176–80. See commentary on 26:105–9.

165–66 According to some, these verses mean that these people engaged in anal intercourse with both men and women (Ṭ), though the context would seem to indicate that they avoided women; for some this means that they engaged in this behavior with foreign men (Q). See also 7:80–81c; 11:77–79c; 29:28–29c.

167 Cf. 7:82.

168–69 What Lot "detests" are their sexual practices (Ṭ).

170–71 Some commentators mention here that she (i.e., Lot's wife) was punished because she pointed out the guests to the inhabitants of the city (see also 7:83; 27:57; 29:32), while others mention some details of the story as described in Genesis 19 (Q), namely, that she was turned into a pillar of salt, though such details are not mentioned in the Quran.

172–73 See 25:40, which is also thought to refer to the people of Lot: *And indeed they passed by the town upon which fell the evil rain.* This rain is described as a rain of fire and sulfur (cf. Genesis 19:24; Th).

174–75 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

176–80 For a similar opening to other prophets' stories, cf. vv. 105–9, 123–27, 141–45, 160–64. See commentary on 26:105–9. On Shuʿayb, see 7:85c. The *thicket* (*aykah*) is also mentioned in

said unto them, "Will you not be reverent? (178) Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you. (179) So reverence God and obey me. (180) And I ask not of you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds. (181) Give full measure, and be not among those who fall short. (182) Weigh with the right balance, (183) and diminish not people's goods, nor behave wickedly upon the earth, working corruption. (184) And reverence Him Who created you and the generations of old." (185) They said, "You are but one of the bewitched. (186) You are naught but a human being like us, and indeed we deem you to be among the liars, (187) so make fragments from the sky fall upon us, if you are among the truthful." (188) He said, "My Lord knows best what you do." (189) So they denied him, and the punishment of the day of gloom seized them. Truly it was the punishment of a tremendous day. (190) Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers. (191) And truly thy Lord is indeed the Mighty, the Merciful. (192) And truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds, (193) brought down by

15:78; 26:176; 38:13; 50:14; an *aykah* is understood as a tangled or twisted tree (Q, Ṭ) or a group of trees (Ṭ). The *inhabitants of the thicket* are sometimes thought to have been either part of the people of Midian or a separate people to whom Shuᶜayb was sent as a prophet (Q), though their exact identity is unknown; see 29:36–37c; cf. 50:12–14. Al-Thaᶜlabī argues that since Shuᶜayb is described as being sent to the people of Midian as *their brother* (29:36), but not described this way in the case of *the inhabitants of the thicket,* it means that Shuᶜayb was of Midian and the people of the thicket were a different people.

181–83 These verses instruct people not to cheat in matters of buying and selling (Ṭ, Th). The acts referred to by *behave wickedly upon the earth, working corruption* are usually understood to include highway robbery and piracy, raiding, and the destruction of crops (R). On the corrupt and predatory mercantile practices of which the Midianites were guilty, see 7:85c; 11:84–86c.

184 *Generations* renders *jibillah,* which is understood by some to mean "creatures," "a multitude of creatures" (Ṭ), or "many people" (Q).

185–86 See commentary on 26:153–54.

187–88 *Fragments* (*kisaf*) is understood by some to mean "side," as in "side of the sky" (Q); similar imagery is used in 17:92 and 34:9. The request that prophets produce miracles, a prominent theme in the Quran, is also found in 3:183, and the challenge to bring down a punishment (often a form of mockery) is also mentioned in 6:57; 7:70; 16:1; 17:90–93; 22:47; 29:53; 37:176; 42:18; 46:22; 51:14; see, moreover, 8:23c; 8:32c, which discuss challenges made to the Prophet.

189 Some commentators relate a story that God afflicted the people of the thicket by withholding the wind and sending a terrible heat for seven days, after which a cloud appeared under which a man found comfort and coolness. He called his people to join him beneath it, and when they did, they were all destroyed by a fire originating from it (IK, Q, Th). This was the *gloom* that destroyed them.

190–91 For this refrain, see 26:8–9c.

192–93 The *Trustworthy Spirit* (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) is a reference, according to most commentators, to the Archangel Gabriel (Ṭ), the angel of revelation. According to one reading of the verb in this verse, it would mean, "The Trustworthy Spirit descended with it"—that is, with the Quran (Ṭ)—rather than the reading here, which is more akin to "to cause it [i.e., the Quran] to descend."

the Trustworthy Spirit, (194) upon thine heart—that thou mayest be among the warners— (195) in a clear, Arabic tongue. (196) It is indeed in the scriptures of those of old. (197) Is it not a sign for them that the learned of the Children of Israel know it? (198) And had We sent it down upon some non-Arab, (199) and he recited

Gabriel is called a Spirit because he is created from Spirit, because he is the bringer of that which gives life, or because he is entirely Spirit, unlike human beings, who have a material dimension as well as a spiritual nature (R). Gabriel is called *Trustworthy,* because of his faithfulness in conveying God's message to the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets (R). It is also noteworthy to mention that several prophets in this *sūrah* say that they are *a trustworthy messenger* (e.g., vv. 107, 126, 143), and this is the only *sūrah* to refer to the *Trustworthy Spirit.*

194–95 A clearer word order might be, "Upon thine heart in a clear, Arabic tongue, that thou mayest be among the warners" (cf. 2:97). The significance of the Quran being in Arabic, the language of the people of the Prophet Muhammad, is also mentioned in 12:2; 13:37; 16:103; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3, 44; 42:7; 43:3. Some understand its being brought "upon the heart" of the Prophet to mean that the *Trustworthy Spirit* caused the Prophet to understand and retain it (R) or that Gabriel strengthened his heart (Q).

Here al-Rāzī remarks upon the Quranic meaning of the heart as the seat of understanding and knowledge, upon which the faculties of the soul depend. He explains that, in contrast to some positions even in his day, it is not the brain but the heart that is the seat of intelligence, even though he acknowledges straightforwardly the role of the brain in human physiology and details different ways in which the brain can function together and in harmony with the heart. He does not go beyond that, however, as many philosophers and authorities on doctrinal Sufism do when they claim for the heart a spiritual and subtle reality of which the biological heart is only a symbol and reflection and its manifestation on the corporeal level of reality. On significance of the heart in the Quran, also see 2:7c.

196 *Scriptures* here renders *zubur* (see 3:184c). This verse is understood to mean that the Quran is mentioned or described in some of the previous scriptures revealed to other prophets (Ṭ) or that the Prophet himself is so mentioned (Th).

197 Some see *the learned of the Children of Israel* as a reference to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām (among others), one of the learned Jews of Madinah who became Muslim and whose conversion was, because of his knowledge and standing within the Jewish community of his time, of special significance (Q, Ṭ). This view, however, would not harmonize with the opinion that this *sūrah* is from the Makkan period, since ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām converted after the migration of the Prophet to Madinah. It is said that the Makkan idolaters would consult with the People of the Book on certain religious matters, such as the prophethood of Muhammad, and were told by at least some of them that he was the prophet described in their scriptures and that this was his time (Q).

198 *Non-Arab* renders *aʿjam,* a word that also denotes someone who does not speak Arabic well and hence connotes a foreigner; see 41:44c. In Islamic texts the term came to be used mostly as a reference to Persians.

199 *They would not have believed in it;* that is, they would not have understood it. This idea is related to the emphasis that the Quran places on the fact that prophets are not foreigners to the people to whom they are sent, but are rather known to them, as in 10:16, where the Prophet is commanded to say to his people: *Had God willed, I would not have recited it unto you, nor would He have made it known to you. Indeed, I tarried among you for a lifetime before it.* It is also a reminder that the Quran speaks through proof and evidence, against which the idolaters are inured (R), and that it is meant to be understood and not only rehearsed. See also 41:44: *And had We made it a Quran in a foreign tongue, they would say, "If only its signs were expounded. What! A foreign tongue and an Arab [messenger]?"* and 14:4: *And We have sent no messenger, save in the language of his people.*

it unto them, they would not have believed in it. (200) Thus do We place it into the hearts of the guilty; (201) they will not believe in it till they see the painful punishment; (202) so it will come upon them suddenly, while they are unaware. (203) Then they will say, "Will we be granted respite?" (204) Do they seek to hasten Our Punishment? (205) Consider: if We grant them enjoyment for years, (206) and there comes upon them that which they were promised, (207) of what avail to them will be that which they were made to enjoy? (208) And never did We destroy a town save that it had warners, (209) as a reminder; and We did no wrong. (210) And the satans did not descend with it, (211) nor is it fitting for them, nor are they able.

200 For some the *it* in this verse means that the denial of the Quran is placed by God within the hearts of the disbelievers (R). Others interpret it to mean that God causes the Quran itself to enter into the hearts of disbelievers and becomes a proof against them when they do not believe in it (Th, Ṭs). Some point out that the negative particle *lā* here is possibly read with an implied sense of "in order to," which would result in the translation of vv. 200–201 as, "We place it into the hearts of the guilty, that they may not believe in it till they see the painful punishment" (Q, Ṭ, Th). Several commentators interpret this verse as an articulation of God's predestining certain souls, reflecting an understanding that the thing being placed in the soul is not the Quran, but disbelief, as implied by the end of v. 199 (Bḍ, R). A plausible reading, based upon the context of this verse, is that the reception of the Quran by those who do not believe is analogous to that of non-Arabs hearing Arabic: they can hear it, but cannot understand it.

201 The guilty will believe only when it is too late and the punishment is already upon them (IK; cf. 10:88, 97).

202 It is said that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī read the verb *come upon* in this verse in the grammatical feminine, which would not correspond to the grammatically masculine *punishment* of the previous verse, but rather to an implied "Hour" (*sāʿah*), meaning that the end of the world would come suddenly (Q). The idea of the Hour coming unexpectedly appears in 6:31; 7:187; 12:107; 21:40; 22:55; 39:55; 43:66; 47:18.

203–4 At the moment of truth, the disbelievers will seek to have the punishment delayed, though in life they would mockingly *seek to hasten* the Punishment of God, as in v. 187 (R, Ṭ). This is related to other verses that speak of those who wish to have a second chance at life in order to do good deeds (e.g., 2:167; 39:58). Regarding the desire by people to return to the world in order to live their lives differently, see 2:167c; 6:27–28c; 23:99–100c; 32:12c. That they seek to hasten God's Punishment refers to the manner in which disbelievers ignore the warnings of the prophets and mock the punishments they foretell; see 10:50–51; 13:6; 22:47; 27:46, 72; 29:53c; 37:176–77; 38:16; 42:18; 51:14.

205–7 This passage is a reference to the idolaters of Makkah and says that even if the promised punishment were not to arrive for a long time, the things of the world that they enjoyed would be of no use to them in the Hereafter (Q). Moreover, in their case it would only add to their ruin, as they would have become entrenched in their lack of faith and would spend years more without repenting (Ṭ).

208–9 For the idea that God did not destroy any people without first having given them a chance to be righteous, see also 15:4; 17:15; 20:134; 28:59. Some read *as a reminder* not as a clause modifying *warners*, but as the second half of a phrase whose first half is implicit, so that it would be translated, "They had warners, [who delivered] a reminder," or, "They had warners. [It was] a reminder" (Q).

210–12 These verses reaffirm that the Quran was brought by an angel (v. 193), from whom no falsehood can come (IK, Q). Satans bring corruption and misguidance to God's servants, whereas the Quran enjoins right and forbids wrong and is

(212) Indeed, they are debarred from hearing [it]. (213) So call not upon another god along with God, lest thou be among the punished. (214) And warn thy tribe, thy nearest kin, (215) and lower thy wing to the believers who follow thee. (216) And should they disobey thee, say, "Truly I am quit of that which you do." (217) And trust in the Mighty, the Merciful, (218) Who sees thee when thou standest [to pray], (219) and thy movement amid those who prostrate. (220) Truly He is the

a light and guidance (IK). Nor would the satans be able to bring such a thing even if they desired to do so. About the suitability of nonhuman beings receiving the revelation, Ibn Kathīr cites 59:21: *Had We made this Quran descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God.* With regard to *they are debarred from hearing [it],* he mentions that the jinn are described as saying in 72:8: *We reached out to Heaven and found it filled with mighty sentries and flaming stars;* see 15:17–18c; 37:6–10c; 72:8–9c; and the introduction to *Sūrah* 72. Some say *debarred from hearing [it]* means they cannot understand the Quran or that they hear its commands, but do not obey them (Su).

213 This verse is in the second-person singular and is thus considered to be addressed to the Prophet himself, but is also interpreted as a Command to the Prophet to say these words to others (Q).

214 It is reported that when this verse was revealed, the Prophet addressed his kin directly by name, including his daughter Fāṭimah, his uncle ʿAbbās, and his aunt Ṣafiyyah, and his tribe, the Quraysh, in more general terms, saying, "Purchase your souls from God! I can avail thee naught against God" (Ṭ, Th). In a version of the story favored by Shiite sources, the Prophet asked a gathering of his nearest relatives who among them would be his supporter, helper, and trustee; only his young cousin ʿAlī, who was still a boy, rose to respond (Qm, Ṭ). In some accounts, the Prophet's words to his family and relatives come over the course of three consecutive nights during which he invited them to partake of a meal. In other accounts, the Prophet ascends the hill Ṣafā to deliver his warning, asking his kin (usually the number given is approximately forty) if they would believe him if he told them that an army was just about to come from around the mountain; when they reply in the affirmative, he then warns them of the coming of the Hereafter (Ṭ, Z).

215 Cf. 15:88. *Lower thy wing* means to be gentle (Ṭ). Some understand this symbolism through the image of a bird, which, when it is in flight and wants to descend, lowers its wings, representing humility and gentleness (R); or since, in the case of a human being, a *wing* (*janāḥ*) is one's side, it means to "lower one's side" to the believers and to deal gently with them (Q).

216 *I am quit* (*barīʾ*) *of that which you do* means that the Prophet is not responsible for the disobedient and is innocent of their wrongdoings (cf. 6:19, 78; 10:41; 11:35, 54). The Quran frequently mentions that the Prophet is not answerable for the sins of his people; he is only responsible for warning them and bringing them glad tidings (see 26:115c).

217 Trusting here means that one's fear and hope should rest entirely with God, reflecting the heart's reliance upon God, which increases as one's faith grows (Su). The concept of *trust* in God (*tawakkul*) is a cornerstone of Islamic spirituality, and believers are told in dozens of verses to trust in God (e.g., 4:81; 5:23; 8:61; 25:28); regarding the significance of trust in God, see 14:11–12c.

218–20 According to one interpretation, *when thou standest [to pray]* refers to the night vigil prayer (*tahajjud;* see the introduction to *Sūrah* 73), which many consider to have been at one time an obligatory act in Makkah that was later made supererogatory; see 73:20c. When the obligatory status was lifted, it is said that the Prophet went from house to house to see if his Companions were continuing the practice even though it was no longer a religious obligation, which is what is meant by *thy movement amid those who prostrate*

Hearing, the Knowing. (221) Shall I inform thee of those upon whom the satans descend? (222) They descend upon every sinful liar, (223) eavesdropping, and most of them are liars. (224) And as for the poets, the errant follow them. (225) Hast thou not considered that they wander in every valley, (226) and that they say what they

(R). In another interpretation, this refers to the Prophet's role as leader of prayer, including his movements of bowing and prostrating along with the other worshippers (R, Ṭ). According to another interpretation, *movement* (*taqallub*) refers to the movement of the Prophet's sight—in 2:144 *taqallub* refers to the Prophet's turning his face toward Heaven—over the worshippers behind him, in accord with a *ḥadīth* that states that the Prophet could see in front of him and behind him during the prayer: "Straighten your rows, for truly I can see you behind me" (IK, R).

221–23 In connection with these verses, commentators mention various *aḥādīth* that describe how the jinn and satans overhear something from the unseen world of the angels and convey this knowledge to their allies among human beings, such as soothsayers (sing. *kāhin*); they convey some truth, but add to it a hundred lies (IK, Q, R); see 72:8–9c. *Every sinful liar* is interpreted to mean soothsayers. *Eavesdropping* refers to their listening in on the celestial discourse (see *Sūrah* 72) and then conveying this to soothsayers (IK). *Most of them are liars* is understood by some to mean that these soothsayers lie about what they hear from the satans and jinn (R), or it can mean that most of the satans lie to the soothsayers (Sm, Ṭ).

224–26 The Quran distances itself from *shiᶜr*, usually rendered "poetry," and from the accusation that the Prophet was a poet (21:5; 36:69; 37:36; 52:30; 69:41). In pre-Islamic Arabia a poet (*shāᶜir*) was not merely a person who composed verse, but rather one who was part of a spectrum of supernaturally affected individuals that included soothsayers (sing. *kāhin*) and those who were possessed or mad (sing. *majnūn*), as described in 52:29–30: *So remind, for thou art not, by the Blessing of thy Lord, a soothsayer or one possessed. Or do they say, "A poet—let us await the vagaries of fate for him."* Soothsayers claimed openly and directly to have contact with jinn or satans and typically served an oracular function predicated on their ability to communicate with unseen forces who could convey information from the unseen world (*ghayb*). Poets did not serve this function, but their imaginative powers were often associated with inspiration from the same kind of otherworldly or magical source. That is to say, it was the widely accepted source and function of "poetry" in the Age of Ignorance (*al-jāhiliyyah*) that was the point of contention between the Prophet and the idolaters who accused him of being a "poet." When the Quran distances itself from poetry, it is not to deny that the Quran has identifiable formal beauty, as many of its sections reflect the highest poetic eloquence, or that it employs allegory and symbolism and so has much overlap with what anyone would call poetry. It is rather to say that in the context of the Arabia in which the Quran was revealed, calling someone a *shāᶜir* or calling some text *shiᶜr* suggested a source other than God or the *Trustworthy Spirit* mentioned in v. 193. That is to say that *shāᶜir* and *shiᶜr* as used at the time of the Quranic revelation do not correspond exactly to "poet" and "poetry" as those words are used in English today.

At another level, poets were also associated with vulgarity and with many of the worst aspects of tribal culture, such as vainglory, intemperance, lust, and combativeness. Al-Rāzī reflects upon this passage by noting that the poets would fashion words in praise of someone one day and then say the opposite the next day to a different audience. They would rhetorically savage a person for the smallest fault of an ancestor, while committing all manner of sin themselves. Al-Qurṭubī points out that in the tradition poetry is considered a special kind of speech, which can be either good or bad, beautiful or ugly, but he notes that pre-Islamic Arab poets would versify for money to whatever purpose the customer wished, whether true or false. There were exceptions, such as the pre-Islamic poet Labīd, some of whose poems the Prophet praised.

Some say that *the errant* (*ghāwīn*) refers to the aforementioned satans (v. 221) or the "rhapsodists"

do not do? (227) Not so those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and remember God much, and help one another after having been wronged. And those who do wrong shall know to what homecoming they will return!

(*rawwāh*), individuals whose function it was to memorize and transmit the compositions of poets (Ṭ, Th). Other opinions say they are idolaters or misguided people in general (Ṭ).

227 This verse is understood to refer to those poets who compose verse and engage the imagination for noble purposes rather than those referred to in the previous verse (IK), and indeed there were famous poets among the Prophet's Companions, such as ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Rawwāḥah and Ḥassān ibn Thābit, who used their talents in the service of the believers' cause. It is also worth noting that wherever Islam went, the poetic tradition became strong; and precisely because of the form of the Quran, poetry is one of the highest arts in Islam and plays a much greater role in Islamic culture than in Western culture.

*Remember God much* can also be rendered "mention God much" or "invoke God much," and some interpret this to be a reference not to the poets, but to the poetry itself if it contained spiritually wholesome themes (Ṭ). Some point out that *to remember God much* is not a matter of mere quantity of time, but of being conscious and aware of God's Presence in a way that is not affected by habit or forgetfulness (Su).

*Having been wronged* is understood by some to mean the idolaters' use of verse to mock or satirize the believers (Ṭ). Commentators such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr note that the Prophet on occasion commanded Companions to compose verse in response to the idolaters, saying, for example, to Ḥassān ibn Thābit, "Versify against them, for Gabriel is with thee." On the occasion of the conquest of Makkah, ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Rawwāḥah recited verses against the idolaters. He was rebuked by ᶜUmar for reciting poetry in the environs of the Kaᶜbah, but the Prophet said to ᶜUmar, "Leave him be, O ᶜUmar, for it [the verse] goes through them [the idolaters] faster than an arrow."

*Those who do wrong* is understood to mean any who do wrong (IK), but it is also associated more specifically with individuals such as the aforementioned poets or idolaters of Makkah (Ṭ). *Homecoming* (*munqalib*) is the active participle of *return* (*yanqalib*), which has the sense of returning, but also of being brought to the opposite of one's state (Q), and here it refers to what one returns to after death (Th). In this sense homecoming is related to other similar words relating to one's ultimate return to God in the Hereafter, such as *maṣīr* (*journey's end;* e.g., 2:286; 24:42; 31:14; 35:18; 40:3), *maᵓāb* (*return;* e.g., 3:14), and *marjiᶜ* (*return;* e.g., 3:55), all of which mean "return" or "place of return," as well as to general verses that speak of all things returning to God (see, e.g., 2:210; 3:109; 22:76; 35:4; 57:5).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 27

# The Ants

## *al-Naml*

A Makkan *sūrah* (Q), *al-Naml* takes its name from the valley of the ants through which Solomon's army passes, mentioned in v. 18. The *sūrah* opens with several verses articulating common themes in the Quran regarding Final Judgment in the Hereafter and then turns to Moses' encounter with the fire on the mountain, from which God spoke charging him with his mission to go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites (vv. 7–14). This is followed by an account of Solomon with his miraculous host of men, jinn, and birds and his encounter with the Queen of Sheba, who eventually comes before Solomon and embraces faith in the One God (vv. 15–44). The story of the Arabian prophet Ṣāliḥ and his people, the Thamūd, is recounted (vv. 45–53), describing a plot devised by Ṣāliḥ's people to murder him. Lot's story, including the destruction of his people for their iniquities, is told briefly (vv. 54–58). Next are several verses that challenge readers to meditate upon the Nature of God and His creation; the refrain *Is there a god alongside God?* punctuates the passage several times (vv. 59–64).

The disbelievers challenge the Prophet regarding the reality of bodily resurrection and the coming of the end of the world and are then reminded that only God knows what is hidden in the heavens and on the earth and within the hearts of human beings (vv. 65–72). Verses describing how God will judge between those who differ on religious matters (vv. 75–81) are followed by a section that discusses eschatological realities, such as the "beast" that will rise as one of the portents of the end of the world, the marshaling of religious communities and the terror human beings will experience at the end of the world, the destruction of the mountains, and the consequences for those who do good and those who do evil (vv. 82–93).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ṭā. Sīn.* These are the signs of the Quran and a clear Book, (2) a guidance and glad tidings for the believers, (3) who perform the prayer and give the alms, and of the Hereafter are certain. (4) Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter, We have made their deeds seem fair unto them, while they wander confused. (5) It is they who shall have a terrible punishment, and in the Hereafter it is they who are the greatest losers. (6) Truly thou dost receive the Quran from the

1 For a discussion of the separated letters that appear at the start of some *sūrah*s, see 2:1c. Some say the *ṭa'* represents the Divine Name *al-Laṭīf* ("the Subtle") and the *sīn* the Name *al-Samī'* ("the Hearing"), while others say the *ṭā'* represents purity (*ṭahārah*) and the *sīn* the mystery (*sirr*) of the Beloved (Th). On these two particular letters, also see 26:1c. *These are the signs* refers to the verses (*āyāt,* lit. "signs") of this *sūrah,* while *a clear Book* refers to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; R) or the Quran (Q). Cf. 10:1; 12:1; 13:1; 15:1; 26:1; 28:1; 31:2.

2 This pairing of *guidance* and *glad tidings* also appears in 2:97 and 16:102.

3 The pairing of the *prayer* (*ṣalāh;* see 2:3c) and the *alms* (*zakāh*) occurs throughout the Quran (2:43, 83, 110, 177, 277; 4:77, 162; 5:12, 55; 7:156; 9:5, 11, 18, 71; 19:31, 55; 21:73; 22:41, 78; 24:37, 56; 31:4; 33:33; 58:13; 73:20; 98:5). Being *certain of the Hereafter* is a description that also appears in 2:4 and 31:4, and it encompasses belief in the Resurrection, Judgment, the Garden, and the Fire (IK).

4 The description of actions being *made* to *seem fair* (*zuyyina*) to people is found throughout the Quran (e.g., 2:212; 3:14; 6:43; 6:108, 122, 137; 8:48; 9:37; 10:12; 13:33; 15:39; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38; 35:8; 40:37; 41:25; 47:14; 48:12; 49:7). In this verse, God is the agent of making worldly things seem fair (i.e., beautiful or good) to human beings; in other passages it is Satan; and in still others the verb is passive, as in 9:37: *The evil of their deeds is made to seem fair unto them.* Making what is bad "seem fair" is a common theme connecting fallen human beings to their passions and can mean, in other contexts, to "adorn" (15:16), meaning that one's actions were, as it were, "adorned" (made to seem good) in the eyes of those who *believe not in the Hereafter.* To *wander confused* (cf. 6:110; 7:186; 10:11; 23:75) can mean to vacillate between sin and error and to engage in empty play (Q), a state resulting directly from one's attachment to the ephemeral objects of the world, which renders one incapable of practicing the spiritual life (Qu).

5 Some say the *terrible punishment* can refer to any punishment in this world or the Hereafter (R), but others situate such loss and punishment in this world, seeing the *punishment* as a reference to the Battle of Badr (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 8; Z). Some connect *greatest losers* with the symbolism of buying and selling employed throughout the Quran, for example, when the Quran warns people about purchasing error at the price of guidance (cf. 2:16, 86, 175; Ṭ). Others explain this phrase by saying that some people lose the world and gain the Hereafter, but these people do the opposite and hence are the *greatest losers* (Q).

6 Some commentators describe this verse as a kind of introduction to the stories of the prophets that follow (Q, R). Sufis meditating upon this verse read it beyond its context as addressed to the Prophet; they say that no one can be considered among those *firmly rooted in knowledge* (*al-rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm,* mentioned in 3:7) until one recites the Quran "through God" (*bi'Llāh*) and hears it "from God" (*min Allāh*)—that is, hears it from *the Presence of One who is Wise, Knowing* (Aj).

Presence of One who is Wise, Knowing. (7) [Remember] when Moses said unto his family, "Verily, I perceive a fire. I shall bring you some news therefrom, or a brand, that haply you may warm yourselves." (8) Then when he came to it, a call came unto him, "Blessed is the One in the fire, and the one around it. And glory be to God, Lord of the worlds! (9) O Moses! Verily, it is I, God, the Mighty, the

7 In Sufism, this verse symbolizes the levels of certainty envisioned as progressive stages in the spiritual life: (1) having conceptual knowledge of the fire, (2) seeing that fire, and (3) being burned or consumed by it symbolize (1) theoretical knowledge about spiritual matters, (2) direct vision of spiritual realities, and (3) the realization attained when the substance of the soul is transformed by being consumed by the Truth.

Some understand *family* (*ahl*) here to refer to Moses' wife only, which is one possible meaning of *ahl* (R). *Some news* refers to information about the road, since they had become lost on their journey (IK, R). (Cf. 28:29; Exodus 3:1–6.)

8 *The One in the fire* is understood to refer to God Himself, so that, according to some, this phrase means that it was the fire that was blessed or that the Light of God within the fire was blessed (Ṭ). The *one around it* refers to the angels or to Moses and the angels together (Ṭ), meaning that Moses and the angels are blessed by God (Th). For some this means that the fire itself is what is blessed, since the Arabic particle *man,* which is rendered here as *the one,* but ordinarily means "who" or "one [who]," can also have the more general meaning of *mā,* or "what," so that it would mean, "Blessed is that which is in the fire," meaning the fire itself (Th). In trying to understand this verse in relation to the description of this same incident in 28:30, which speaks of the location as *the blessed site,* some interpret *blessed* to mean that it is the place of the fire that is blessed (Z), because it is the place where this great event took place (R). Still others say that *blessed is* implies, "Blessed is the one [seeking after] the fire," or, "Blessed is the One [whose power and authority is] in the fire" (Th). Such different interpretations of the meaning of *blessed is* arise, because ordinarily this form of the verb (*bāraka*) takes a direct or indirect object (Q, Th), but in this case there is no object for the verb. *Blessed* (the passive verb *būrika*) is also understood to mean "holy" (*muqaddas;* IK, Th).

Some note that the phenomenon was described as fire (*nār*), but was actually light (*nūr*); Moses deemed it "fire," but the Arabs are said to have sometimes used the word "fire" (*nār*) in the place of "light" (*nūr;* Q, Th). Ibn ʿAbbās said it was not fire, but a flickering light, and in another statement he referred to it as the "Light of the Lord of the worlds" (IK).

It is in the context of this verse that many commentators mention the *ḥadīth:* "God sleeps not; nor is it proper to Him to sleep. He lowers justice and raises it. He raises to Himself the deeds of the night before the day, and the deeds of the day before the night. His veil is light [or fire]. If it were removed, the glories of His Face would burn up everything whose sight fell upon It."

9 Because of the different ways in which this verse can be read, *Verily, it is I, God* could also be understood to mean, "It is the case that truly I am God" (Ṭ). It can also be read as simply denoting the beginning of a new clause, so that it would be rendered, "O Moses! I am God" (R, Z).

It is worth noting that the ambiguity in the Arabic between *annahu anā'Llāh* and *innahu anā'Llāh,* which leads to the aforementioned interpretations, is not the same type of ambiguity that fuels debates surrounding the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh,* which God says to Moses as recounted in Exodus 3:14 and which is rendered in numerous ways, such as "I am that I am," "I am Who I am," "I am He who is," or "I will be what I will be." The Islamic understanding of what God said during this event, namely, that He identified Himself by His Name, overlaps with those currents of Jewish and Christian understanding of *ehyeh asher ehyeh* that hold that this phrase is or contains a Name of God.

Wise!" (10) And, "Cast thy staff!" Then when he saw it quivering like a serpent, he turned in retreat without returning. "O Moses! Fear not! Verily the messengers fear not in My Presence, (11) save one who did wrong, then replaced evil with good. For truly I am Forgiving, Merciful. (12) And insert thy hand in thy bosom; it will come forth white, without blemish—among nine signs to Pharaoh and his people. Truly they have been an iniquitous people." (13) And when Our signs came to them as a clear portent, they said, "This is manifest sorcery!" (14) They rejected them—though their souls were convinced of them—wrongfully and exultantly. So behold how the workers of corruption fared in the end! (15) And indeed We gave unto David and Solomon knowledge. And

10–11 *And* at the start of v. 10 could also be understood as connecting v. 10 to the statement in v. 9, so that the translation would be, "I am God, the Mighty, the Wise; so cast thy staff." *Without returning* is also interpreted to mean without looking to one side or the other (Q, Ṭ), implying so little hesitation that he did not even venture a sideways glance.

In this passage, *save one who did wrong* is considered an oblique reference to Moses himself, who struck and killed an Egyptian who was fighting with an Israelite (see 28:15–21; cf. Exodus 2:11–14) and perhaps feared God's Presence on this account (Ṭ). To *replace evil with good* means to repent for one's sins (Ṭ). The particle *illā,* which ordinarily means "except" or "save," can also have other meanings. Here some commentators understand it so that the sentence would read, "Verily the messengers fear not in My Presence, and neither does one who did wrong and replaced evil with good" (Ṭ). It is likely that those who search for alternate meanings for *illā* do so out of a reluctance to attribute sin to prophets and messengers, because their infallibility and protection from sin is an important doctrine among the vast majority of Muslim theologians. As al-Qurṭubī points out, however, many accept that prophets could have committed "errors" (*dhanb*) before their investiture with prophethood; moreover, it is a sign of sincerity that one fears that one's repentance is not complete. A saying attributed al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī says, "Prophets sin and are chastised" (Q, Ṭ).

12 The miracle of the white hand (cf. 20:22; 26:33; 28:32) is demonstrated to Moses here, before being made to appear again later in the presence of Pharaoh (26:33). On the *nine signs,* see 17:101c, which speaks of the *nine clear signs* given to Moses. As a spiritual symbol, the white hand can mean that one should place one's spiritual meditation into one's heart, and one's thoughts will then emerge white and gleaming, which will lead to greater understanding and vision and a fuller realization of the virtues necessary to journey to God (Aj).

13–14 It was the arrogance of Pharaoh and his people that prevented them from accepting what they knew to be true in their hearts (Ṭ). The final phrase of v. 14 is a frequent refrain that appears in the Quran in the context of previous peoples whose ultimate disappearance or destruction serves as a lesson to later peoples; see 30:9c.

15 This *knowledge* is considered by some to be the wisdom and understanding proper to prophethood (Q); for others it refers to the special favors mentioned in vv. 16–17 (Ṭ) or the forms of knowledge mentioned in 21:80: *And We taught him how to make garments for you to protect you against your own might.* Some note that this verse shows the eminence of knowledge among the gifts that God bestows, as mentioned in 58:11: *God will raise in degrees those among you who believe and those who have been given knowledge* (Q). David and Solomon's gratitude for their God-given knowledge surpasses their gratitude for their kingdom, and the knowledge that they possess is

they said, "Praise be to God, Who has favored us above many of His believing servants." (16) Solomon inherited from David and said, "O mankind, we have been taught the language of the birds, and we have been given of all things. Truly this is clear bounty!" (17) And gathered for Solomon were his hosts of jinn and men and birds, and they were marshaled [in ordered ranks], (18) till when they came to the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants! Enter your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you, while they are unaware." (19) And he smiled, laughing at her words, and said, "My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Thy blessing wherewith Thou hast blessed me and my parents and to work

beyond that of ordinary believers and necessarily includes, given that they were prophets, an awareness and remembrance of God at all moments (R).

16 Knowledge of *the language of the birds* was something Solomon inherited from David (R); it is mentioned in 21:79: *We compelled the mountains and the birds to glorify along with David;* and 34:10: *And indeed We gave David bounty from Us: "O mountains! Echo God's praises with him, likewise you birds!"* See also 38:19, which states regarding David: *And the birds gathered, each turning oft unto Him.* The phrase *given of all things* does not mean literally everything, but "much" or "abundantly" (R). The idea of the "language of the birds" became an important idea in Sufi thought, often symbolizing higher states of consciousness that enable one to understand the deeper significance of things beyond their outward appearances. Some Sufis have interpreted this phrase to mean not only knowledge of an esoteric character in general, but more specifically knowledge of the inner meaning of other religions. One of the most famous works of Sufism is the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* of ʿAṭṭār, which is usually rendered "Conference of the Birds," but which has the identical Arabic terms as the phrase in this verse.

17 *Marshaled* translates *yūzaʿūn,* which some interpret as meaning "corralled" or "kept in check," as in keeping the lines together and being tightly grouped (Q, Ṭ). For others *marshaled* means that they moved forward or else that they were defenders against attacks (Ṭ). For some Solomon's hosts were particular to his time and the birds serving him were unlike those of other times, though even normal birds (like all creatures) possess a measure of intelligence and inspiration proper to their state of being (R). The inclusion of jinn as part of Solomon's host indicates not only that it was of a miraculous and wondrous nature, but also that Solomon had the stature and power to control and make use of the jinn, beings ordinarily considered uncontrollable by human beings and most often mischievous.

18–19 Some commentators say that the ants were winged, thus making them *ṭayr,* or "birds," whose language Solomon understood (Q, Ṭh). Also, a number of commentators actually give a name for the ant, though others say it is inconceivable that one could possibly know such a detail (Q). The ant says *while they are unaware,* assuming that if a prophet like Solomon knew, he would not crush them (R). Solomon laughed and smiled, because he marveled at the ant's anxiety and care and felt grateful to God for the privilege of being able to understand the ant's concerns (Bḍ). Some commentators mention the *ḥadīth:* "An ant bit a prophet, and he ordered the anthill burned. God revealed unto him, 'Did you, because a single ant bit you, destroy a community (*ummah*) from among the communities that hymn praises [of Me]? Why not a single ant?'" (IK, Q).

*Inspire me* renders *awzaʿni,* which some understand to mean "make me" (Ṭ); it is in fact the same word rendered *marshaled* in v. 17; the difference in meaning is based on context. Solomon mentioned his parents, because he considered the invocation of blessings upon them to be tantamount to blessings upon himself (R). To *work righteousness* per-

righteousness pleasing to Thee, and cause me to enter, through Thy Mercy, among Thy righteous servants!" (20) And he surveyed the birds and said, "How is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Or is he among those who are absent? (21) I will surely punish him with a severe punishment, or I shall slaughter him, unless he brings me a clear warrant." (22) But he tarried not long, and said, "I have comprehended that which thou hast not comprehended, and I bring you a sure report from Sheba. (23) Verily, I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given of all things, and hers is a mighty throne! (24) I found her and her people prostrating to the sun, apart from God, and Satan has made their actions seem fair unto them, and turned them from the way, such that they are not rightly guided. (25) Will they not prostrate unto God, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and on the earth, and Who knows what you hide and what you disclose? (26) God, there is no god but He, Lord of the mighty

tains to the life of this world, while being included *among Thy righteous servants* pertains to being in their company in the Hereafter (R).

20 The *hoopoe* (*hudhud*) is a medium-sized bird with a long thin bill, notable for a distinctive crest on its head. In the commentary, the hoopoe is described as knowing where the nearest water was, and when Solomon asked about the water, he discovered the hoopoe was absent (Ṭ); others say that he learned of the hoopoe's absence, because it was the bird's function to shield Solomon from the sun (R). Some note that Solomon's reaction shows one of the qualities of a great leader—he was aware of the condition of those he led, down to that of a single bird (Q). As a spiritual allegory and symbol, this passage is interpreted to be a drama between the spiritual heart, or the spirit within one, and the ego. The hoopoe symbolizes an aspect or faculty of the soul, while Solomon is the spiritual heart that must control the soul and take it to task when it disobeys. The soul can become lost in heedlessness of God; yet its faculties are able to bring to the soul knowledge and wisdom previously undiscovered (Aj).

21 *Warrant* renders *sulṭān,* in this case meaning some clear evidence or excuse for why the hoopoe was absent (Ṭ).

22–23 For Sheba, see commentary on 34:15–19 (in the *sūrah* of the same name). The Queen of Sheba is known in the Islamic tradition as Bilqīs (or Bilqays) daughter of Sharāḥīl. *Mighty throne* here is understood to refer not only to her power, but also to the actual physical dimensions and richness of the throne (Q, Ṭ, Th). *All things* is understood to mean "everything she needs for her kingdom" (Q). The same phrase also appears in v. 16 in connection with Solomon's kingdom.

24 On Satan's making things *seem fair,* see 27:4c.

25 This verse could also be read as a continuation of *and turned them from the way* from the previous verse, so that the two verses together would mean, "And turned them from the way, so that they were not rightly guided and so that they did not prostrate." In this case the first word of v. 25 would be read *alā* rather than *allā,* but both are accepted readings (Q, Ṭ). By *what is hidden* some understand rain (*ghayth*), the fruits of the earth, all things in the heavens and the earth that are known only to God (Ṭ), or mysteries generally (Q).

26 Al-Qurṭubī notes that the Queen of Sheba's throne is called *mighty* (v. 23) in relation to the other thrones of the sovereigns of the earth, whereas God's Throne is Mighty because it (or its Pedestal) encompasses the heavens and the earth. This is one of fifteen verses after which it is said that one must prostrate when reciting the Quran; see 19:58c.

Throne!" (27) He said, "We shall see if you have spoken the truth or if you are among the liars. (28) Go with this letter of mine and deliver it unto them. Then turn away from them and observe what they send back." (29) She said, "O notables! Truly a noble letter has been delivered unto me. (30) Verily, it is from Solomon and verily it is, 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. (31) Do not exalt yourselves against me, but come unto me in submission.' " (32) She said, "O notables! Give me your opinion in this matter of mine. I am not one to decide on any matter unless you are present." (33) They said, "We are possessed of strength and possessed of great might. But the command is thine; so consider what thou wouldst command." (34) She said, "Verily, kings, when they enter a town, corrupt it, and make the most honorable of its people the most abased. They will do likewise. (35) I will send a gift to them, and observe what

27–28 In these verses Solomon is speaking to the hoopoe (Ṭ), since the hoopoe had made such a categorical claim in v. 22 regarding what he knew and what Solomon did not know (Q), but it also shows that a leader should accept the legitimate excuses of his followers (Q). Al-Qurṭubī quotes a *ḥadīth* that states, "None love excuses more than God. That is why He revealed the Books and sent the messengers."

29–30 The Queen of Sheba called the letter *noble* either because of its seal, because it was sent by Solomon, or because the contents were noble and good (Q, Ṭ). V. 30 is the only verse in the Quran that repeats the entire *basmalah* (the formula with which all *sūrahs* but one begin) in the middle of a *sūrah*.

31 *Come . . . in submission* means in a state of submission and obedience to God and with faith in His Oneness (Ṭ), though some read it to mean the queen and her notables should approach Solomon in a state of obedience (R) rather than arrogantly or as tyrants, as alluded to in *Do not exalt yourselves against me* (IK).

32–33 The words of the queen's notables pertain to their worldly power and military strength, the implication being that they were capable of supporting her with their strength in battle (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī considers their response a good one, as it is balanced between deference to the queen and a display of strength. Others note that she likely knew more than they did in any case, and hence her question was more diplomatic than practical (IK). In his commentary on this incident in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* Ibn ʿArabī notes that the queen's handling of the letter from Solomon demonstrated her superiority and worthiness to rule. Such attributes along with her willingness to embrace true faith when challenged (unlike other figures such as Pharaoh) can also be interpreted as constituting a Quranic model for beneficent and wise female leadership and governance.

34 The queen uttered this sentence in response to the suggestion by her council of notables that they were strong enough to resist the power of Solomon, meaning that if Solomon were to enter their land, destruction would ensue (Q). Although the plain sense of the queen's comment is that it is about the way kings or queens overturn the order and harmony of conquered lands, some Sufis read this verse as a spiritual allegory. In his famous *Kitab al-ḥikam* ("Aphorisms"), Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh al-Iskandarī sees the *kings* as symbolic of inspirations that assail the heart from the spiritual world, which, when they are real and true, will enter the *town* of the heart, topple the dominance of its worldly desires and make them *most abased,* and replace them with spiritual aspirations that are no longer subordinate to the appetites of the soul (Aj).

35 The commentators give details to the story, describing—sometimes at length—what the gifts

the envoys bring back." (36) But when it came to Solomon, he said, "Do you offer me wealth? What God has given me is better than what He has given you. Nay, but it is you who exult in your gift!" (37) "Return unto them, for we shall come upon them with hosts they cannot withstand, and we shall expel them hence, abased, and they shall be humbled." (38) He said, "O notables! Which of you will bring me her throne before they come unto me in submission?" (39) An *ʿifrīt* among the jinn said, "I will bring it to thee before thou risest from thy place. Truly I have the strength for it, [and] am trustworthy." (40) The one who had knowledge of the Book said, "I will bring it to thee in the blink of an eye." Then when he saw it set before him, he said, "This is of the Bounty of my Lord, to try me whether I will give thanks or be ungrateful. And whosoever give thanks, he

were (IK, Ṭ), though it is not completely clear where such information would have come from; commentators such as al-Rāzī dismiss such details as irrelevant to the story.

36 The Queen of Sheba's worldly possessions were no match for those of Solomon (Ṭ), who in any case was a prophet and therefore not motivated by the acquisition of worldly possessions for their own sake (Q). *Exult in your gift* means that the gift was a means of celebrating their own wealth and power rather than a manifestation of generosity or goodness (Ṭ).

37 These words were spoken by Solomon to the envoy from Sheba (Ṭ).

38 The majority hold that these words were said after Solomon received the gifts from Sheba (Q). For others, these words were spoken when the hoopoe first came with news of the Queen of Sheba and her throne and follow upon Solomon's statement in v. 27: *We shall see if you have spoken the truth.*

*In submission* (*muslimīn*) here is interpreted by some to mean in obedience to Solomon (Q), but by others to mean "as Muslims," that is, as adherents to the religion of the One God (Ṭ). It is thought that Solomon asked for her throne in order to send her a message of reproof or so that he could later show it to her as a proof of his prophethood (Ṭ).

39 An *ʿifrīt* is a kind of jinn (see 2:30c; 6:71–72c; and the introduction to *Sūrah* 72) that is either a giant (Ṭ), in one account described as big as a mountain (IK), or a mischievously clever jinn (Q, Ṭ). Others say that an *ʿifrīt* is a man who is foul and bold (R). Al-Qurṭubī mentions a *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet overpowers an *ʿifrīt* that had come to disrupt his prayer. This *ḥadīth* supports the idea that an *ʿifrīt* is a kind of mischievous jinn.

40 The *one who had knowledge* was a man (Ṭ), whose name is usually given as Āṣif ibn Barkhiyā, who knew a secret Name of God that, when invoked, caused one's supplication to be answered (Q, Ṭ). It is reported that Ibn Masʿūd said that the man was Khiḍr, the name traditionally attributed to the mysterious undying servant of God who became Moses' teacher in 18:65–82. Some even say that the speaker of these words was Solomon himself and that they were said to the *ʿifrīt* (R). Al-Rāzī prefers this last interpretation, since it seems to fit better with the context: as a prophet, Solomon would have been most knowledgeable about the Book, and he expressed gratitude to God for seeing the throne appear before him, implying that Solomon did it himself. By *Book* is understood the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22), the books of the prophets, or a book particular to Solomon (R), though what this book could be is not specified.

*Blink of an eye* renders a phrase that means "immediately," but literally means something like, "Before your glance returns to you." For some this

gives thanks only for his own soul; and whosoever is ungrateful, truly my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Generous." (41) He said, "Disguise her throne for her. We shall see if she is rightly guided or if she is among those who are not rightly guided." (42) Then when she came, it was said, "Is your throne like this?" She said, "It seems the same." [Solomon said], "And we were given knowledge before her and we were submitters, (43) while that which she worshipped apart from God barred her; verily she was from a disbelieving people." (44) It was said unto

phrase means that the man would bring the throne in less time than it would take for a man who was within range of Solomon's vision to reach him (Ṭ). For others it means that in the time it takes for Solomon to look as far as his sight would reach, the throne would appear before him (Ṭ). For still others, the throne sprang from the ground (Ṭ).

*Whether I will give thanks or be ungrateful* is interpreted by many to mean that Solomon understood that such amazing blessings as the power to bring a throne from afar contained within them a test of his sincerity (Ṭ). To mention here that God is Self-Sufficient serves to emphasize that He has no need of gratitude from human beings and is neither helped by its presence nor harmed by its absence (Ṭ).

41 *Disguise* means change the throne (Ṭ), that is, add some things and remove some things (Ṭ) or turn it upside down (Q). *We shall see* implies waiting to see if the queen recognizes it (Ṭ), as it was meant to be a test for her (IK).

42 *It seems the same* indicates that she was in doubt (Ṭ). Some say the question was a test of her intelligence; if she said yes or no, she would have been incorrect, because the throne was neither entirely the same nor entirely different, but she correctly evaluated it by saying that it "seemed" like her very throne (Q).

43 The queen's worship of the sun prevented her from worshipping God properly (Ṭ). A minority opinion considers the possibility that the words beginning *And we were given knowledge before* are a continuation of the words of Bilqīs, alluding to a certain level of acknowledgment of the Power of God and the truth of Solomon's prophethood before she was shown the wonders of her transformed throne and the glass pavilion mentioned in the subsequent verse, indicating that she was in a sense held back or hindered from the fullness of faith by the erroneous religion she practiced (Z).

44 The *pavilion* is also interpreted to be a palace or fortress. Some commentators note that part of the illusion was that there were actually fish swimming beneath the crystal (Q, R, Ṭ). Part of the folklore attached to this story is that Solomon's jinn told him that the mother of Bilqīs was a jinn with the legs of an ass, and this ruse was prepared to trick her into exposing her legs; after the incident, other legends say that Solomon fell in love with Bilqīs and married her (Q, R, Ṭ). Ibn Kathīr, echoing al-Rāzī's sentiment regarding v. 35, sees little value in this folkloric material, which originated in Arab legends and the oral traditions of various converts to Islam from Judaism and Christianity.

Ibn ʿArabī notes in the chapter on Solomon in his *Fuṣūṣ* that the submission of Bilqīs was superior to that of Pharaoh, because she submitted to the *Lord of the worlds* without qualification, whereas he submitted (though too late according to many theologians) to the *Lord of Moses and Aaron* (7:122; 26:48); that is, Bilqīs understood what God was in Himself, whereas Pharaoh's understanding was limited to the Power of God as manifested through some of His prophets.

Ibn ʿAjībah interprets the encounter between Solomon and Bilqīs on a spiritual level and states that it is a highly complex allegory of the relationship between a spiritual master and a disciple and of the spiritual love between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Among other elements, Ibn ʿAjībah notes that in the spiritual life one relinquishes one's throne, which symbolizes the soul, and it is transfigured by the spiritual master into something new, but not completely different.

her, "Enter the pavilion." But when she saw it, she supposed it to be an expanse of water and bared her legs. He said, "Verily it is a pavilion paved with crystal." She said, "My Lord! Surely I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to God, Lord of the worlds." (45) And indeed We sent to Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ, [saying], "Worship God!" And behold, they were two groups, quarreling. (46) He said, "O my people! Why do you seek to hasten evil before good? Why do you not seek Forgiveness of God, that haply you may be shown mercy?" (47) They said, "We augur ill of you and of those with you." He said, "Your auguring ill is with God. Rather, you are a people being tried." (48) And in the city there were nine persons working corruption in the land and not setting matters aright. (49) They said, "Swear by God to each other that we shall attack him and his family by night. Then we shall surely say to his heir that we were

Commentaries on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ* mention that Bilqīs was taught here a lesson about appearances, about seeing what she believed should not have been there (her throne) and about not seeing what was in reality there (glass, not water), which is a kind of allegory for the challenge of overcoming appearances to reach the true nature of things, a goal of the spiritual life.

45 For a description of the Thamūd, see 7:73c; 11:61c. Other narrative accounts of Ṣāliḥ are found in 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31. The two groups were those who believed in Ṣāliḥ and those who denied him (Ṭ).

46 The *evil* is the Punishment of God, and the *good* is His Mercy (Ṭ). *Seek to hasten evil before good* may also refer to the fact that the Thamūd's actions were evil and deserved punishment, and that they committed such actions rather than performing good actions, which merit reward (Q). Cf. 13:6: *And they would have thee hasten evil before good, though examples have passed before them.*

47 Other verses in which people *augur ill* of or call their prophets an *ill omen* are 7:131 and 36:18. *Your auguring ill is with God* means that those things they predict happening as a result of ill omens are with God (Q), that is, known only to God (Ṭ). Any good or evil that they believed would happen to them comes not from any auguring, but originates from God (R). They were *being tried* precisely by the sending of Ṣāliḥ to them (Ṭ). The language of ill omen here is based on the ancient practice of using birds for divination: a bird would be released or chased, and if it went right, it was a good omen, and if went left, a bad one.

48 *Working corruption* (*afsada*) and *setting matters aright* (*aṣlaḥa*) are generally contrasted with one another in the Quran (e.g., 7:142; 26:152). These nine people are singled out because they were those who worked together to hamstring the she-camel and conspired to assassinate Ṣāliḥ (Ṭ). They were among the notables of the city, and their evils included, according to some, corrupt lending practices and a habit of dishonoring and humiliating people (Q).

49 The people swore by God to each other that they would kill Ṣāliḥ and provide alibis for one another to his heir (Ṭ), meaning that they wanted to have an excuse to give to the person upon whom exacting retribution would fall (Q); on the concept of retribution, see 2:178c. According to some, this plot took place three days after they had hamstrung the she-camel (7:77; 11:65; 26:157; 54:29; 91:14) and Ṣāliḥ had informed them of their impending doom; various versions of how their plot was foiled and they came to their death are given in various commentaries, but none are definitive (Q).

not present at the destruction of his family and that surely we are truthful." (50) And they devised a plot, and We devised a plot, while they were not aware. (51) So behold how their plot fared in the end; truly We destroyed them and their people all together. (52) And those are their houses, lying desolate for their having done wrong. Surely in this is a sign for a people who know. (53) We saved those who believed and were reverent. (54) And [We sent] Lot, when he said to his people, "Do you commit indecency, though you see? (55) Do you really come with desire unto men instead of women? Nay, but you are an ignorant people!" (56) Yet the reply of his people was naught but to say, "Expel the family of Lot from your town! Truly they are people who keep themselves pure!" (57) So We saved him and his family, except for his wife. We decreed that she should be among those who lagged behind. (58) And We poured down upon them a rain—evil is the rain of those who were warned! (59) Say, "Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen." Is God better, or the partners they

50 In related passages, God is described as *best of plotters* (3:54; 8:30), and elsewhere it is said that *unto God belongs plotting altogether* (13:42; cf. 14:46). Almost synonymous with this language is that of God using "schemes" against the disbelievers, and that His scheming is superior to theirs is alluded to in other verses (see 7:99; 52:42; 86:15–17; cf. 10:21).

51 Asking how people *fared in the end* is a common refrain in the Quran, an invitation to meditate upon the ultimate downfall of previous peoples who were wicked (cf. 12:109; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10).

52 The *wrong* they did was their idolatry and denial of their prophet (Ṭ). One interpretation of *houses, lying desolate,* beyond the outward sense of their now empty dwellings, is that their hearts were hardened through their disobedience (Su).

53 Some commentators say that those who were saved with Ṣāliḥ settled in Ramallah in Palestine (Ṭ), while others say that the saved, numbering some four thousand, went to Ḥaḍramawt, where Ṣāliḥ died. It is said that the place is called Ḥaḍramawt because it is where he died, since the word can mean "death has come" (Q), but this is one of several legendary etymologies for this place-name.

54–55 On the story of Lot in the Quran, see commentary on 11:77–83. As discussed in 26:165–66c, the *indecency* is understood to refer to anal intercourse, especially by men with men, but also according to some with women (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī points out that part of their sin was that they were open about their illicit activity and did not seek to keep it from view, and it went against the Wisdom of God, who did not create men sexually for men. *Though you see* means that they knew their deeds were indecent (R).

56 *Keep themselves pure* renders the verb *taṭahhara* (cf. 7:82), which in other contexts is a term of praise for those who believe (2:222; 9:108), but here is used by Lot's people pejoratively. It means, "They are trying to keep themselves pure [from our sexual practices]" (R, Ṭ).

57 Lot's wife is also mentioned in 7:83; 15:60; 26:171; 29:33; 37:135.

58 On this *evil rain,* also see 25:40.

59–64 This is a section devoted to descriptions of God in the form of rhetorical questions, ending with the refrain *Is there a god alongside*

ascribe? (60) He, Who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water for you from the sky, through which We make grow beautiful gardens, whose trees it is not for you to make grow? Is there a god alongside God? Nay, but they are a people who ascribe equals. (61) He, Who made the earth a dwelling place, and made rivers to run through it, and made firm mountains for it, and made between the two seas a barrier? Is there a god alongside God? Nay, but most of them know not. (62) He, Who answers the one in distress when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and Who makes you vicegerents of the earth? Is there a god alongside God? Little do you reflect! (63) He, Who guides you in the

*God?* The questions beginning *He, Who* are structured to seem as though they will end with a comparison between God and something else, but instead they arrive at the question, *Is there a god alongside God?* By implication they are asking in so many different ways the question posed in v. 59: *Is God better, or the partners they ascribe?* The questions beginning with *He, Who,* whose grammar suggests a comparison that is not actually made explicit (cf. 13:33), imply that God's Power and Beneficence are so great that one should not even offer an explicit comparison with Him.

60 *Ascribe equals* renders *yaʿdilūn,* which can also mean "swerve or turn away," since this particular verb changes meaning depending on the preposition that follows it, and both meanings are accepted by commentators. In this case there is no preposition to indicate which shade of meaning is being emphasized. *Gardens* renders *ḥadāʾiq* (sing. *ḥadiqah*), which are walled gardens (Ṭ) or gardens of palm trees (Q). *Beautiful* renders *bahjah,* understood to connote here edible flowers or simply anything from which human beings and animals eat (Ṭ). *It is not for you to make grow* refers to the fact that if God were not to provide water, these trees would not flourish (Ṭ). Al-Rāzī notes that this verse disabuses people of the idea that a human being makes a tree grow, when all aspects of its being and survival originate with God. See also 56:63–64: *Have you considered what you reap? Is it you who sow it or are We the sowers?*

61 The *two seas* are also mentioned in 25:53; 35:12; 55:19. Some note that within the soul there are two seas, the sea of faith and wisdom and the sea of rebellion and passion, and God by His Grace placed a barrier between them, a barrier (*ḥājiz,* also spoken of in 25:53 and 55:19, though in those two verses the term used for the barrier is *barzakh*) that is maintained as long as the soul is not insolent and rebellious toward God (R). *He Who . . . made rivers to run through it* is similar to 18:33: *We made a stream gush forth in their midst.* On the concept of *firm mountains* (*rawāsī*), see 21:30–31c.

62 *Evil* here means harm (Ṭ). *One in distress* refers to one who is helpless and powerless (Q), in the sense of being in a bad situation through no choice of one's own, perhaps afflicted by poverty or sickness (R). Al-Qurṭubī quotes a *ḥadīth* connecting the one in distress to those who are wronged or oppressed: "Be mindful of the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no veil between it and God." For some Sufis *one in distress* refers to those who have cut themselves off from attachment to everything but God and see no answer to their distress except for God. Others say that this phrase refers to those who raise their hands in prayer to God, but who have not a single good deed to present to Him. Such people have only their past sins to show God and cannot approach God with an attitude of merit; yet their prayers are answered by God's pure Generosity, meaning that those who come with awareness of their complete helplessness before God will find their prayers answered no matter what their actions might have been and will have the heart's evils removed (Aj). On the meaning of *vicegerents,* see 6:165c.

63 The darkness of the sea and land (cf. 6:63, 97) can be taken both in the literal sense of

darkness of land and sea, and sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy? Is there a god alongside God? Exalted is God above the partners they ascribe! (64) He, Who brings creation into being, then brings it back, and Who provides for you from Heaven and the earth? Is there a god alongside God? Say, "Bring your proof, if you are truthful." (65) Say, "None in the heavens or on the earth know the Unseen, save God. And they are not aware of when they will be resurrected." (66) Nay, but does their knowledge reach to the Hereafter? Nay, but they are in doubt concerning it; indeed, they are blind to it. (67) And those who disbelieve say, "What? When we and our fathers are dust, shall we indeed be

physical danger and as a symbol of the spiritual journey. Here it also suggests a wilderness without guideposts or signs to show the way (Q). Regarding *winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy,* referring to the gathering of a rainstorm before the water starts to fall, see 7:57c; 25:48c. *Winds* as signs of God and blessings are also mentioned in 2:164; 7:57; 15:22; 30:46; 45:5.

64 *Brings creation into being, then brings it back* (cf. 10:4; 30:11, 27) is understood to encompass all of the other blessings that God provides from Heaven and earth (R). The message of the prophets is not only that God begins everything, which even many idolaters accepted (see 39:3c; 46:28c), but also that all things will return to Him; the Origin indicates and points to the Return (R), evoking 57:3: *He is the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward.* For some, the provisions *from Heaven and the earth* refer to the spiritual and material blessings, respectively, that God bestows (Aj).

65 In the Quran *Unseen* (*ghayb*) refers to what is invisible in the sense of belonging to another order of reality, not something that is too distant or hidden to see physically, but it can also refer to events that are unknowable because they are in the remote past or have yet to occur, such as *when they will be resurrected;* on *ghayb,* also see 6:59c; 9:94c. God is described several times as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (*shahādah*), which could also be translated "Knower of what is absent and what is present" (6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18; see also 59:22c). Some say this verse was revealed when the idolaters asked the Prophet to tell them when the Day of Resurrection would come (Q).

66 *Nay, but does their knowledge reach* renders *bal iddāraka,* which has several different readings (R) depending on how the consonants are vocalized. The translation reflects a reading of the verb as an interrogative, an alternate translation of which would be, "Or, does their knowledge reach to the Hereafter?" as a form of reproach. Another reading makes it a declarative statement, "Their knowledge reaches the Hereafter," in the sense that they will come to possess knowledge in the Hereafter after it is too late for such knowledge to do them any good (Ṭ). If *iddāraka* is read as a contraction of the verb *tadāraka* (such contractions occur in Arabic when letters whose pronunciation is close are blended together), it would mean something like, "Their knowledge is completed in the Hereafter" (Q, R).

67 This rhetorical question frequently comes from the opponents of prophets (e.g., 13:5; 17:49; 23:35, 82; 37:16; 56:47) and implies rejection of the notion of bodily resurrection in the Hereafter. *Brought forth* can mean something like "taken out," that is, taken out of the grave. Al-Rāzī notes that doubt in the reality of the Hereafter stems from doubt about the Power of God, which is in a sense a failure of ordinary human imagination, which the Quran also mentions in 36:81: *Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? Yea, indeed, He is the knowing Creator.* Some Sufis say that as one's knowledge of God increases, one's apprehension of certain unseen and mysterious realities increases as well (Aj), which is a

brought forth? (68) Indeed, we were promised this, we and our fathers, before. This is naught but fables of those of old!" (69) Say, "Journey upon the earth and behold how the guilty fared in the end!" (70) And grieve not for them, and be not distressed by what they plot. (71) And they say, "When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" (72) Say, "It may be that some of what you seek to hasten is close behind you." (73) And truly thy Lord is Possessed of Bounty toward mankind, but most of them do not give thanks. (74) And surely thy Lord knows that which their breasts conceal and that which they disclose. (75) And there is nothing hidden in Heaven or on the earth, but that it is in a clear Book. (76) Verily, this Quran recounts unto the Children of Israel most of that wherein they differ, (77) and verily it is a guidance and a mercy for the believ-

way of saying that to the degree that one is truly detached from the world, one begins to see beyond it.

68 The often repeated idea in the Quran of the dismissal of prophetic messages as *fables of those of old* (cf. 6:25; 8:31; 23:83; 25:5; 46:17; 68:15) is comparable to calling them legends or old wives' tales; see 25:4–5c.

69 On the Quran's retort and challenge (e.g., 12:109; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10) to travel the earth to see the vestiges of the peoples who denied their prophets (Ṭ) in ruin, see 7:84c; 30:9c. By *behold* some understand observe with one's heart and one's insight (Q).

70 The Quran offers consolation to the Prophet elsewhere (5:68; 15:97; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 35:8), instructing him, among other things, not to be saddened by the failure of his people to embrace his mission, but to entrust their souls to God. *Distressed* renders *ḍayyiq,* which has the sense of contraction or constriction.

71 The *promise* refers to the end of the world, the coming of the Hereafter, and God's Judgment of human beings (cf. 10:48; 21:38; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25). See 36:48c.

72 *Is close behind* means "has come near" (Ṭ), but also has the sense of following in someone's footsteps (Q). Some interpret what is closing in upon them to be their defeat at the Battle of Badr (R), which occurred within a few years of the revelation of this *sūrah;* it is quite common among commentators for such warnings of impending punishment to be interpreted as references to the Battle of Badr.

73 God is also described as *Possessed of Bounty* (*dhū faḍl*) in 2:243, 251; 40:61. That most human beings are not sufficiently grateful to God is mentioned in 2:243; 7:10, 17; 10:60; 12:38; 23:78; 32:9; 40:61; 67:23.

74 Cf. 28:69. The concealing of thoughts and intentions within breasts (*ṣudūr*) is an important idea in the Quran and is frequently discussed in the context of God's Knowledge of *what lies within breasts* (e.g., 3:119; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 39:7; 40:19; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13; 100:10).

75 *Hidden* renders *ghā'ibah,* related to *ghayb* ("Unseen"). The *clear Book* refers to the *Mother of the Book* (Ṭ), mentioned in 3:7 and 43:4.

76 *That wherein they differ* is what the Israelites themselves disagree about (R, Ṭ), to the point of disparaging and cursing one another about it, regarding such matters as what they and the Christians "distorted" (*taḥrīf;* see 2:75c) in the Torah and the Gospel (R) and the obligations of the Divine Law (Q); on this latter question, see 3:50–51c. This verse is also interpreted in a more general way to mean that the Quran provides universal answers regarding the Nature of God.

77 The coupling of *a guidance and a mercy* for the Quran or the Torah also appears in 6:154, 157; 7:203; 10:57; 16:64, 89.

ers. (78) Verily thy Lord shall judge between them by His Judgment, and He is the Mighty, the Knowing. (79) So trust in God; truly thou standest upon the manifest truth. (80) Surely thou dost not make the dead hear; nor dost thou make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs; (81) nor canst thou guide the blind away from their error. Thou canst only make hear those who believe in Our signs and are submitters. (82) And when the Word comes upon them, We

78 *Thy Lord shall judge between them;* that is, God will judge in the Hereafter about who is right (Q, Ṭ), and it is not the duty of the Prophet to carry out this judgment (R). This verse is also related to the idea that God will, in the Hereafter, *inform you of that wherein you differed,* referring to God's Judgment or disclosure of the truth in matters of religious disagreement on the Day of Judgment, mentioned in 2:113; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:39; 16:124; 22:69; 32:25; 39:3, 46.

79 Regarding the virtue of *trust* in God (*tawakkul*), see 3:122, 160; 5:11; 9:51; 12:67; 14:11–12; 39:38; 58:10; 64:13. *Thou standest upon* could also be rendered, "Thou followest" or "Thou art based upon." *Manifest truth* could also be rendered "clear truth."

80–81 Those whose heart God has sealed cannot be made to understand the truth, and those God has made deaf cannot then be made to hear (Ṭ). These verses echo similar imagery used throughout the Quran for those who are spiritually blind and deaf (e.g., 2:17–18; 5:71; 6:25; 6:39; 10:42–43), such as 22:46: *Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind;* also see 2:7c. Al-Rāzī interprets these verses as helping the Prophet's heart to actualize trust in God and to become stronger thereby, arguing that when one hopes to get something from others, it weakens one's ability to manifest opposition to them; by absolving the Prophet of any responsibility or power over whether his people believe or disbelieve, God strengthens the Prophet's ability to declare and teach the truth.

82 Some connect *the Word comes upon them* with similar language about the Word "coming due" (e.g., 10:96; 28:63; 36:7, 70; 39:71; 40:6), which connotes the coming of Divine Judgment (Ṭ); see 10:33c; 36:7c. For others the *Word* signifies that it is necessary for God's Wrath to come upon them (Q, Ṭ).

*Beast* renders *dābbah* (sometimes translated *creature;* cf. 2:164; 6:38; 11:6, 56; 16:49, 61; 24:45; 29:60; 31:10; 34:14; 35:45; 42:29; 45:4), a word whose most general meaning is anything that crawls or walks upon the earth (including human beings); it can often have the special sense of an animal that serves as a mount, but it can also include insects and sea animals that crawl. It is said the *beast* will come upon people at a time when no one any longer "enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong" (see 3:104c; Ṭ). Various *aḥādīth* are mentioned in connection with this *beast,* which is considered one of the signs of the impending end of the world and the Day of Resurrection: "There are three things that, when they come, no soul's belief will avail it, if they did not believe before, or if their belief earned them no good: the rising of the sun from the west, the Dajjāl, and the beast of the earth." See also the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

For some, the beast is enormous in size, sixty (R) or seventy cubits long (IK, Th). Others say it will emerge with the staff of Moses and the seal of Solomon, touch the face of the believers with the staff, and stamp the face of the disbelievers with the seal, so that anyone seeing a person will be able to say, "This is a believer, or this is a disbeliever" (IK, Q, Ṭ).

Other accounts describe the beast as being made up of parts of different ordinary animals on earth, with the head of a bull, the eyes of a pig, the trunk of an elephant, the horns of a stag, the torso of a lion, the markings of a tiger, the haunches of a cat, the tail of a ram, and the legs of a camel; this composite beast will be twelve cubits long. It will come out with the staff and the seal. When it

shall bring forth for them a beast from the earth who will speak to them of how mankind was not certain of Our signs. (83) And on that Day We shall gather from every community a group of those who denied Our signs, and they shall be marshaled [in ordered ranks], (84) till, when they come, He will say, "Did you deny My signs, though you encompassed them not in knowledge? What is it that you used to do?" (85) And the Word will come upon them for their having done wrong, and they shall not speak. (86) Have they not considered that We

touches the face of the believer, a white spot will appear that will grow to cover the believer's face, and when it touches the face of the disbeliever with the seal, the same will occur with a black spot. It will then say to people, "O so-and-so, you are one of the people of the Garden, and so-and-so, you are one of the people of the Fire" (Th). Others give it the face of a man and the body of a bird or mention that its feet will be on the ground, but its head will be in the clouds (IK). According to some Sufis, the form of the beast in these accounts, which encompasses so many animal forms in paradoxical and fantastical ways, symbolizes a "universal nature" that bears, as it were, all worldly realities within it; it is a manifestation of that intermediate world (*barzakh*) between bodies and spirits where certain kinds of opposites can exist together, and it will unlock mysteries and provide insight to those who possess depth of spiritual vision (IḤ). At another level, some say that the *beast* is an ignorant spiritual master whom one encounters when one has been spiritually veiled from the truth and through whom God punishes those whom He chooses to punish by miring them in the psychic veiling and ignorance that comes from following a fool (Aj).

Some report that *speak to them* (*tukallimuhum*) can be understood to mean "wound them" (*taklimuhum;* Q, R). Others say the beast will actually be a human being (Q), though this is not a widely held position. Most commentators believe that *mankind was not certain of Our signs* will be spoken or conveyed by the beast (Z).

There is a great deal of disagreement regarding the attributes of this beast and whence it will come (Q). For some, it is said the beast will come forth from Makkah, specifically from Minā (one of the sites of the rites of *ḥajj*), or that it will arise three times: from Yemen, from the desert, and then from Makkah. Some point out that since there is no clear indication of any of these details in the Quran, one should accept a report only insofar as it can be authenticated as from the Prophet, but otherwise one should pay no attention to such details (R).

83 As when used in connection with Solomon's hosts in v. 17, *marshaled* can mean to corral or group together (Ṭ).

84 *Encompassed them not in knowledge* is interpreted to mean that the disbelievers did not know or recognize the signs as they deserved to be known (Ṭ).

85 The *wrong* that the disbelievers have done was their denial of the truth and rejection of God's Revelation (Ṭ). *They shall not speak* means they will not be able to defend themselves (Ṭ). The notion that the wretched will or will not be able to speak in the Hereafter to God is discussed in the commentary on 2:174, *God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection* (cf. 3:77), which describes how not being able to speak with God is a form of punishment.

86 Cf. 10:67; 17:12; 25:47; 40:61. That God created the *night* for rest and repose is also invoked in 28:73 and 78:9. The symbolism and significance of the *night* and *day* is brought up in several ways in the Quran, as when it mentions the night and day passing into one another (3:27; 22:61; 31:29; 35:13; 57:6), and the alternation of the night and the day (2:164; 3:190; 10:6; 13:3; 17:12; 22:61; 24:44; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 45:5). For the relationship between night and day, see 10:6c; 17:12c.

made the night that they might rest therein, and the day by which to see? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. (87) And on that Day the trumpet will be blown, and whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth will be terrified, save whom God wills, and all will come to Him in abject humility. (88) And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away like clouds—the Work of God, Who perfects all things. Truly He is Aware of what-

87 Some read this verse as, "[Remember] the Day when the trumpet will be blown" (Q). Regarding the blowing of the *trumpet* (by Seraphiel, or Isrāfīl in Arabic), one of the major eschatological events signaling the coming of the Final Judgment according to the Quran, see 6:73c; 18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 36:51; 39:68c; 50:20; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18. Some mention that this terrifying blowing of the trumpet will be the first of three; the second will cause all to swoon, and the third will bring about the Resurrection (Ṭ). Others, however, think that the trumpet will only be blown twice, because the one mentioned in this verse is the same as the one causing swooning mentioned in 39:68: *And the trumpet will be blown, whereupon whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth will swoon, save those whom God wills* (Q). Although many interpret *trumpet* (*ṣūr*) to be something like a "horn" (*qarn*), it could also be interpreted as an army being mustered by a trumpeter to symbolize the raising of the dead (R). Some read *ṣūr* as *ṣuwar,* the plural of *ṣūrah,* or "form," meaning that the blowing would be the blowing of spirit into the forms or bodies to resurrect them (R).

*Be terrified* renders the verb *fazi*ᶜ*a,* which can also have the meaning of responding to a summons with alacrity and hence would describe the way in which those who are resurrected emerge from the graves (Q).

*Save whom God wills* is thought by some to refer to those who were *slain in the way of God* as mentioned in 3:169, which describes them as *alive with their Lord, provided for;* they are exempt from the terror that will affect those alive in the world (Ṭ). For others this exception refers to certain angels, or specifically to Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and the Angel of Death, or ᶜIzrāʾīl (Azrael; Q), and may also include the prophets and saints (Aj). Others are saved from this terror as described in v. 89. The terror of the end of the world is also mentioned in other verses, such as 70:11: *The guilty would wish to ransom himself from the punishment of that Day at the price of his children;* 79:8: *Hearts that Day shall tremble;* and 80:34: *That Day when a man will flee from his brother.* The manner in which human beings are brought before God is also mentioned in 19:95: *And each of them shall come unto Him on the Day of Resurrection, alone.*

88 Some commentators interpret *pass away* as "move" and *thou dost suppose are solid* to mean that mountains move but we cannot see this movement, since large objects viewed from a distance, even if they are moving quickly, appear to be standing still (Q, R). Others interpret the whole phrase (*thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away*) as referring to an event at the end of the world similar to the destruction or movement of mountains at the Hour spoken of in other verses (e.g., 18:47; 19:90; 20:105; 52:10; 56:5; 69:14; 70:9; 73:14; 77:10; 78:20; 81:3; 101:5; R). Some interpret *pass away* as a reference to the earth itself, meaning that the world, believed to be solid, is actually as ephemeral as a cloud (Q). Another interpretation is that this verse is an allegory for the spirit when it leaves the body at death and rises toward the Divine Throne (Q). It is said that when the famous Sufi Junayd al-Baghdādī was asked why he did not appear to have the same (visible) states and ecstasies as other Sufis, he responded by reciting this verse. *Perfects* renders *atqana,* which some understand to mean to "tie down" or "make firm" (Ṭ) or which in this context means that God "ties together" things according to His Wisdom (R).

soever you do. (89) Whosoever brings a good deed, he will have that which is better than it. And that Day they will be secure from terror. (90) And whosoever brings an evil deed, their faces shall be cast down into the Fire. Are you recompensed for aught save that which you used to do? (91) Truly I am commanded to worship the Lord of this city, Who has made it sacred. And unto Him belong all things. And I am commanded to be among those who submit, (92) and to recite the Quran. So whosoever is rightly guided, he is guided only for his own soul. And [as for] whosoever is astray, say, "Verily, I am but a warner." (93) And say, "Praise be to God! He will show you His signs, and you will know them." And thy Lord is not heedless of what you do.

89–90 *A good deed* refers to testifying, "There is no god but God" and believing in Him (Q); al-Qurṭubī quotes a *ḥadīth* that states, "*Lā ilāha illa'Llāh* is the best of good things." *An evil deed* refers to idolatry (Q, Ṭ). *Which is better* can mean many things, among them knowledge of God in this world, the vision of God in the Hereafter (R), or the Contentment of God (Q). It can also refer to the multiplication of good deeds as mentioned in 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof* (Q). For some this verse implies that people of faith, if they are punished in the Hereafter, will not be punished forever (R). Some say that *what is better* refers to being secure from terror on that day (Ṭ).

The imagery of faces cast down into the Fire or afflicted by it also appears in 17:97; 18:29; 23:104; 33:66; 54:48. Here *faces shall be cast down* can refer to being cast in the Fire upside down as in 17:97 or *dragged upon their faces* as in 54:48. According to some the face, like the head or neck, can in idiomatic usage stand for the whole person, so that "their faces" means simply "they" (Q, R). For some the question *Are you recompensed for aught save that which you used to do?* can also be read as a description of what will be said to the people as they are *cast down into the Fire* (R).

91 *This city* (*balad*) is thought to refer to Makkah, though God is the Lord of all lands (Ṭ). It is mentioned specifically, because it is the home of the idolaters to whom the Prophet is preaching; it is a reminder of the blessings and benefits that accrue to them by virtue of being inhabitants of Makkah, where they are safe from attack (Ṭ). *Made it sacred* refers to the fact that people were forbidden to commit certain acts during the pilgrimage to Makkah, or it means that it is a safe place for people seeking sanctuary or refuge. Its trees were not to be cut or its animals hunted, prohibitions followed even by the Arabs of the time because of their abiding recognition of the sanctity of the Kaʿbah, the House of God built by Abraham, and its surroundings (Q, R); see also 3:97c; 5:97c; 29:67c. On *those who submit* (*muslim;* cf. 10:72), see also 2:128c; 3:52c; 3:85c; 3:110c; 5:3c; 5:111c; 22:78c.

92 *He is guided only for his own soul,* or "for himself," "for his own sake." Similar verses that speak of human beings' good deeds as benefitting themselves, but as of no benefit to God include 31:12; 39:41; 41:46; 45:15. Being *but a warner* is a description of the Prophet found throughout the Quran meaning that it is not his responsibility to compel anyone to believe (cf. 11:12; 34:46; 35:23; 38:65; 79:45).

93 *He will show . . . His signs,* both within the soul and in the created order (Ṭ), echoes 41:53: *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth;* and 51:20–21: *And upon the earth are signs for those possessing certitude, and within your souls.* Others see this as a warning to the disbelievers that they will see the signs of God, but only after it is too late, referring to the signs at the end of the world (R).

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 28

# The Story

## *al-Qaṣaṣ*

Most commentators consider *al-Qaṣaṣ* to be an entirely Makkan *sūrah* that was revealed after *Sūrah* 27, *al-Naml,* although some consider vv. 52–55 to be Madinan (JJ, Q) and others maintain that v. 85 was revealed during Muhammad's migration from Makkah to Madinah (Āl, IJ, JJ). It takes its name from the *story* (*qaṣaṣ*) Moses tells his future father-in-law in v. 25 regarding his flight from Egypt.

*Al-Qaṣaṣ* begins with the story of Moses and Pharaoh and describes the oppression suffered by the Children of Israel, leading Moses' mother to cast him into the river, after which he was rescued and cared for by the family of Pharaoh and ultimately reunited with his mother (vv. 3–13). This is followed by an account of Moses' striking and killing an Egyptian who was quarreling with an Israelite and the subsequent flight of Moses from Egypt to Midian (vv. 14–22). There Moses meets two sisters, one of whom he will come to marry, and finds refuge for many years in the employ of his father-in-law (vv. 23–28). Then Moses encounters the fire from which he hears God speak to him; he has his first experience of the miracles he will perform in Egypt and requests that Aaron, his brother, be sent with him to confront Pharaoh (vv. 29–35). The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh includes the issue of the latter's claim to divinity and his boast about building a structure to climb up to Heaven to encounter and challenge the God of Moses (vv. 36–42).

The Prophet Muhammad is told that he was not present when Moses received his revelations and that in the intervening period God sent prophets to other peoples, a reminder that only highlights the obstinacy and pride of the Prophet's contemporaries who claimed to long for guidance from God, but who rejected His Prophet when he was sent (vv. 43–50). They are contrasted with those who, when they hear the truth, believe in it (vv. 51–55).

The last part of the *sūrah* emphasizes the ephemerality of the world in relation to the Hereafter; Moses' contemporary Korah is presented as the epitome of wickedness and worldly extravagance and pride. The *sūrah* ends with a reminder that this world is coming to an end and that all things will return to God (vv. 56–88).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ṭā. Sīn. Mīm.* (2) These are the signs of the clear Book. (3) We recite unto thee in truth some of the account of Moses and Pharaoh, for a people who believe. (4) Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land, and made its people into factions, oppressing a party among them, slaying their sons and sparing their women. Verily he was among those who work corruption. (5) Yet We desired to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs, (6) and to establish them in the land, and to show

1 For a discussion of the separated letters that appear at the start of some *sūrah*s, see 2:1c. On these particular letters, two of which also appear at the beginning of *Sūrah* 27, see 27:1c.

2 *Signs* translates *āyāt,* which is also used to denote the verses of the Quran; on the range of realities signified by the word *āyah* in the Quran, see also commentary on 2:106; 45:3–5. Other *sūrah*s of the Quran have a similar verse at the beginning (10:1; 12:1; 13:1; 15:1; 26:2; 31:2). The *Book* refers here to either the Quran itself or the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; R). It is *clear* in its message, its blessings, and in the goodness it contains (Q).

3 *We recite* means that God conveys it to Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel (Q, R).

4 *Pharaoh exalted himself in the land* means he was tyrannical and oppressive (Ṭ) in his own kingdom (R). Or it can refer to his claim to lordship, as described in 79:24, when he says, *I am your lord most high* (Q). *Oppressing . . . them*—"to oppress" can also mean "to deem weak" (cf. 7:75, 150)—refers to the Egyptians' enslaving of (R, Ṭ) and forcing the Israelites into servile and demeaning labor (IK). Other than describing it as a punishment or suffering (*ʿadhāb*), the Quran does not give a specific reason for the slaughter of boys and sparing of girls (cf. 2:49). In light of the fact that Pharaoh repeats the same threat when Moses is an adult (7:127; 40:25), the Quran itself indicates that the murder of males was a form of collective punishment or control (R; cf. Exodus 1), rather than the result of a foretelling of future events, as is sometimes mentioned in the commentaries (R, Ṭ, IK), by soothsayers or astrologers (or even through a dream of Pharaoh) warning that a child would be born of the Israelites who would rise and destroy Pharaoh's kingdom; see 20:25–28c.

5 *Those who were oppressed in the land* are the Israelites (Ṭ). The idea of making them *imāms* is also echoed in 21:73 with regard to Isaac and Jacob: *And We made them imāms, guiding according to Our Command;* and in 25:74, in a prayer by those who repent: *Make us imams for the reverent.* In 2:124 God makes Abraham an imām *for mankind.* To be an imām means to be foremost in matters of faith and worldly affairs (R) and to be a leader in doing good and in calling others to do what is good (Q). *To make them the heirs* means that they would inherit a land, though what precisely they would inherit is not described here. On this question, see 7:137c, and 26:59c, which mentions that one interpretation is that they inherited land and property similar to what the Egyptians possessed, though they did not inherit it from Pharaoh directly; see also 44:25–28.

6 Hāmān is also mentioned in vv. 8, 38; 29:39; 40:24, 36. In two of those verses, Pharaoh asks Hāmān to build a tower in order to proclaim Pharaoh a deity (v. 38; 40:36). The identity of Hāmān has long been a source of contention between Muslim scholars and some revisionist scholars and also among Muslims themselves. Matters have often not been clarified by the willingness of many classical commentators to pass along folkloric or legendary material that was derived, often uncritically, from Jewish, Christian, and other sources. This transmission of extra-Quranic material concerning this question has often resulted

Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts that which they dreaded from them. (7) So We revealed to the mother of Moses, "Nurse him. But if you fear for him, then cast him into the river, and fear not, nor grieve. Surely We shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers." (8) Then the House of Pharaoh picked him up, such that he would become unto them an enemy and a sorrow.

in a confusion between the Hāmān of the Quran and the Hāmān of the later commentary tradition. Many Muslim scholars who have examined this issue closely have concluded that the most plausible explanation for the name Hāmān is that it is a title (like the title Pharaoh, or *Firʿawn*), not a personal name, and refers to the high priest of Amon (Ha-Amen), who would have had important governmental functions, such as being in charge of public works like constructing buildings, and would have been second in authority only to Pharaoh. Revisionist or skeptical scholars have offered alternate derivations from various Biblical and apocryphal literature to explain the entry of the figure of Hāmān into the Quranic accounts of Pharaoh—arguments too complex to repeat here, but ones that essentially propose a confused borrowing from the Bible (specifically the figure of Haman from the book of Esther) or other traditions from the ancient Near East.

*That which they dreaded from them* is thought by some to refer to a prophecy given to Pharaoh and Hāmān by their soothsayer that an Israelite would be born who would rise up and destroy them (R, Ṭ), but it could also, and perhaps more plausibly, refer to a fear of losing control of a subject population who had hitherto been kept in check by periodic decimation of their male population (see v. 4; 2:49c). To *establish them in the land* (or "on the earth") means to establish them in a land like that of the Egyptians (R).

7 *Revealed to the mother of Moses* means that the message in this verse was cast into her heart (Ṭ). Other opinions mention that she saw it in a dream, though some say Gabriel appeared and told her. Al-Qurṭubī argues that an appearance by Gabriel, usually associated with prophethood, would not have made her a prophet, citing consensus in the Islamic tradition that she in fact was not a prophet. *Revealed* renders the verbal form of *waḥy*, a word often used to describe the process by which the Quran came to the Prophet, as in 53:4, *It is naught but a revelation revealed*, but it is also used for the inspiration God gave to the apostles of Jesus (5:111) and even the bee (16:68). Though classical Islamic theology distinguishes typically between *waḥy*, referring to the revelation given to the prophets and messengers, and *ilhām*, or "inspiration" given to saints and sometimes ordinary people (the latter appears as a verb in 91:8 in connection with the inspiration given to the human soul), the usage of the word *waḥy* in the Quran is somewhat more complex, or at least is not restricted to the conveyance of revelation to prophets and messengers.

Some say Moses' mother would hide him in a garden and come and nurse him secretly (Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī mentions several opinions regarding how long Moses' mother waited before placing him in the river, but he notes there is no solid evidence to specify such a time period. *Bring him back to you* is thought to mean that God would return Moses to her so that she could nurse him (v. 13; Ṭ). She is told to *fear not* that Moses would die or be lost, *nor grieve* over her separation from him (Q). Some note that fear is suffering over what may come, and grief is suffering for what has gone by (R); the absence of both fear and grief is a state often attributed to those who achieve salvation and enter the Garden, as in the common Quranic refrain *No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve* (e.g., 2:38; 3:170; 5:69; 6:48; 46:13). The story of Moses' separation and return to his mother is also told in 20:37–40.

8 *Such that he would become unto them an enemy and a sorrow* does not mean that this was the intention of those from the House of Pharaoh who took the baby; rather, it refers to the ultimate end God had in store for them (R, Ṭ). *Sinners* translates *khāṭiʾ*, which can also mean those who make a mistake, and for a minority of commentators *their hosts were sinners* (*khāṭiʾ*) means not that they were sinning, but that they were making a mistake in understanding the nature of the situation (R).

Truly Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts were sinners. (9) And the wife of Pharaoh said, "A comfort for me and for you! Slay him not; it may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son." Yet they were unaware. (10) But the heart of Moses' mother became empty, and she would have disclosed it, had We not fortified her heart, that she might be among the believers. (11) And she said to his sister, "Follow him." So she watched him from afar; yet they were unaware. (12) And We forbade him to be suckled by foster mothers before that; so she said, "Shall I direct you to the people of a house who will take care of him for you and treat him with good will?" (13) Thus We returned him

9 In the Islamic tradition the wife of Pharaoh is named Āsiyah and is considered by many to have been one of the saintliest women to have ever lived, as mentioned in a *ḥadīth* that singles out in this regard Āsiyah, Mary the mother of Jesus, the Prophet's first wife, Khadījah, and his daughter Fāṭimah (see 3:42c; 66:11:c). The Quran's account does not say that it was the wife of Pharaoh who plucked Moses from the water, though some commentaries assert this (Q; in the Biblical account, Exodus 2:6, it is the daughter of Pharaoh who finds Moses).

According to the commentaries, in response to his wife's statement that the child would be a blessing and a comfort, Pharaoh said, "A comfort for you, but for me, no," and some commentators mention a *ḥadīth* from the Prophet saying that had Pharaoh agreed with his wife's positive and hopeful appraisal of Moses' arrival, God would have guided Pharaoh to faith just as He guided his wife (Q, Ṭ). *Yet they were unaware* refers to their ignorance of the fate that awaited them (Ṭ), though some say it could refer to the fact that the Israelites did not know that Moses would save them (Ṭ).

10 The first instance of *heart* renders *fu'ād*, and the second renders *qalb*. Some lexicographers say *qalb* pertains more to the essence, or "kernel," of the heart, while *fu'ād* signifies the container or outward dimensions of the heart, though the terms are sometimes treated synonymously. In Sufi literature there is often a hierarchy of such terms—*fu'ād, qalb, sirr* ("secret" or "mystery"), and *rūḥ* ("spirit")—to describe the depths and layers of human beings' inner reality. That Moses' mother's heart *became empty* means it was empty of everything except for the remembrance of her son and her grief over his absence (Ṭ), or she forgot or was made to forget the promise that God had made her regarding Moses (v. 7). *Became empty* may also be a way of saying that she was completely driven to mental distraction and could not think (R) or that she was overcome by anxiety and fear (R), as alluded to in a similar metaphor used in 14:43 to describe the terror of the end of the world: *Running with necks outstretched and heads upraised, their glance returning not to them, their hearts vacant.* The verb translated *became* can also have the more particular sense of something that happens in the morning, so that it would be rendered, "And morning found the heart of Moses' mother empty" (Q). What she *would have disclosed* was that Moses was her son and she had placed him in the river (R, Ṭ); she might have exclaimed something like, "Oh, my son!" (Q).

11 Moses' mother instructed his sister to follow him to see what would happen to him, whether he lived or died (R, Ṭ). *They were unaware* means that those of the House of Pharaoh were oblivious to her presence or that they did not know that she was his sister or what her intentions were (R, Ṭ).

12 Cf. 20:40. *We forbade him to be suckled by foster mothers* means that God caused the infant Moses to refuse suckling by any woman other than his mother (R). His sister then suggested to the House of Pharaoh that there was a woman who could *take care of him* and suckle him, and so Moses was reunited with his mother (Ṭ).

13 *God's Promise* refers to Moses' return to his mother, which was foretold in v. 7 (Ṭ). This

to his mother, that she might be comforted and not grieve, and that she might know that God's Promise is true. But most of them know not. (14) When he reached maturity and was firmly established [in life], We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus do We recompense the virtuous. (15) He entered the city at a time of heedlessness among its people. And he found therein two men fighting—one from among his own faction and the other from among his enemies. Then the one from among his own faction sought his aid against the one who was from among his enemies; so Moses struck him with his fist and put an end to him. He said, "This is the work of Satan! Truly he is a manifest

promise is a part of the story of Moses, but the healing of his mother's heart is described as an end in its own right, and the compassion and solicitude toward her suffering as a mother evokes the consolation received by Mary during her labor pains in 19:23–26.

14 See also 12:22, which speaks of wisdom and knowledge being given to Joseph at the time of his *maturity* (*ashudd*), or adulthood, a concept also used in connection with the age at which orphans become independent of their custodians (e.g., 6:152; 17:34). For a fuller discussion of the various ages given for "maturity" in Islamic Law, see 4:6c. *Was firmly established* renders the verb *istawā*, a word that has a rich range of meaning, including "to mount" (e.g., 10:3; 25:59; 32:4), "to turn or direct oneself to" (e.g., 2:29), and "to be equal to or the same as" (e.g., 4:95; 16:75; 35:19). It implies the stage at which one achieves the balance and sure footing of adulthood, and spiritually it indicates when a person has become balanced inwardly between hope and fear, humility and dignity, and dependence and autonomy, a time when true wisdom begins (Aj). As a physical description, it is thought to refer to the age of forty (the age of prophethood, as it is commonly known in Muslim tradition, and the age at which Muhammad first received the revelation; Q). Some treat these two ideas as synonymous, but for others the difference between *maturity* and being *firmly established* is that between physical maturity, on the one hand, and reaching one's intellectual and psychological maturity, on the other, the first often associated with the end of puberty and the second with reaching the age of forty (R); others say they refer to thirty-three and forty years old, respectively (Ṭ).

By *wisdom* (*ḥukm*) is understood the wisdom that is possessed by a prophet before his investiture with prophethood, while *knowledge* refers to understanding in religious matters (Ṭ); some think that in this context it refers to knowledge in the religious tradition of Moses' forefathers among the Israelites (Q), but others say it refers to the wisdom to judge between people (M). *Thus do We recompense the virtuous* (cf. 6:84; 12:22; 37:80, 105, 110, 121, 131; 77:44; see also 29:69c; 37:80c) refers to how God rewarded and blessed the mother of Moses by giving her a son, returning him to her after she was forced to relinquish him, and giving him sound judgment and intelligence (Q). Some have made the point that this verse could not refer to prophethood, since according to the Islamic tradition prophethood is never given as a reward for merit (R).

15 The *city* is thought to be the capital city in which Pharaoh resided (R), though some specify that it was Heliopolis (R) or Memphis (Ṭ); it is unclear where this information originates (cf. Exodus 2:11–15). Some commentators understand *time of heedlessness* to mean a time when most of the inhabitants were asleep at midday (Q, Ṭ); most commentators note that by this time Moses would have been identifiable as part of Pharaoh's retinue and was even called "the son of Pharaoh" (Q, R, Ṭ). Others say that by this time Moses had already shown his opposition to Pharaoh and had been cast out (R); *heedlessness* refers to the fact that the people did not know or remember Moses anymore (Q, Ṭ).

enemy, leading astray." (16) He said, "My Lord! Truly I have wronged my own soul. Forgive me." So He forgave him. Verily He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (17) He said, "My Lord! Because Thou hast blessed me, I shall never be a supporter of the guilty." (18) Morning found him in the city, fearful and vigilant, and behold, the one who had sought his help the day before cried out to

*His own faction* refers to the Israelites, and *his enemies,* the Egyptians (R). Others speculate that the adversary mentioned in this verse could have been another Israelite, but one who was a disbeliever and thus an enemy (M); the Biblical story mentions explicitly that it was an Egyptian (Exodus 2:12). Though the Quran's account uses the word "enemy" to specify the person with whom this Israelite was quarreling in both this verse and v. 19, the Biblical account specifies that the Israelite's first adversary was an Egyptian, but the second adversary was another Israelite; some Muslim commentators rely on the Biblical account in also identifying the adversary in this verse as Egyptian. The slightly different language in v. 19 (*enemy unto them both* rather than one who was *from among his enemies* in v. 15) could suggest, if one accepts the interpretation that enmity can also be a matter of whether one is a disbeliever, that the second adversary was a different kind of enemy and not necessarily that this second enemy was also an Egyptian; it can also be noted that v. 15 also mentions Satan as an *enemy.*

*Put an end to him* (*qāḍā ʿalayhi*) is understood to imply that Moses did not intend to kill the Egyptian, but only to defend the Israelite (Q). *Work of Satan* signifies that it was "not appropriate" for a prophet to kill a person; the sin was not murder, but striking him in such a manner as to result in his death (Q). In general commentators are careful, here and elsewhere, to keep from attributing sin to Moses or any prophet.

16 *I have wronged my own soul* could also simply mean, "I have wronged myself." Some suggest that the "wrong" may have been that Moses could have helped the Israelite without striking the Egyptian so forcefully (R). As to why someone whose intentions are pure—an assumption Muslims make for all prophets—would ask for forgiveness, some note that prophets are more careful and anxious about these kinds of matters than ordinary believers; some also note that, in addition, this verse shows the harm of unintended consequences (Q). See also 26:82, which speaks of Abraham's *hope* for forgiveness; 26:82c, on the theological questions this issue raises for those commentators who believe that prophets have certainty of forgiveness from God; and 48:2–3c.

17 Moses was *blessed* by being given wisdom and knowledge (v. 14; Q). Some note that his gratitude for blessings did not stem from his being forgiven, because this was said before he was made a prophet and could have had certain knowledge of God's Forgiveness (Q). For some *never be a supporter of the guilty* refers specifically to the fact that Moses had been a member of Pharaoh's household, but he now desires to no longer participate in the wrongs they committed; or it can mean something more universal and general, functioning more as a supplication asking God to never let him be a supporter of wrong (Q, R, Ṭ).

18 *Morning found him . . . fearful* could also be rendered simply as, "He became fearful" (see the similar issue in 28:10c; Q). He was *vigilant* in that he was keen to see what the consequences of striking and killing the Egyptian would be (Ṭ). Moses tells the man who *cried out to him for help* that he was *clearly in error*—that is, clearly doing wrong—because this was the same man who only the day before had quarreled with the other man whom Moses had struck (Q, Ṭ). In the Exodus account (2:13), it is said that Moses came upon two Israelites, but this account does not specify the other person's identity other than saying he was an enemy to them both, though some Quran commentators describe him as a second Egyptian with whom the same Israelite was quarreling (Th; see 28:15c).

him for help! Moses said to him, "Truly you are clearly in error." (19) But when he desired to strike him who was an enemy unto them both, he said, "O Moses! Do you desire to slay me, as you slew a soul yesterday? You desire naught but to be a tyrant on the earth, and you desire not to be among the workers of righteousness." (20) Then from the outskirts of the city a man came running. He said, "O Moses! Truly the notables are conspiring against you, that they might slay you. So leave! Truly I am among your sincere advisers." (21) So he left from there, fearful and vigilant. He said, "My Lord! Save me from the wrongdoing people!" (22) And when he turned his face toward Midian, he said, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to the right way." (23) And when he arrived at the wells of

19 These words are usually thought to be spoken by the *enemy,* but some say they could also be spoken by the Israelite whom Moses had helped previously (R). According to this latter reading, it was this statement that exposed the incident from the day before, which led to Moses' flight (R, Ṭ). Here *tyrant* renders *jabbār,* which al-Rāzī explains is a human being who commits violence and oppression without regard for consequences and without searching for the best way to go about one's actions.

20 Some commentators say that the *man* who *came running* was "a believer from the people of Pharaoh" (Q, R) or an Israelite (Ṭ). As noted in 28:19c, some think that the reason Moses' deed was discovered was that what the Israelite said to him in v. 19 was loud enough to be heard by others (Ṭ). *Notables* (*mala'*) can also mean "council" or "group of leaders." The Quran also discusses the notables—a class of people who were often the most hostile to the prophets—of the Queen of Sheba (27:29); the Quraysh (38:6); the people of Hūd (7:65); the people of Shu'ayb (7:88); and the king in the story of Joseph (12:43).

21 *Fearful and vigilant* (cf. v. 18) is the same way Moses is described after he struck and killed the Egyptian; he is concerned that he would be caught and killed by Pharaoh's forces (Ṭ). Moses' prayer is understood to highlight his reliance upon God and his realization that God was his only refuge (Q).

22 Some say that Moses did not know how to get to Midian, and only had his trust in God's Benevolence to guide him along the *right way.* It is said that he had no provisions or money (R, Ṭ) and that he did not even have a specific destination, but only trusted in God (R). Midian was the land of the people of Shu'ayb (see 7:85c).

23 Commentators note that the *two women* held their flocks back either because they were not strong enough to make their way to the water, because they did not want their animals to mix with the others, or out of modesty in order to avoid mingling with the men watering their flocks (Q, R). Though the act of *holding back* is usually understood to mean they were holding the flocks back, some say it could mean that they were holding the other people back from their flocks (Ṭ). Moses asked them why they were staying away rather than watering their flocks (Ṭ). Their reply meant that their father was too old to do so himself, and had he been present, they would not have had to stay back with their flocks (R, Ṭ). *What is your errand?* can also be rendered, "What is your situation?" or "What is going on with you?"

The plain sense of the passage indicates that Moses, as a strong man in that particular social context, was able to move the animals forward and give them water. However, some commentators mention certain popular accounts in which a heavy rock that ten men could not lift was blocking another well; Moses lifted it, allowing the women's animals to drink (Q, R, Ṭ); such popular accounts are, however, often dismissed (R). Most Muslims say that the father of the women, named

Midian, he found there a community of people watering [their flocks]. And he found beside them two women holding back [their flocks]. He said, "What is your errand?" They said, "We water not [our flocks] until the shepherds have driven [theirs] away, and our father is a very old man." (24) So he watered [their flocks] for them. Then he turned toward the shade and said, "My Lord! Truly I am in need of any good that Thou mayest send down upon me." (25) Then one of the two came to him, walking bashfully. She said, "Truly my father summons you, that he might render unto you a reward for having watered [our flocks] for us." When he came and recounted his story unto him, he said, "Fear not. You have been saved from the wrongdoing people." (26) One of the two said, "O my father! Hire him. Surely the best [man] you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy." (27) He said, "I desire to marry you to one of these two daughters of mine, on condition that you hire yourself to me for eight years. But if you complete ten, that will be of your own accord. And I desire not to be hard upon you. You shall find me, if God wills, to be among the righteous." (28) He said, "So let it be between you and me. Whichever of the two terms I complete, let there be no enmity toward me. And God is Guardian over what we say." (29) Then when

Jethro in the Bible, was identical with the prophet Shuʿayb, though the Quran does not explicitly indicate this (R); see 7:85c; cf. 11:84–86c; 29:36–37.

24 Moses turned toward the *shade* of a tree (Ṭ), by which some understand that the time was the middle of a hot day (R). Most commentators say that *I am in need of any good that Thou mayest send* refers to the fact that Moses was hungry, as he had been traveling for days without provisions (Q, Ṭ). *In need of* renders *faqīr,* a word that denotes a state of dependence and poverty in relation to something else and is used in both a material and a spiritual sense.

25 Moses went to the father of the women and recounted the story of his flight from Egypt. The father told him to *fear not,* because Pharaoh had no power in that land (Ṭ).

26 The woman called Moses *strong,* because of his actions in watering the flocks, and *trustworthy,* because of his noble conduct when he was approached to meet their father; according to certain accounts he insisted on walking in front of her out of modesty (My, Q, Ṭ), though this detail is not part of the Quran's account and is likely a later embellishment.

27 *I desire not to be hard upon you* is in reference to the eight years of service the father requested for his daughter's hand (Ṭ); he was saying that he would be fair and reasonable in his demands during that period of time (R).

28 *The two terms* are the eight years and ten years (Ṭ). Some say that it was at this time that Moses was given his staff, though others say the staff was given to him later by Gabriel (Ṭ). *Enmity* renders *ʿudwān,* which could also mean "injustice." *Let there be no enmity* means that neither would go outside of the bounds of their agreement (R).

29 Some say that Moses *completed the term* of the entire ten years and then stayed ten more (Q, R). The incident of Moses seeing the fire is also mentioned in 20:9; 26:10; 27:7. A *firebrand* refers to a burning log or branch with which one might start another fire (R, Ṭ).

Moses had completed the term and set out with his family, he perceived a fire on the side of the Mount. He said to his family, "Stay here. I perceive a fire. Perhaps I will bring you some news therefrom, or a firebrand, that haply you may warm yourselves." (30) And when he came upon it, he was called from the right bank of the valley, at the blessed site, from the tree, "O Moses! Truly I am God, Lord of the worlds!" (31) and, "Cast thy staff!" Then when he saw it quivering like a serpent, he turned in retreat without returning. "O Moses! Approach and fear not! Truly, thou art of those who are secure. (32) Insert thy hand in thy bosom; it will come forth white, without blemish. And draw thine arms to thyself against fear. These are two proofs from thy Lord to Pharaoh and his notables. Verily they are an iniquitous people." (33) He said, "My Lord! Verily I have

30 For the manner in which the place or the tree and fire were blessed, see 27:8c. This verse is an important point of contention between theologians on the question of whether God's Speech is created or uncreated, an argument that usually centers on the Quran itself in a controversy that arose some two centuries after the revelation of the Quran (see the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy"). In this verse the question involves the nature of the voice coming from the tree: are the words that Moses hears created or uncreated, and, if Speech is one of God's Attributes, what does the answer to that question mean for the unchanging Essence of God? It is said that God spoke to Moses directly, without intermediary, based on 4:164: *And unto Moses God spoke directly* (*kallama Allāhu Mūsā taklīman*).

The commentators embellish the Quranic account with legendary material about the origin of Moses' staff. It is said in these later sources that Moses' staff was the staff of Adam given to him by Gabriel. In another story, when Moses agreed to work for his father-in-law, he was told to go into a house where there were several staffs and choose a staff to use; when he opened the door, one of the them fell onto him. Jethro then told him to put it back and get another one, but the same staff fell onto him again and again. At that, Jethro told his two daughters, "This is a prophet" (Q, R). These are legendary accounts, but nonetheless highlight the importance in Islamic sacred history of the connections (genealogical or otherwise) between the prophets and the significance of Moses' staff. For more on Moses' staff, see 7:106–8c.

31 *Serpent* renders *jānn,* which evokes the meaning of jinn, since *jānn* is considered by some to be a synonym for *jinn* or to refer to a certain kind of jinn. *Without returning* means that he retreated without the intention of returning. It also means that he did so without waiting (Ṭ).

32 *Bosom* (*jayb*) is understood to mean that part of his shirt covering his bosom. For the meaning of *jayb,* see 24:31c; it can refer to the chest area up to the collarbones. In 20:22 it is not *jayb,* but *janāḥ* ("side") where Moses places his hand, which would entail his placing his hand using the same motion. The displaying of the "white hand" (cf. 20:22; 26:33; 27:12) is one of the miracles that Moses would perform later in the presence of Pharaoh; see 27:12c.

*Draw thine arms to thyself* is interpreted by some to signify a gesture associated with a lack of fear, the opposite of extending the arms out in fear or in a gesture of defense (R). Others see in the action of bringing the hands to the chest a means of allaying fear (Q), although how this occurs is not clearly explained. In this case, *fear* is interpreted to mean Moses' fear of the staff that became like a living serpent (R) or his fear of Pharaoh (Q). The *two proofs* are the hand and the staff (Ṭ).

33 Cf. 26:14. This verse refers to the striking and killing of the Egyptian described in v. 15.

killed a soul among them, and I fear that they will slay me. (34) And my brother, Aaron, is more eloquent than me in speech. So send him with me as a helper to confirm me, for I fear they will deny me." (35) He said, "We shall strengthen thine arm through thy brother, and We shall grant an authority for both of you, such that they shall not reach you. With Our signs, you and those who follow you shall be the victors." (36) But when Moses brought them Our clear signs, they said, "This is naught but fabricated sorcery. We heard this not among our fathers of old." (37) Moses said, "My Lord knows best who brings guidance from Him, and whose end is the Abode. Truly the wrongdoers will not prosper." (38) Pharaoh said, "O notables! I know of no god for you other than myself. So kindle for me a fire, O Hāmān, for clay, and make me a tower, that haply I may behold the God of Moses, though truly I think he is among the

34 Moses' request for Aaron's help is mentioned also in 20:29–30 and 26:13; see 20:29–35c.

35 *Strengthen thine arm* is an idiom meaning "help thee" (Ṭ) or "strengthen thee" (Q). The authority given to Moses and Aaron is also mentioned in 23:45, and the idea of Moses bringing a *manifest authority* appears in 4:153; 11:96; 40:23. That *authority* (*sulṭān*) is sent down (e.g., 7:71; 11:96; 12:40) is often understood to mean a Divine revelation or message; see also 22:71c; 69:29c. *Sulṭān* is also used to denote the influence or power of one thing over another, as in Satan's words to his followers in 14:22: *And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. They shall not reach you* means that the Egyptians will not be able to harm Moses and Aaron (R).

36 *We heard this not* can mean that the people had not heard of the notion of the worship of the One God (Ṭ) or that Moses was saying something earlier peoples had not heard of and hence was novel (Q). The *clear signs* were *fabricated,* or false, because in their eyes Moses was lying about their source (R). For al-Rāzī, the point of this verse is partly to condemn blind conformity to forefathers' beliefs, as in 5:104: *"Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing." What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided?* (cf. 2:170). Condemnations of slavish conformity to ancestral beliefs are also addressed to the Children of Adam in 7:28: *When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus."* Similar verses can be found with regard to the Egyptians (10:78), Abraham's people (21:53–54), and human beings in general (31:21; 43:24).

37 In *whose end is the Abode* (*dār;* cf. 6:135), *Abode* usually refers to the *Abode of the Hereafter* (*dār al-ākhirah;* e.g., 2:94; 6:32; 16:30; 29:64), but only in its beatific sense (R). The *end* does not mean only "what is last," but also the result or outcome of a thing. The Quran also speaks of *the end* belonging to the reverent (e.g., 7:128; 11:49; 13:35; 28:83).

38 See also 79:24, where Pharaoh says: *I am your lord most high.* It is not known whether the *tower* was ever actually begun or built (R). Some traditions exist that Pharaoh actually had such a structure built, climbed to the top, and shot an arrow toward the sky, which miraculously fell back down and struck him, drawing blood (R, Ṭ); al-Rāzī finds such accounts to be "not for the sane" and wonders how anyone could think of building a structure taller than a mountain, and if so, then go on to propose employing a weapon from the top of it. The order to build it can be seen as a kind of rhetorical move on Pharaoh's part, perhaps said with a sense of irony; see 40:36–37c.

liars." (39) And he and his hosts waxed arrogant upon the earth, without right, and they thought they would not be returned unto Us. (40) So We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea. So behold how the wrongdoers fared in the end. (41) And We made them imams calling unto the Fire. And on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped. (42) And We caused them to be pursued by a curse in this world. And on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the repugnant. (43) And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book—after We had destroyed the former generations—as a [source of] insight for mankind, and guidance and mercy, that haply they may reflect. (44) And thou wast not on the western side when We decreed unto Moses the Commandment, and thou wast not among the witnesses. (45) But it is We Who brought into being the generations, and lives grew long for them. And thou dwelt not among the

39 The return to God is one of the great certainties mentioned throughout the Quran, but denied by those who disbelieve (cf. 23:115; 84:14).

40 Asking how people *fared in the end* is a common refrain in the Quran, and is an invitation to meditate upon the ultimate downfall of previous peoples (e.g., 12:109; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10). The drowning of the Egyptians is also mentioned in 7:136; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 20:77–79; 26:65–66 (cf. Exodus 14–15).

41 Imāms *calling unto the Fire* is understood by some to refer to those who were foremost in performing actions and upholding beliefs that led them to the Fire and in calling others to follow them (R), in the sense that what they called for necessarily led to punishment (Q).

42 The *curse in this world* refers to the successive plagues and humiliation the Egyptians suffered for disobeying Moses' call and to their ultimate doom (Ṭ). As in other contexts in the Quran, the idea of a *curse* (*laʿnah*) has the sense of being distanced from God or from the good (Q). *Repugnant* renders *maqbūḥ*, which also has the sense of something that is detestable or ugly, denoting both moral and physical ugliness, or something that is accursed and to be kept at a distance (R). On the Day of Judgment it is said that inward ugliness will manifest itself outwardly (R).

43 *The Book* refers to the Torah (R), and *former generations* refers to ancient peoples such as those of Noah, Lot, and Ṣāliḥ (Ṭ). *Insight* renders *baṣāʾir* (sing. *baṣīrah*; cf. 6:104; 7:203; 12:108; 17:102; 45:20; 75:14). *Baṣīrah*, like the English word "insight," can be both an attribute of a person and something by which one gains insight (Q); hence its rendering in 17:102 as *clear portents* and in 75:14 as *testimony*.

44–45 *And thou* addresses the Prophet Muhammad, and the *western side* refers to the side of the mountain where Moses received his mission (Ṭ). In these verses, God is telling the Prophet that he was not witness to these events experienced by previous prophets (Ṭ). *Lives grew long for them* (cf. 20:86; 21:44; 57:16) is understood to imply that, over the course of time, people came to abandon the remembrance of God (Q) or to indicate the long period of time between Moses and Muhammad (R). Some commentators say that these verses are talking about the foretelling of the Prophet Muhammad in the Book of Moses, a prophecy that came to be lost and misunderstood over time (Q); see also 3:65–66, 78, 187, and especially 7:157, which are also understood to refer to such prophecies in the Bible; see also 7:157c. *It is We Who sent* refers to the sending of Muhammad (Q), or it is telling the Prophet Muhammad that he was not sent to previous peoples and God had sent different prophets to peoples at different times (R).

people of Midian, reciting unto them Our signs. But it is We Who sent. (46) And thou wast not on the side of the Mount when We called out. But [thou art sent as] a mercy from thy Lord that thou mayest warn a people unto whom no warner has come before thee, that haply they may remember. (47) And [We did so] lest there be an affliction that would befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth at which they should say, "Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent a messenger unto us, we would have followed Thy signs and been among the believers!" (48) But when the truth came to them from Us, they said, "Why

46 *When We called out* is thought to refer not to Moses' initial investiture with the mission of going to Pharaoh, but with the giving of the Law or with the encounter described after the destruction of the calf (Q), for which see 2:55c; 7:155c. Some commentators understand this call to be directed not to Moses, but to the community of Muhammad and to consist of: "O community of Muhammad, I gave unto you before you asked of Me, and I answered you before you called unto Me" (Q, Ṭ). Others say that Moses was told at this moment of the coming of the community of Muhammad and that he would not live to see it (R). These commentators use imagery similar to the covenant recounted in 7:172: *Thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves;* that is, according to this interpretation, the aforementioned words addressed to the community of Muhammad were spoken to them while they were "in the loins" of their forefathers (R). For some, *a mercy* (cf. 21:107) refers to the Quran (Ṭ). Others interpret *[thou art sent as] a mercy* to mean, "[We did that] as a mercy" or "[We sent thee, Muhammad,] as a mercy" (Q).

47 For the idea that, before the advent of Muhammad's mission, the people of Arabia were asking for a prophet, see 2:89c. It is thought that the present verse refers to the Quraysh, but some say it refers to the Jews (Q), though the first is more likely, because *al-Qaṣaṣ* is considered a Makkan *sūrah*. *And [We did so] lest there be* is a phrase that indicates a grammatical elision, which is interpreted by commentators such that the verse would mean, "Were it not for the fact that the disbelievers, when they experience God's Punishment, plead that God sent them no messenger, [God would have punished them sooner, or God would not have sent a prophet]." It is thus interpreted to mean that, with the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, any possible excuse for disbelieving was gone (Bḍ, Q, R, Ṭ, Z). This verse should be read especially in light of v. 59; other verses relevant to the condition of those peoples who were destroyed include 6:131; 11:117; 15:4; 17:16. At the end of this particular section in v. 59 it is reaffirmed that God does not destroy or punish a town or city until a messenger has been sent to them. In this sense the sending of the Prophet Muhammad and his presence among them remove the excuses the disbelievers may have been insincerely offering for their previous conduct (Q), to which v. 48 alludes.

48 When Muhammad came to them as a prophet, the Quraysh disbelieved in him and asked why his revelation was not like the revelation given to Moses; this verse asks them why, then, when the revelation of Moses was available to them before, they did not believe in it (Ṭ). Or the verse can have a more general significance, meaning that Moses was denied by the disbelievers of his time just as Muhammad was in his (R).

For some, *that which was given to Moses* refers specifically to miracles, such as the white hand (20:22) and the staff (20:69; Q). For others, it is revelation all at once, as with the Torah, rather than in parts (R), as mentioned in 25:32: *And the disbelievers say, "Why was the Quran not sent down upon him as a single whole?"* The *two sorceries* refer, according to some, to the Torah and the Quran, or the Torah and the Gospel (Ṭ). Reading *sorceries* (*siḥrān*) as "sorcerers" (*sāḥirān*), some

was he not given the like of that which was given to Moses?" Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Moses aforetime? They said, "Two sorceries, supporting one another." And they said, "Truly we are disbelievers in each." (49) Say, "So bring a book from God that provides better guidance than these two, that I may follow it, if you are truthful." (50) And if they respond not to thee, then know that they follow only their caprices. And who is more astray than one who follows his caprice without guidance from God? Surely God guides not wrongdoing people. (51) And indeed We have caused the Word to reach them, that haply they may reflect. (52) Those unto whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it. (53) And when it is recited unto them, they say, "We believe in it; verily it is the truth from our Lord. Truly we were submitters even before it." (54) It is they who will be given their reward twice

have proposed Moses and Muhammad, or Moses and Aaron, or Jesus and Muhammad (Q, Ṭ).

According to some, the Quraysh would consult with local Jews on matters related to religion and prophethood, and when they described Muhammad to them, the Jews told the Quraysh to challenge Muhammad in the way mentioned in this verse (Q). It shows that, far from being sincere, the Quraysh were issuing these challenges cynically (R); see also 6:7c; 43:57–58c.

49 The Prophet is commanded to challenge the Quraysh regarding the two books (*two sorceries*) they demeaned in the previous verse. Similar challenges to produce something like the Quran are made in 2:23; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88.

50 The idea of following one's *caprices* (*ahwāʾ*, sing. *hawā*), or egotistical desires, is a theme present in such verses as 25:43, which speaks of *one who takes his caprice as his god,* and other verses in which the Prophet is warned not to follow or be influenced by the whims and desires of other people (e.g., 2:120, 145; 6:56; 38:26); also see 45:23c; 53:2–3c.

51 *We have caused the Word to reach them* is understood to mean, "We elaborated the Word for them" (Ṭ) or "We completed the Word for them" (Q). *Them* refers to the Quraysh, the Jews, or both (Q). The *Word* means the contents of the Quran (Ṭ).

52–53 These verses are thought to refer to the People of the Book who believed in the Prophet Muhammad (Ṭ). *Before it* means before the Quran (Ṭ); that is, they were monotheists or believed in the coming of a prophet before the advent of the Quranic revelation (Q). Or it can refer to those who were devoted to their own religion before but followed Muhammad when he came, including people such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, who was Jewish, and Salmān al-Fārsī, who was Zoroastrian (Ṭ); others also mention certain Christian monks such as Baḥīrah and Waraqa, other Christians from Syria, or others from Abyssinia who returned with the Muslims who had sought refuge there before the Muslim community as a whole migrated from Makkah to Madinah (Q, R). *Submitters* renders *muslimīn;* regarding the universal capacity of the term *islām* to refer to correct religion as such and not only Islam, see 2:128c; 3:19c; 3:85c; 5:3c, as well as the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." These are people who receive a reward *twice over* in v. 54 (Ṭ). For a similar set of issues regarding the faith of members of other religious communities, see also commentary on 3:110–15; 5:82–83.

54 Some say that their reward is given *twice over* because they believed in the foretelling of the coming of Muhammad and then accepted him

over for their having been patient. And they repel evil with good, and spend from that which We have provided them. (55) And when they hear idle talk, they turn away therefrom and say, "Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds. Peace be upon you! We do not seek out the ignorant." (56) Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will. And He knows best those who are rightly guided. (57) And they say, "If we follow guidance along with thee, we shall be snatched away from our land." Have We not established for them a secure Sanctuary, to which the fruits of all things are brought, as a provision from Our Presence? But most of them know not. (58) And

when he was sent; or because they accepted their previous prophet and then accepted Muhammad as well (R). The virtues mentioned here are celebrated elsewhere in the Quran as attributes of the believers, for example, in 41:34: *The good deed and the evil deed are not equal. Repel [evil] with that which is better; then behold, the one between whom and thee there is enmity shall be as if he were a loyal protecting friend;* and 2:2–3: *The reverent . . . believe in the Unseen and perform the prayer and spend from that which We have provided them* (cf. 2:254; 8:3; 13:22; 32:16; 35:29; 42:38).

55 For the attitude of forbearance and patience in the face of ignorant talk or abuse, see 19:47c; 25:63c. Some report that this verse was revealed in connection with an incident in which certain People of the Book embraced Islam in the presence of Abū Jahl, the early leader of those opposed to the Prophet; when these new converts were leaving the gathering, Abū Jahl followed them hurling insults and abuse at them, to which they responded simply, "Peace be upon you" (Q, R); see also 109:6c.

56 It is generally thought that this verse was revealed in connection with the Prophet's uncle and patron, Abū Ṭālib (Ṭ). According to Sunni accounts, when Abū Ṭālib was on his deathbed, the Prophet said to him, "Say, 'There is no god but God,' and I can bear witness for you on the Day of Resurrection." He responded, "Were it not for the fact that the Quraysh should shame me by saying, 'He did it only out of fear of death,' [I would do so]." This is the accepted version of events among Sunnis, but Shiites believe that at the end of his life Abū Ṭālib did embrace the faith of his nephew. Some point out that although the verse is addressed to the Prophet, it applies to all people and is exemplified in the examples of other prophets who were unable to guide some of those they loved: Adam and his son Cain (5:27–31), Noah and his son (11:42–46), Abraham and his father (9:114; Aj). Related verses include 2:272; 3:128–29; 9:113.

57 The statement in this verse by some of the Prophet's people indicates that they believed that what he said was true, but they feared being ostracized and losing their secure place, because the other Arabs did not share that belief (Q). The *Sanctuary* (*ḥaram*) was a place of relative safety and security in comparison with the surrounding lands of Arabia (Q). On the notion of the sanctuary and its privileged conditions, see 5:97c; 27:91c; 29:67c. *Most of them know not* that it is God Who established them in the first place and kept them safe (Ṭ). At a spiritual level, this verse can refer to those who offer various kinds of excuses to themselves or others as to why they have not or cannot embark on the spiritual life or why they cannot give up such and such in their attachment to the world (Aj).

58 This verse is connected to the previous one in that the rejection of faith for the sake of retaining the objects of this world will eventually lead to loss of both those worldly goods and salvation in the Hereafter (R). *How many a town have We destroyed?* is also asked in various forms in 7:4; 21:11; 22:45; 47:13; 65:8. *Exulted in their life of ease* means that they did not know that they ought to have thanked God for what they had (Q). *Save for a few* does not mean that a few of

how many a town have We destroyed who exulted in their life of ease. There are their dwellings, uninhabited after them save for a few. And We, truly, are the Inheritor. (59) And thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs. And We never destroy towns, save when their people are wrongdoers. (60) And whatsoever you have been given, it is an enjoyment of the life of this world, and its ornament. But that which lies with God is better and more lasting. Will you not understand? (61) And is he unto whom We made a goodly promise and who receives it, like unto him whom We granted enjoyment in the life of this world and who then, on the Day of Resurrection, will be among those arraigned? (62) And on the Day when he shall call out to them, and say, "Where are My partners, those whom you

the people remained, but that some of the ruins still stood, and people such as travelers would use them as temporary dwellings while on their journeys. In this sense it could also be rendered "save a little" (Q). The implication in *We, truly, are the Inheritor* is that, because of the utter destruction, none were left to inherit them but God (Ṭ). In a more general sense, a foundational teaching of the Quran is that all things return to God (e.g., 2:210; 3:83; 8:44; 11:123); He is the Inheritor of all things.

59 Most commentators understand this verse to be a reference to Makkah, which came to have (and still has) the traditional title Umm al-Qurā, meaning "Mother of Towns" (Q, Ṭ). By *mother city* (lit. "mother") is meant the greatest or largest of them (Th, M). By *towns* is meant those towns around Makkah (M) or all towns, as most Muslims understand the title. Some say this verse can refer to all peoples who have towns and a central city to whom messengers have been sent (M). In other verses it is also said that God never destroyed a city or town before sending it a warner (e.g., 6:131; 11:117; 26:208).

60 The inferiority of this transient world in comparison with the more enduring Hereafter or with what lies with God is a major theme of the Quran (see, e.g., 4:77; 7:169; 12:57; 16:30; 87:17). Some say that this world in relation to the Hereafter is like a speck of dust in relation to the sea, and that the realities of the Hereafter are lasting in that they never come to an end, unlike all things in this world, which certainly will end (R). The idea of the goods of this world as an ornament is also mentioned in 33:28.

61 The question in this verse—whether one who is promised the rewards of the Garden and then ultimately reaches them is like one who enjoys the world but loses a place of felicity in the Hereafter—serves as a reminder that poor and afflicted believers are superior in the sight of God to disbelievers who are wealthy and comfortable in this world (Q). *Arraigned* (*muḥḍar*) has a negative connotation, as it is associated with being called to account (R); or it means being "made present" (a more literal rendering) in the Punishment of God (Ṭ). Some say that the two people being compared in this verse are the Prophet (in other opinions, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib or the Prophet's uncle Ḥamzah) and Abū Jahl (see 28:55c), respectively (Ṭ).

62 The *partners* (ascribed unto God) in this question posed on the Day of Judgment (cf. v. 74) can refer to inanimate objects such as idols, but also to living objects of worship, such as jinn, angels, or human beings; for the same or a similar question, see 6:22; 16:27; 40:73; 41:47. This verse thus describes a situation where those who have been resurrected now have knowledge of the Oneness of God and the truths that the prophets brought, but this knowledge has not come to them through reflection; it has come of necessity rather

claimed?" (63) Those against whom the Word has already come due will say, "Our Lord! These are those whom we perverted. We perverted them as we ourselves were perverse. We disavow [them] before Thee; it was not us whom they worshipped." (64) It will be said, "Call upon your partners." So they will call upon them, but they will not answer them. And they will see the punishment—if only they had been rightly guided! (65) And on the Day when He will call out to them and say, "What answer gave you to the message bearers?" (66) the tidings

than by choice (R). The *them* is thought to refer to the leaders who misguide, which seems to be implied by the subsequent verse (R). *You claimed* refers to those leaders' claims that these objects of worship would help or intercede for those who put their faith in them (Q).

63 In the Quran the language of the Word "coming due" (e.g., 10:96; 36:7, 70; 39:71; 40:6) usually means the Word of punishment and requital, as when a guilty person receives a deserved or preordained sentence; see 10:33c; 36:7c. The words spoken in this verse are those of the leaders among the disbelievers and wrongdoers and those who misguided others, as also mentioned in such verses as 2:166: *When those who were followed disavow those who followed* (R). *Perverted* renders *aghwā,* and *were perverse* renders *ghawā,* both of which come from the same root; the former means to entice or lure someone from the way, and the latter means to stray or err. Some understand the leaders' disavowal to imply that it was not they whom the followers worshipped, but their own egotistical desires and attachments (R).

64 The idolaters are to *call upon* those whom they worshipped instead of or alongside God (Q); cf. 7:195; 17:36; 34:22. Since the former idolaters will know the inescapable certainty of their situation, some commentators interpret this verse to mean that not even they will expect an answer from their former objects of worship; rather, this experience is part of their chastisement (R).

*If only they had been rightly guided* is the first part of a conditional statement whose completion would be, "they would have been saved from the Fire" (Q) or "they would have known the truth" (R). Some read the whole sentence as the complete conditional statement: "They would have seen the punishment, if they had been rightly guided." *They* may refer to the idolaters, who, had they been rightly guided in the world, would have had known to fear the punishment in the Hereafter; or *they* may refer to the idols, which would see the punishment if they were actually living beings capable of being guided (R).

65 This verse is often understood in light of the fact that the prophets will be asked about the response of those to whom they were sent, as in 5:109: *The Day when God will gather the messengers and say, "What response did you receive?" they shall say, "We have no knowledge. Truly it is Thou who knowest best the things unseen."*

66 The *tidings* (*anbāʾ*) are understood to be pleas or arguments that *shall be obscured for them,* meaning that there are no valid arguments those people can make on their own behalf in the Hereafter (Q); or perhaps their news of each other will be obscured and they will not be able to question one another (R).

*Question one another* can also mean "inquire about one another," but this will not occur (cf. 23:101) because of the terror of the Day (Q, R). However, in other verses (7:44–50; 37:27, 50; 52:25) some kind of mutual questioning is said to take place among the condemned, and in 74:40 such "questioning" is a part of the felicitous state of being in the Garden; on how this apparent disparity is dealt with, see 23:101c. The seeming contradiction in the accounts of whether people will "question one another" is similar to the question of whether God will speak to people on the Day of Resurrection, as some verses imply that He will and others that He will not; on this question, see 2:174c. On the similar issue of how or whether the guilty will be "questioned," see 28:78c.

shall be obscured for them on that Day, and they shall not question one another. (67) But for he who repented, believed, and worked righteousness, perchance he will be among those who prosper. (68) And thy Lord creates what He will, and chooses; no choice have they. Glory be to God and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe! (69) And thy Lord knows what their breasts conceal and what they disclose. (70) And He is God; there is no god but He! To Him belongs praise at the beginning and at the end. To Him belongs judgment, and unto

67 On the concept of repentance in the Quran, see 2:37c; 2:128c; 4:17–18c; 9:14–15c; 25:71c. Commentators often point out that in the Quran phrases such as *perchance, it may be,* and *haply* (usually *ʿasā* or *laʿalla*) denote not a possibility, but something that will necessarily come to pass because it is God Who is speaking (Q); see also 2:21c; 11:12c. This interpretation implies that such terms are meant to give hope to those who repent, believe, and do good works (R).

68 Many commentators say that *thy Lord . . . chooses* refers to the selection by God of prophets, and that this verse is a response either to those among the Quraysh who thought that a man of higher social standing and power than Muhammad would have merited the office of prophet or to those Jews who believed that the prophet should have been a Jew rather than an Arab (Q); on this subject, see 2:139c; 3:26c; 43:31c. For others it is thought to refer to the privilege of intercession (*shafāʿah;* Q; see 2:48c; 2:255c). *No choice have they* means that it is not they who decide who will be a prophet or messenger (Q). It can also mean, according to some, that in all matters it is God, not the creature, Who decides (Q).

Some commentators, most notably al-Ṭabarī, read this verse, "Thy Lord creates what He will, and chooses that which is choicest of what they have," understanding it to mean that God chooses the best among them for Himself. Al-Qurṭubī points out that al-Ṭabarī prefers this interpretation, because otherwise the verse, which can be rendered more literally as, "No choice had (*kāna*) they," would imply that the idolaters had no choice in the past, but would in the future, an inference that al-Qurṭubī rejects, since *kāna* can apply to the future as well as the past.

On a spiritual level, this verse is understood to express a fundamental fact about the relationship between God and human beings, namely, that in their spiritual lives people must understand their own power of choice in submitting to what God chooses for them (Aj). Ibn ʿAjībah quotes a saying of the Sufi master Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), "Forsake the directing of things, and if you must direct things, then let it be to direct yourself not to direct things," referring to the art of submitting one's will to the Will of God both outwardly and inwardly.

69 Cf. 27:74. According to this verse, God knows the opponents' inner thoughts of enmity against the Prophet and their contempt for God's choice, not only their outward abuse and hostility toward him (R). The concealing of thoughts and intentions within *breasts* (*ṣudūr*) is an important idea in the Quran, which frequently describes that God knows what *lies within breasts* (e.g., 3:119; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 39:7; 40:19; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13; 100:10).

70 *At the beginning and at the end* can mean at the beginning and end of time or this world and the next. *The end* renders *al-ākhirah,* which can also mean "the last" and is usually rendered "the Hereafter," especially when it is juxtaposed against *al-dunyā,* or "this world" (*al-dunyā* literally means something like "the lower" or "the nearer"). In this verse *al-ākhirah* is coupled with *the beginning* (*al-ūlā*), which can also mean "the first."

*Judgment* here renders *ḥukm,* which can also convey the sense of the power of decision, dominion, or rule as well as wisdom. In this world, all judgment and power are rightfully exercised only as a function of God's Judgment and Power, and

Him shall you be returned. (71) Say, "Have you considered: if God should make night come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you light? Will you not, then, listen?" (72) Say, "Have you considered: if God should make day come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you night, that you might rest therein? Will you not, then, see?" (73) Out of His Mercy He made for you night and day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. (74) And on the Day when He shall call out to them, He will say, "Where are My partners, those whom you claimed?" (75) And We shall draw forth from every community a witness, and say, "Bring your proof." Then they will know that the truth belongs to God. And that which they used to fabricate will forsake them. (76) Truly Korah was of the people of

in the Hereafter God will judge and decide directly between and among His creatures, which is part of that to which they *shall be returned* (R; e.g., 4:141; 10:93; 22:56; 27:78).

71–73 *Unceasingly* renders *sarmad,* a term that in the language of Islamic philosophy came to be associated with the notion of eternity. The alternation of night and day and the blessings particular to each half of the daily cycle are mentioned frequently in the Quran (e.g., 2:164; 3:190; 10:6; 13:3; 17:12; 22:61; 24:44; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 45:5). In this passage it is the alternation of activity and rest, exposure and hiddenness that is evoked, and human beings are asked to contemplate what the day, which enables work and the fulfillment of needs, would be like without the night's rest and tranquility, and similarly to contemplate what the night's quiet and rest would be like without the light of the day by which one is able to see (R). Human beings are then asked why they would worship a being who can neither provide nor take away the alternating of day and night, followed by the questions *Will you not, then, listen?* and *Will you not, then, see?* These rhetorical questions correspond to the half of the daily cycle that precedes them: during the night one depends more upon hearing, while during the day one depends more upon sight.

The night and the day can refer, in the context of the spiritual life, to periods of psychological and spiritual difficulty and ease, to confusion and clarity. A basic teaching of Islamic spirituality is the notion that it is through the alternation of the rhythms of the night and the day of the soul that one progresses and matures spiritually: if one experiences the expansion of the day too much, one becomes bold and importunate, but if one is relentlessly subject to the night of contraction, one becomes despairing and timid (Aj).

74 See 28:62c.

75 It is thought that the bringing *forth from every community a witness* refers to prophets, as suggested by 4:41, which addresses the Prophet: *How will it be when We bring forth a witness from every community, and We bring thee as a witness against these* (Q, Ṭ). Alternately, it would include all those who could be named "witnesses" for their communities, since there will have been many generations within various communities without prophets actually living among them (R). *Bring your proof* is thought to be addressed to the communities that rejected their prophets, meaning that they should bring any evidence on their own behalf that they were justified in their rejection of the messengers sent to them (Ṭ). *That which they used to fabricate* refers to the idols that they invented (Q) and the lies that they told (R).

76 In the Bible the story of Korah (Qārūn), a prominent Israelite who rebelled against Moses,

Moses, but he transgressed against them. And We gave him such treasure that the keys to it would be a heavy burden for a group of strong men. [Remember] when his people said to him, "Exult not! Surely God loves not the exultant. (77) And with what God has given you, seek after the Abode of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion in this world. And be good, as God has been good to you. Seek not to work corruption upon the earth. Surely God loves not the workers of corruption." (78) He said, "I have only been given it on account of knowledge I possess." Did he not know that God has destroyed generations

is told in Numbers 16; cf. 29:39c. Korah's station in life exemplifies the lesson of v. 60, namely, that wealth and power in the world will not save one from the Punishment of God. *Transgressed* renders *baghā,* which can refer to his disbelief in God (Q) or his contemptuous attitude toward others stemming from his great wealth (Q); or it may point to his failure to give charity in accordance with proper belief, flaunting his wealth, or mistreating people (R). Some say that his attitude and actions stemmed partly from his jealousy of Moses and Aaron and the station that God had bestowed upon them. Here the admonition *Exult not* is understood to mean that he should not be wanton or miserly with this wealth, denying it from those who have a right to some of it (Q), and that he should not celebrate the things of this world as if there were no consequences in the Hereafter (R).

The meaning of the *keys* to *such treasure* here is interpreted variously to mean that they were literally keys to manifold treasures so numerous that a single man could not carry them; or that the nature of the burden was one of knowledge—he had so many different keys for different treasures they were difficult to count or keep track of; or that the keys were carried along with the treasures. It can also be interpreted to mean that these were keys of knowledge, meaning that Korah was proficient and knowledgeable in so many different areas that even the combined skills of a group of people could not equal his (R); *keys* are used with regard to knowledge in connection with God's Knowledge of the Unseen in 6:59: *And with Him are the keys of the Unseen* (R).

77 Korah is advised to use his wealth for good works, rather than wasting it or being miserly with it (Q), although the advice also has general applications. *Forget not your portion in this world* is thought to mean that one should in waste one's life by neglecting to do good works, be charitable, or prepare for the Hereafter (Q, Ṭ); others interpret it to mean that one should not go to extremes of asceticism and detachment from the world and enjoy what God has made permissible (Q, R, Ṭ). Here al-Qurṭubī quotes a saying of ᶜAbd Allāh ibn ᶜUmar (sometimes attributed to the Prophet or to ᶜAlī): "Work for this world as though you would live forever, and work for the Hereafter as though you were to die tomorrow." Some say that the *portion in this world* refers to one's coffin or grave (Q), and thus the phrase points to the important spiritual attitude of remembering death. The root of *good* in *And be good, as God has been good to you* is *ḥ-s-n,* which also has the sense of beauty and virtue.

78 *On account of knowledge* renders *ᶜalā ᶜilm,* which appears also in 7:52; 39:49; 44:32; 45:23. Some think that here it means Korah possessed certain skills and proficiencies that enabled him to become wealthy (some say he was a goldsmith; others transmit a tradition that he was an alchemist, which are both mentioned and dismissed by commentators). In this instance of *ᶜalā ᶜilm,* it is clear that Korah attributes the blessings he possesses to knowledge he has, but in other instances this phrase can also be used to mean that God acts based upon His Knowledge (translated *with knowledge* or *knowingly;* 7:52; 44:32; 45:23). In other instances the sense of *ᶜalā ᶜilm* is more open to interpretation; see 39:49c. Some commentators read *ᶜindī,* rendered here as *I possess,* to mean "in my opinion," which is another usage of the word and which would make the translation, "I have

before him who were mightier in strength and greater in what they had amassed? And the guilty will not be questioned about their sins. (79) And he came forth unto his people in his adornment. Those who desired the life of this world said, "Would that we had the like of that which has been given to Korah. Truly he is a possessor of great fortune!" (80) But those who had been given knowledge said, "Woe unto you! The Reward of God is better for those who believe and work righteousness, and none shall receive it save the patient." (81) Then We caused the earth to engulf him and his house. And he had no party who could help him against God, nor could he help himself. (82) And morning found those who had longed to be in his place the day before saying, "Alas! It seems God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will among His servants. Had God not been gracious to us, He would have caused us to be engulfed [as

only been given it on account of knowledge, in my opinion" (R, Ṭ).

Other verses in which disbelievers are reminded of those *generations* or peoples who came before them who were as great or greater than they were in worldly possessions and strength and yet were destroyed include 6:6; 19:74; 40:82; 47:13; 50:36; see 40:82c.

Some interpret *the guilty will not be questioned about their sins* to mean that the guilty of one generation will not be questioned about or held responsible for the sins of another generation (Ṭ). That the guilty are not questioned about their sins is similar in meaning to 30:57: *Nor can they make amends* (Q); and 41:24: *And if they seek favor, they will not be granted favor.* It can also mean that God has no need to question them about their deeds, because He already knows these deeds completely (R).

Because other verses indicate that people will be questioned, such as 15:92, *So by thy Lord, We shall question them all,* some note that there are different kinds of questions to be asked—those that seek information, those that call one to account, and those that are meant as rebuke (R)—and these different verses can be referring to those different kinds of questions, so that God questions them in one respect, but does not question them in another. For a similar issue of whether and how people will question one another, see 28:66c.

According to the Sufis, one should not exult in one's own attainments or be pleased with one's own state, words, or actions; they believe that individuals who look at their own accomplishments with a sense of glory should be considered wretched (Aj).

79–80 The commentators relate various descriptions of the fantastic wealth and luxury displayed by Korah (Q, Ṭ). Although it is more plausible that *those who had been given knowledge* refers to people of piety and wisdom, some commentators say that it refers to the "rabbis" or "priests" (*aḥbār;* Q), though this would have been somewhat of an anachronism as applied to the time of Moses. These people *who had been given knowledge* point out that one must be patient and steadfastly obedient in the world in order to attain success in the Hereafter (Q).

81–82 Some commentators relate that because of the enmity, rebellion, and scurrilous actions that Korah undertook against Moses, God granted the latter the power to call upon the earth to swallow him (Q, Ṭ). *Party* renders *fiʾah,* a word that in other contexts refers to a group upon whom one can call for support in a battle (see 8:15–16c). In both instances in v. 82, *it seems* renders *kaʾanna,* which some understand as

well]. Alas! It seems the disbelievers will not prosper!" (83) That is the Abode of the Hereafter, which We ordain for those who desire neither dominance upon the earth, nor corruption. And the end belongs to the reverent. (84) Whosoever brings a good deed, he shall have better than it; and whosoever brings an evil deed, those who perform evil deeds shall only be recompensed for that which they have done. (85) Truly the One Who ordained the Quran for thee shall surely bring thee back to the place of return. Say, "My Lord knows best those who bring guidance, and those who are in manifest error." (86) And thou didst not hope that the Book would be delivered unto thee; rather, it was a mercy from thy Lord. So be not a support for the disbelievers. (87) And let them not turn thee from the signs of God after they have been sent down unto thee. But call [others] to thy Lord and be not among those who ascribe partners unto

providing emphasis: "Indeed, God outspreads," or with an implicit verb, "Alas! [Know that] God outspreads" or "Alas! [Do you not know that] God outspreads?" (Q, Ṭ). Others read this phrase as meaning, "Alas for you! Truly God outspreads," which is possible depending on how the letters are voweled (Q, R). The idea that God *outspreads and straitens* also appears in 13:26; 17:30; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52). *And morning found those* could also mean simply "and it came to be that those."

83 *That* refers to the Garden (Q), which one will attain not through *dominance* or *corruption,* but by no longer dominating or corrupting (R). *Dominance* renders *ʿuluww,* which also can mean "ascendancy," "exaltedness," or "grandeur." *The end* can denote the outcome of something, and the Quran also states elsewhere that *the end belongs to the reverent* (7:128; 11:49; 13:35). *Corruption* (*fasād*), a word that literally means "rot," is used here, as in most instances in the Quran, to mean corruption in the broadest sense, including ethical and financial corruption, decadence, and immorality.

84 That the reward for good deeds is multiplied is also mentioned in 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof* (see also 2:245, 261; 4:40; 64:17).

85 This verse is often recited by Muslims as a prayer of protection for those who are about to set out on a journey. What is *ordained* consists of the commands and prohibitions of the Quran, to be followed in this life, after which one will be returned to God after death (R); or *ordained the Quran for thee* signifies "bestowed the Quran upon thee" (Ṭ).

Some understand this verse to be a promise to the Prophet that he would return to Makkah victorious (Q, R, Ṭ). It is said in some traditional sources that this verse was revealed neither in Makkah nor in Madinah, but in Juḥfah, between Makkah and Madinah, during the Prophet's emigration (*hijrah*); its purpose was to console the Prophet in his sadness at having to leave his home by informing him that he would return to it (Q, R). *The place of return* refers to one's death, or to the Day of Resurrection, or to the Garden (Q, Ṭ).

86 The first part of this verse is taken to mean that the Prophet did not know beforehand that he was to be chosen as a messenger by God (Q). Some say that this verse could also be read, "Thou didst not hope that the Book would be delivered unto thee, but only for mercy from thy Lord" (R, Z). For the notion of what it means to be a *support* (*ẓahīr*), see 28:17c.

87 In this verse the Prophet is told not to let the disbelievers' lies, denials, and efforts to harm him or shake him from his mission (Q, R); rather,

God. (88) And call not upon another god along with God. There is no god but He! All things perish, save His Face. Judgment belongs to Him, and unto Him will you be returned.

he should call them to the affirmation of the Oneness of God. It is said that this verse was revealed when the Quraysh were trying to induce the Prophet to praise or magnify their gods (Q), but some assert that the real audience for this verse is not the Prophet himself, but the community of believers as a whole (R).

88 *Face* renders *wajh,* a word with a rich range of meanings. Fōr some it means God Himself (Q, Th), the Divine Essence or Self (*al-Dhāt;* Z), or Truth/Reality (*al-Ḥaqq;* Th). Others emphasize the *Face* as what one faces, interpreting the verse to mean that all objects of aspiration other than God will come to nothing (M). Some say this verse means that all actions are empty except for those that lead one to God (Su) or that all things perish except those things by which one approaches God (IK, Q). This latter meaning echoes the opinion that *Face* refers to God's religion (Q, Ṭb). Others say that this verse means anything that lives will die, except God (Qu). Others interpret it to mean all things perish except God, the Garden, the Fire, and the Throne (Th). See also commentary on 55:26–27: *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord.* Ibn Kathīr cites a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "The truest words spoken by a poet were those of [the pre-Islamic poet] Labīd, 'All that is other than God is false (*bāṭil*)'" (*bāṭil* can also mean "vain" or "void"); the poem continues, "And every enjoyment will without doubt vanish." *Wajh* can also be understood to mean that aspect of the Divine Reality that is turned toward His creation.

For some, *perish* (*hālik*) means to become nothing or to be annihilated (R), while for others it means to be removed, through death, from a state of being able to benefit from the Face of God; in this latter sense perishing or being destroyed does not mean that a thing becomes literally nothing. Al-Rāzī uses the example of a garment, which, when it becomes tattered or ripped to the point of becoming unusable, is said to have perished or been destroyed, even though its constituent parts remain. He extends this imagery to the heavens and the earth, which will be destroyed, but whose parts will not become literally nothing, as suggested by 14:48: *On the Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth, and the heavens [too].* For others, "perishing" means that a thing is essentially or by its nature perishable and subject to destruction; that is, a "perishing" thing is ephemeral or contingent (R), which is the status of all created beings.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 29

# The Spider

## *al-ʿAnkabūt*

Most scholars maintain that *al-ʿAnkabūt* is a Makkan *sūrah,* although many of those say the first ten verses were revealed in Madinah (Āl, IJ, Q, Tb). A minority maintain that it is Madinan (IJ), but some say that the first ten verses were the last verses revealed in Makkah (Āl, IJ). According to several sources, among them the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, the Prophet would recite *Sūrah*s 29 and 30 together in his prayers, sometimes followed by *Sūrah* 36. The *sūrah* takes its name from the use of *the spider's house* as a metaphor for the frailty of this world in v. 41: *The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a house. Truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house, if they but knew.* This verse evokes the central theme of this *sūrah,* that human beings are not aware of the true nature of God and the Hereafter and that in taking protectors other than God, they take the frailest of positions and thus are not prepared for what will transpire after death.

*Al-ʿAnkabūt* begins by challenging the believers who think that their faith or belief alone will save them from the trials of this life, reminding them of the difficulties of this life and that one must continue to strive in the way of God, since truth rarely prevails without great effort and sacrifice (vv. 1–13). It then provides examples of previous communities, such as those of the prophets Noah, Abraham, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ, who disobeyed the messengers God had sent to them (vv. 14–43). After discussing the Quran and its purifying efficacy, while reaffirming its transcendent Source (vv. 44–51), the *sūrah* responds to the objections posed by the disbelievers and addresses the nature of their beliefs (vv. 52–63). It concludes with a meditation on the ephemerality of this world, assuring those who believe in God and the Hereafter that by remaining thankful and striving for God, they will be rightly guided (vv. 64–69).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Mīm.* (2) Does mankind suppose that they will be left to say, "We believe," and that they will not be tried, (3) though We have indeed tried those who were before them? Surely God knows those who are truthful, and surely He knows the liars. (4) Or do those who commit evil deeds suppose that they

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *mīm,* which also appear in 2:1; 3:1; 30:1; 31:1; and 32:1 are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaᶜāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and whose ultimate meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. In this context, some say that *Alif Lām Mīm* is a name for the *sūrah* or a name for the Quran (Q).

2 That human beings will *be tried* is attested in many Quranic verses and is believed to be inherent in creation, as in 67:2, where God is described as He *Who created death and life that He may try you as to which of you is most virtuous in deed.* Of this broad Quranic theme, al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "Truly affliction is a doorway between the people of spiritual knowledge (*ahl al-maᶜrifah*) and God" (ST), meaning that through affliction and forbearance true knowledge of God can be attained. Although the meaning of this verse applies to all Muslims, commentators offer several separate instances as the possible occasion of its revelation. According to one account, this verse was revealed about Mihjaᶜ, the first Muslim to be killed at the Battle of Badr. His wife and parents were distraught because of his death, so God revealed vv. 2–3, explaining that Muslims were not exempt from suffering trials and hardship for the sake of God (IJ, Q, W). According to another account, vv. 2–3 were revealed in response to the situation of a group of Muslims who had not been able to emigrate from Makkah to Madinah with the others (IJ, Q, Ṭ). When this group first attempted to emigrate, they were stopped by the idolaters; then the first ten verses of this *sūrah* were revealed. When they heard the revelation, they resolved to try to emigrate again. Some were killed and some were saved, and then 16:110 was revealed: *Then indeed thy Lord, for those who emigrated after being oppressed, then strove and were patient, surely thy Lord thereafter is Forgiving, Merciful* (IJ, Q); see commentary on 16:110; 8:74–75.

3 *Those who were before them* refers to the followers of previous prophets, such as Moses and Jesus, who suffered persecution for their beliefs, but persevered (Q, Ṭ). In this sense vv. 2–3 are similar to 2:214: *Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without there having come to you the like of that which came to those who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and they were so shaken that the Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When will God's help come?" Yea, surely God's Help is near* (cf. 3:142). That God knows the *truthful* and the *liars* can be understood to mean that God tries them not to learn their true natures, but to make their true natures manifest, as God knows their true natures before they are tested (Ṭ). To be afflicted by trials is thus considered beneficial for believers, as it both manifests their true natures and serves to expiate some of their sins. In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "No fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt, or distress befalls a Muslim—even if he be pricked by a thorn—but that God expiates some of his sins thereby." Similarly the Quran says of those who oppose the disbelievers, *No thirst, nor toil, nor hunger befalls them in the way of God; nor do they take any step enraging the disbelievers; nor do they endure aught at the hands of an enemy; . . . nor do they spend aught, be it small or large; nor traverse a valley, but that it is written down for them, that God may reward them for the best of that which they used to do* (9:120–21).

4 Whereas the previous verses chastise those who may think their declaration of faith will spare them, the present verse criticizes disbelievers who take the fact that they experience health and wealth as an indication that they will not be

will outstrip Us? Evil indeed is the judgment they make! (5) Whosoever hopes for the meeting with God, God's term is coming. And He is the Hearing, the Knowing. (6) And whosoever strives, strives only for himself. Truly God is beyond need of the worlds. (7) And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall surely absolve them of their evil deeds, and We shall surely recompense them according to the best of that which they used to do. (8) And We have enjoined man to be good unto his parents. But if they urge thee to ascribe

punished. They will not *outstrip Us* means that none can thwart or evade God (Ṭ, Z), as in 8:59: *And let not those who disbelieve suppose they have outstripped [anyone]. Indeed, they thwart nothing* (Z). Their judgment is evil (cf. 6:36; 16:59; 45:21) or simply bad, because it is based upon neither reason nor revelation and thus has no foundation (R).

5 Here *the meeting with God* is understood as a reference to reaching one's final end and all it entails, such as meeting the Angel of Death, the Resurrection, the Reckoning, and the Recompense (Bḍ, Z). In this sense, *Whosoever hopes for the meeting with God* is sometimes interpreted to mean "Whosoever fears the meeting with God," that is, fears God's Punishment (Q); or it is said to refer to both those who hope for reward and those who fear the Reckoning (Aj). *God's term*—that is, the term that God has appointed—refers to death (R, Z) or the Resurrection (R). In this context, that it *is coming* alludes to the reward that one who hopes and works for *the meeting with God* is to receive (R). It can also be understood as an injunction to all who believe that they must devote themselves to those acts that will demonstrate and confirm their hope to meet with God and bring them closer to Him (Z).

6 Since human beings are punished and rewarded for their own actions, ultimately one *strives only for* oneself. One's deeds are not for God, since *God is beyond need* of anything human beings do, and those deeds cannot be counted for or against another person, because *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). This verse thus indicates a moral reflexivity in which the ultimate impact of one's actions, whether good or evil, falls upon oneself, as in 41:46 and 45:15: *Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul. And whosoever commits evil, it is to the detriment thereof* (on this subject of individual moral responsibility, see also 2:9, 272; 3:69; 6:123; 8:60; 9:34–35; 10:23; 35:18).

7 The retribution people would receive for their evil deeds is absolved or outweighed by the reward for their good deeds (Z). In addition, idolaters who embrace belief and act in accord with it will be absolved of their previous evil deeds; that is, they will be requited in accordance with their faith rather than the acts of disobedience they committed before they embraced Islam (Z). From one perspective, their evil deeds are absolved through their faith and then they are rewarded for their good deeds (R). Faith and belief are even understood to help cover over one's evil deeds in this life (R). God requites people *according to the best of that which they used to do* (cf. 9:121; 16:96–97; 24:38; 39:35; 46:16), because righteous deeds are the only deeds that truly remain, since they are performed *seeking the Face of God* (2:272) and *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88; R). In contrast, "that which is not performed for God does not last through itself, through the one who performs it, or through the one for whom it is performed; thus it is not righteous" (R). The righteous deed is said to have three components or aspects: actualization in the heart through belief, reflection, and affirmation; actualization through the tongue by bearing witness to what is in the heart, implying right intention; and actualization through the bodily members by means of acts of obedience and worship (R).

8 Goodness, gratitude, and virtue toward parents are enjoined in several verses (4:36; 31:14–15; 46:15), and in 2:83 *Be virtuous toward parents* is listed as the first injunction of the covenant (*mīthāq*). Obedience toward parents is considered one of the highest virtues in Islam and is thus

as partner unto Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge, then obey them not. Unto Me is your return, whereupon I shall inform you of that which you used to do. (9) And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall surely cause them to enter among the righteous. (10) Among mankind are those who say, "We believe in God"; but if he is harmed for the sake of God, he takes persecution from men to be as God's Punishment. Yet if help comes from thy Lord, he will surely say, "We were indeed with you." Does God not know best what lies within the breasts of all creatures? (11) Surely God knows those who believe, and surely He knows the hypocrites. (12) Those who disbelieve say to those

presented alongside the command to worship God (2:83; 4:36; 6:151; 17:23). The Prophet also told his Companions, "To attribute partners unto God and to be disrespectful toward parents" are "the greatest of the major sins." If one's parents remain idolaters, one is to continue to consort with them *in a kindly manner,* but not to obey them in matters that would run contrary to religious dictates (see 31:15).

According to several early commentators, this verse was revealed about Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. When he embraced Islam, his mother, Ḥamnah, said to him: "O Saʿd, I heard that you have renounced your old religion. By God! I will not take shelter under any roof to protect me from the sun and wind, nor will I eat or drink, until you disbelieve in Muhammad and revert to your old religion." For three days, his mother did not eat, drink, or take shelter until it was feared that she might perish. At that point, Saʿd went to the Prophet to express his lament. As a response God revealed this verse as well as 31:14 and 46:15 (Q, Ṭ, W).

That in the Hereafter God will *inform* people about their deeds performed during the life of this world is a prevalent Quranic theme; see 5:14, 105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 31:15, 23; 39:7; 41:50; 58:6–7; 62:8; 64:7; 75:13.

9 *Cause them to enter among the righteous* means that believers will either enter the Garden with the righteous or be counted among those who are righteous. In a similar vein, *those who believe and perform righteous deeds* will *enter Gardens with rivers running below* (4:57, 122; 14:23; 22:14, 23; cf. 2:25; 10:9), *be made joyous in a Garden* (30:15), and have *Gardens of bliss* (31:8; cf. 22:56). God *shall pay them their rewards in full, and will increase them from His Bounty* (4:173), for to them *God has promised forgiveness and a great reward* (5:9; cf. 22:50), thus *theirs is blessedness and a beautiful return* (13:29) and *for them shall the Compassionate ordain love* (19:96).

10 This verse addresses the state of hypocrites who would backslide whenever affliction befell them (Q, Ṭ, W). According to Mujāhid, it was revealed about people who would declare faith with their tongues, but would succumb to disbelief when tested with trials or calamities (Q, W). Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have said that this verse was revealed about some believers in Makkah who were forced by the idolaters to march with them to the Battle of Badr and about whom 4:97 was then revealed, claiming that they had no excuse for having joined the Makkan army (Q, Ṭ, W), after which 16:110 then offered them a means of repentance (Ṭ); see 4:98–99c; 29:2c. That God knows *what lies within the breasts* is repeated verbatim in 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13; see 5:7c.

11 This is most likely the first use of *hypocrites* (*munāfiqūn*) in the chronological order of revelation, as hypocrisy did not become an issue within the Muslim community until the Madinan period. In the Quranic context, hypocrisy indicates moral wavering in addition to conscious dissembling, so that one who is unable to commit and always seeking to maintain options can also be considered a *munāfiq;* see the introduction to Sūrah 63; 63:1–8c.

12–13 Cf. 14:21; 40:47. Those who have led others in disbelief and in rejecting God's

who believe, "Follow our path and we shall bear your sins." But they bear not aught of their sins. Truly they are liars. (13) Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own, and on the Day of Resurrection they will surely be questioned concerning that which they used to fabricate. (14) And indeed We sent Noah unto his people and he remained among them a thousand years, less fifty; and the flood seized them, for they were wrongdoers. (15) Then We saved him and the companions of the ship, and We made it a sign for the worlds. (16) And [We sent] Abraham, when he said to his people, "Worship God and reverence Him. That is better for you, if you but knew. (17) You only worship idols apart from God, and you only create perversion. Truly those whom you worship apart from God have no power over what

messengers will bear the burden of the punishment for their own disbelief and an additional burden for having led others astray (see also 16:25). This punishment will not, however, alleviate the burden of those who followed them, for individuals are responsible for their own actions, since *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). Elsewhere, those whom they have led astray supplicate to God, *Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment in the Fire* (7:38; cf. 33:68; 38:61); see 7:38–39c.

14–15 For the Quranic account of Noah and the flood, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 21:76–77; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15, and *Sūrah* 71. *The companions of the ship* refers to his children and his wives (Ṭ) or to a larger group of seventy-eight, ten, or eight believers, divided evenly between men and women (Z). As with other prophets whose people met with calamity and destruction for having rejected them, Noah and those who followed him were spared the punishment. That God *made it a sign* is understood to mean that the ship remained for many years upon the top of Mount Jūdī (IJ, Ṭ), though some say that *it* refers to the punishment (Ṭ, Ṭs), hence the flood that came upon Noah's people. In either interpretation it can be understood as a sign of the manner in which God will separate the believers from the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭs). When *a sign* is understood as a reference to the whole story, it also reminds one to reflect upon the Grace of God in providing for and saving Noah and those with him, as God not only warned them, but also made the waters recede before their provisions ran out (R).

16–17 Various aspects of Abraham's story are repeated in over two hundred verses of the Quran. Islam presents itself as the renewal of his creed, as in 6:161, where the Prophet is enjoined, *Say, "Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham."* Thus 2:130 asks rhetorically, *Who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul?* And Muslims are all enjoined to *follow the creed of Abraham* (3:95; 16:123). When challenged by Jews and Christians as to the origins of their religion, Muslims are counseled to say, *[Ours is] the creed of Abraham* (2:135); see 3:67c.

The injunction to *worship God and reverence Him* is a summation of Abraham's more extensive entreaties in 19:42–48, where he withdraws from his people; 21:52–66, where he smashes their idols; 26:69–76; and 37:85–95. His criticism of their idol worship is found in several accounts, as when he chastises his father, saying, *Do you take idols for gods? Truly I see you and your people in manifest error* (6:74; cf. 19:42; 21:52). But the only justification that his father and his people are able to give is, *We found our fathers worshipping them* (21:53; cf. 26:74).

That they *only create perversion* refers to their lie in claiming that their idols are gods (IJ). That the idols they worship *have no power over what provision may come* (cf. 16:73) indicates the utter futility

provision may come to you. So seek your provision with God, worship Him, and be thankful to Him; unto Him shall you be returned. (18) But if you deny, then communities have certainly denied before you; and naught is incumbent upon the Messenger but the clear proclamation." (19) Have they not considered how God originates creation, then brings it back? Truly that is easy for God. (20) Say, "Journey upon the earth and observe how He originated creation. Then God shall bring the next genesis into being. Truly God is Powerful over all things." (21) He punishes whomsoever He will and has mercy upon whomsoever He will, and unto Him will you be returned. (22) You thwart not on earth, nor in Heaven; and apart from God you have no protector or helper. (23) Those who disbelieve in God's signs and in the meeting with Him, they

of their worship and that their "gods" cannot even be considered minor deities who bring them closer to God, as they claim when they say, *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God* (39:3). Similarly Jesus is said to have addressed the disbelievers, *Do you worship, apart from God, that which has no power over what benefit or harm may come upon you?* (5:76); see 25:3c. *Unto Him shall you be returned* (cf. 2:28, 245; 10:56; 11:34; 21:35; 28:70, 88; 29:57; 30:11; 39:44; 41:21) speaks to the promise of the Resurrection; see 2:28c.

18 This verse can be read as a continuation of Abraham's address to his people or as the beginning of a break in the story of Abraham, which then resumes in v. 24 (IK). In either reading, *communities have certainly denied before you* serves as a reminder and a consolation to the Prophet Muhammad that, as in the case of Abraham, previous communities rejected the messengers sent to them, though the messengers eventually prevailed. That Muhammad and other prophets are only responsible for *the clear proclamation*—that is, for delivering God's Message—is emphasized in many passages (e.g., 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12).

19–23 Most commentators see these verses as a break in the story of Abraham, which is resumed in v. 24. Others interpret them as a continuation of Abraham's words in vv. 16–18.

19 This verse is one of many instances in which the Quran refers to God's Ability to "originate creation" as an argument for His Ability to resurrect, both of which are said to be *easy for God,* as in 30:27: *He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back, and that is most easy for Him* (see also 10:34; 27:64; 64:7; 10:4c; 30:11c).

20 Although here the call is to *journey upon the earth* and observe or reflect upon the created order, other instances call for one to journey in order to observe *how the deniers fared in the end* (3:137; 16:36; cf. 6:11; 27:69; 30:42). Regarding the spiritual value of journeying, see 30:9c. *The next genesis* (cf. 53:37) refers to resurrection after death (IJ, Ṭ).

21 This verse refers to God's Punishment and Mercy either in this life or after *the next genesis* (IJ), or both.

22 People cannot thwart God on earth, and the inhabitants of the heavens cannot thwart God in Heaven; or people cannot thwart God on earth, and were they in Heaven, they could not thwart Him there either (IJ, Q, Ṭ); cf. 8:59; 9:2–3; 11:20; 35:44; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12. And they have *no protector or helper* near at hand to benefit them or prevent God's Punishment from coming upon them (IJ); cf. 2:107; 9:116; 42:31.

23 *Those who disbelieve* in and thus deny *God's signs,* meaning His proofs (Ṭ), such as the Quran (IJ, Ṭ, Z), evidentiary miracles (Z), and the Resurrection, will despair of ever reaching the Garden (IJ) or of receiving God's Forgiveness (IJ).

24 *His people* means Abraham's people. For the story of Abraham and the fire, see 21:66–70c.

despair of My Mercy, and for them there shall be a painful punishment. (24) Yet the answer of his people was but to say, "Slay him, or burn him!" Then God saved him from the fire. Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. (25) And Abraham said, "You have taken idols apart from God on account of affection between you in the life of this world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another, and you will curse one another; your refuge will be the Fire, and you will have no helpers." (26) And Lot believed him and said, "Truly I am fleeing unto my Lord. Truly He is the Mighty, the Wise." (27) And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, and We established prophethood and scripture among his progeny. We gave him his reward in this world, and in the Hereafter he shall truly be among the righteous. (28) And [We sent] Lot, when he said to his people, "Truly you commit indecency such as none in the worlds committed before you. (29) What! Do you come unto men, cut off the way, and commit reprehensible deeds in your gatherings?" Yet the answer of his people

*Truly in that are signs for a people who believe* (cf. 6:99; 16:79; 27:86; 30:37; 39:52) refers to God saving Abraham from the fire. That the believers will be saved, despite severe trials, is a major theme of this *sūrah*.

25 That they have taken idols *on account of affection . . . in the life of this world* indicates that their love for the world is what leads them to worship idols, but as this love pertains entirely to this world, it will bring them no benefit in the Hereafter, and their affection will also be cut off (Ṭ). That the disbelievers *will disown one another, and . . . curse one another* points to the rancor within their breasts (see also 2:166–67; 7:38–39c; 34:31–33), since *friends on that Day will be enemies to one another, save for the reverent* (43:67).

26–35 For other narrative accounts of Lot (who is considered to be either Abraham's nephew or cousin) and his people, see 7:80–84; 11:77–83; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 54:33–38. A similar Biblical narrative is found in Genesis 19.

26 Lot's declaration *I am fleeing unto my Lord* indicates that he is emigrating from Sodom to wherever God will provide him refuge, a practice similar to what is enjoined upon the first Muslim community in Makkah and lauded in 16:41–42: *And those who emigrate for the sake of God, after having been wronged, We shall surely settle them in a good place in this world—and the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but knew—those who are patient and trust in their Lord* (see also 2:218; 3:195; 4:100; 8:72–75; 9:20; 16:110; 22:58; 24:22). The present verse can thus be read as an extension of the theme in v. 10, when that verse is interpreted as being addressed to those Muslims who had failed to emigrate and thus suffered affliction and nearly apostatized.

27 Here *him* refers to Abraham. Isaac and Jacob are also identified as Divine gifts in 6:84 and 19:49 and referred to as *an added gift* in 21:72 (called *added* because Ishmael was born before Isaac). For the account of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, receiving the news of Isaac's impending birth, see commentary on 37:101; 51:28–30.

28–29 For the story of Lot, who was sent to the people of Sodom, see 7:80–84; 11:77–83; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 54:33–38; and Genesis 19. Similarly in 7:80, Lot proclaims, *What! Do you commit an indecency such as none in the worlds committed before you?* In both accounts, *indecency* renders *fāḥishah*, which denotes an abominable sin and is most often used with reference to sexual transgression (see 4:15c). Here *indecency* is understood as a specific reference to

was but to say, "Bring us God's Punishment, if you are among the truthful." (30) He said, "My Lord, help me against the people who work corruption." (31) And when Our envoys came unto Abraham with glad tidings, they said, "We shall surely destroy the people of this town; truly its people are wrongdoers." (32) He said, "Verily, Lot is in it." They said, "We know better who is in it. Assuredly We shall save him and his family, save for his wife; she is among those who lagged behind." (33) And when Our envoys came unto Lot, he was distressed on their account; yet he was constrained from helping them. And they said, "Be not afraid, nor grieve. We shall surely save thee and thy family, save for thy wife; she is among those who lagged behind. (34) Truly we shall bring down upon the people of this town a torment from Heaven for having

sexual relations between men (cf. 7:81; 26:165–66; 27:55), a transgression that, based upon this verse, commentators say no people had committed on such a wide scale before Lot's people (IK; cf. 7:81).

Given the aggressive manner in which the men of Sodom are said to have approached other men in 11:77–79; 15:67–71; and Genesis 19, some maintain that Lot reproaches them for forcible rather than consensual sexual relations. However, the emphasis here and in 7:81; 26:165–66, and 27:54 is upon approaching men with desire and lust, whether consensual or not, and thus "leaving their spouses their Lord created for them" (see 26:166); also see 7:80–81c. That they *cut off the way* by preferring men over women means they cut off the way to having children (Ṭs), or they *cut off the way* of travelers, as, according to some accounts, they specifically targeted travelers to rape them (Ṭs). Their challenge to Lot is similar to the one the people of ʿĀd pose to the prophet Hūd (*Then bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are among the truthful;* 46:22; cf. 7:70) and the one the people of Thamūd pose to the prophet Ṣāliḥ (see 7:77).

30 Elsewhere, "working corruption" is connected in a more general manner to committing physical violence (see 2:11, 27, 30, 205; 5:33, 64; 7:127; 17:4; 26:183; 27:48–49; 28:4; 29:30; 38:28; 47:22). In other verses, it often implies a combination of spiritual and worldly corruption; see 7:74, 85–86, 103; 11:85; 13:25. For the Quranic understanding of *corruption,* see 30:41c.

31–32 For a more complete account of Abraham's encounter with the angels, to whom reference is made elsewhere as *the guests of Abraham* (15:51), see 51:24–34; 15:51–60; and commentary on 11:69–74. *This town* refers to the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham also pleads with the angels *concerning the people of Lot* in 11:74, but here and in 15:58–60 the angels explain that they will destroy everyone in it, *save for the family of Lot . . . except for his wife. . . . She is indeed among those who lagged behind* (15:59–60; cf. 7:83; 26:171; 27:57). The angels' statement *We know better who is in it* means that they know better than Abraham who the wrongdoers and believers are, and that Lot is not among the wrongdoers (Ṭ). *Those who lagged behind* renders *ghābirīn* and indicates that they are destroyed in this life, completely covered over by dust (*ghubār*), and that they will be disgraced in the Hereafter, when their faces *shall be covered with dust* (*ghabarah*), *overspread with darkness* (80:40–41). For more on Lot's wife, see 7:83c.

33–34 *Torment,* which also appears in 2:59 and 7:134, renders *rijz,* a word that can also be understood to mean "defilement," as in 8:11, where God purifies Lot and his people from *the defilement of Satan* (*rijz al-shayṭān*), or to mean "plague." This verse could thus indicate that God will send a plague or some form of defilement upon Lot's people, though it most likely refers to the *stones of baked clay* (11:82; 15:74) or *torrent of stones* (54:34) said to have rained down upon them; see also 7:84.

been iniquitous." (35) And We indeed have left of it a manifest sign for a people who understand. (36) And unto Midian, [We sent] their brother Shuʿayb; he said, "O my people! Worship God and hope for the Last Day, and behave not wickedly upon the earth, working corruption." (37) But they denied him, and so the earthquake seized them, and morning found them lying lifeless in their abode; (38) and ʿĀd, and Thamūd; [their fate] is certainly evident to you from their dwellings. Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them and thus turned them from the way, though they had been discerning; (39) and Korah, and Pharaoh, and Hāmān! Indeed, Moses brought them clear proofs, but they waxed arrogant upon the

35 God has left the punishment that He inflicted upon the people of Lot as a sign, a proof and a warning, for those who understand (Ṭ). *It* could refer to the ruins of their town, the stones or rain that came down upon them, or the account of their story (Z).

36–37 This discussion of Shuʿayb likely comes after that of Abraham and Lot, because the Midianites are said to take their name from Midian, the son of Abraham from whom they descended (see Genesis 25:2); see 7:85c. Though considered an Arab prophet, Shuʿayb is usually identified with the Biblical figure Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, since the Quran mentions that Moses met his future wife and father-in-law in the area of Midian (see 26:22–23). According to some commentators, Shuʿayb was sent both to the people of Midian and to "the inhabitants of the thicket" (*al-aykah*), while others consider "the inhabitants of the thicket" to be another reference to the people of Midian (see 15:78; 26:176; 38:13; 50:14c). The warning given here is part of a longer warning delivered by Shuʿayb in 7:85 (see also 11:85; 26:183). For the meaning of *working corruption* and its place in the Quran, see 30:41c. For more complete accounts of the story of Shuʿayb, see 7:85–93; 11:84–95; 26:176–89.

The description in v. 37 of the destruction of the Midianites for their rejection of Shuʿayb (cf. 7:91; 11:94) is identical to the description of that of the tribe of Thamūd for their rejection of the prophet Ṣāliḥ (see 7:77–78c; 11:67–68c). *Lying lifeless* can be understood to mean that they were rigid corpses or that they were prostrate upon their knees, dead (Z), which would imply a humiliating position with their faces on the ground and their hindquarters in the air.

38 The ʿĀd and the Thamūd were pre-Islamic Arabian tribes that rejected the prophets sent to them, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, respectively. For the tribe of ʿĀd, see commentary on 7:65–72; 11:50–60. For the tribe of Thamūd, see commentary on 7:73–79; 11:61–68. That *Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them* (cf. 8:48; 16:63; 27:24) means that he made them consider their disbelief in God and their rejection of His messengers to be a mark of their excellence (Ṭ). That Satan *turned them from the way* can also mean that he blocked the way for them. *Though they had been discerning* implies that they were people of intelligence who nonetheless did not act in accord with the truth (Q, Z), or that they had seen clearly that a punishment would come upon them (IJ, Q), but followed Satan nonetheless (Z). It could also be rendered "Though they had understood," referring to the fact that they had been shown the truth through the messengers God had sent (R) and were thus aware that they were in error (Q, Ṭ).

39 The initial *and* connects those listed in the verse to the fates of the tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd in the previous verse or to the phrase *Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them and thus turned them from the way* (Ṭ). For the story of Korah, a great grandson of Levi (Numbers 16:1) with vast wealth who was swallowed by the ground for opposing Moses (Numbers 16:32), see commentary on 28:76–82. For Hāmān, a member of Pharaoh's court who was ordered to light a fire and *make a tower* (28:38) to proclaim Pharaoh a deity, see 28:6, 8, 38; 40:24, 36–37; 28:6c. Although some

earth, and outstripped [Us] not. (40) Each We seized for his sin. Among them are some upon whom We sent a torrent of stones, and among them are some whom the Cry seized, and among them are some whom We caused the earth to engulf, and among them are some whom We drowned. God wronged them not, but themselves did they wrong. (41) The parable of those who take protectors apart from God is that of the spider that makes a house. Truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house, if they but knew. (42) Truly God knows whatsoever they call upon apart from Him. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (43) These are

have confused this Hāmān with the Haman mentioned in the Biblical book of Esther (9:5–14), it most likely refers to the head of Pharaoh's stone quarries; see 28:36c. Here *clear proofs* refers to the miracles that Moses performed, such as the white hand and the staff turned serpent, as well as the plagues against the Egyptians in 7:133, in the face of all of which Pharaoh and "his notables" *waxed arrogant* (cf. 7:133; 10:75; 23:46; 28:39). That they cannot "outstrip" God means they cannot escape what God has decreed (Ṭ, Z), as in v. 22: *You thwart naught on earth, nor in Heaven;* see also 56:60c.

40 A *torrent of stones* (cf. 17:68; 67:17) was sent against the people to whom Lot preached (see 15:74; 29:33; 54:34). Those *whom the Cry seized* (cf. 15:73, 83; 23:41) were the tribe of Thamūd (11:66–68; 11:95) and the Midianites (11:94–95). Those whom the earth swallowed (cf. 16:45; 34:9; 67:16) were the people of Korah (28:81). Those drowned refers to Noah's people, and Pharaoh and Hāmān. *The Cry* is also interpreted to indicate lightning and its accompanying thunder. Thus in this verse human beings are destroyed by the four traditional elements: fire, through lightning or *the Cry;* water, through drowning; earth, which engulfed them; and air, by whose wind God *sent a torrent of stones.* None of these punishments were arbitrary, but were, from a Quranic perspective, the outcome of the people's own iniquity. Thus *God wronged them not, but themselves did they wrong* (cf. 2:57; 7:160; 9:70; 16:33, 118; 30:9).

41 The Quranic criticism of those who take *protectors apart from God* (cf. 7:30; 39:3; 42:6; 45:10) is directed against those who take other human beings as protectors (see, e.g., 4:139c; 5:51c; 9:23–24c), those who take satans as protectors (see 7:27c; 18:50c), and those who take idols as protectors (see 2:257). From a Quranic perspective, God is the ultimate Protector (*Walī*), and the Prophet and the community of believers are the only true protectors for Muslims in the human realm (see, e.g., 2:107, 257; 3:68, 122; 4:45, 139; 5:55; 6:14, 127; 7:196; 8:72; 9:71, 116), whereas the idolaters seek protection from their idols (e.g., 2:257; 13:16) and disbelievers seek protection from Satan and each other (e.g., 7:30; 8:73; 16:100).

Just as a house provides shelter and protection, while a spider's house, or web, does not, so too do true protectors provide nourishment and shelter, while false protectors taken by the disbelievers do not (R). They are thus afflicted with the forms of destruction mentioned in the previous verse and with punishment in the Hereafter. And just as *the spider's house* becomes scattered dust, so too do the creeds and rituals that the idolaters have constructed for their religion become scattered dust and *their deeds have come to naught* (2:217; 3:22; 5:53; 7:147; 9:17; 18:105). In this way, this verse also points to the hidden polytheism of those who worship God *to be seen of men* (2:264; 4:38, 142; 8:47), for they have, in effect, taken a god other than God (R). From this perspective, any religion or ideology produced by human beings is *the frailest of houses.*

42 Even though the idolaters are unaware of the emptiness of *whatsoever they call upon,* or worship, *apart from Him,* God knows and will not reward them for it.

43 *These are the parables* refers to the parable of the spider's house and similar parables found throughout the Quran (Sh). Similarly, 59:21 states that God sets forth parables *for mankind, that haply they may reflect.* Commenting upon the present verse, al-Tustarī writes, "God sets forth

the parables; We set them forth for mankind. But none understand them, save those who know. (44) God created the heavens and the earth in truth. Surely in that is a sign for believers. (45) Recite that which has been revealed unto thee of the Book, and perform the prayer. Truly prayer prevents against indecency and abomination, but the remembrance of God is surely greater. And God knows

the parables for mankind in general, since those things that bear witness to power point to the Powerful. But none understands them, save His elect. Thus knowledge is rare and comprehension of God even rarer. Whosoever attains knowledge by himself through his natural self is deluded. And whosoever comes to know Him through the knowledge of God, God knows what He Himself desired for him. The creature has no knowledge of the truth beyond that. This allusion [to the parables] was made due to the distance of hearts from the knowledge of reality" (ST).

44 That *God created the heavens and the earth in truth* (cf. 6:73; 16:3; 39:5; 45:22; 64:3) is reiterated in various ways in several verses (see 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 30:8; 46:3; see also 44:38–39c). *In truth* translates *bi'l-ḥaqq,* which can also mean "for the truth," indicating that creation was brought forth to manifest the truth (IJ). In this context, that *in that is a sign for believers* (cf. 15:77) alludes to the frailty of the created order, of which the spider's web described in v. 41 is a symbol, and evokes the idea that every created thing can be used by God as a parable, as in 2:26: *Truly God is not ashamed to set forth a parable of a gnat or something smaller.*

45 Here *prayer* refers to the obligatory prayers (IJ, Q, R). Some say it means the act of reciting the Quran (IJ, Ṭ), which is another form of supererogatory worship, but al-Rāzī argues against such an interpretation, given that the verse already begins with the mention of reciting the Quran. The combined command to recite the Quran and perform the prayer can be understood to mean that if one performs the prayers and then reflects upon the words of the Quran recited in them, it will prevent one from committing *indecency and abomination* (IJ), though others understand this verse to mean that prayer in and of itself fulfills this function (IJ). According to a saying sometimes attributed to the Prophet and sometimes to his Companion Ibn Masʿūd, "He whose prayer does not prevent *indecency and abomination,* his prayer increases him in naught but distance [from God]" (IJ, R, Sh, Ṭ). From this perspective, prayer in and of itself may not prevent *indecency and abomination* unless it is combined with sincerity and repentance, as in 5:27: *God accepts only from the reverent* (Z). Nonetheless, it is thought that the grace of prayer itself can move one away from bad deeds and toward good deeds, as when the Prophet said of a young man who prayed with him but inclined toward indecent acts, "Surely his prayer will soon prevent him [from doing that]" (Bḍ, Q, Z). Here *indecency* may refer to fornication and *abomination* to disobedience (Ṭ). Prayer prevents these and other sins in that it purifies the heart, a function alluded to when the Prophet asked his Companions, "Tell me, if one of you had a river at his door in which he washed five times a day, would any of his filth remain?" To which the people replied, "Nothing of his filth would remain." He said, "That is a likeness of the five prayers. God obliterates sins with them" (Q). In this vein, al-Ghazzālī advises penetrating deeper into prayer, since it was not prescribed merely for the words and motions it entails, but for "polishing the heart and renewing the remembrance of God" (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* [Beirut, 1998], 1:142). Regarding the function of prayer in protecting against *indecency and abomination,* al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "Every prayer that does not restrain shameful and unjust deeds and is devoid of the adornment of shunning these deeds is tainted, and it is incumbent upon one to purify it" (ST, Su).

*The remembrance of God is surely greater* (or "greatest") means that to remember God is greater than all else (IJ, Sh, Ṭ), including other acts of worship. From another perspective, it means that God's remembrance of human beings is greater than their remembrance of God (Bḍ, IJ, Sh, Su, Ṭ, Z), since His remembrance is eternal and theirs is temporal (Su), or both meanings can obtain at the same time (Sh, Ṭ). From a Sufi perspective,

whatsoever you do. (46) And dispute not with the People of the Book, save in the most virtuous manner, unless it be those of them who have done wrong. And say, "We believe in that which was sent down unto us and was sent down unto you; our God and your God are one, and unto Him are we submitters." (47) Thus have We sent down unto thee the Book. So those unto whom We have given the Book believe in it. Among those are some who believe in it; and none reject Our signs, save the disbelievers. (48) And thou didst not recite before this any Book;

the two meanings together indicate that the fullness of remembrance comes only when individuals have been annihilated before God, so that no selfhood or egotism remains, and they thus realize that their remembrance of God is in fact God's remembrance of God Himself through and within them. Only this form of remembrance can be truly "great," since only this form of remembrance is beyond the contingencies of time and place, to which any ordinary human remembrance of God would, by definition, be bound.

Some also understand this verse to mean that remembering God in prayer is better than the *indecency and abomination* that it prevents (IJ, Ṭ), that believers' remembrance of God is better than idolaters' remembrance of their gods (R), or that prayer, which some understand to be what is meant by *the remembrance of God* in this verse, is better than all other acts of obedience (Bḍ, Z). Regarding the preeminence of the remembrance of God, whichever of the meanings above may obtain, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The world is accursed, accursed is all that is in it, save the remembrance of God and that which supports it."

46 This verse is an injunction to the Prophet and Muslims to not argue with Jews and Christians, except in a beautiful manner that calls them through God's signs and draws evidence from God's proofs (Ṭ) or in a manner that exhorts them to good, as in 16:125: *Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner* (IK); this means that even if others speak poorly, Muslims should still speak well (Ṭ). *Those of them who have done wrong* means those People of the Book who turn away from the signs delivered by God's prophets and remain stubborn and arrogant (IK), or those who engage in physical conflict against the Muslims and who will not enter into a treaty with them (Ṭ). According to some, this verse was abrogated by 9:29, but al-Ṭabarī argues that this verse is in effect and not abrogated, emphasizing that a verse cannot be considered abrogated in the absence of definitive proof.

Muslims are then ordered to declare the fundamental similarities between the revelations sent to them and those sent to previous religious communities, as in 2:136: *Say, "We believe in God, and in that which was sent down to us, and in that which was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit"* (cf. 3:84). Regarding discussions with the People of the Book, the Prophet is reported to have counseled his followers, "Do not confirm the People of the Book and do not deny them; *say, 'We believe in that which was sent down unto us and that which was sent down unto you; our God and your God are one, and unto Him are we submitters'*" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z).

47 *Among those are some who believe in it* means that among the People of the Book, here referred to as *those unto whom We have given the Book*, are some who believed in the Quran and the prophethood of Muhammad (Ṭ, Z); or it means the Makkans (Z), some of whom believed in the Quran, but many of whom did not. When understood as a reference to the People of the Book, most commentators interpret it to mean those Jews and Christians who became Muslim (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z). But this need not be the case, as in 3:199: *And truly among the People of the Book are those who believe in God and that which has been sent down unto you, and that which has been sent down*

nor didst thou write it with thy right hand, for then those who make false claims would have doubted. (49) Nay, it is but clear signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge, and none reject Our signs, save the wrongdoers. (50) And they say, "Why have signs not been sent down unto him from his Lord?" Say, "Signs are with God alone, and I am only a clear warner." (51) Does it not suffice them that We have sent down unto thee the Book that is recited unto them? Surely in that is a mercy and a reminder for a people who believe. (52) Say, "God suffices as a Witness between you and me. He knows whatsoever

*unto them.* Such people would not have rejected God's signs and thus would not have been those who opposed the Muslims; also see commentary on 3:110–15; 5:82–83.

48 This verse is understood to mean that the Prophet had no part in authoring the Quran, one of the fundamental beliefs of all schools of Islamic thought. Addressing him directly, it alludes to his having lived among his people for many years, during which time he had never recited another book or made any claims to have composed one, since he was "unlettered" or "unschooled" (*ummī*), as in 7:157, where Muhammad is referred to as *the unlettered Prophet* (IK, Ṭ, Z). Both 26:224–27 and 36:69 also reject the idea that the Prophet was a poet. This verse then proposes that, had the Prophet engaged in recitation and composition, *those who make false claims,* meaning either the Quraysh (Ṭ, Z) or those among the People of the Book who opposed him (Z), may have had more reason to doubt the origin of the revelation, as in 25:5: *And they say, "They are fables of those of old which he has had written down, and they are recited to him morning and evening"* (cf. 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13).

49 Some understand this verse to mean that the Quran is composed of clear signs or verses that are easy to memorize, as in 54:17: *And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember* (cf. 54:22, 32, 40), and that these signs or verses are preserved, recited, and interpreted by *those who have been given knowledge* (Aj, IK, Z). Others interpret *those who have been given knowledge* (cf. 22:54; 34:6; 58:11) as a reference to those among the People of the Book who had found references to or *clear signs* of the Prophet Muhammad in their scriptures (Aj, Ṭ).

50 This is one of several verses in which the disbelievers call for a miraculous sign as proof of the reality of the revelation (see 2:118; 10:20; 13:7; 17:90–93; 20:133; 6:37c; 54:1–2c). That the *signs are with God alone* refers to God alone having the keys to the treasuries of the Unseen and dispensing signs as He alone wills, as in 6:50, where the Prophet is enjoined, *Say, "I do not say to you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the Unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me."* The Prophet is told to say, *"I am only a clear warner"* or *"I am naught but a warner"* in several verses (22:49; 38:70; 46:9; 67:26; also see 27:92), and other verses instruct the Prophet, *Thou art but a warner* (13:7; 79:45), and *Thou art naught but a warner* (35:23).

51 This verse is a response to the objection raised in the previous verse (Q) meaning, "Does it not suffice as a sign that God has sent the Quran as a revelation?" (Ṭ). See also 20:133: *They say, "Why has he not brought us a sign from his Lord?" Has there not come unto them the clear proof of that which is in the scriptures of old?* Regarding the sufficiency of the Quran as a sign, the Prophet is reported to have said, "There is no prophet who was not given miracles that would make the people believe in him. What I have been given is revelation that God reveals to me, and I hope that I will have the greatest number of followers on the Day of Resurrection" (IK). The Quran is *a mercy,* since it tells of the Blessings and Bounty of God, and *a reminder,* or admonition, regarding God's Punishment (IK).

52 In 17:96, the Prophet is also enjoined to say *God suffices as a Witness between you and me* when the disbelievers object to his prophethood by

is in the heavens and on the earth." And those who believe in what is false and disbelieve in God, it is they who are the losers. (53) And they bid thee hasten the punishment. Yet were it not for a term appointed, the punishment would have come upon them. And it will surely come upon them suddenly, while they are unaware. (54) And they bid thee hasten the punishment. Truly Hell shall encompass the disbelievers (55) on the Day when the punishment will cover them from above and from beneath their feet, and We shall say, "Taste that which you used to do!" (56) O My servants who believe! Truly My earth is vast. So

saying, *Has God sent a human being as a messenger?* (17:94). In the present *sūrah,* the disbelievers ask for a sign, meaning a miracle, as proof of the Prophet's claims, and in 17:92 they ask why God did not send angels. In both instances they seek an undeniable supernatural proof, but as 6:25 states, *Were they to see every sign, they would not believe in it* (cf. 7:146). Thus the Prophet is enjoined to respond by letting them know that *God suffices as a Witness* (cf. 4:79, 166; 13:43; 17:96; 46:8; 48:28), meaning that He will settle their differences, since He knows *those who believe in what is false* and those who attest to the truth. In a similar vein, the Prophet is enjoined to say to the disbelievers who reject his prophethood, *God and whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book suffice as a witness between you and me* (13:43).

53–54 That they seek to *hasten the punishment* refers to the manner in which disbelievers ignore the warnings of the prophets and mock the punishments they foretell, saying, *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25), even going so far as to say, *O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment* (8:32). This attitude of derision is attributed to all disbelievers in one way or another and is elsewhere contrasted with that of the believers: *Those who believe not in it would seek to hasten it, and those who believe are wary of it and know that it is the truth* (42:18; for other passages in which the disbelievers seek to hasten their punishment, see 10:50–51; 13:6; 22:47; 26:204; 27:46, 72; 37:176–77; 38:16; 51:14). In response to this attitude, the Prophet is told to say, *That which you seek to hasten is not within my power. Judgment belongs to God alone, He relates the Truth, and He is the best of deciders* (6:57; see also 22:47).

*A term appointed* appears in several contexts in the Quran, most often as a reference to the span of a human being's life (6:2, 60; 11:3; 14:10; 22:5, 33; 39:42; 40:67; 71:4); in other instances, as here, it alludes to Divine Punishment (16:61; 20:129; 29:53; 35:45) and is a reference to the Day of Judgment (35:45; 42:14). It also appears in reference to the spans decreed for the trajectories of the moon and the sun (13:2; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5), the span of existence of the heavens and the earth (30:8; 46:3), and paying one's debts (2:282). For more regarding the interpretation of *a term appointed,* see 35:45c.

55 That the punishment covers the disbelievers *from above and from beneath their feet* is an idiomatic expression meaning that punishment will envelop them from all sides (cf. 5:66; 6:65; 33:10). It may also refer to the various forms of punishment that come *from above,* such as floods of rain, torrents of stones, and a destructive thunderbolt, and *from below,* such as earthquakes; see 6:65c. *Taste that which you used to do* implies *taste the punishment everlasting for that which you used to do* (32:14; cf. 3:106; 6:30; 7:39; 8:35; 46:34).

56 This verse was reportedly revealed to advise some Muslims to emigrate from Makkah to Abyssinia, where they would be able to practice their religion freely (IK, Q). Similar to vv. 1–10, it indicates that those who are unable to worship God in the land in which they live should migrate to another land where they will be able to be true to their religion (Z). In this regard, it is related to 4:97: *When the angels take the souls of those who were wronging themselves, [the angels] say, "In*

worship Me. (57) Every soul shall taste death. Then unto Us shall you be returned. (58) And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, We shall surely settle them in lofty abodes of the Garden with rivers running below, therein to abide. Excellent indeed is the reward of the workers [of righteousness], (59) those who are patient and trust in their Lord. (60) And how many a beast bears not its own provision, yet God provides for it and for you? And He is the Hearing, the Knowing. (61) Wert thou to ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth and made the sun and the moon subservient?" They would surely say, "God."

*what state were you?" They say, "We were weak and oppressed in the land." [The angels] will say, "Was not God's earth vast enough that you might have migrated therein?" These shall have their refuge in Hell—what an evil journey's end!*

57 Cf. 3:185; 21:35. In the immediate context, this frequently quoted verse explains why the previous verse enjoins worship of God. Since death is inevitable, everyone must prepare for it by worshipping God.

58–59 After souls have returned to God, each is informed of its place in the Hereafter. Believers are given *lofty abodes of the Garden,* which are elsewhere described as *lofty abodes above which are lofty abodes* (39:20). Regarding them the Prophet is reported to have said, "In the Garden there are rooms whose outside can be seen from the inside, and whose inside can be seen from the outside. God has prepared them for those who give food, those who speak well, those who pray and fast continually, and those who stand in prayer at night while others sleep" (IK). That God *shall settle them* alludes to the difficulties some may confront in emigrating, addressed in v. 56, assuring the believers that whatever they give up, if they *emigrate for the sake of God* (16:41), they will receive *lofty abodes* in the Hereafter, if not in this life. Elsewhere, they are assured: *Those who emigrate for the sake of God, after having been wronged, We shall surely settle them in a good place in this world—and the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but knew* (16:41). In contrast to the disbelievers, who sought to hasten their final end (vv. 53–54), such individuals *are patient* with what confronts them in the present *and trust in their Lord* regarding what He will provide them in the future (cf. 16:42; R).

60 Here the manner in which wild animals trust in God for their provision is cited as an example for believers, as in a famous *ḥadīth:* "Were you to trust in God as He merits, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds; they depart with empty stomachs and return full" (Q). In this context, that God is *the Hearing, the Knowing* serves as a reminder that God is aware of and provides for the needs of all things. It can also be understood to mean that He hears believers when they make supplication and knows their needs when they are silent (R).

61 Cf. 43:87. When asked who is creator and master of all things, *they*—that is, the idolaters among the Quraysh—*would surely say, "God"* (cf. 10:31; 23:84–85; 29:63; 31:25; 39:38; 43:9, 87), because they still believed in a supreme deity, though they nonetheless worshipped idols alongside—that is, attributed partners to—this deity. The Prophet is then told to respond, saying, *Praise be to God* (v. 63), meaning that only God should be praised for everything in creation and not those partners they attribute to Him, partners who had nothing to do with creation, and that no one other than God should be worshipped (Z).

*How, then, are they perverted* translates *annā yuʾfakūn* (cf. 43:87), which is literally, "How are they turned away?" and which always carries a negative connotation, meaning turning away from truth toward falsehood—turning from telling the truth to lying or from beautiful actions to ugly ones (Iṣ)—and thus becoming perverted or deluded (*Tāj al-ʿarūs*). Here it is an expression of astonishment meaning, "How could they turn away from the Oneness of God and attribute partners to Him, even while they affirm that He is the

How, then, are they perverted? (62) God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will among His servants. Truly God is Knower of all things. (63) And wert thou to ask them, "Who sends down water from the sky and revives thereby the earth after its death?" They would surely say, "God." Say, "Praise be to God!" Nay, but most of them understand not. (64) The life of this world is naught but diversion and play. And surely the Abode of the Hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew. (65) And when they board a ship, they call upon God, devoting religion entirely to Him, but when He delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners [unto Him]. (66) So let them be ungrateful for that which We have given them, and let them enjoy themselves, for soon they will know! (67) Or have they

Creator of the heavens and the earth?" (Z). In this sense, it relates to the prevalent Quranic theme that many believe in God, but do not act in accord with their belief; see 23:84–89.

62–63 *God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12; see 34:39c) serves as a transition from the discussion of God as Creator to God as Sustainer. Here, that the disbelievers *would surely say, "God"* (cf. 10:31; 23:84–85; 29:61; 31:25; 39:38; 43:9, 87) indicates that just as they acknowledge a Supreme Creator, so too should they acknowledge that God provides for them. Nonetheless, they fail to draw the proper conclusion because *most of them understand not* (cf. 5:103; 49:4). God's Ability to revive barren land also stands as an argument for His Ability to resurrect (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 30:19, 24, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11).

64 This world is also described as *naught but play and diversion* (6:32; cf. 47:36), indicating the rapidity with which it dissipates (Aj), and as *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185). In 57:20 the world is described more fully as *play, diversion, glitter, mutual boasting, and vying for increase in property and children—the likeness of a rain whose vegetation impresses the farmers; then it withers such that you see it turn yellow; then it becomes chaff;* see 57:20c. *The Abode of the Hereafter* (cf. 2:95; 6:32; 7:169; 12:109; 16:30; 28:77, 83; 33:29) refers to Paradise.

65 Cf. 10:22–23; 17:67; 31:32. A storm at sea can be seen as a parable for the afflictions that beset one in life. *Devoting religion entirely to Him* (cf. 7:29; 10:22; 31:32; 40:14, 65; 98:5) refers to the singularity of people's devotion in the face of the severity of the afflictions that befall them (T). Yet when they are delivered to safety, they *turn away* and are *ungrateful* (17:67), return to their polytheism, and *behave tyrannically upon the earth without right* (10:23). In the context of the previous verse, this verse can be understood as an allusion to religious and spiritual hypocrisy, as many will pray, turning to God briefly in their state of dire need, but then when no longer in need turn away, forgetting God and devoting themselves to seeking the things of this world. In this sense, it is attachment to the life of this world that prevents many people from believing in God (R).

66 Cf. 16:55; 30:34. If people do not want God's Blessings, they may choose to reject them and disbelieve, as in 18:29, when the Prophet is enjoined to say, *So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve.* The phrase *let them enjoy themselves* follows upon v. 64. Though they think the *diversion and play* of this world is good, as they are able to *enjoy a little* (77:46), in fact this respite that God has granted them lets them dig a deeper hole for themselves, as in 31:24: *We grant them enjoyment a little, then We compel them toward a grave punishment* (see also 3:178; 10:69–70; 15:3; 16:55; 26:205–7). Thus *soon they will know* how their attempt to direct their own affairs led to their destruction (Aj).

67 The *secure sanctuary* is Makkah. Traditionally, no fighting was to take place within its

not considered that We have made a secure sanctuary while people are snatched away all around them? Do they believe in that which is false? And are they ungrateful for God's Blessing? (68) Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies the truth when it comes unto him? Is there not in Hell an abode for the disbelievers? (69) But as for those who strive for Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways. Truly God is with the virtuous.

confines, and the Makkans were well protected from possible incursions by other tribes. This verse thus rebukes the Quraysh for not reflecting upon the security with which God has blessed them in contrast to other tribes (Ṭ, Z; see also commentary on 106:1–4). *Do they believe in that which is false?* is a rhetorical question rebuking them both for believing in the idols they worshipped and for believing themselves to be the source of their own security. *God's Blessing,* for which they are *ungrateful,* refers to both the security He provides and His having sent them a prophet (Aj). The *secure sanctuary* can also be read as a reference to any form of security or stability that God grants human beings in the face of the instability and uncertainty of the storms of life. On a spiritual level it refers to being preserved from the *diversion and play* (v. 64) of the world that ensnares those who believe in falsehood and are ungrateful for God's Blessings.

68 The condemnation of *one who fabricates a lie against God* is a recurring Quranic theme (see 3:94; 6:21–23, 93, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 61:7c). In the end, *they will surely be questioned concerning that which they used to fabricate* (29:13), and *that which they used to fabricate will forsake them* (10:30; 16:88; 28:75; see also 6:24; 7:53; 11:21). The truth that the creators of lies deny may refer to the Prophet, to the Quran (Aj), to the general message of Divine Unity and all that it entails (Ṭ), or to all of them. *Is there not in Hell an abode for the disbelievers?* (cf. 39:32), or elsewhere *an abode for the arrogant* (39:60), is a rhetorical question meaning that they are undoubtedly in Hell (Ṭ, Z).

69 *Those who strive for Us* refers to those who strive with their very souls against Satan, against their own lower souls, and against the enemies of religion (Aj). That God will guide them in His ways indicates that they will be guided on the straight path (Ṭ) or on ways that lead to good and to Divine Succor (Z), and that they will be guided to God (Aj). This verse is subject to many interpretations, each reflecting the belief that striving to obtain one good will lead to another good. Among these, some say it means that those who strive to act upon what they know will be guided to greater knowledge that they did not have before (Aj, IK); those who strive to obtain knowledge will be guided to the ways of acting in accord with it; those who strive to do what is pleasing to God will be guided to the attainment of contentment; those who strive in repentance will be guided upon the paths of sincerity; or those who strive to serve God will be guided upon the path of intimate converse with God (Aj).

Although several verses speak of God's Love for the virtuous (2:195; 3:134, 148; 5:13, 93), this is the only verse to say that *God is with the virtuous.* Here, *the virtuous* translates *muḥsinīn,* which means those who do what is beautiful or who make things beautiful. It is related to *iḥsān,* "making or doing what is beautiful," and is thus related to "virtue" or "goodness" and to *ḥusn,* meaning both "good" and "beauty." Regarding *iḥsān,* the Prophet said to his Companions, "God has ordained doing what is beautiful for all things." From this perspective, at the core of the Quran's message stands the idea that one must do all things with beauty and goodness (*ḥusn*).



# 30

# The Byzantines

## *al-Rūm*

All commentators agree that *al-Rūm* was revealed during the Makkan period, although some maintain that v. 17 is from the Madinan period (Aj, Āl) and others maintain that vv. 27–28 are from the Madinan period (IJ). The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the defeat of the Byzantines, or Romans, *al-Rūm,* in v. 2. According to some commentators, God's promise that the Byzantines would prevail after having been defeated (v. 3) follows upon the last verse of the previous *sūrah,* which promises that God will guide those who strive for His sake (Āl, Sy). Others maintain that the two *sūrah*s are linked by the promise that *truly God is with the virtuous,* which ends *Sūrah* 29, and the promise in vv. 4–5 that *on that day the believers shall rejoice in God's Help* (Aj).

From the mention of the battle between the Sassanids and the Byzantines and the prediction of the eventual victory of the Byzantines (vv. 2–6) followed by a criticism of the disbelievers for failing to reflect upon the signs of God (vv. 7–9), the *sūrah* proceeds to a discussion of the disparate ends of believers and disbelievers (vv. 10–16). This leads into the *sūrah*'s central theme, the abundance of signs of God in the created order and the inability of many human beings to understand them, because they follow caprice rather than knowledge (vv. 17–29). Beginning with a reference to the original or primordial nature of human beings, the *fiṭrah,* in one of the Quran's more famous verses (v. 30), vv. 30–34 contrast those who follow the *upright religion* with those who divide religion into factions (v. 32). Challenging the disbelievers to bring something to substantiate their claims (v. 35), the *sūrah* then touches upon several broader Quranic themes, such as virtue toward relatives and employing one's wealth in a just manner (vv. 38–39), the phases of human existence (v. 40), and the extent of human corruption (v. 41).

After calling again to *the upright religion* (vv. 43), *al-Rūm* returns to the contrast between the believers and disbelievers (vv. 44–45), which leads into another extended passage on its central theme, the importance of reflecting upon God's signs (vv. 46–51). A reminder of the Prophet's inability to guide those

whom God has not guided (vv. 52–54) is then followed by a discussion of the difficulties that will confront *the guilty* upon the Hour of Judgment (vv. 55–57). The *sūrah* concludes with a reminder that their hearts are sealed (v. 59) and that one must thus remain steadfast when confronted by them (v. 60).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Mīm.* (2) The Byzantines have been defeated (3) in a land nearby. Yet after being defeated they will prevail (4) within a few years—unto God belongs the affair, before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice (5) in God's Help. He helps whomsoever He will, and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *mīm,* which also appear in 2:1; 3:1; 29:1; 31:1; and 32:1, are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known ultimately only to God; see 2:1c.

2–5 These verses provide the only reference in the Quran to political events contemporary to Muhammad and his followers beyond the Arabian Peninsula. According to the majority of commentators, these verses were revealed in response to the disbelievers heckling the Muslims after the Persian Empire had defeated the Byzantine Empire in Syria. In the first part of the seventh century, the Persian ruler Khusraw Parwīz (r. 590–628) sent an army under the command of General Shahrbarāz (d. 630) to Byzantium. These forces conquered parts of Syria, taking Damascus in 613 and Jerusalem in 614, during which time another Sassanid army under General Shāhīn had conquered Egypt and laid siege to Constantinople. For many people the complete defeat of the Byzantine Empire seemed imminent. The Byzantine ruler had entrusted the command of his army to a man called Juhannas. *In a land nearby* most likely refers to the battles that he lost to Shahrbarāz at Adhriʿāt and Buṣrā, which are the closest parts of Syria to the land of the Arabs. The Prophet and his Companions heard of this defeat while in Makkah and were saddened. The Prophet disliked the fact that the Sassanids had the upper hand over the Byzantines, as the former were Magians and the latter were followers of an Abrahamic religion. The disbelievers of Makkah, however, were said to have been exultant and gloating. When they met the Prophet's Companions, they said to them, "You are People of the Book, and the Christians are People of the Book. We are without a revealed scripture, and our brothers the Persians have defeated your brothers the Byzantines. If you ever fight us, we will defeat you too" (Ṭ, W).

Despite the defeats they had suffered, the Quran predicted that the Byzantines would prevail *within a few years.* In this context, *a few* translates *biḍʿ,* which indicates a period between three and nine years (Sh, Ṭ, Z). In 622 the tide began to turn when the Byzantine emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians at Issus, south of the Taurus Mountains. This was the first in a series of victories that culminated in the Battle of Nineveh in 627, after which the Persian Empire weakened considerably, having fallen from the apparent greatness it had reached at the time these verses are said to have been revealed. In the context of the geopolitical events to which these verses refer, *unto God belongs the affair, before and after* refers to God's ability to make one army victorious over another. Metaphysically, it can also be understood to mean before everything existed and after everything ceases to exist, since God is the Originator

(6) [This is] God's Promise—God fails not His Promise, but most of mankind know not. (7) They know some outward aspect of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless. (8) Do they not reflect upon their souls? God did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth and for a term appointed. Yet truly many among mankind believe not in the meeting with their Lord. (9) Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were greater than they in strength. They tilled the earth and built upon it more than have they, and their messengers brought them clear proofs. For God would never wrong them,

of all things and the One to Whom all things return (ST).

6 The first phrase of this verse can also be read as an abbreviated structure substituting for a verbal construction meaning, "God has promised them [victory]." In both readings, it refers to God's Promise that the Byzantines would defeat the Sassanids (IK, Sh). That God *fails not His Promise* (cf. 22:47; 39:20) is a general statement confirming the repeated Quranic assertion that *God's Promise is true* (see 30:60c).

7 This verse refers to those who know how to prosper in this world, but who are ignorant of religious and spiritual matters (IK, Ṭ). They know the outward vanities of this world, but are ignorant of the inner realities and final ends of all things (R, Z).

8 *Do they not reflect upon their souls?* represents one of the Quran's many invitations to reflect upon the nature of God's creation in order to facilitate spiritual understanding; see also 11:24, 30; 13:3; 16:17; 37:155; 56:62; see commentary on 3:191; 45:3–6, 23. Many understand this verse to mean that were the disbelievers to reflect upon themselves and how they were created, they would find evidence of both the Oneness of God and God's Ability to resurrect them (Bḍ, IK, R, Sh, Ṭ). In this sense, it is similar to the question posed to the disbelievers in 23:115: *Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously, and that you would not be returned unto Us?* (R). To *reflect upon their souls* could also be understood to mean to reflect "within themselves" and upon themselves (Aj, Q, Sh). Here, as in many verses, the Quran maintains that were human beings to reflect, they would see that *God did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth* (cf. 15:85; 46:3; see also 10:5; 14:19; 16:3; 39:5; 45:22; 64:3; 6:73c; 29:44c; 44:38–39c). That all things are created *for a term appointed* (cf. 13:2; 22:5; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 46:3), which is understood as a reference to the Day of Resurrection (Sh), points to the finitude of all that exists and to their being created with a final end in mind (R). That they disbelieve in or deny *the meeting with their Lord* (cf. 6:31; 32:10) would thus mean both that they deny the Resurrection and that they do not understand that everything in the created order will eventually come to an end, since *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88).

9 *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end?* (cf. 12:109; 30:42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10) refers to the ruins and traces of bygone peoples that the Arabs would have seen when traveling, vestiges that provide profound lessons regarding the nature of life on earth, as indicated in 22:46: *Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear?* The call to reflect upon the fate of bygone peoples complements the call in the previous verse to contemplate *their own souls,* since all peoples and all souls eventually pass away. In the context of pre-Islamic Arabia, such a call would have served as a reminder that even an individual's legacy as preserved by the tribe would eventually be wiped away with the tribe itself. The Quran mentions frequently the fate of the guilty,

but themselves did they wrong. (10) Then the end of those who committed evil deeds was most evil, for they denied God's signs and mocked them. (11) God originates creation, then brings it back; then unto Him shall you be returned. (12) And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty shall despair. (13) They have no intercessors from among those they ascribed as partners, and they will then disbelieve in those they ascribed as partners. (14) And on the Day when the Hour is come, that Day they will be separated. (15) As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, they will be made joyous in a Garden. (16) But as for those who disbelieve and deny Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter,

the corrupt, the wrongdoers, and those who denied God's messengers as an admonition to the disbelievers (see 3:137; 6:11; 7:84, 86, 103; 10:39, 73; 16:36; 27:14, 69; 37:73; 43:25). That they were greater in strength, tillage, and building indicates that, although they had greater control over the world around them than those who now oppose the Prophet, they too were destroyed (see 35:44; 40:21, 82). That *their messengers brought them clear proofs* (cf. 7:101; 9:70; 10:13, 74; 14:9; 35:25; 40:22, 83) refers to prophetic miracles or to the rulings of Divine Law (Q, Sh). *God would never wrong them,* because they had been given fair warning through the sending of a messenger (Q), *but themselves did they wrong* (cf. 2:57; 9:70; 16:33, 118; 29:40) by failing to follow the prophets and clear proofs that had been sent to them.

10 In the Hereafter the evildoers will receive the worst of all fates, that of being cast into the Fire (Z). Some say this verse refers to their punishment within the Fire, while others say it refers to the Fire itself (IJ).

11 *Originates creation, then brings it back* (cf. 10:4, 34; 27:64; 30:27) refers to the composition of human beings from dust and their resurrection, or to the beginning of all creation and the eventual return of all things to God; see 10:4c. *Then unto Him shall you be returned* (cf. 2:28, 245; 10:56; 11:34; 21:35; 28:70, 88; 29:17, 57; 39:44; 41:21) refers to the Resurrection and the return of all things to God; see 2:28c.

12–13 *Despair* translates *yublisu,* which indicates being broken and silent, having lost any opportunity to present an argument on one's own behalf, and being acutely aware of this state (Q). Just as they despair of being able to argue on their own behalf, those whom they claimed could intercede for them (see 39:3c) now declare themselves innocent of what the disbelievers worshipped, as in 2:166, which describes the Day of Judgment as one *when those who were followed disavow those who followed, and they see the punishment, while all recourse will be cut off from them* (Ṭ; also see 14:22c; 59:16); regarding the question of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. *And they will then disbelieve in those they ascribed as partners* can also be understood to mean "though they disbelieved on account of those they ascribe as partners" (Z). Although they have now learned that believing in them was incorrect, this knowledge has come too late to save them.

14 *On the Day* the believers and the disbelievers will be *separated* from one another in a definitive and lasting manner. For this reason the Day of Resurrection is also referred to as *the Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17; see also 10:28).

15 *Made joyous* translates *yuḥbarūn,* which also indicates being blessed and honored (Q, Ṭ). In this context *Garden* renders *rawḍah,* which means a place where water collects and vegetation is abundant, such as the verdant land that surrounds a spring or well (Q).

16 The *signs* denied by the disbelievers could refer to revelation in general, the verses of the Quran in particular, the signs of God in the created order, the signs of the end of time, or to all of these, as each of these is mentioned in the

they will be arraigned unto the punishment. (17) So glory be to God when you enter upon the eve and when you rise at morn; (18) His is the praise in the heavens and on the earth—when the sun declines and when you reach noontide. (19) He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after its death. Even so shall you be brought forth. (20) Among His signs is that He created you from dust. Then, behold, you are human beings ranging far and wide. (21) And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you. Truly in

Quran as being among God's signs; see commentary on 2:106; 30:20, 22; 45:3–6. All people will be arraigned before God (see 36:32, 53), but only the disbelievers will be *arraigned unto the punishment* (cf. 34:38).

17–18 In this context, *glory be to God* is understood as an injunction to glorify or praise God, either generally or specifically within the five daily prayers, in which one recites "Glory be to God, the Magnificent" when bowing and "Glory be to God, the Most Exalted" when prostrating (Q). Together, these two verses are interpreted as a reference to the five daily prayers: *the eve* refers to the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) and the night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*); *at morn,* to the morning prayer (*fajr*); *when the sun declines,* to the late afternoon prayer (*ʿaṣr*); and *noontide,* to the early afternoon prayer (*ẓuhr;* Q).

19 This verse answers the rhetorical question posed in 10:31: *And who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living?* God *brings forth the living from the dead* when creating human beings the first time and when resurrecting them after death. God *brings forth the dead from the living* when causing them to die. These functions are related to the two Divine Names *Muḥyī* ("Giver of Life"; 30:50; 41:39) and *Mumīt* ("Bringer of Death"); see also 3:27c; 6:95c; 10:31c. This is one of many verses where the manner in which God revives the dead earth is employed as a metaphor for resurrection; see also 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 25:48–49; 29:63; 30:24, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11.

20 *Among His signs,* which begins vv. 20–25 and v. 46 as well as 41:37, 39 and 42:29, 32, can be understood to mean that these *signs* are indications of God's complete Power and Lordship over all things (Aj). On one level, God's having created human beings *from* dust is a reminder of their humble origins and of God's Ability to resurrect them from dust, just as He brought them forth from clay, as in 36:79: *He will revive them Who brought them forth the first time.* It can also be understood as a reminder that human beings are of two natures, one spiritual and one physical, and that the physical nature, made of clay and dust, must not be allowed to dominate over the luminous spiritual nature (Aj). *Behold* translates the particle *idhā,* which in this context indicates immediacy, thus conveying the manner in which God is believed to bring forth creation suddenly through the command "Be!" (R; see 2:117c; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82c; 40:68). That human beings *range far and wide* alludes to all races being of one origin, as in the *ḥadīth:* "God created Adam from a handful [of dust] taken from throughout the earth. Hence the sons of Adam vary as the earth varies; so they are white, red, black, and [colors] in between" (IK).

21 That God made for human beings mates *from among yourselves* (or "from your souls"; cf. 16:72; 35:11; 42:11; 78:8) is also understood to mean "from yourselves" when seen as an allusion to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (IK, Ṭ), though some commentators are skeptical of this association, feeling it relies too heavily on the Biblical tradition (see Genesis 2:21–23). A direct account of Eve's creation is not found in the Quran, only in the *Ḥadīth* literature; see 4:1c. Although many understand the present verse as an address

that are signs for a people who reflect. (22) And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your tongues and colors. Truly in that are signs for those who know. (23) And among His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking His Bounty. Truly in that are signs for a people who hear. (24) And among His signs is that He shows you lightning, arousing fear and hope, and that He sends down water from the sky, then revives thereby the earth after its death. Truly in that are signs for a people who understand. (25) And

to men, telling them of the benefits to be found in their wives (Aj, IK, R), viewed in a broader Quranic context, especially in relation to those verses that state that God created human beings from a *single soul* (4:1; 6:98, 7:189, 31:28, 39:6) and *its mate* from that same soul (see 7:189c and 39:6), it is most likely an address to both men and women, telling of the manner in which God has extended His own Love and Mercy to them through the love and mercy that they manifest toward one another. In this sense, the purpose of marriage is not limited to producing children; it also represents a spiritual good in and of itself and a means by which men and women can encounter God's Love and Mercy in each other. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The believer whose faith is most complete is the one whose character is the best; and the best among you are those who are best to their wives."

22 That the created order serves as a sign of God's Omnipotence and Oneness is a theme found throughout the Quran, though it is stated more explicitly in this pericope (vv. 20–25) than in most others. *The variation* in the *tongues and colors* indicates the differences between languages and races. The difference in tongues can also be understood as a reference to different types of speech, as individuals reveal something of their true nature by the content of their speech. Colors can, moreover, be understood as a reference to different states or conditions of human beings. *Variation* can also be seen as a reference to the different means by which people see and understand God's signs. As Ibn ʿArabī writes, "The Divine signs that have come in the Wise Reminder [i.e., the Quran] have come in great variation. Because of their variation, those addressed by them have a variety of descriptions. Among them are *signs for a people who reflect* (13:3; 30:21; 39:42; 45:13; cf. 10:24); *signs for a people who understand* (2:164; 13:4; 16:12; 30:24); *signs for a people who hear* (10:67; 16:65; 30:23); *signs for a people who believe* (45:3; cf. 6:99; 15:77; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24, 44; 30:37; 39:52); *signs for those who know* (30:22); *signs for a people who are reverent* (10:6); *signs for those possessed of intelligence* (20:54, 128); *signs for the possessors of intellect* (3:190); and *signs for those who possess insight* (3:13)." Ibn ʿArabī then enjoins, "So differentiate as He has differentiated and do not step beyond to what has not been mentioned [in the Quran]. On the contrary, put every sign and everything else in its place" (*Futūḥāt*, IV 105.30–33). In this sense, *those who discern* signs (15:75) are those who know which signs speak to which human types and to which faculties and are able to differentiate between them accordingly.

23 This verse could be understood to mean "your sleep by night and your seeking His Bounty by day" (Aj, Q), in which case *sleep by night* refers to death and *day and your seeking His Bounty* refers to Resurrection (Q). It could also be understood to mean your sleep during both night and day and your *seeking His Bounty* during both (Aj). *A people who hear,* or "listen," is understood to mean those who reflect upon and understand what they hear (Aj, IK, Q). What is heard could be the Quran, the truth, God's exhortation (Q), or all three.

24 *Lightning* arouses *fear* of the destructive forces it may herald, yet *hope* for the rain it may bring; see 13:12–13c. This is one of several verses to invoke God's ability to revive *the earth after its death* as an argument for His ability to resurrect human beings (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:19, 50; 35:9; 41:39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11; 57:17).

25 That all things stand *by His Command* indicates that nothing would exist, were it not for

among His signs is that the sky and the earth stand fast by His Command. Then, when He calls you forth from the earth with a single call, behold, you will come forth. (26) Unto Him belongs whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth; all are devoutly obedient unto Him. (27) He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back, and that is most easy for Him. Unto Him belongs the loftiest description in the heavens and on the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (28) He sets forth for you a parable from yourselves: have you, among those whom your right hands possess, partners in what We have provided for you, such that you are equal with respect to it, with you fearing them as you fear each other? Thus do We expound the signs for a people who understand. (29) Nay,

God's Direction and Wisdom, or His Permission (Q); see also 22:65; 35:41. Then when God calls human beings to the Resurrection (Aj, IK, Q), they rise again, *by His Command*; see also 17:52; 36:53; 79:13–14. As in v. 20, *behold* renders the particle *idhā,* indicating a sudden event. Just as God is said to create human beings out of nothing in an instant through His Word and Command, so too will He resurrect them suddenly, and they will have as much choice in the matter as they did when they were brought forth the first time.

26 That all of creation is *devoutly obedient* (*qānit*) indicates an existential and spiritual obedience that carries with it a sense of constancy and in the human order also serenity (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 4:34; 16:120; 33:31, 35; 39:9; 66:12). In this sense, everything is also said to prostrate unto God, as in 16:49: *And unto God prostrates whatever crawling creatures or angels are in the heavens or on the earth, and they do not wax arrogant* (cf. 13:15; 22:18; 55:6), and in the repeated assertion that *whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorify God* (59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; also see 17:44; 24:41; 57:1; 59:24).

27 Regarding the assertion that it is God *Who originates creation, then brings it back* (cf. 10:4, 34; 27:64), see v. 11; 10:4c. *That is most easy for Him* is understood to mean that the process of creation and resurrection is easy for God (T), or resurrecting human beings could be even easier for God than creating them the first time (IK, Q, R, T). *Unto Him belongs the loftiest description* (cf. 16:60) is understood to mean the most exalted description, which cannot be attributed to anything else (Aj). Thus some link it to the phrase *Naught is like unto Him* (42:11; Aj, IK, T) or to the Muslim testimony of Divine Unity, "There is no god, but God" (Aj, IK, R, T); see 16:60c.

28 The parable established here compares the relationship between God and those whom the idolaters ascribe as partners to God to the relationship between human beings and their own slaves or servants. The rhetorical questions indicate that no one would envision a slave or servant having an equal share in the master's wealth or fear that the slave would have an equal right to it, just as God, the Absolute Sovereign, would not fear anything else sharing in His Power. The argument is that if one cannot envision this state of affairs for one's own limited sphere of sovereignty, how can one attribute it to the universal sovereignty of God (IK, Q, T)? Also see commentary on 16:71, 75–76. This verse is understood by some as a response to the devotional chant that the idolaters are reported to have sung when circumambulating the Kaʿbah, "At Thy service, Thou hast no partner, save the partner that Thou hast. Thou dost possess him and whatsoever he doth possess" (IK, Q). Regarding the manner in which God is said to *expound the signs,* see 6:97–98, 126; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 41:44; 6:46c; 6:55c; 41:3c.

29 From a Quranic perspective, to follow one's own *caprices* and desires is the opposite of following God and God's messengers; see commentary on 2:120; 45:18; 23. Those who follow caprice have thus taken a course directly opposite

those who do wrong follow their caprices without knowledge. So who will guide those whom God has led astray? And they shall have no helpers. (30) Set thy face to religion as a *ḥanīf,* in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not— (31) turning unto Him. And reverence Him and perform the prayer; and be not among the idolaters, (32) among

to that of guidance, as in 47:14: *Is one who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord like one whose evil deeds are made to seem fair unto him, and like those who follow their caprices?* The answer to the rhetorical question *So who will guide those whom God has led astray?* is found in 4:88: *Whomsoever God leads astray, thou wilt not find a way for him.* There could therefore be no helpers among human beings, jinn, or angels who would help the disbelievers (see also 3:22, 56, 91; 16:37; 42:8; 48:22), as none can thwart God.

30 To *set,* "turn," or "submit" one's face to or toward religion (see 6:79; 10:105) means to orient one's whole being toward worship and obedience to God (see also 2:112; 3:20; 7:29; 30:43; 31:22). The present verse is thus taken by most commentators to be a command to follow the religion for which God created human beings. It is addressed directly to the Prophet or to all who hear the message (Aj). Some commentators take the first phrase to mean, "Follow the religion as a *ḥanīf* and follow the primordial nature in which God created you" (Q, Ṭ). In another interpretation, *primordial nature* (*fiṭrah*) modifies *religion,* which is referred to as "primordial" because human beings were originally created for religion, as in 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me* (Q). *As a ḥanīf* is understood by most to mean in a straight and upstanding manner, neither inclining nor adhering to past religions that have been altered or abrogated (Q). For *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafāʾ*), which derives from the verb *ḥanafa,* meaning "to incline," see 2:135c. *Ḥanīf* is usually employed in the Quran with reference to Abraham (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:79, 161; 16:120, 123), but in general it indicates one who inclines away from misguidance and toward belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd;* Iṣ). Thus in 10:105, the Prophet is enjoined, *Set thy face toward the religion as a* ḥanīf, *and be thou not among the idolaters* (see also 22:31; 98:5). The basic understanding of *ḥanīf* may best be illustrated by a famous *ḥadīth qudsī:* "God says, 'Verily I created My servants as *ḥunafāʾ*. Then the satans came to them and distracted them from their religion'" (IK). Seen in this light, to be truly devout (*ḥanīf*) and incline toward the worship of God and away from idolatry is to live according to one's *primordial nature* (*fiṭrah*), in which all human beings have been created. One cannot change this underlying nature as a servant or worshipper of God, because *there is no altering the creation of God* (Q, R). This phrase is also understood to mean that there is no change in God's religion (IK, Q); that is, there is no change in the substance or universal truths of religion, only in the forms in which these truths are revealed in different religions.

The reference to the *fiṭrah* is read by some to mean that human beings are born for Islam, so that anyone who follows any other religion is "astray" or "misguided" (IK). But al-Qurṭubī maintains that it is impossible for the *fiṭrah* mentioned here to be Islam in its particular sense, because "Islām (submission) and *īmān* (faith) are declaring with the tongue, embracing with the heart, and performing with the limbs," implying that if *fiṭrah* pertains to the original human nature, which is related to the spirit, it cannot pertain to the specific practices of a particular religious tradition because these can only be performed while a spirit resides in a body in this world. From this perspective, the *upright religion* (cf. 6:161; 9:36; 12:40; 30:43; 98:5) could refer to religion as such and thus to any religious practice that accords with the *fiṭrah*. Nonetheless, most interpret *upright religion* as a reference to Islam in particular (IK, Q). Regarding *the upright religion,* see 6:161c.

31–32 *Turning unto Him* translates *munībīna ilayhi,* which can mean turning unto God in repentance or returning to God (Q). In this

those who have divided their religion and become factions, each party rejoicing in that which it has. (33) And when harm befalls the people, they call upon their Lord, turning to Him in repentance. Then, when He lets them taste of His Mercy, behold, a group among them ascribe partners unto their Lord. (34) Let them be ungrateful for that which We have given them: "Enjoy yourselves! For soon you will know." (35) Or have We sent down upon them any authority that speaks of that which they ascribe as partners unto Him? (36) And when We

context, *perform the prayer* can be seen as a general injunction to follow all of the practices of religion (Ṭū), as these are the means by which one acts in accord with the *fiṭrah* while in this world. Although the injunction to *be not among the idolaters* or polytheists is clearly a call to monotheism, in this context it is also seen as a call to avoid hidden polytheism, meaning that one should seek only to please God in one's worship (R). To do otherwise constitutes a hidden polytheism on account of which human beings have *divided their religion and become factions* (R). Being divided into factions is understood by many as a reference to being divided into various sects or even making false religions out of true religion (Ṭs), but it can also be seen as a reference to those who worship God with the goal of seeking something of this world, or even those who do so seeking Paradise, rather than those who do so with a sincere heart, seeking only God (R).

In other passages, dividing religion into factions is an error attributed to previous religious communities, one that Muslims are enjoined to avoid (see 3:103–5; 6:65; 42:13–14; 98:4; 6:159c). When understood as a reference to religious sects, *each party rejoicing in that which it has* can be understood as a reference to competing creeds and tenets (Ṭs, Ṭū). But when understood as a reference to different modes of worship, it can be seen as a reference to the different aspects of God's Bounty and Mercy in which different types of worshippers rejoice (R) and the injunctions that God has promulgated for each religious community.

33 This is one of several verses to mention human beings' tendency to *call upon their Lord* in times of peril or adversity (cf., e.g., 10:12; 17:67; 39:8; Ṭ), such as illness and poverty (JJ); see 6:40–41c. *Then, when He lets them taste of His Mercy* by relieving them of such afflictions, they revert to heedlessness and to pursuing their caprices (Ṭ, Ṭb); see also 7:189–90c; 10:12c.

34 Cf. 16:55; 29:66c. *Enjoy yourselves* is an ironic injunction indicating that people will continue to follow their caprices (v. 29) and rejoice in the tenets of their ways (v. 34), but that these are merely the ephemeral delights of this world, which stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the next life (see 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 40:39; 42:36; 43:35), since the world itself *is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20). In this regard, the Prophet is instructed to say to disbelievers, *Enjoy your disbelief a little; truly you shall be among the inhabitants of the Fire* (39:8). In this sense, *those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as cattle eat* (47:12) and give no thought to anything beyond their immediate interests and desires.

35 Here *authority* can be understood to mean a revealed book (Q, Ṭ), as in passages that speak of God having sent Moses *with a manifest authority* (4:153; 11:96; 23:45; 40:23; 44:19; 51:38). It can also be understood to mean any proof that would attest to the truth of the idolaters' position (IK, Q, Z). In this vein, 37:156–57 asks the disbelievers: *Or have you a manifest authority? Bring your Book, then, if you are truthful.* Elsewhere the Quran asks rhetorically, *Did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?* (35:40; see also 6:148; 34:44; 43:21; 53:28; 68:37–38, 47).

36 Cf. 42:48. People rejoice in their blessings, which they attribute to their own merits and which they believe are a testament to their own superiority, as in 39:49: *And when harm befalls man, he calls upon Us. Then, when We confer upon him a blessing from Us, he says, "I was only given it because of knowledge."* The judgment wrongdoers

cause the people to taste some mercy, they rejoice in it. But should an evil befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth, behold, they despair. (37) Have they not considered that God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. (38) So give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler. That is better for those who desire the Face of God. It is they who shall prosper. (39) That which you give in usury, that it might increase through other people's wealth, does not increase with God. But that which you give in alms, desiring the Face of God—it is they who receive a manifold increase. (40) God it is Who created

receive in the next life is the result of the acts of disobedience that *their hands have sent forth* (Q; 2:95; 4:62; 28:47; 42:48; 62:7; see also 5:80; 18:57; 36:12; 78:40), reinforcing the idea that human beings are responsible for their fate in the Hereafter. But there is also the suggestion that the misfortunes generated by their wrongdoing might be visited upon them in this life. From one perspective, their actions are *sent forth* to be confronted again at a later point in time or on the Day of Judgment, though from another perspective, actions are "brought forth" by their hands, thus making manifest what is in their hearts (Ṭs). Those who do not succumb to the tendency to turn away from God when evil befalls them are the patient *who, when affliction befalls them, say, "Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return"* (2:156).

37 For *Truly in that are signs for a people who believe,* cf. 6:99; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24; 39:52. Regarding *God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12); see 34:39c.

38 According to Shiite commentaries, the first phrase of this verse is a specific injunction for the Prophet to give his family members their due (Ṭs, Ṭū). In accordance with this injunction, the Prophet is reported to have given his daughter Fāṭimah a garden. But due to different understandings of what the Prophet had intended, this garden was viewed by the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, as property that belonged to the Muslim polity and not to Fāṭimah (Qm, Ṭs, Ṭū). In contrast, most Sunni commentators see this as one of several injunctions to observe the rights of kin found throughout the Quran. The *right,* or due, that one is to give can be seen specifically as charity or generally as virtuous conduct toward relatives (see 2:83). It is even said that giving charity to others while one's relatives are in need will not be accepted by God as a good deed (Q). For a broader discussion of the categories of people among whom one's wealth should be distributed, see 2:177c. That giving others their *right,* or due, is *better* means that it is better than keeping wealth just for oneself (Q). To give charity because one desires *the Face of God* indicates that one does not do it to obtain favors from others or for some other form of worldly gain (see 2:264c).

39 This is the earliest mention of *usury* (*ribā*) in the chronological order of the Quran. The last verses in the chronology of revelation (2:275–81) also deal with the concept of *ribā,* but are ambiguous enough to have led to centuries of debate over how one defines "usury"; see 2:275–81c; 3:130; 4:161c. In the context of this verse, *ribā* is understood as a reference to either *usury,* which is forbidden (see 2:275–81) or the seeking of increase, which is permissible (Ṭs). It is permissible to present a gift to another in the hopes of receiving something greater than it from that person, although it does not bring *increase with God,* because it is thought that actions are rewarded in accord with the intentions behind them (Q). That one receives *a manifold increase* from paying alms (*zakāh*) is meant as a contrast to the practice of *ribā* in pre-Islamic Arabia, where loans could compound exponentially, to the point of leaving the borrower in complete ruin (see 2:275–81c).

40 This is one of many verses that refer to all the stages of existence and God's function as the

you, then nourished you; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Is there anyone among those you ascribe as partners who does aught of that? Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe. (41) Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of that which men's hands have earned, that He may let them taste some of that which they have done, that haply they might return. (42) Say, "Journey upon the earth and observe how those before fared in the end, most of whom were idolaters." (43) And set thy face to the

creative agent for each. For *then He causes you to die; then He gives you life* (cf. 2:28; 22:66; 45:26), see 2:28c. *Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe* (cf. 10:18; 16:1; 39:67) is an affirmation of God's utter transcendence.

41 *Corruption* (*fasād*) implies all manner of decadence and injustice, in regard to both rebelling against God and oppressing others, thus failing to recognize the rights of all. It is often understood by commentators to mean open disobedience toward God. In both 2:27 and 13:25, *corruption* is presented as part and parcel of breaking the covenant: *those who break God's pact after accepting His covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth;* and in 5:33 working corruption is linked to rejecting God's messengers. In general, when human caprice is followed rather than Divine ordinances, corruption ensues, as in 23:71: *Were the truth to follow their caprices, the heavens and the earth and those therein would have been corrupted.* As such, *corruption* can be linked to all manner of iniquity, such as arrogance (see 7:74), oppression (26:183; 28:4), and failing to honor family relations (47:22). Though *working corruption* is an accusation made against several specific human collectivities, such as the Children of Israel (17:4) and the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes of Thamūd (26:152) and Midian (7:85; 29:36), it is recognized as a general human shortcoming. Thus the angels are reported to have said to God regarding the creation of the human being on the earth, *Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood?* (2:30). *Working corruption* implies a combination of spiritual and worldly corruption (e.g., 2:27; 7:74, 85–86, 103; 11:85; 13:25); and it is implicitly or explicitly connected to physical violence in several verses (e.g., 2:205; 5:64; 26:183; 27:48–49; 28:4). The opposite of *working corruption* (*ifsād*) is *iṣlāḥ*, "setting things aright" or "making amends," and elsewhere corruption is put in direct contrast to performing righteous deeds (*ṣāliḥāt*): *Or shall We make those who believe and perform righteous deeds like those who work corruption upon the earth? Or shall We make the reverent like the profligate?* (38:28).

In the present verse *corruption* is said to appear *because of that which men's hands have earned* while elsewhere it is said that it is through the works of men that corruption is repelled: *And were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted* (2:251). The final ends of *those who work corruption* and those who oppose it are thus divergent. Heaven is ordained for the latter: *That is the Abode of the Hereafter, which We ordain for those who desire neither dominance upon the earth, nor corruption* (28:83); and punishment for the former: *Those who disbelieve and who have turned from the way of God, for them We shall add punishment on top of punishment, for their having worked corruption* (16:88).

That God will *let them taste some of that which they have done* means that God will allow them to experience some form of trial or punishment in this life in hopes that it may help them turn toward repentance and thus be forgiven and absolved of experiencing the full punishment in the Hereafter. *That haply they might return* thus implies that they might repent (Ṭ) and refrain from committing acts of disobedience in the future (IK, Ṭs).

42 Cf. 12:109; 22:46; 30:9; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10. See 30:9c.

43 *Set thy face to the upright religion* is understood to mean to not turn away from it in the least, lest one be unable to return to it, as in 9:127:

upright religion before there comes a day from God that none can repel. That Day they will be spread asunder. (44) Whosoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his own detriment. And whosoever works righteousness, they make provision for their souls, (45) that from His Bounty He may recompense those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Truly He loves not the disbelievers. (46) And among His signs is that He sends the winds as bearers of glad tidings to let you taste of His Mercy, and that ships may sail by His Command, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. (47) We have indeed sent messengers unto their people before thee, and they brought them clear proofs. Then We took vengeance upon those who were guilty; and it is incumbent

*Then they turn away. God has turned their hearts away, because they are a people who understand not* (Ṭs). For *set thy face,* see 30:30c. Regarding the *upright religion* (cf. 6:161; 9:36; 12:40; 30:30; 98:5), see 6:161c.

*None can repel* the Day of Resurrection, just as *naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God* (35:44; cf. 8:59; 9:2–3; 11:20; 24:57; 29:22; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12). Thus none can avert the punishment that is their due, as in 6:134: *Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart [it].* Here *a Day from God that none can repel* can also be read, "a Day on which none can repel God" (R, Ṭs), but the former meaning is more likely, as such a reading more closely corresponds to other Quranic verses, such as 21:40: *Nay, but it will come upon them suddenly, and confound them. Then they will not be able to repel it, nor will they be granted respite.* That people *will be spread asunder* refers to their being divided into those destined for the Garden and those destined for the Fire (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); see 30:14c.

44–45 That *his disbelief is to his own detriment* (cf. 35:39) relates to the broad Quranic teaching that those who turn away from God and deny God's signs ultimately do wrong to themselves, as in 7:177: *Evil is the parable of the people who denied Our signs and wronged themselves.* That the righteous *make provision for their souls* means that their good deeds will translate into their being recompensed from God's Bounty in the Hereafter. *Make provision* translates *yamhadūn,* which can also mean "to spread out." Some thus relate this verse to their spreading beds for themselves in the grave before the Resurrection (Ṭ) or in the Garden (Bḍ), or both (Ṭs). Others relate it to the manner in which God rewards good deeds with *ten times the like thereof* (6:160; IK).

46 That the *winds* come as *bearers of glad tidings* refers to their heralding rain, as in v. 48, and all the benefits that derive from it (cf. 7:57; 25:48; 27:63). Regarding the Quranic use of "winds" and "wind," see 30:48–49c. Seafaring is invoked as a blessing from God in several verses (14:32; 17:66; 23:21–22; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 42:32–34; 43:12; 45:12; 55:24; see also 2:164c). Here, as in other verses, the ships are understood by some as a spiritual symbol: the winds are the winds of guidance, spiritual inspiration, and the mercy of spiritual knowledge, and the ships allude to the meditations by means of which one courses upon the ocean of Divine Oneness to seek God's Bounty (Aj).

47 Regarding the meaning of *clear proofs,* see 30:9c. To this same opening phrase, 13:38 adds *and it is not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave; and for every term there is a book,* which follows upon other verses maintaining that *for every people there is a guide* (13:7), that *there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them* (35:24), and that God has *sent a messenger unto every community* (16:36). From this perspective, God takes *vengeance upon those who were guilty,* because they have rejected guidance and failed to heed the warnings that were sent to them by God (see 26:208–9c).

upon Us to help the believers. (48) God is He Who sends the winds, then they cause clouds to rise, and He spreads them in the sky as He will and makes them into fragments, whereupon you see the rain emerging from their midst. Then, when He bestows it upon whomsoever He will among His servants, behold, they rejoice, (49) though previously, before it was sent down upon them, they had been in despair. (50) So observe the vestiges of God's Mercy, how He revives the earth after its death. Truly that is the Reviver of the dead, and He is Powerful over all things. (51) And were We to send a wind and they were to see it turn

The translation of the last phrase, *and it is incumbent upon Us to help the believers,* is based upon reading *upon Us to help the believers* as modifying *incumbent,* which here renders *ḥaqqan.* But *ḥaqqan* can also be read as the end of a sentence (Aj), in which case the phrase might best be rendered, "and it was due. Ours is to help the believers," as it is often by means of other people that God repels the unjust (see 2:250–51c; 22:40c). Both readings indicate that God took vengeance in order to aid the believers, but the second reading is somewhat more emphatic, indicating that God's Vengeance was due and that it was just. The means by which God aids human beings can also be seen as a reference to His saving them in the Hereafter, as in a famous saying of the Prophet, "No Muslim defends the honor of his brother but that it is incumbent upon God to defend him from the Fire of Hell on the Day of Resurrection," after which he recited *and it is incumbent upon Us to help the believers* (Bḍ, IK, Q, R, Ṭs).

48–49 *Winds* appears in the plural form ten times in the Quran, and each time it expresses God's Mercy, as in 7:57: *He it is Who sends forth the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy* (see also 25:48; 35:9). In contrast, when *wind* occurs in the singular, it is usually used to convey God's Wrath and Punishment (see 3:117; 10:22; 17:69; 22:31; 30:51; 33:9; 41:16; 46:24; 51:41; 54:19; 69:6). This distinction is likely made because the winds of the south, east, and north are all said to bring mercy; only the west wind is said to bring punishment and destruction. *Fragments* renders *kisaf,* which could also mean "piled up" (IK). The people to whom the rain came may have been in despair because they were in need, and the rain relieved their despair (IK). Or they may have been in despair when the winds first arose, thinking that a violent storm was coming, and then became relieved when it only brought rain.

50 *The vestiges of God's Mercy* refers to the rain and all of the things that are given life through it (Bḍ). *Vestiges* translates *āthār,* which can also be read *athar,* meaning "the effect of God's Mercy" (IJ, Ṭ). As with other passages that refer to the revival of dead earth (e.g., 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 30:19, 24; 35:9; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11), this passage also uses such imagery to argue for God's ability to resurrect decayed bones (Aj). *That is the Reviver of the dead* thus indicates that God and no other has the ability to revive the earth, since *He is Powerful over all things,* and that God has the ability to resurrect human beings. God's reviving the earth by sending water is also understood as a symbol for spiritual revival. Thus al-Tustarī writes, "In its outer meaning it refers to the rain, and in its inner meaning it alludes to the life of hearts through remembrance" (ST).

51 In contrast to their positive reaction to the winds of mercy and blessings mentioned in vv. 46–50, when people are confronted with a wind that removes those blessings, they think poorly of God, fail to reflect upon the blessings that they have been given, fail to trust in God (Bḍ), and thus come to *disbelieve.* In this context, *turn yellow* refers to either plants turning yellow from lack of rain or clouds changing color (N). *After that* means either after they were made glad or after the plants or clouds turned yellow (N). Together, vv. 48–51 indicate the manner in which disbelievers vacillate, first despairing of God's Mercy and provision, then becoming glad

yellow, after that they would surely disbelieve. (52) Surely thou dost not make the dead to hear; nor dost thou make the deaf to hear the call when they turn their backs; (53) nor dost thou guide the blind from their straying. Thou makest none to hear, save those who believe in Our signs and are submitters. (54) God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength. He creates whatsoever He will, and He is the Knowing, the Powerful. (55) And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty will swear that they had tarried naught but an hour; thus were they perverted. (56) And those who have been given knowledge and belief will say, "Indeed, you tarried in God's Book until the Day of Resurrection; and

when they arrive, and then disbelieving in God and God's Mercy when some of the blessings are removed (N).

52–53 Cf. 27:80–81. Just as the Prophet is unable to make the dead hear in their graves, so too is he unable to make those who turn away from the revelation hear, as this ability lies with God alone (IK, Ṭ). A similar parallel is drawn in 6:36: *Only those who hear will respond. As for the dead, God will resurrect them, and unto Him they shall be returned.* That the Prophet cannot cause the dead to hear can also be understood as an allusion to those whose hearts are dead or sealed (N), as in v. 59. *Blind* then refers to those whose hearts are blind (Aj), as in 22:46: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.* From a Quranic perspective, the Prophet cannot cause their hearts to see or hear because his function is only to convey the revelation (see 3:20; 13:40), and *whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he* (7:186; 13:33; 39:23, 36; 40:33); the Prophet should thus concern himself only with guiding those who do listen.

54 That human beings were created *from weakness* (cf. 4:28) refers either to their having been made *from a base fluid* (77:20; cf. 32:8; 86:5–7; Aj, Q, Ṭ), or to the weakness of a child at the beginning of life (Aj, Q, Z). *Strength* then refers to the period of youth and maturity, followed by the period of decline in old age. See also 22:5, where all of the stages of earthly life from conception to old age are cited as signs of God's Power (see also 22:5c) as well as 36:68, which speaks of those whom God causes to *regress in creation,* and 16:70, which speaks of *those who are brought back to the weakest of ages, such that they know nothing after having had knowledge* (cf. 5:17; 24:25; 42:49).

55 That *the guilty* seem to have *tarried naught but an hour* (cf. 10:45; 17:52; 20:102–4; 46:35; 79:46) refers either to their experience of the period in the grave before the Day of Resurrection or to their period of time on earth (Q), whose duration is as an hour or less in relation to the eternity of the Hereafter. Their claim may be made in ignorance or in order to argue that there is not enough proof against them (IK). *Perverted* translates *yu'fakūn,* which literally means "turned away," but which always carries a negative connotation, meaning turning away from truth toward falsehood—turning from telling the truth to lying or from beautiful actions to ugly ones (Iṣ)—and thus becoming perverted or deluded (*Tāj al-ʿarūs*). In this latter sense, the last phrase can also mean "thus were they deluded" (Z) in their understanding of the relationship of this world to the Hereafter.

56 Here, *those who have been given knowledge and belief* is understood to mean those who are given knowledge of and belief in God's Book (Ṭ), which some identify specifically as the angels or the believers (IJ) or more generally as the angels, the prophets, and the believers (Aj, Z). *In God's Book* means in God's Knowledge that is written on the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22), in God's

this is the Day of Resurrection! But you knew not." (57) On that Day the excuses of those who do wrong will benefit them not; nor can they make amends. (58) And indeed We have set forth for mankind in this Quran every kind of parable. And if thou bringest them a sign, those who disbelieve will surely say, "You make naught but false claims." (59) Thus does God seal the hearts of those who know not. (60) So be patient. God's Promise is indeed true. And let not those without certainty disquiet thee.

Judgment and Decree (Aj), in the Quran (Aj), or in the book of deeds that is with God (IK). Their saying *This is the Day of Resurrection* implies a rebuke, similar to the disbelievers being told, *This is the Day of Division that you used to deny* (37:21).

57 The wrongdoers' excuses do not benefit them, because they have been provided ample warning through the messengers and ample opportunity to repent, as in 35:24: *And there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them* (cf. 16:36). Thus they are commanded, *O you who disbelieve! Make no excuses this day! You are only requited for that which you used to do* (66:7); see also 16:84; 45:35.

58–59 That God has *set forth . . . every kind of parable* (cf. 39:27) and *employed every kind of parable* (17:89; 18:54) means that God has shown people the truth, so that they may understand and follow it (IK), thus indicating why it is that the disbelievers have no excuse. *Here a sign* can mean verses of the Quran (Aj) or prophetic miracles (Aj, IK), such as Moses' staff turning into a snake and his hand turning white (IJ) or the Prophet Muhammad's cleaving of the moon (IK; see 54:1c). In this context, *them* in *if thou bringest them a sign* refers to *the guilty* (v. 55) as well as those whom the Prophet cannot make hear (v. 52) because God has "sealed their hearts" (v. 59); thus they will not believe, *though every sign should come unto them, till they see the painful punishment* (10:97). God's sealing hearts (see also 2:7; 6:46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 40:35; 63:3) indicates that He has cut off the faculties of understanding. In some instances it is combined with a reference to God taking away both hearing and sight (e.g., 6:46; 16:108), for although one may still have the use of these faculties, one does not understand the images one perceives through them; see 2:7c; 63:3c.

60 That *God's Promise is indeed true* (cf. 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21; 28:13; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17) hearkens back to v. 6. Here it is understood as a reference to God's Promise to aid the Prophet, to make him prevail (IJ, Ṭ, Z), and to render his veracity clear (R). The command to not be disquieted by the uncertainty of the disbelievers can mean to not let them make one restive regarding one's own religion (IJ, Q). Thus although the address is in the second-person singular, which ordinarily signifies an address to the Prophet alone, it is understood as having been addressed to the Prophet's community as a whole (Q). *Disquiet* translates *yastakhiffa*, which can also mean to induce another to levity or to force another to do something in a hurry and so become unsteady. It is also understood to mean making another heedless or ignorant, so that the person then falls into error and transgression (Q).



# 31

# Luqmān

## *Luqmān*

*Luqmān* is believed to have been revealed during the Makkan period immediately after the previous *sūrah, al-Rūm,* although some maintain that vv. 27–29, perhaps the most frequently cited verses of the *sūrah,* were revealed during the Madinan period (Āl, IJ, JJ). The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the sage or prophet Luqmān (vv. 12–13), who conveys wisdom to his son (vv. 13, 16–19). The beginning of the *sūrah* can be seen as flowing directly from the last verse of the previous *sūrah* in that being steadfast in adhering to *the Wise Book* (v. 2) and following its guidance are what prevent one from being disquieted, while following *idle discourse* (v. 6) will lead to disquiet. The observation in v. 7 that the disbelievers turn away from God's signs as if they do not hear also echoes the assertion in 30:52 that the Prophet cannot cause the deaf to hear.

The focus of this *sūrah* is upon worship, obedience, and gratitude. Luqmān enjoins his son to recognize the Greatness of God, His Oneness, and the need to worship only Him. As in several other passages, this injunction is linked to obedience and gratitude toward parents, so long as they do not challenge one's allegiance to God. In this teaching one can see an important component of the Quranic social message: people should support the community and maintain familial allegiances, but not to the detriment of their relationship with God. The *sūrah* closes with a warning that neither parent nor child can help one another on the Day of Judgment (v. 33).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Alif. Lām. Mīm.* (2) These are the signs of the Wise Book, (3) guidance and mercy for the virtuous, (4) who perform the prayer and give the alms and who are certain of the Hereafter. (5) It is they who are upon guidance from their Lord, and it is they who shall prosper. (6) And among mankind are those who purchase idle discourse to lead astray from the way of God without knowledge

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *mīm,* which also appear in 2:1; 3:1; 29:1; 30:1; 32:1, are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c.

2 Cf. 10:1. *The Wise Book* is a reference to the Quran, which is also described as *wise* in 10:1 and 36:2; and *the Mother of the Book*—interpreted to mean the Quran or the source of all revelation—is described as *wise* in 43:4. *Wise* translates *ḥakīm,* which can also mean "determined" or "made firm" (*muḥkam*), as in 11:1, where the Quran is described as *a Book whose signs have been determined* (*uḥkimat*). According to Ibn Kathīr, its being determined (*muḥkam*) indicates that *falsehood comes not upon it from before it or from behind it* (41:42). *Ḥakīm* is also interpreted to mean that which makes wise (*muḥkim*), since the Quran clarifies and explains (Ṭ). For other *sūrah*s that open with references to the signs of the Book, see 12:1; 13:1; 15:1; 26:1; 27:1; 28:1.

3 If read in the nominative, *guidance and mercy* describes the *Wise Book* (IJ, Ṭ); if read in the accusative, it is the reason for which its signs were revealed, that is, as *guidance and mercy. Guidance and mercy* also characterize the revelation sent to Moses (6:154; 28:43) and describe the Quran in 7:52; 16:64; 16:89. That it is *for the virtuous* means it is for those who act in accord with it (Ṭ); regarding *the virtuous,* see 29:69c.

4 In this context, performing prayer can be seen as virtue with regard to oneself, while paying alms (*zakāh*) can be seen as virtue with regard to one's property. Prayer also indicates virtue in relation to God, while alms indicates virtue in relation to other human beings. See commentary on the similar verse 27:3; cf. 5:55.

5 *Upon guidance* means that they see, have clarity, and are following a clear way (IK), since they "ride upon guidance and are made firm by it" (Aj) and are "upon a light from their Lord" (Ṭ, Sh on 2:5). For *prosper,* see commentary on the identical verse 2:5.

6 *Idle discourse* can be a reference to all forms of speech that hinder one from seeing the signs of God and following in the way of God (IK). In this sense, it is a contrast to the Quran, which is referred to as *the most beautiful discourse,* or "the best discourse," in 39:23. *Idle* translates *lahw,* which can also mean "diversion" or "distraction." Thus some say it means whatever diverts or distracts one from God (IJ), while others say it refers to disputing in matters pertaining to religion and becoming engrossed in falsehood (ST). This verse was reportedly revealed in relation to stories related by one Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, who would return from his travels to distant lands with stories, those of the Byzantines and Sassanids in particular. *Idle discourse* would then refer to the stories he transmitted to the Quraysh, saying, "Muhammad relates to you the events of ʿĀd and Thamūd, and I relate to you the events of Rustam, Isfandiyār, and Khosro." Some found his tales more entertaining than listening to the Quran, and so this verse was revealed (IJ, JJ, W, Z).

According to others, *idle discourse* refers to singing (IK, Ṭ), and the verse refers to those who hired singing girls for amusement (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z), a practice forbidden in several sayings of the Prophet (Ṭ, Z). Others maintain that *purchase* does not refer to spending money, but to prefer-

and who take it in mockery; for them there shall be a humiliating punishment. (7) And when Our signs are recited unto him, he turns away arrogantly as if he did not hear them, as if there were deafness in his ears. So give him glad tidings of a painful punishment. (8) Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be Gardens of bliss, (9) therein to abide—God's Promise in truth. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (10) He created the heavens without pillars that you see, and cast into the earth firm mountains, lest it shake beneath you, and spread about all manner of beast therein. And We sent down water from the sky and caused every noble kind to grow therein. (11) This is the creation of God; so show me that which those apart from Him have created. Nay, the

ring *idle discourse* and thus being lead astray by it (IK, Ṭ), choosing false or empty discourse over true discourse and discourse that harms over discourse that benefits (Ṭ). Such people *purchase idle discourse . . . without knowledge* (R), ignorant of what the outcome of such actions will be (Ṭ). What they *take in mockery* is understood to be *the way of God* (IJ, R, Ṭ) or the signs of God (IJ, Ṭ).

7 Because some prefer *idle discourse* to the Quran, they turn away arrogantly. When such people do hear the Quran, however, they do not understand it, because they are spiritually deaf, as in 6:25: *Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness* (cf. 2:171; 5:71; 6:39; 8:22; 10:42; 17:46; 18:57; 21:46; 41:5, 44; 47:23); see 6:25c. This is one of many verses to speak of the various ways in which the disbelievers react to the recitation of God's signs, that is, verses of the Quran; cf. 8:31; 19:73; 22:72; 34:43; 42:25; 46:7; 68:15; 83:13. *Glad tidings* usually indicates the good news of salvation that prophets bring, but here, as elsewhere, it is used with a sense of irony (cf. 3:21; 4:138; 9:3, 34; 45:8; 84:24; see also 5:60), indicating that hypocrites and disbelievers will receive the *painful punishment* that actions such as purchasing *idle discourse* and turning away from God's signs merit.

8 In other verses, *those who believe and perform righteous deeds* are said to have *Gardens with rivers running below* (47:12; 85:11) and *the Gardens of Paradise as a welcome* (18:107) as well as *a reward unceasing* (41:8).

9 *God's Promise in truth,* which could also be rendered "God's True Promise" or "God's Promise is true," means that God has given believers a true promise (Ṭ), the Gardens of bliss (Z). In this context, the combination of the Divine Attributes *Mighty* and *Wise* indicates that, while God *is the Mighty,* Whom none can overcome or thwart and Who thus blesses whomsoever He wills, He is also *the Wise,* so such blessings are not bestowed arbitrarily, but in a manner that is wise and just (Z).

10 As translated, *that you see* refers to *pillars.* But it could also be understood as a reference to *the heavens,* in which case it would be rendered, "He created the heavens, and you see them without pillars" (Q, Ṭ, Z). See commentary on 13:2: *God it is Who raised the heavens without pillars that you see.* Regarding *cast into the earth firm mountains,* see 16:15c. That God has *spread about all manner of beast* (cf. 2:164) upon the earth indicates God's Mercy in providing nourishment (Ṭ) and the extent of His Knowledge and Power (IK). *Beast* can be understood as a reference to all animals, and *every noble kind* (cf. 26:7) can be understood as a reference to every form of vegetation (Ṭ). *Noble* translates *karīm,* which also means "generous" and is thus understood by some as a reference to the manner in which vegetation gives abundantly without asking anything in return (R).

11 This verse challenges the idolaters to substantiate their claim that their idols have some part in the creative process, as in 52:35–36: *Were they created from naught? Or are they the creators?*

wrongdoers are in manifest error. (12) And indeed We gave Luqmān wisdom: "Give thanks to God!" And whosoever gives thanks, he gives thanks for his own sake. And whosoever is ungrateful, truly God is Self-Sufficient, Praised. (13) And behold, Luqmān said to his son, admonishing him, "O my son! Do not ascribe partners unto God. Truly ascribing partners is a tremendous wrong." (14) And We have enjoined man concerning his parents—his mother bore him, weakness upon weakness, and his weaning was two years—give thanks unto Me and unto thy parents. Unto Me is the journey's end. (15) But if they strive to make thee ascribe as a partner unto Me that of which thou hast no knowledge, then obey them

*Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Nay, but they have no certainty* (cf. 7:191; 16:20). For *manifest error*, see 36:24c

12 Vv. 12–13 provide the only direct reference to Luqmān in the Quran. There is extensive debate regarding his identity. A minority of commentators propose that he was a pre-Islamic Arabian prophet (Ṭ, Z), but most commentators maintain that he was simply a righteous man (IK, Ṭ) or a sage (*ḥakīm*). Some identify him as a Nubian, an Ethiopian, or an Egyptian slave (IK, Ṭ, Z). Others claim that he was the nephew of the Prophet Job who lived a thousand years and acquired knowledge from the prophet David (Z), or that he was a judge among the people of Israel (Z). In the modern period, some scholars have attempted to identify him with such ancient figures as Prometheus, Alcmaeon, or the Biblical Balaam. It is most likely that he was a pre-Islamic Arabian sage revered during the time of Muhammad. That he was given *wisdom* is thus interpreted to mean comprehension and understanding rather than revelation (Ṭ).

Thankfulness toward God is for one's own benefit, because God gives generously in accord with one's thankfulness toward Him (Ṭ). *Whosoever is ungrateful* is ungrateful to the detriment of his or her own soul (Ṭ), as in 30:44 and 35:39: *Whosoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his detriment* (cf. 40:28). In this context, that God is *Self-Sufficient* means that He has no need for human gratitude, since it adds nothing to God (Ṭ, Z), but that human beings are in need of being grateful toward God. That God is *Praised* means that it is in God's Nature to be praised whether human beings praise God or not (Ṭ, Z). From this perspective, participating in the praise of God is itself a gift for which human beings should give thanks.

13–14 The advice given by Luqmān to his son combined with the "charge" given to human beings about parents constitute protection against the two greatest sins, as when the Prophet asked his Companions, "Shall I tell you what are the greatest of major sins? . . . To attribute partners to God and to be disrespectful toward parents." Goodness, gratitude, and virtue toward parents are enjoined in several verses (4:36; 29:8; 46:15) and often combined with the command to worship none but God (see 17:23); see 29:8c. In 2:83, *Be virtuous toward parents* is listed as the first injunction of the covenant (*mīthāq*). *Weakness upon weakness* refers to the hardships of childbearing (IK, Ṭs) and can also mean "exhaustion upon exhaustion" (IK). *His weaning was two years* means that it is best for a child to be breast-fed for a full two years when possible, as in 2:233: *And let mothers nurse their children two full years, for such as desire to complete the suckling* (see also 46:15c). Giving *thanks unto* God is said to be accomplished through praise and obedience, while giving thanks to parents is demonstrated through righteousness and maintaining ties of kinship (Ṭs).

15 Although this verse should be understood as a general address to all human beings (Ṭū), according to several accounts this verse and the preceding one were revealed in connection with Saʿḍ ibn Mālik. Saʿd had always honored his mother,

not. Consort with them in the world in a kindly manner, and follow the way of those who turn in repentance unto Me. Then unto Me is your return, and I shall inform you of that which you used to do. (16) "O my son! If it be but the weight of a mustard seed, be it in a rock, in the heavens, or on the earth, God will bring it forth. Truly God is Subtle, Aware. (17) O my son! Perform the prayer, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and bear patiently whatever may befall thee. That is indeed a course worthy of resolve. (18) And turn not thy cheek at men in scorn, nor walk exultantly upon the earth. Surely God loves not any vainglorious boaster. (19) And

but when he embraced Islam, his mother asked him to leave Islam, saying that if he persisted, she would not eat or drink until she died, and people would all declare his shame by saying that he had killed his mother. But after two days she gave up her hunger strike when she saw that it had no effect upon him (IK, Q, Ṭ). The command to *follow the way of those who turn in repentance unto* God is understood as an address to all human beings to follow the way of the prophets (Q) or the way of the Prophet Muhammad (Qm, Ṭs) as well as the way of the believers (Ṭs, Ṭū). Some who read the verse as addressing the situation of Saʿd ibn Mālik understand it as a command to follow the way of Abū Bakr, under whose tutelage Saʿd is reported to have entered Islam (Q, Ṭ, W). This is one of several verses where it is said that at the Final Judgment, God will *inform* people about their actions in this life; see also 5:14, 105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 29:8; 31:23; 39:7; 41:50; 58:6–7; 62:8; 64:7; 75:13. In this context, God's "informing" human beings stands as a reminder that among the things for which they will be called to account are their attitude and actions toward parents.

16 All deeds, no matter how small, will be accounted for on the Day of Judgment, as in 99:7–8: *So whosoever does a mote's weight of good shall see it. And whosoever does a mote's weight of evil shall see it.* Thus it is said that all deeds will be weighed, as in 21:47: *We shall set the just scales for the Day of Resurrection, and no soul shall be wronged in aught. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it.* That *God is Subtle* indicates that God has knowledge of the minutest details, while *Aware* indicates that He is aware of all things at every moment.

17 To *enjoin right and forbid wrong* is a major ethical injunction of the Quran; see 3:104c, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112; 22:41. In this context, where it follows Luqmān's initial command to give thanks to God, ascribe no partners to Him (vv. 12–13), and *perform the prayer,* the injunction to *enjoin right and forbid wrong* can be understood to mean that after individuals have perfected their own worship of God, then they can help others perfect theirs (R). As translated, *That is indeed a course worthy of resolve* (cf. 3:186; 42:43) indicates that the phrase relates to the importance of human beings resolving to follow such a course. But it can also be understood to mean that it is a course or matter that God has resolved, determined, or commanded (Ṭ), in which case it might be rendered, "That is indeed among the matters resolved."

18 *Turn not thy cheek at men in scorn* is understood as a general command not to be arrogant with others, especially when conversing with them, but is also said to refer specifically to shunning a companion for whom one had affection (Ṭ). Others understand it as an injunction to avoid speaking in a boastful manner (Ṭ). The injunction to *walk not exultantly upon the earth* (cf. 17:37) means that one's reason for walking about should not be vanity and insolence (Z). In the contemporary period, this phrase is invoked by some environmentalists to argue against human beings' arrogant behavior toward nature, which is seen as an abuse of their role as God's vicegerents on earth. When seen in relation to the injunctions Luqmān gives his son in vv. 13 and 17–18, this verse can be understood to mean that once people have achieved the level where they truly *enjoin right and forbid wrong,* they should not be condescending toward others or put

be moderate in thy pace and lower thy voice. Truly the vilest of voices are those of asses." (20) Have you not considered that God has made whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you and has poured His Blessings upon you, both outwardly and inwardly? Among mankind are those who dispute concerning God without knowledge, without guidance, and without an illuminating Book. (21) When it is said unto them, "Follow that which God has sent down," they respond, "Nay, but we follow that which we found our fathers following." What! Even though Satan is calling them to the punishment of the Blaze? (22) And whosoever submits his face to God and is virtuous has indeed grasped the most unfailing handhold, and unto God is

on airs (R), and they should not turn their backs on those who seek guidance (ST).

19 *Be moderate in thy pace* means to be neither lazy nor hasty (IK). Combined with the injunction to *lower thy voice,* it can be understood as counsel to be moderate and deliberate in all of one's affairs (R). *Be moderate in thy pace* can also be understood to mean "direct thy walking" (Z), indicating that one should direct one's course to avoid being influenced by forces that might lead one astray. The command to lower one's voice is connected to the general advice to be cautious in speech, as the tongue is said to "translate" or manifest the heart (R). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have asked rhetorically, "Is there anything that drags people on their faces"—or he said, "on their noses"—"into the Fire other than the jests of their tongues?" In relation to the Prophet, lowering the voice is also connected to reverence, as in 49:3: *Truly those who lower their voices before the Messenger of God, they are the ones whose hearts God has tested for reverence.*

20 God has made all things *subservient* to human beings (cf. 14:33; 22:65; 45:13) insofar as He has made human beings *vicegerents upon the earth* (6:165; 35:39; cf. 2:30). In this context, the subservience of creation to human beings highlights the importance of being moderate in one's actions and one's speech, as the deeds of human beings can have an exponential impact on the world around them. Here *outwardly* describes blessings that are attained through the senses, while *inwardly* describes those attained through the mind, the intellect, and the heart (Aj). Outward *blessings* could also be seen as the health and comfort God provides, while inward *blessings* could be seen as faith, certainty, and knowledge (Aj). That people dispute *without knowledge, without guidance, and without an illuminating Book* (cf. 22:8) indicates that they have no rational arguments, no transmitted knowledge, and no revelation to support their claims (cf. 34:44; 35:40; 43:21; 46:4; 68:37–38).

21 Similar to this verse is 5:104, in which, when the Makkan idolaters are called to follow the Quran, they respond, *Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing;* this is then countered with a rhetorical question, *What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided?* Likewise, when the prophets Moses and Aaron call their people to follow the Torah, they respond, *Have you come unto us to turn us away from that which we found our fathers following?* (10:78). All such verses indicate an unequivocal rejection of blind adherence to the ways of previous generations (Bd).

22 Submitting one's face to God (cf. 2:112; 3:20; 4:125) implies submitting one's entire being to Him, as in Arabic the face is a metonym for one's essence. *Virtuous* renders *muḥsin,* which indicates one who performs *iḥsān,* that is, virtue, or literally doing what is beautiful or what makes things beautiful; see 29:69c. The manner in which being virtuous or doing what is beautiful is connected to submitting one's face, or essence, to God indicates that the full depth of *islām*—the reality

the end of all affairs. (23) And whosoever does not believe, let not his disbelief grieve thee. Unto Us is their return; then We shall inform them of that which they did. Truly God knows what lies within breasts. (24) We grant them enjoyment a little, then We compel them toward a grave punishment. (25) And wert thou to ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they would surely say, "God." Say, "Praise be to God." Nay, but most of them know not. (26) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. Truly God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised. (27) And if all the trees on earth were pens, and if

of "submission"—is attained by performing all actions with virtue and beauty. Both *islām* and *iḥsān* control passions and conceits, the former by channeling and neutralizing them from without through the dictates of the Shariah, and the latter by dissolving them from within. But when passions and conceits are dissolved from within, many of the prescriptions and prohibitions that pertain to the outer neutralizing discipline of *islām* do not need to be imposed, because the actions they enjoin arise organically from within. Submitting one's face as a *muḥsin* could thus be understood to be *the most unfailing handhold* (cf. 2:256), a term understood as a metaphor for salvation (Ṭb) and by some Shiites as a reference to the sanctity of the Imams (Ka, Qm). Regarding *the most unfailing handhold,* ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām is reported to have said, "I saw myself in a garden, and there was a pillar in the middle of the garden, and there was a handhold at the top of the pillar. I was asked to climb it. I said, 'I cannot.' Then a servant came and lifted up my clothes, and I climbed [the pillar], and then got hold of the handhold, and I woke up while still holding it. I told the Prophet of it, and he said, 'The garden symbolizes the garden of Islam, and the handhold is the firm Islamic handhold, which indicates that you will be adhering firmly to Islam until you die.'"

23 As the disbelievers will return to God on the Day of Resurrection, be informed of their deeds (see 31:15c), and be punished for them, the Prophet is enjoined not to grieve regarding them (Ṭ), since they will not be able to overcome God's Plan (Z; see also 3:176; 5:41, 68; 6:33; 10:65; 15:88; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 35:8; 36:76). In this context, that *God knows what lies within breasts* (cf. 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13) means that God knows the disbelief hidden within their hearts (Ṭ). It could also be understood as a general statement that God will deal with all human beings in accord with their true natures (Z).

24 This verse could also be read, "And We grant them a little enjoyment." In both readings, the implication that God is allowing the disbelievers to enjoy the blessings of this life for a while should not be a cause for consternation, since their being given more time and more blessings often allows them more time to commit sin and thus prove their true character. In this regard, 15:3 says of the disbelievers, *Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves and to be beguiled by hopes, for soon they will know.* And in 14:30, the Prophet is told to say to the disbelievers, *Enjoy yourselves! For truly your journey is unto the Fire!* See also 3:178; 10:69–70; 16:55; 26:205–7; 29:66; 30:34c; 77:46.

25–26 When questioned about the source of creation, *they*—that is, the idolaters among the Quraysh—*would surely say, "God"* (cf. 10:31; 23:84–85; 29:61, 63; 39:38; 43:9, 87), because the agency of a creator above all others is evident to them, given that many of them still believed in a supreme deity. The Prophet is then told to say, *Praise be to God,* meaning that only God should be praised for the existence of the created order, not those who had nothing to do with bringing forth creation (Ṭ), and that no being other than God should be worshipped (Z). Regarding the Divine Names *the Self-Sufficient, the Praised,* see 31:12c.

27 This verse evokes the inexhaustibility of God's creation through Divine Speech (R), as in 36:82: *His Command when He desires a thing is*

the sea and seven more added to it [were ink], the Words of God would not be exhausted. Truly God is Mighty, Wise. (28) Your creation and your resurrection are as naught but a single soul. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing. (29) Hast thou not considered that God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and that He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed, and that God is Aware of whatsoever you do? (30) That is because God, He is the Truth, and whatsoever they call upon

*only to say to it, "Be!" and it is* (cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68). In this context, *seven more* is not literal, but is meant to indicate an immeasurable quantity (IK, R). Thus, were one to attempt to bring forth all of the creations of God, the possibilities of which are infinite, immeasurable seas of ink and innumerable pens would be exhausted before God's creative speech would be exhausted (Aj, Ṭb); see 18:109c.

This verse was reportedly revealed in response to a dispute the Prophet had with some Jews. After he had migrated to Madinah, a group of Jewish leaders went to see him and said, "O Muhammad, you have said, *And you have not been given knowledge, save a little* [17:85]. Are you referring to us or to your people?" The Prophet said, "Both." To which they replied, "Do you not recite in what has come to you that we have been given the Torah *as a clarification of all things* [16:89]?" The Prophet answered, "In relation to God's Knowledge it is little, and you have from [God's Knowledge] what suffices you." Then God sent this verse in response to what they had asked (Ṭ). According to another account, the Prophet responded, "The knowledge that you have is very little in comparison with God's Knowledge. God has given you something that would benefit you, were you to act in accord with it." They said, "O Muhammad, how can you claim this when it is you who says, *Whosoever is granted wisdom has been granted much good* [2:269]? How can little knowledge and much good be combined together?" Then as a response, God revealed this verse (W). Others say that this verse may have been revealed in relation to a group of disbelievers after they had remarked, "What Muhammad transmits will soon be exhausted" (R).

28 God only needs to command a thing once and it will be (Q), as in 54:50: *Our Command is naught but one, like the blinking of an eye* (IK). Likewise, the Resurrection *shall be but a single cry* (36:53; 79:13). Thus it is no more difficult for God to create all human beings and to resurrect them than it is for God to create a single human being (Aj, IK, Q). In this way, this verse reaffirms the idea that God's Power would not and could not *be exhausted* (v. 27) by the process of creation or resurrection. In somewhat different contexts, however, the Quran mentions that God created human beings from *a single soul* and that from this single soul was created *its mate* (see 4:1c; 6:98; 7:189; 39:6). That *God is Hearing, Seeing* (4:58, 134; 22:61, 75; 58:1) reinforces the fullness of God's Omniscience; see 4:58c.

29 Cf. 35:13. The passing of the night into the day and the day into the night (cf. 3:27; 22:61; 57:6) can refer to the daily exchange of light and darkness (Aj), to seasonal variations in the length of days and nights (IK, JJ), or to both. That God has *made the sun and the moon subservient* (cf. 7:54; 13:2; 14:33; 16:12; 29:61; 39:5) refers to God's control over all celestial bodies (IK), as in 16:12: *The sun, and the moon, and the stars are subservient by His Command.* It can also be understood as a reference to the manner in which they are made to serve human beings, as in 14:33: *He has made the sun and the moon subservient unto you, constant, and He made the night and the day subservient unto you* (cf. 22:65; 31:20; 45:13). That each *runs for a term appointed* (cf. 13:2; 35:13; 39:5) refers to their termination at the end of the world (IK, JJ) or to their cyclical rotation.

30 *That* refers to all that is mentioned in the previous verse (Aj, Q, Ṭ, Z), or it can be understood to begin an emphatic statement meaning "Witness that God, He is the Truth" (Aj). *The Truth* renders *al-Ḥaqq,* which can also mean "the Real."

other than Him is false, and God is the Exalted, the Great. (31) Hast thou not considered that the ships sail upon the sea by God's Blessing, that He may show you His signs? Truly in that are signs for all who are patient, thankful. (32) And when waves enshroud them like awnings, they call upon God, devoting religion entirely to Him. Then when He has delivered them safely to land, some of them take a middling course. And none reject Our signs, save all who are perfidious, ungrateful. (33) O mankind! Reverence your Lord and fear a day on which no parent will avail his child aught and no child will avail his parent aught. Surely God's Promise is true. So let not the life of this world delude you, nor let the Deluder delude you concerning God. (34) Truly with God lies knowledge of the Hour, and He sends down the rain and knows what lies in wombs. And no soul knows what it will earn on the morrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Truly God is Knowing, Aware.

This verse is thus understood as an affirmation that God is the Ultimate Reality beyond and behind all of creation and that all of the things to which anyone ascribes ultimate power or upon which anyone calls for intercession are entirely dependent upon God, possessing no reality in and of themselves. God is the only reality or being that is necessary, while all other realities are contingent (Ṭb).

31 That seafaring is a blessing bestowed by God (cf. 14:32; 17:66; 22:65; 30:46; 43:12) reiterates the manner in which God makes creation subservient to human beings, as in 45:12: *God it is Who made the sea subservient unto you, that the ships may sail upon it by His Command, that you may seek His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks;* see 31:20c. *Patient* and *thankful* describe those who are steadfast in the face of affliction and thankful when in a state of ease (IK).

32 Cf. 10:22–23; 17:67; 29:65. A storm at sea can be seen as a parable for every affliction that besets human beings in life. *Devoting religion entirely to Him* (cf. 7:29; 10:22; 29:65; 40:14, 65; 98:5) refers to the singularity of their devotion in the face of severe afflictions (Ṭ). Yet when they are delivered to safety, some *take a middling course,* wavering away from the sincerity they had declared when they feared for their lives (Z), or *turn away* and are *ungrateful* (17:67), returning to their polytheism or their forgetfulness of God and behaving *tyrannically upon the earth without right* (10:23). *Perfidious* translates *khattār,* which means one who betrays or stabs in the back or who breaks every promise made (IK). Such people deny that their good fortune is a blessing from God and do not give thanks for it (IK).

33 On the Day of Judgment none can avail another against God's Punishment (2:48, 123; 3:10, 116; 26:88; 44:41; 86:10). On the one hand, this means that even if a parent wanted to take the place of a child, or vice versa, he or she would not be able to do so (IK), since *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). On the other hand, it indicates that on the Day of Judgment, everyone will be too concerned with his or her own state of affairs to give thought to the condition of those he or she had loved in this world, as alluded to in 80:37: *For every man that Day his affair shall suffice him* (see also 70:10–14). This present verse is also one of several that warn against being deluded by the life of this world (cf. 6:70, 130; 35:5; 43:35). *The Deluder* is a reference to Satan, the nature of whose delusion is made clear in 4:120: *He makes them promises and stirs in them desires, but Satan promises naught but delusion* (cf. 14:22). *Deluder* translates *gharūr,* which could also be taken as a reference to "delusion" in general.

34 That knowledge of the end of time, or *the Hour,* lies only with God is mentioned in several

verses (see 7:187; 33:63; 41:47; 43:85; 67:25–26; 79:42–46). Similarly, only God knows when the rain will fall or what is decreed for children in wombs, since *with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He* (6:59). Ibn ʿUmar related that the Prophet said, "The keys of the Unseen are five, and none knows them except God: none knows the timing of the Hour except God; none knows what is hidden in wombs except God; none knows what is in store for tomorrow except God; no soul knows in which land it will die; only God knows this; and none knows when it will rain except God" (IK, Ṭ). According to some accounts, after making this statement, the Prophet recited this verse.

This verse was reportedly revealed in response to a man who asked the Prophet about the Hour and its exact timing, adding, "Our land has dried up. When is it going to rain? And I left my wife pregnant. When is she going to give birth? And I know in which land I was born, but in which land am I going to die?" (W). But according to others, the verse had been revealed before this encounter, and the Prophet simply responded to these questions by saying, "If God wanted to take the soul of a servant in a particular land, He would place within that servant a need, such that he would not cease until he had reached that land," after which he recited this verse (Q).

That no one knows the time or place of death is understood as an admonition to be always prepared for death and thus ever mindful of God. In this vein, al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "*No soul knows what it will earn on the morrow;* that is, [no soul knows] what [counts] for it and against it in what has been measured out from the Unseen. So, be wary of [what has been measured out] by upholding the remembrance of Him and crying out to Him for help, until He Himself takes care of your affair; as He has said: *God effaces what He will and establishes* [13:39; ST]."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 32

# Prostration

## *al-Sajdah*

*Al-Sajdah* is from the Makkan period, although many scholars maintain that vv. 16–20 are from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ, Q), and others maintain that only vv. 18–20 are Madinan, or that only v. 16 is (IJ). Such interpretations may, however, derive from a desire to attach these verses to occasions of revelation for which there is not strong support; al-Ālūsī observes that the strength of the connection of these verses to the preceding verses makes it seem unlikely that they are from a different period. Believed to have been revealed after *Sūrah* 23, *al-Muʾminūn* (JJ), this *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of those who *fall prostrate and hymn the praise of their Lord* in v. 15. It was also known to some as *Sūrat al-Maḍājiʿ*, meaning "*Sūrah* of the Beds," after the reference to those who shun their beds in order to devote themselves to God in v. 16 (Āl; Sy). Many also refer to this *sūrah* by its first words, "*Alif, Lām, Mīm,* the Revelation" (Al, Bq, Q), as a way to distinguish it from other *sūrah*s that begin with the Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *mīm.*

Many *aḥādīth* attribute great favor to this *sūrah.* It is reported that the Prophet would read both *al-Mulk* (*Sūrah* 67) and *al-Sajdah* every night before going to sleep (Āl, Q, Sy, Ṭs), and that he would often recite *al-Sajdah* and *al-Insān* (*Sūrah* 76) during the morning prayer on Fridays (Āl, Q, Sy). Some attribute the reverence for this *sūrah* to the way it covers the major themes of the Quran in a succinct manner. The first half of the *sūrah* discusses revelation (vv. 2–3), God (vv. 4–6), creation, especially of human beings (vv. 7–9), and Resurrection and Judgment (vv. 10–14). The second half provides an eloquent contrast between those who prostrate before God in beholding His signs and those who turn away from them (vv. 15–22), employing the Children of Israel as an example of those who were guided so long as they followed God's signs (vv. 23–25). A call to reflect upon the end of civilizations past and the signs of God in creation (vv. 26–27) then segues into a call for the Prophet to challenge the disbelievers and await the answer (vv. 28–30).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① *Alif. Lām. Mīm.* ② The revelation of the Book in which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the worlds. ③ Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Nay, it is the truth from thy Lord, that thou mayest warn a people to whom no warner has come before thee, that haply they may be guided. ④ God it is Who created the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in six days. Then He mounted the Throne. Apart from Him you have neither protector,

1 The Arabic letters *alif, lām,* and *mīm,* which also appear in 2:1; 3:1; 29:1; 30:1; and 31:1, are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be ultimately known only to God; see 2:1c. In an allusive commentary upon this verse, al-Maybudī writes, "*Alif* alludes to God; *lām* alludes to Gabriel; and *mīm* alludes to Muhammad. He is saying, 'It is by My Divinity, by Gabriel's holiness, and by thy splendor, O Muhammad, that this revelation, which is the Quran that We promised unto thee, would be thy level of prophethood and thy ruling power."

2 This is the first of five *sūrahs* to begin with *the revelation of the Book* (cf. 39:1; 40:2; 45:2; 46:2). In each of these instances, *revelation* translates *tanzīl,* which literally means "descending" or "descent." From one perspective, "Although the Quran is a single reality, it has many levels of descent and is called by various names corresponding to each particular level of descent" (MṢ). *The Book* refers to the Quran (JJ). *In which there is no doubt* may refer to either *the Book* itself (IK), meaning its contents, or to *the revelation of the Book,* meaning that there is no doubt regarding its Divine provenance (IK, Ṭ, Z).

3 The beginning question asks whether people attest to the *Book* or claim the Prophet *has fabricated it* (cf. 10:38c; 11:13, 35; 46:8). *Or* translates the particle *am,* which can be read as an interrogative particle or as particle for continuing the previous discussion, in which case the verse would read, "Yet they say . . . " or "Nay, but they say . . . ," a reading preferred by several commentators (Ṭ, Z). *To whom no warner has come before thee* indicates that the Arabs of the Prophet's generation had not received a revelation (R, Ṭ, Z), though earlier Arabs, such as the tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd, had received revelations. In this sense, this verse is similar to 34:44, which says of the Arabs, *We have not given them any books that they study; nor have We sent them a warner before thee;* and 36:6, which states that the Quran was sent *that thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were not warned; so they were heedless.* Similar to 36:6, the present verse could also be read to mean "that thou mayest warn a people of that which came to them by a warner before thee," in which case it refers to the fact that their ancestors were warned in earlier epochs, but these revelations were forgotten over time.

4 Regarding the creation of *the heavens and the earth . . . in six days* (cf. 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 50:38; 57:4), after which God *mounted the Throne* on the seventh day (IK, Ṭ), an allusion to God's Sovereignty (R), see 7:54c. Some maintain that *then,* here rendering *thumma,* can be understood to mean "and" (Q), which would appear to contest the interpretation that God mounted the Throne on the seventh day. That people have *neither protector, nor intercessor* other than God means that none may intercede or help without God's Permission (IK, Z), as in 10:3: *There is no intercessor, save by His Leave* (see also 19:87; 20:109; 39:44; 43:86; 53:26; 74:48; 2:48c; 2:255c), which is another means of confirming God's absolute sovereignty (see 2:107). *Will you not, then, remember* (cf. 6:80; 45:23) can be understood as a reference to remembering the pretemporal covenant made between God and all human beings in 7:172 (K) or to remembering the Reality of God. The phrase can also be rendered,

nor intercessor. Will you not, then, remember? (5) He directs the affair from Heaven unto earth; then it ascends unto Him in a day whose measure is as a thousand years of that which you reckon. (6) Such is the Knower of the Unseen and the seen, the Mighty, the Merciful, (7) Who made beautiful all that He created, and Who began the creation of man from clay. (8) Then He made his seed from a draught of base fluid. (9) Then He fashioned him, and breathed

"Will you not, then, be admonished?" meaning, "Will you not take heed of this warning?"

5 After mounting the Throne, God *directs the affair* (cf. 10:3, 31; 13:2), making it descend from the highest heaven to the lowest level of the earth (IK), which refers to His control over all affairs (Ṭ) and the carrying out of His Decree (IJ) for the duration of the world (JJ) or to the descent of revelation (IJ). What ascends to God are the angels (IJ) or the Command, meaning that everything that was created by the Command *ascends unto Him* on the Day of Resurrection (IJ, Z). That its measure *is as a thousand years of that which you reckon* (cf. 22:47) indicates the severity of the terrors of that Day for the disbelievers and is elsewhere likened to *fifty thousand years* (70:4; JJ). Such disparity also indicates the difference between duration in the spiritual world and that in the world of form and matter; see 22:47c; 70:4c.

Regarding the importance of understanding the manner in which God *directs the affair,* al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "He reveals to His servants from His Knowledge that which is a means of guidance and salvation for them. The person who is content with the decreed provision resulting from God's directing for him will have the evil of his own directing disposed of and removed from him. Thus [God] will have returned him to a state of contentment with the Divine Decree and rectitude in the face of the unfolding of what is destined for him. [Such people] are among those who are *brought nigh* [unto God (*al-muqarrabūn;* see 56:11–12c)]. Truly, God created people without any veil, and then made their directing [for themselves] their veil."

6 Regarding God as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (cf. 6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18), see 59:22c.

7 *Made beautiful* translates *aḥsana,* which can also be understood to mean "perfected" or "completed with precision," although in this context some understand it to mean "determined" (*aḥkama;* Ṭ). Regarding the creation of human beings, God is also said to have *made beautiful* their *forms* (40:64). This verse implies that the quality of "making beautiful" is something in which human beings can partake by beautifying the world around them and by beautifying their character. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Verily God has enjoined making beautiful (*iḥsān*) for everything. So, when you kill, kill in a beautiful manner; when you sacrifice, sacrifice in a beautiful manner."

The clay from which Adam and, by extension, all human beings were created is variously described as being like potter's clay (55:14); *dried clay, made of molded mud* (15:26); *a draught of clay* (23:12); and *viscous clay* (37:11). These different forms of clay can be seen as describing stages of human creation: from *dust* (3:59), to *viscous clay,* to *molded mud,* to *dried clay, like earthen vessels* (55:14), at which point it is ready for the spirit to be blown into it, as in v. 9.

8 *His seed,* meaning human progeny (R, Ṭ), hence all human beings, is from an extract of clear liquid (Iṣ, Ṭ). *Base fluid* (cf. 77:20), like the *gushing fluid* in 86:6, refers to semen. *Draught* renders *sulālah,* which implies something drawn forth or gently flowing forth; the semen is referred to as such because it flows gently from the loins (Ṭs). It is mentioned in part as a reminder for human beings of their humble origins. God's Ability to create human beings out of such lowly materials can also be seen as testimony to God's Ability to resurrect human beings from mere dust and bones.

9 A similar account of the creation of Adam is phrased as an address from God to the angels: *When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating* (38:72; cf. 15:29). *Breathed into him of His*

into him of His Spirit, and endowed you with hearing, sight, and hearts. Little do you give thanks! (10) And they say, "What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we indeed be created anew?" Nay, they believe not in the meeting with their Lord. (11) Say, "The Angel of death, who has been entrusted with you, will take you; then unto your Lord shall you be returned." (12) Couldst thou but see when the guilty bend their heads low before their Lord: "Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard; so send us back that we may work righteousness. Truly we are certain." (13) And had We willed, We would have given every soul

*Spirit* indicates that God made Adam, who had been inanimate, into a living conscious being (JJ). The Spirit can also be understood to represent the bestowal or activation of the intellect by which human beings control *hearing, sight, and hearts*. The order in which these three terms are mentioned can be understood as an allusion to the path by which one acquires knowledge, first hearing of things from others, then seeing them and attaining to them for oneself, then perceiving their true nature and coming to a more direct and complete understanding of them (R). Those who do not *give thanks* for these faculties are those whose *hearing, sight, and hearts availed them naught, since they rejected God's signs* (46:26), meaning that they do not use these faculties to act in accord with God's teachings, but simply to follow their own desires and caprices.

10 The question in this verse may be seen as meaning, "When our bodies have decomposed, are we to be reconstituted?" (IJ, JJ). This is similar to the more common objection voiced by disbelievers, *What! When we are dead and have become dust and bones, are we to be resurrected?* (56:47; cf. 17:49, 98; 23:82–83; 36:78; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 79:11). Regarding those who deny resurrection and *the meeting with their Lord* (cf. 6:31), see 30:8c.

11 In Islamic angelology, *the Angel of death* is understood to be Azrael (IK, Q), who is in charge of removing spirits from bodies at the moment of death, for which he is said to have helpers among the angels (IK, Ṭ; see 4:97c; 8:50; 16:32), though it is also said that *God takes souls at the moment of their death* (39:42). Al-Qurṭubī reconciles these verses by saying that the Angel of Death seizes them, the helping angels, referred to as *guardians* and as *Our messengers* in 6:61, attend to them, and God brings about their end; see also 6:61–62c; 7:37; and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

12 *Couldst thou but see* is an address directly to the Prophet or a general address (R). In either case, it refers to the amazement one would experience upon witnessing the state of the disbelievers in the Hereafter (R). Now that the souls of disbelievers have been taken by the Angel of Death, seen the realities of Resurrection and Judgment that they had denied (cf. 19:38), and been made to *admit their sin* (67:11; cf. 40:11), they say, *We are certain,* meaning they believe with certainty or that they are simply claiming to believe in order to avoid the punishment, as in 6:23: *Then their contention will be but to say, "By God, our Lord, we were not idolaters"* (R). In another verse, God responds to the same request that they be sent back, in their words, so that they *may work righteousness,* saying, *Did We not give you long life, enough for whosoever would reflect to reflect therein? And the warner came unto you; so taste [the punishment]!* (35:37). In 23:100, when the same request is made by one person, the evaluation is *Nay, indeed these are words that he speaks.* God thus denies all such requests, because *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden* (6:28). For the manner in which this and other verses can be seen as part of an extended discourse between God and the denizens of Hell, see 40:11–12c.

13 This verse is an address to those who despair over the attitude of the disbelievers, as the Prophet did, letting them know that it is God's Decree that some turn away, as in 10:99: *And had thy Lord willed, all those who are on the earth*

its guidance. But the Word from Me comes due: "I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together!" (14) So taste [the punishment] for having forgotten the meeting with this your Day! Verily, We have forgotten you! And taste the punishment everlasting for that which you used to do. (15) Truly they believe in Our signs who, when reminded of them, fall prostrate and hymn the praise of their Lord and wax not arrogant, (16) whose sides shun [their] beds, calling upon their Lord out of fear and hope, and who spend from that which We have provided them. (17) No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it

*would have believed all together. Wouldst thou compel men till they become believers?* That God will *fill Hell with jinn and men all together* (cf. 11:119; 38:85) then speaks to the fact that the Prophet can only call people to guidance, but must leave their final end in the Hands of God.

14 These words are spoken by God or by the angels who serve as the keepers of Hell to the disbelievers as the latter enter Hell (JJ). In other verses, God or the keepers say, *Taste the punishment for having disbelieved* (3:106; 6:30; 8:35; 46:34; cf. 7:39). This is one of several verses that speak of the disbelievers being forgotten by God, as in 45:34: *And it will be said, "Today We forget you just as you forgot the meeting with this your Day; your refuge is the Fire and you have no helpers"* (see also 7:51; 9:67; 20:126; 59:19). Such verses mean that they are cast out of God's Mercy or into the state of punishment (Bḍ), since God does not "forget" (IK). Many understand such verses to mean that disbelievers are left to wallow in the punishment of the Fire (JJ), but it also speaks to the importance for one's spiritual life of remembering the meeting with God and thus death. In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The intelligent person is one who knows his soul and works for what follows death." And when asked, "Who is the most intelligent of believers?" he replied, "The most frequent in remembering death, and the best prepared for what follows it, they are the most intelligent."

15 *Our signs* refers to the verses of the Quran (Aj, JJ), to all revelations, to prophetic miracles, or to all of the signs of God in the created world. According to a *ḥadīth*, "The closest that a servant can be to his Lord is when he is prostrating" (IK, Q). Nonetheless, this verse cautions that for such prostration to be efficacious it must not be mixed with arrogance. According to the Islamic tradition, this is one of fifteen verses after which one prostrates when reciting the Quran; see 19:58c.

16 This verse was reportedly revealed with regard to some Companions of the Prophet who would stand in prayer from after the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) until the time of the night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*; W), while others say it refers to those who pray the night vigil (*tahajjud*; W). Given that they *shun [their] beds,* the second interpretation is more plausible. In this context, *fear* is understood to mean fear of punishment and *hope* is understood to mean hope for mercy (JJ). From a spiritual perspective, it can be understood to mean the fear of being separated from God and the hope of meeting Him (Qu, ST). Al-Maybudī writes, "Sleeplessness and wakefulness at night are the cause of nearness to the Truth and evidence of the perfection of love, for the first degree of love is seeking conformity, and the attribute of the Truth is that *neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep* [2:255]." In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "My eyes sleep, but my heart waketh" (My).

As the reference to prayer is understood by most to mean the supererogatory night vigil, the reference to spending is understood to mean charity (*ṣadaqah*) beyond the required alms tax (*zakāh*). Spending of what God has provided is extolled alongside prayer and belief in several verses (e.g., 2:3; 8:3; 4:39; 35:29), and human beings are called upon to *spend of that which We have provided you before death comes upon one of you and he says, "My Lord, wouldst that Thou grant me reprieve until a term nigh, that I might give charity and be among the righteous!"* (63:10; cf. 2:254; 14:44).

17 *Comfort* translates *qurrat aʿyun,* which literally means "coolness of the eyes" and conveys

as a recompense for that which they used to do. (18) Is one who believes like one who is iniquitous? They are not equal. (19) As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be Gardens of refuge, as a welcome for that which they used to do. (20) And as for those who are iniquitous, their refuge is the Fire. Whenever they desire to go forth therefrom, they are returned unto it, and it is said unto them, "Taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny!" (21) And We make them taste the lesser punishment before the greater

ease, comfort, and joy. In the Quran, some understand it as an allusion to the vision of God (Aj), because "the eye is only cooled by the vision of the one it loves" (Qu). In relation to this verse, it is reported that the Prophet said, "God says, 'I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being.'" Then the Prophet recited, *No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it* (Q).

One of the Prophet's Companions, Muʿādh ibn Jabal, reported that the Prophet cited this verse and the previous one when teaching him the practice of Islam: "I said, 'O Messenger of God, tell me of an act that will take me into the Garden and will keep me away from the Fire.' He replied, 'You have asked me about a significant matter; yet it is easy for him for whom God Almighty makes it easy. You should worship God, associating nothing with Him, perform the prayers, pay alms (*zakāh*), fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House.' Then he said, 'Shall I not show you the gates of goodness? Fasting, which is a shield; charity, which extinguishes sin as water extinguishes fire; and the prayer of a man in the depths of night.'" Then the Prophet recited vv. 16–17.

Interpreting the *comfort* or cooling of the eyes as an allusion to the joy one finds in the attainment of spiritual realities, al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "Their eyes [are cooled] at the outward and inward realities that they witness, which are disclosed to them by way of unveiling. Then they behold them and adhere to them, so that their eyes are cooled and their hearts repose in them" (ST).

18–19 V. 18 is one of several verses to ask a rhetorical question aimed at indicating the utter disparity between believers and disbelievers. Elsewhere, their disparity is likened to that between the blind and the seeing (see 11:24; 13:19; 35:19; 40:58), *the living and the dead* (35:22), or *those who know and those who do not know* (39:9; see also 3:162; 5:100; 38:28; 39:9; 47:14–15; 59:20; 68:5). These two verses, along with the following two, can be read as part of the continuing response to the disbelievers who in v. 12 asked to be sent back in order to perform righteous deeds. In these four verses, it is made clear that the stark difference between believers and disbelievers in this world portends an even starker contrast in their final ends, since the declaration of faith with the tongue is believed to have little efficacy if it is not put into practice with the limbs and manifest in the heart.

20 The desire of the disbelievers to leave the punishment can be understood as evidence of the continuing inability of some of them to realize that they have in fact earned their punishment through their own actions. Having failed to grasp the true nature of their iniquity, as evidenced by their request to be returned to this world to *work righteousness* (see v. 12c), they are condemned to be cast in the Fire over and again. Also see 22:22: *Whensoever they desire, in their grief, to leave it, they shall be returned unto it, while [being told], "Taste the punishment of the burning!"*

21 *The lesser punishment* is punishment in this world (IK, JJ), which can come through the humiliation of defeat, through illness, or by natural disaster (JJ), among other afflictions. Others say it refers to the legal punishments brought against the disbelievers in this world or to the punishment in the grave that comes before the eternal punishment (IK). *The greater punishment* is that of the Hereafter (JJ). From one

punishment, that they might turn back. (22) And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them? Truly We shall take vengeance upon the guilty. (23) And indeed We gave unto Moses the Book; so be not in doubt regarding the meeting with Him. And We made him a guide for the Children of Israel. (24) And We appointed leaders from among them who guided by Our Command when they were patient and

perspective, they are afflicted with the lesser punishment as a mercy from God, as it might make them reflect and thus *turn back* to belief (JJ), which is considered the natural state of human beings (see 7:172c; 30:30c).

22 The first sentence of this verse is repeated in 18:57, followed by *Surely We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand not, and in their ears a deafness. Even if thou callest them to guidance, they will never be rightly guided.* It is not that such people cannot see the signs if left to themselves, but that God veils the signs from them due to their arrogance and disbelief, as in 7:146: *I shall turn away from My signs those who wax arrogant upon the earth without right. Even if they were to see every sign, they would not believe in them.* A subtle theme throughout the Quran is that miracles by themselves do not convince people of religious truth if their souls are set against it, as in 6:25, which says of the disbelievers, *Were they to see every sign, they would not believe in it, so that when they come to thee, they dispute with thee* (see also 2:145; 7:146; 10:96–97). With regard to the present verse, Qatādah is reported to have said, "Whosoever turns away from the remembrance of God has been beguiled by the greatest delusion, rendered destitute by most severe penury, and oppressed by the greatest of sins" (IK), and that is the most severe form of *vengeance*. Regarding the manner in which God takes vengeance, see also 44:16c.

23 This sudden change of subject to a discussion of Moses may suggest that the revelation given to him was among those signs from which one should not turn away (v. 22). As translated, *the meeting with Him* refers either to Moses' meeting with God when he received revelation or to the meeting with God that awaits every soul. Many commentators understand the pronoun *Him* in this phrase as a reference to the Prophet Muhammad's meeting with Moses on his ascent from Jerusalem to the Throne of God (see 17:1c; 53:1–18), in which case it would be translated "with him" (IK, R, Ṭ); or to the Prophet Muhammad's receiving revelation (Bḍ, R); or to Moses' receiving revelation, in which case it would be rendered "with it." Such interpretations are possible, but would not be consistent with the common Quranic use of "meet" (*laqiya*) and "meeting" (*liqāʾ*) to indicate the meeting with God (see 2:4, 223, 249; 6:31, 154; 8:46; 9:77; 10:7, 11, 15, 45; 11:29; 13:2; 18:105, 110; 29:5; 30:8; 32:10; 33:44; 41:54c); the meeting with death (see, e.g., 3:143; 62:8); or the meeting of the Day of Judgment (see, e.g., 6:130; 23:14; 39:71; 45:34). "Meeting" is, however, never used as a direct reference to receiving revelation. The most consistent interpretation of this verse would thus be to see it as a reference to the meeting with God. In this context, it would then mean that any who have received a revelation, like the people of Moses, should not be in doubt about the meeting with God. *We made him a guide* could also be rendered "We made it a guide," referring to the Torah (IK, JJ, Ṭ).

24 The *leaders* in this verse likely refers to the scribes, priests, Pharisees, and rabbis. The verse indicates that so long as the religious leaders patiently adhered to God's commands, confirming God's messengers and following them, they were guided. But when they altered the scriptures or the correct interpretation of the scriptures (see 4:46; 5:15, 41), they were deprived of that station and their hearts hardened (IK). Their being patient can also be seen as a reference to enduring the attractions of this world and not succumbing to them (IK, Ṭ). Thus some see this verse as evidence that one cannot be a religious leader unless one has attained the virtue of patience (IK). The last phrase could also be read as a new sentence, "And they were certain of Our signs."

were certain of Our signs. (25) Truly thy Lord will distinguish between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that wherein they used to differ. (26) Does it not serve as guidance for them, how many generations We destroyed before them, amidst whose dwellings they walk? Truly in that are signs. Will they not listen? (27) Have they not considered how We drive the water to the barren earth and bring forth crops thereby, whereof they and their cattle eat? Will they not see? (28) And they say, "When is this victory, if you are truthful?" (29) Say, "On the Day of Victory, faith will not benefit those who disbelieved; nor shall they be granted respite." (30) Then turn away from them and wait; they, too, are waiting.

25 This verse is either specific, referring to the Children of Israel, or general, referring to all of humanity. On the Day of Judgment, God distinguishes between them regarding the different understandings of religious matters, resurrection, reward, and punishment and then sends them to the Garden or the Fire (T); see also 2:113; 10:93; 16:124c; 39:3; 45:17.

26 This is one of several verses to allude to the towns (6:6; 7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13) and whole generations (17:17; 19:74; 20:128; 36:31; 38:3; 50:36) that were destroyed for their iniquities and for their refusal to accept the messengers whom God had sent to them. *Amidst whose dwellings they walk* refers to the remains of bygone towns and settlements that the Arabs would pass on their travels.

27 *They* is most likely a reference to disbelievers among the Quraysh. The discussion of God's reviving barren earth indicates that they fail both to be thankful for the manner in which He provides for them, as in 56:68–70, and to understand the manner in which God can resurrect human beings after they have died. All such verses that refer to the revival of the earth can also be understood as a reference to spiritual revivification, with the dead land serving as a metonym for the dead heart (see, e.g., 25:48–49; 30:19; 36:33; 50:9–11).

28 The disbelievers ask the believers, *When is this victory, if you are truthful?* meaning, "When is the Day of Resurrection?" *Victory* translates *fatḥ,* which can also mean a decisive arbitration between parties. *Fatḥ* is thus understood by some commentators as a reference to God's Decree and to His distinguishing between the believers and disbelievers (IK), as in 34:26: *Say, "Our Lord will gather us together; then He will decide between us with truth; and He is the Arbiter, the Knower."*

29 When the Day of Judgment comes, even though the disbelievers say, *Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard. . . . Truly we are certain* (v. 12), their acknowledgment of the truth will be of no benefit. They will not be *granted respite* to make amends, because they had already been warned and been shown God's signs in this life, but they turned away in arrogance.

30 Believers are counseled to *wait* for the punishment to be sent down upon the disbelievers (JJ). *They, too, are waiting* means that the disbelievers are expecting and awaiting the believers' destruction as well (JJ). *They, too, are waiting* can also be read with a sense of irony, meaning that the disbelievers are waiting for their own destruction, though they do not know that this is what they are awaiting. For other instances of this ironic statement with slight variations, see 6:158c; 7:71; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 20:135; 52:31.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 33

# The Parties

## *al-Aḥzāb*

A Madinan *sūrah, al-Aḥzāb* is believed to have been revealed immediately after *Sūrah* 3, *Āl ʿImrān*. The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of *the parties* (*al-aḥzāb*), or confederates (an alliance consisting of the Makkan Quraysh and other Arab and Jewish tribes), who fought the Muslims at the Battle of the Trench (5/627), also known as the Battle of the Parties and as the Siege of Madinah.

The strength of the confederate armies is estimated to have been around ten thousand men with six hundred horses and many camels; the Madinans numbered around three thousand. When news of the forces marching upon Madinah reached the Prophet, the outnumbered defenders of Madinah, mainly Muslims, had only six days to prepare. They employed a strategy suggested by the Persian Salmān al-Fārsī and heretofore unknown to the Arabs: they dug a trench on the northern outskirts of Madinah that connected its natural fortifications, large lava tracts to the east and west whose rough, irregular surface impeded cavalry attacks. The earth and rock excavated from the trench were heaped up on the defenders' side, giving them protection from projectiles and providing them with many rocks as ammunition. The trench also made it almost impossible for horses to leap to the other side. Hundreds of high-walled gardens that created serpentine pathways already impeded attack from the south, because any attacking army would be forced to march in long columns that would be open to ambush.

The Muslim forces patrolled the approximately three-and-a-half-mile trench day and night. These defenses limited the fighting to small skirmishes and turned the battle into a test of wits and wills that resulted in a month-long siege. The confederate army made several attempts to cross the trench at night, but repeatedly failed. Hoping to make several attacks at once, the confederates persuaded the Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayẓah, who resided in Madinah, to allow them through their fortifications to attack the city from the south. The Muslims, however, caught wind of this plan and managed to sow dissension between the Quraysh and the Banū Qurayẓah and thus derail their negotiations.

They further weakened the confederacy by offering one of its key tribes, the Banū Ghaṭafān, one-third of the date harvest of Madinah if they left the battlefield. Although terms of the treaty with the Banū Ghaṭafān could not be agreed upon, the fact that a large part of the confederacy had entered into negotiations with the Prophet strained the already tense relations within the confederacy. The dissension between the parties, the sinking of confederate morale, and a sandstorm that lasted several days helped bring the siege to an end.

In the aftermath, the Muslim army laid siege to the Banū Qurayẓah and forced their unconditional surrender. For their act of treason in negotiating with an opposing force and thus breaking the treaty of Madinah, the men of the Banū Qurayẓah were all sentenced to death and the women and children taken captive. The defeat also caused the Makkans to lose much of their prestige and was the last major battle between the Muslims and the Quraysh before the conquest of Makkah in 8/630.

In addition to addressing this major turning point in early Islamic history, *al-Aḥzāb* is significant for highlighting the importance of the Prophet in Islam and the status of his wives. He is said to be *closer to the believers than they are to themselves* (v. 6) and *a beautiful example for those who hope for God and the Last Day, and remember God much* (v. 21). The believers are thus counseled to obey him (vv. 33, 36, 66, 71), especially when he has decreed a matter (v. 36). The *sūrah* further confirms that he is not the biological father of any of the men among the believers (v. 40), but in extolling the virtues of the Prophet's wives and declaring them to be the *mothers* of the believers (v. 6), it confirms his status as a spiritual father to all believers. In addition to affirming that the Prophet is a witness, a warner, a bearer of glad tidings, and one who calls unto God (vv. 45–46), as do many other passages of the Quran, this *sūrah* refers to him as *the Seal of the prophets* (v. 40) and *a luminous lamp* (v. 46).

In one of the most celebrated verses of the Quran, *al-Aḥzāb* declares that God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet and enjoins the believers to do so as well (vv. 56–57). Finally, the Prophet's wives are afforded a status above other women (vv. 31–32), and the family of the Prophet, here referred to as the *People of the House,* are said to be those whom God desires to purify of all defilements (v. 33). Based upon such verses and many *aḥādīth,* love for the Prophet and his family has long been regarded as a foundational component of faith. In the words of the Prophet, "Love God for how He nourishes you from His Blessings. Love me for the love of God. And love the people of my house for the love of me." In this regard, the famous scholar and ascetic Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) is reported to have said, "Whosoever loves one whom God loves only loves God. And whosoever honors one whom God has honored only honors God."

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O Prophet! Reverence God and obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Truly God is Knowing, Wise. (2) And follow that which is revealed unto thee from thy Lord. Truly God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (3) And trust in God; God suffices as a Guardian. (4) God has not placed two hearts in the breast of any man. Nor has He made your wives whom you repudiate with the practice of *ẓihār* your mothers. Nor has He made those whom you claim [as sons] your sons. Those are mere words from your mouths. But God speaks the

1 The Prophet is commanded to not compromise with the disbelievers in a manner that would contravene the revealed law. Throughout the Quran, the Prophet is warned to avoid any such concessions, as in 45:18: *Then We placed thee upon a clear path from the Command; so follow it, and follow not the caprices of those who know not* (cf. 5:48–49; 42:1). The present verse was reportedly revealed with regard to some leaders of the Quraysh who had traveled to Madinah after the Battle of Uḥud (3/625) to see the Prophet. Muhammad had allowed them to come to speak with him with his assurance of protection. They requested that he cease rejecting their idols and recognize the idols' ability to intercede on behalf of those who worship them. Upon hearing this, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said to the Prophet, "Let me kill them, O Messenger of God!" The Prophet replied, "I have given them my assurance of protection," upon which ʿUmar said to them, "Leave with God's Curse and Wrath upon you." The Prophet then ordered ʿUmar to drive them out of Madinah (Ṭs, W). In this context, the command to reverence God, though general, can also be understood as a specific reminder to those who wanted to kill the delegation from the Quraysh that they must honor their agreement to grant them protection (Ṭs).

2 The first verse makes clear who Muslims should not follow, and this verse reiterates what they should follow, namely, the Quran and the revealed laws (Ṭs). In a variant reading, *whatsoever you do* could also be "whatsoever they do" (Ṭs).

3 In this context, that *God suffices as a Guardian* (cf. 4:81, 132, 171; 33:48; see also 17:65) affirms that the Muslims do not need to make alliances that would compromise the principles of the revelation.

4 When viewed in relation to the previous verses, that no one has *two hearts* refers to one's inability to follow two contrary ways: those who believe in the revelation and the Quran, on the one hand, and the people of disbelief and rebellion, on the other (Ṭs); that is, one cannot both believe and disbelieve at the same time (Ṭs). It can also refer to the Quranic position that no person can have any true guardian other than God (R), just as no person can serve two masters. From a Quranic perspective, true reverence for God does not allow one to rely upon the teachings of God in some matters and upon the caprices of people in others, for one would then not *reverence God as He should be reverenced* (3:102). That one cannot have two hearts is also understood as a reminder that a heart preoccupied with one thing is distracted from anything other than that; so a heart preoccupied with this world is separated from the next (Qu), and the heart preoccupied with what is other than God cannot be focused upon God. In this regard al-Tustarī states, "So as long as one is preoccupied with oneself, one will be veiled from God."

When viewed in relation to the remainder of this verse, that no person has two hearts means that just as a man's wife cannot be his mother, because one cannot have two mothers, and that just as someone claimed as a son is not one's true

Truth and guides upon the way. (5) Call them after their fathers. That is more equitable before God. And if you do not know their fathers, then they are your brethren in religion and your clients. There is no blame upon you for being mistaken therein, but only for that which your hearts intend. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (6) The Prophet is closer to the believers than they are to

offspring, because no one can have two fathers, so too no one can have "two hearts" (IK, Z). To be both mother and wife of someone would also require existing in two mutually incompatible states (Z), which a heart cannot do.

*Ẓihār* was a pre-Islamic Arabian practice in which a man could repudiate his wife by declaring, "You are to me as my mother's back." By custom this implied that the husband was now free of all duties toward the wife, but the wife was not free to leave the husband and contract another marriage. For a more extensive discussion of *ẓihār,* see commentary on 58:1–4, which abolished this practice.

*Nor has He made those whom you claim [as sons] your sons* was reportedly revealed to clarify the nature of the Prophet's relationship with Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, a freed slave of the Prophet who remained a part of the Prophet's extended household. Sometime before the beginning of the revelations, Zayd's father had repudiated him when Zayd declared that he preferred to remain with Muhammad as his slave rather than return to his family. Muhammad then declared Zayd to be his son and proclaimed, "He inherits from me, and I inherit from him." When the Prophet married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, the ex-wife of Zayd (see 33:37c), some of his detractors said, "Muhammad has married the wife of his son while forbidding people to do the same!" And so this verse was revealed clarifying that, although the Prophet had claimed Zayd as his son, such bonds were not subject to the same restrictions as bonds of blood (IK, Q, Ṭs, W).

*Those are mere words from your mouths* refers to those who criticized the Prophet, maintaining that Zayd was indeed his son. More generally, it indicates that words from the mouth are nothing more than words, but that words from the heart are true (R). Whereas the words spoken by a human being may arise from the mind, the heart, or the emotions, those spoken by God have only one source (R). *God speaks the Truth* can also be understood as a reference to God bringing all things into existence through Divine Speech, since *His Command when He desires a thing is only to say to it, "Be!" and it is* (36:82; cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68), and *He created the heavens and the earth in truth,* or "through truth" (39:5).

5 Regarding this verse, ᶜAbd Allāh ibn ᶜUmar is reported to have said, "We did not use to call Zayd ibn Ḥārithah by any name other than Zayd ibn Muhammad until the Quran revealed, *Call them after their fathers. That is more equitable before God*" (Q, Ṭs, W). This verse abolished the pre-Islamic custom of adopting others the way the Prophet had adopted Zayd, enjoining Muslims instead to adopt one another as brothers and as clients (Q, Z). *Clients* translates *mawālī* (sing. *mawlā*), which is elsewhere translated *heirs* (4:33; 19:5), and which in other verses refers to God as *Master* (e.g., 2:286; 3:150; 6:62; 8:40), and is etymologically related to *walī* (pl. *awliyāʾ*), meaning "protector" or "protecting friend." Both *mawlā* and *walī* are employed throughout the Quran to refer to a variety of close relations, such as inheritance, kinship, servitude, friendship, and alliance. *There is no blame* upon those who had engaged in the practice of adoption as the Prophet did in Zayd's case, since they did not intend to go against God's Will (Ṭs). Applied more broadly, this verse is understood to mean that people are not taken to account for unintended mistakes, regarding which the Prophet is reported to have said, "God exonerates my community of being mistaken, of forgetting, and of that which they are forced to do" (IK, Z).

6 *Closer to the believers* could also be rendered, "More worthy of the believers," meaning he has more right over them than they have over themselves. In both renderings it refers to the centrality of the Prophet in the lives of Muslims. This applies legislatively, as in 4:65: *By thy Lord, they will not believe until they have made thee the judge*

themselves, and his wives are their mothers. Family relations are closer to one another, according to the Book of God, than are the believers and the emigrants. Nonetheless, you should act rightly toward your friends. That is inscribed in the Book. (7) And [remember] when We made with the prophets

*between them in their disputes, and find no resistance in their souls to what thou hast decreed, and surrender with full submission;* and spiritually, as in a famous *ḥadīth:* "By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, none of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self, his wealth, his children, and mankind all together" (IK). Commenting upon this verse and citing this *ḥadīth,* al-Tustarī writes, "Whoever does not see himself [or his soul] as belonging to the Messenger and does not see the patronage (*wilāyah*) of the Messenger in every situation has in no way tasted the sweetness of his wont (*sunnah*). This is because the Prophet is the closest to the believers" (ST). From the logic of the Quran, this is because the Prophet is *troubled* by what the believers *suffer* and is *solicitous, kind,* and *merciful* toward them (9:128; Aj). It is also understood to mean that his supplication for the believers is more efficacious than their supplication for themselves (Ṭs).

This verse and v. 53 elevate the status of the Prophet's wives. Thereafter they were known as the "mothers of the believers," and marriage to them after the Prophet's death was forbidden. Their position as the "mothers of the believers" implies by extension that, although the Prophet is not the biological or adoptive father of the believers (see 33:40c), from a spiritual perspective he is the father of all believers (Qm), which is also a basis for their brotherhood (Ṭs). That *family relations are closer* means that despite the bonds of brotherhood between Muslims, inheritance was based upon blood relations. When the Prophet first arrived in Madinah, he joined the Emigrants from Makkah and the Helpers from Madinah together in pacts of brotherhood, but the Prophet and the members of his family made the pact with one another. Until the revelation of this verse, it was reportedly the practice to observe these pacts of brotherhood when dividing the property of the deceased. After this verse, that practice was no longer followed (IK, Q, Ṭs), but believers were permitted to make limited bequests to nonrelatives (Ṭs). *That* refers to the abrogation of inheritance based upon religion and emigration (IK, JJ, Ṭs); see also 8:72–75, which is interpreted as having nullified the legal implications of the pacts of brotherhood. Here *the Book* refers to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; JJ, Ṭs) or to the Quran (Ṭs).

Some Shiite commentaries connect this verse to the events at Ghadīr Khumm, which took place during the Prophet's return from Makkah to Madinah after the Farewell Pilgrimage in 10/632, at which time 5:67 is reported to have been revealed. After this revelation, the Prophet called for the people to gather. When they had gathered, he delivered a lengthy sermon during which he said, "I have been called [by God], and I shall answer. I am leaving for you two great things. If you adhere to them both, you will never go astray after me. They are the Book of God and my progeny, that is, the People of my Household. The two shall never separate from each other until they come to me by the Pool [of Paradise]." Toward the end of the sermon, he took the hand of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and said, "O people! Am I not closer to you than yourselves?" To which they responded, "Indeed! O Messenger of God." Then he said, "For whosoever I am his master (*mawlā*), ʿAlī is his master," to which some report he added, "O God, love those who love him, and be hostile to those who are hostile to him." He is also reported to have then said to ʿAlī, "You are to me as Aaron to Moses, save that there is no prophethood after me." For the Shiites, this event is understood to mean that ʿAlī had been designated the successor to the Prophet and to have been given the same rights over the believers that the Prophet had over them, and the reference to *family relations* is understood as a reference to the Shiite Imams who came after him (Qm). According to this interpretation, the reference to the covenant in the next verse then applies to the Shiite Imams as well.

7 *Covenant* (*mīthāq*) can be understood as a reference to the covenant made by all of humanity while they were still in Adam's loins (Mw) or to the pacts (*ʿuhūd*) made by the messengers to convey the message and call to *the upright religion*

their covenant, and with thee, and with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary; We made with them a solemn covenant, (8) that the truthful may be questioned concerning their truthfulness. And for the disbelievers He has prepared a painful punishment. (9) O you who believe! Remember the Blessing of God upon you when the hosts came upon you and We sent against them a

(30:30; Bg, Mw, Q, Z). According to some commentators, this verse pertains to a covenant that is particular to the prophets in which they pledged to worship God, call others to worship God, and confirm one another (Mw, Sh). Some say that this was an additional covenant made after the covenant to which all of humanity bore witness on the Day of the Covenant (see 7:172; IK). These five prophets are said to be mentioned for their exalted status as *the resolute among the messengers* (46:35), who brought the known Divine laws (Bg, Q, Sh) and revealed books (Q). The mention of the five prophets can also be understood to stand for all prophets. With regard to the order in which the prophets are mentioned, the Prophet is reported to have said, "I was the first prophet to be created and the last of them to be sent; so He began with [the mention of] Me before them" (IK, Mw, Q). In this regard, a Companion of the Prophet said, "I asked, 'O Messenger of God, when were you a prophet?' and he replied, 'While Adam was between spirit and body.'" Another *ḥadīth* states, "Truly I was with God, the Seal of Prophets, when Adam was still kneaded in his clay."

The second mention of *covenant* in the verse can be seen as a repetition and reaffirmation of the first; or the first mention can be seen as a covenantal affirmation of God's supreme Sovereignty and the second as pertaining to the particularities of prophethood; see 3:81. According to al-Zajjāj, "[God] made the covenant when they were brought forth from Adam's loins as progeny, then He affirmed the covenant He had made with the prophets by repeating the mention of it and describing it as *a solemn covenant*, meaning 'a pact firm in fulfillment' of that which they had been made to carry and of that which God had enjoined upon them" (Sh).

The present verse could also be understood to mean that God made a covenant with them twice, the first time without "making it solemn" (*taghlīẓ*) and without firmness (*tashdīd*), then a second time making it solemn and firm, as in 3:81 (Sh). Its being *solemn* can also be understood as a reference to the sobering obligation of bearing God's message and conveying Divine laws (Ṭs). Although the covenant is mentioned throughout the Quran (see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions"), a *solemn covenant* is only mentioned here, in 4:21, where it describes the marriage pact, and in 4:154, where it describes the covenant with Moses and the Israelites.

8 God made the covenant with the prophets so that He could ask "the believers who confirm their pact when He makes them testify about themselves regarding their truthfulness toward their pact" (Bg); for had God not enjoined the prophets to deliver revelation, it would be unjust to hold human beings accountable for having failed to uphold the covenant, as they would have received no specific reminders. In this respect, al-Zamakhsharī relates the mention of the covenant in the previous verse to the pretemporal covenant alluded to in 7:172. When they are questioned, the response of the *truthful* will be, *The messengers of our Lord certainly brought the truth* (7:43; IK).

9 The first mention of *hosts* refers to the Quraysh and their allies, who *came upon* Madinah "as parties" at the Battle of the Trench in 5/627; see the introduction to this *sūrah*. *A wind* refers to the sandstorm that came at the end of the siege of Madinah and eventually led many members of the confederacy to quit the battlefield. *Hosts that you saw not* is understood as a reference to angels who untied the tents of the confederacy during the storm, leaving them exposed to the elements (Ṭ). In an alternate reading, the last sentence could also be understood to mean, "God sees whatsoever they do," referring to the disbelievers (Ṭs).

wind and hosts that you saw not—and God sees whatsoever you do— (10) when they came upon you from above you and below you, and when eyes swerved and hearts reached into throats, and you thought many things regarding God. (11) It was there that the believers were tried and shaken in a manner most severe. (12) And when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease said, "God and His Messenger promised us naught but delusion." (13) And when a group among them said, "O people of Yathrib! There is no stand for you; so turn back." And a group among them sought permission from the Prophet, saying, "Truly our houses are exposed," though they were not exposed. They wanted naught but to flee. (14) Had they been entered upon from the sides of the city,

10 *From above you and below you* (cf. 5:66; 6:65; 29:55) is an idiomatic expression meaning to be enveloped on all sides. In this context it refers to the Muslims being surrounded by the confederate forces on all sides (JJ). *From above* could thus be seen as a reference to the tribes that came upon Madinah from the east, those of Qurayẓah, Naḍīr, and Ghaṭafān. *Below you* would then refer to those who came from the west, meaning the Quraysh and the smaller tribes that followed them (Ṭs). *Eyes swerved* to gaze upon the enemy, and *hearts reached into throats* due to the intensity of their fear (IK, JJ). During the siege of Madinah, in which any severe lapse could have led to the downfall of Madinah, some had misgivings, others thought they would receive Divine assistance, and others despaired (JJ). As the situation worsened, a Companion of the Prophet is reported to have asked, "O Messenger of God, is there anything we should say, for our hearts have reached our throats?" He replied, "Yes. Say, 'O God, cover our weaknesses and calm our fears'" (IK, Ṭs). The different groups involved *thought many things regarding God:* the believers were certain that God's Help would come and they would be victorious; the hypocrites believed that the Prophet and his followers would be eliminated; and others despaired of the situation (IJ, IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). *Thought many things regarding God* could also refer only to those whose hearts were weak and thus doubted God or to the general state of mind in which those who lack courage might find themselves (Ṭs).

11 The nearly month-long siege the Muslims endured was a test through which their faith and patience became manifest (Ṭs), and the true believers were clearly distinguished from the hypocrites (IJ, Ṭ). For the spiritual benefit of trials, see commentary on 29:2–3.

12 *Those in whose hearts is a disease* (2:8–11; 5:52; 24:47–50; 33:60; 47:20, 29; 74:31) is usually employed to describe the hypocrites and those with impure intentions (see v. 32). But its use here for a separate group in addition to the hypocrites may indicate that it refers to those believers whose convictions were weak because they still harbored some doubt within their souls (Ṭs).

13 *A group among them* refers to the hypocrites, here identified by most as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy and those with him. *Yathrib* was the name of Madinah before Islam; so their call is to all the inhabitants of Madinah. *There is no stand for you* is meant to communicate to the Madinans that there is no way for them to oppose the forces now gathered against them (JJ) or that their particular strategy of manning the trench leaves them unduly exposed to attack (IJ). *Turn back* enjoins them to retreat to their houses in the city rather than man the trench on its outskirts. *A group* sought to leave the hardships of maintaining watch over the trench by claiming that their houses were in need of defense (IJ, JJ). Before the siege, this same group had argued that it was better to fight the confederates from within the city.

14 Had the confederates entered the city and exhorted the hypocrites to revert to polytheism,

then were exhorted to treachery, they would have committed it and would not have hesitated, save a little, (15) though previously they had made a pact with God that they would not turn their backs; and the pact with God is called to account. (16) Say, "Fleeing will not benefit you if you flee from death or killing, for you will not be granted enjoyment, save a little." (17) Say, "Who is it who will protect you from God if He desire for you evil or desire for you mercy?" They will find no protector or helper for themselves apart from God. (18) Surely God knows those among you who hinder and those who say unto their brethren, "Come hither unto us"; yet they come not to the battle, save a little, (19) greedy toward you. But when fear comes, thou seest them looking at thee with their

they would have done so with little hesitation (IJ, Ṭs) and would have fought against the Muslims (Z). Alternately, *and would not have hesitated, save a little* could mean "and would not have remained in it, save a little"; that is, had they reverted and fought against the Muslims, they would not have remained in Madinah very long, because God would have destroyed them (Z) or the believers would have expelled them soon thereafter (R).

15 This verse makes clear the corruption of the hypocrites (R). They had previously pledged to fight with the Prophet, aiding him in defending Madinah, just as he had pledged to aid in their defense. Some say that this verse refers to the pledge taken with the Prophet at ʿAqabah before the emigration (Ṭs, Z). Others say that it refers to those who were absent from the Battle of Badr, but vowed to fight in the future if called upon to do so (Ṭ, Z). Another opinion names the tribe of Banū Ḥārithah, who had abandoned the Muslim armies at the Battle of Uḥud, leading to their rout that day; they vowed that they would never do the same, but now wavered again in the face of the enemy (Ṭ). That *the pact with God is called to account* (cf. 17:34) means that one is bound to it until it has been fulfilled (Z) and that one will be held accountable for it in the Hereafter (Ṭs).

16 *Fleeing* will benefit the hypocrites in neither a metaphysical sense, because they cannot escape what is destined to befall them, whether natural death or being slain (Z), nor an earthly sense, because they would not be able to escape the confederate army that would deal with them after having dealt with the other forces. *You will not be granted enjoyment, save a little* then means that there will only be a short respite before they too would be overwhelmed by the Quraysh and the confederates. Alternately, it could mean that they might only have comfort for the remainder of life in this world (JJ), thus indicating that they might receive some comfort during the time that God has decreed for them, but no reward in the Hereafter (Ṭ).

17 That no one can find any protector or helper apart from God is a recurrent Quranic theme (cf., e.g., 2:107; 4:123, 173; 9:74, 116; 11:113; 29:22; 33:65; 42:8, 31), as from a Quranic perspective *God suffices as a Protector, and God suffices as a Helper* (4:45); see 29:22c. In relation to the Battle of the Trench, this verse also evokes 3:28: *Let not the believers take the disbelievers as protectors apart from the believers* (cf. 4:144; 5:55–57; 9:71).

18–19 *Those among you who hinder* refers to the hypocrites who sought to dissuade others from manning the defenses with the Prophet and the believers (R, Ṭs). *They come not to the battle, save a little* means that they engage in the battle only for outward show and to maintain their reputations (JJ, Ṭs), or because they are *greedy toward you,* meaning greedy to attain the material spoils of victory (Ṭ). *Greedy toward you* could also mean "miserly toward you," referring to their refusal to "spend in the way of God" (Ṭ, Ṭs) and to the fact that they would not fight on the side of the Muslims (Ṭs). But when they fear defeat, they look to the Prophet as if they were in the throes of death, seeking shelter and aid from him (Ṭ). Yet afterwards they turn their focus again to the objects of

eyes rolling like one whom death overwhelms. Then when fear subsides, they assail thee with their sharp tongues, greedy for good things. Such as these have not believed; so God made their deeds come to naught, and that is easy for God. (20) They suppose that the parties have not withdrawn, and if the parties were to come, they would wish they were in the desert among the Bedouin, seeking news of you. And were they among you, they would not fight, save a little. (21) Indeed, you have in the Messenger of God a beautiful example for those who hope for God and the Last Day, and remember God much. (22) When the believers saw the parties, they said, "This is what God and His Messenger promised; God and His Messenger spoke true." And it increased them in naught but faith and

this world. Then they assail the Prophet and the believers, claiming it was they themselves who had fought and through whose help the enemy had been defeated (R) and that the Prophet has no more right to the spoils than do they (Ṭs), because they are *greedy for good things,* that is, for the spoils of war (R, Ṭ). They *have not believed;* so although they may obtain some of the spoils of victory in this life, in the absence of sincere belief, their deeds will provide no reward in the next life. Regarding the broader Quranic discussion of deeds coming to naught, see 2:217; 5:5, 53; 7:147; 9:17; 11:16; 18:105; 33:19; 47:9, 28, 32; 3:22c; 6:88c; 39:65c.

20 That the hypocrites think that the parties had *not withdrawn* implies the depth of their fear and cowardice (Z), for they fear an enemy that is no longer there. *If the parties were to come* a second time (Ṭs, Z), the hypocrites would prefer to be with the tribes in the desert awaiting news of the Muslims' defeat (Ṭ). Similar to v. 18, that *they would not fight, save a little* indicates that they would only do so halfheartedly, out of concern for maintaining their reputations (Ṭs, Z), rather than out of a sincere desire to aid the Prophet and his followers or to strive in the way of God.

21 This is among a number of verses that establish the importance of obeying the Prophet and following his example, even in matters not addressed directly by the Quran (see also 3:31; 4:59, 83; 24:63; 33:21). In the immediate context, the *beautiful example* that is found in the Prophet refers to being steadfast in combat and holding one's ground (JJ), but this verse is also among the most important regarding the position of the Prophet in Islam in general. Although his function as God's messenger is unique and inimitable, the Prophet's words and actions are considered to provide the archetype of a life lived in full submission to God. Regarding the Prophet's example, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "He was the most generous of people, the most truthful of the people in speech, the gentlest of them in temperament, and the noblest of them in social affability. If someone saw him unexpectedly, he was awestruck by him, and if someone associated with him knowingly, he loved him.... I have never seen the like of him, either before him or after him." The example provided by the Prophet is for those who look forward to reward from God (Q, Ṭs) or to the meeting with God (Q), thus for those who believe in the Resurrection (Q). In this context, *and remember God much* can be seen as a reference to the heart of the prophetic example, since to live in accord with the prophetic model is to live in constant remembrance of God. For more on the nature of the Prophet, see commentary on 68:4, which addresses the Prophet saying, *Truly thou art of an exalted character.*

22 In contrast to the hypocrites, when the disbelievers saw the confederate troops amassed on the other side of the trench, they saw that it was a manifestation of God's Promise, as in 2:155: *And We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits* (cf. 2:214; 29:2). Whereas the hypocrisy of the hypocrites became manifest when they wavered, as in vv. 12–18, the faith of the believers was strengthened.

submission. (23) Among the believers are men who have been true to that which they pledged unto God. Among them are those who have fulfilled their vow, and among them are those who wait, and they have not changed in the least, (24) that God may recompense the truthful for their truthfulness and punish the hypocrites if He will, or relent unto them. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (25) And God turned back those who disbelieved in their rage; they attained no good. God sufficed the believers in battle; and God is Strong, Mighty. (26) He brought the People of the Book who supported them down from their strongholds and cast terror into their hearts—some you slew and some you took captive. (27) And He bequeathed unto you their land, their homes, their property,

23 *True to that which they pledged* refers to those who remained alongside the Prophet in battle (JJ) and more broadly to those who complete their religious commitments in full (cf. 2:40; 3:76; 5:1; 13:20; 16:91). Those who have *fulfilled their vow* refers to those who died or were killed while remaining steadfast (JJ), which many take as a reference to those killed at the Battle of Uḥud (Ṭs), such as the Prophet's uncle Ḥamzah ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, regarding whom some say this verse was revealed (Ṭs, Ṭū). *Those who wait* refers to those who remain true to their vow or those who wait patiently for the help that God has promised and do not waiver or become *changed in the least* (JJ), as did the hypocrites (IK, Ṭs).

Some relate this verse specifically to the death of Anas ibn al-Naḍr, who had been absent from the Battle of Badr and said, "O Messenger of God! I was absent from the first battle you fought against the idolaters. By God, if God affords me the opportunity to fight the pagans, no doubt God will see how I shall fight." Then at the Battle of Uḥud, when the Muslims turned their backs and fled, he said, "O God! I apologize to Thee for what these [Muslims] have done, and I denounce what these [idolaters] have done." While advancing toward the enemy, he met Saʿd ibn Muʿādh and said "O Saʿd! By the Lord of al-Naḍr, the Garden! I smell its aroma coming from before [Mount] Uḥud." Later Saʿd said regarding Anas, "O Messenger of God! I cannot achieve or do what he did. We found more than eighty wounds by swords and arrows on his body" (IK, Q, W).

24 Within the context of this *sūrah,* this verse can been seen as a continuation of v. 11; that is, *It was there that the believers were tried and shaken in a manner most severe . . . that God may recompense the truthful for their truthfulness.* In this regard, Ibn Kathīr glosses this verse with a reference to 47:31: *And We shall test you until We know those among you who strive and those who are patient, and We shall test your proclamations.* The *truthful* are then recompensed for having remained true to their covenant (IK, Ṭs).

25 In this context, *those who disbelieved* refers to the confederate troops that gathered outside of Madinah at the Battle of the Trench (JJ). *They attained no good* in that their siege of Madinah was unsuccessful (JJ). *God sufficed the believers in battle* by sending upon the disbelievers a violent sandstorm and a host of angels who untied their tents. This demoralized the confederates, and they disbanded, thus sparing the Muslims from the need to fight. This is also understood as a reference to a major turning point in the relations between the Muslims and the Quraysh, as the Battle of the Trench was the last occasion when the Quraysh sought to launch an assault against Muhammad and his followers. Thus the Prophet is reported to have said, "Now we will attack them, and they will not attack us" (IK).

26–27 In this context, *the People of the Book* refers to the Banū Qurayẓah, the last remaining Jewish tribe in Madinah; the others, Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qaynuqāʿ, had previously been exiled from Madinah for breaking their treaty with the

and a land you had not trodden. And God is Powerful over all things. (28) O Prophet! Say unto thy wives, "If you desire the life of this world and its ornament, then come! I shall provide for you and release you in a fair manner. (29) But if you desire God and His Messenger and the Abode of the Hereafter, then truly God has prepared a great reward for the virtuous among you." (30) O wives of the Prophet! Whosoever among you commits a flagrant indecency, her

Prophet and the Muslims. (Regarding the expulsion of Banū Naḍīr, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 59). After the confederate troops had abandoned the siege of Madinah, the Muslims laid siege to the tribe of Banū Qurayẓah for having plotted against the Muslims and having actively supported the efforts of the Quraysh and their allies. Rather than fighting, the Banū Qurayẓah retreated to their strongholds, and the Muslims surrounded them for twenty-five days (IK). Eventually both sides agreed to let the matter of the tribe's treason be decided by Sa$^{c}$d ibn Mu$^{c}$ādh, a prominent Madinan Companion and the leader of the Aws tribe, who had been a close ally of the Banū Qurayẓah. Despite the pleas of many in his tribe, Ibn Mu$^{c}$ādh decreed, "My judgment is that their fighters should be killed and their children and wealth should be seized" (IK). The Prophet is said to have approved of Ibn Mu$^{c}$ādh's judgment, saying, "You have judged in accord with the judgment of the Sovereign" (IK). *Some you slew* refers to the adult males who were offered the opportunity to renounce the treason of their tribe and accept Islam or be executed. A few accepted Islam, but the majority (between four and nine hundred, depending upon the account) did not do so and were executed. *Some you took captive* then refers to the women and children, who were not slain. *He bequeathed unto you their land, their homes, their property* then sanctions the Muslims' taking the possessions of the Banū Qurayẓah as booty; *a land you had not trodden* is understood as an allusion to the eventual conquest of Khaybar in 629 (IK, JJ), some of whose inhabitants had been among the confederate forces. Others say it refers to the lands of the Persian and Byzantine empires, or to all three (IK).

28–29 These verses shift the discussion from the Battle of the Trench to the Prophet's marital affairs. The Prophet's wives, seeing the spoils of war that the Muslims had acquired, reportedly asked the Prophet for more of the "ornaments of this world." The Prophet is thus told to offer them the option of divorce or remaining married to him. *I shall provide for you* means, "I will pay you the appropriate compensation for divorce," and *release you in a fair manner* means, "I will not coerce you" (JJ), and that his wives would then be free to remarry. When the Prophet offered this choice to his wives, they each chose to remain with him (IK). The juxtaposition between the two choices that the Prophet is here told to offer his wives is similar to the one in 3:145: *Whosoever desires the reward of this world, We shall give him of it; and whosoever desires the reward of the Hereafter, We shall give him of it.* Throughout the Quran it is emphasized that the *Abode of the Hereafter* is better than the abode of this world (see 16:30, 41; 28:60, 79–80; 29:64; 40:39; 42:36; 43:35; 57:20–21; 87:16–17; 93:4).

30 Inasmuch as the Prophet's wives chose to remain with him, this verse now clarifies that the privilege pertaining to their status carries with it responsibilities. In this context, *indecency* is understood to mean disobedience toward the Prophet (Q, Z) or "discord and animosity" (*nushūz;* IK, Z). *Indecency* (*fāḥishah*) usually implies more severe transgressions, such as adultery (see 3:135–36c; 4:15c), and is interpreted by some as having that same meaning in this context (Bḍ). But here the use of *fāḥishah* may also be meant to express the gravity of the offense in bringing discord into the household of the Prophet. *Her punishment will be doubled* means either that she will be punished in this life and in the Hereafter or that her punishment will be twice the punishment for other women (IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ), because, in view of their greater blessings and place of honor, an offense

punishment will be doubled; and that is easy for God. (31) And whosoever among you is devoutly obedient to God and His Messenger and works righteousness, We shall give her her reward twice over, and We have prepared for her a generous provision. (32) O wives of the Prophet! You are not like other women. If you are reverent, then be not overly soft in speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease be moved to desire; and speak in an honorable way. (33) Abide in your homes and flaunt not your charms as they did flaunt them in the prior Age of Ignorance. Perform the prayer, give the alms, and obey God and His

committed by the Prophet's wives would be greater than one committed by other women (Q, Z).

31 To be *devoutly obedient* translates the verb *yaqnut,* which indicates spiritual and religious obedience rather than obedience (*ṭāʿah*) in the general sense (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 4:34; 16:120; 30:26; 33:35; 39:9; 66:12) and also conveys a sense of constancy and serenity. Nonetheless, most commentators interpret *devoutly obedient* here as obedience (*ṭāʿah*) generally (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z). *Her reward twice over* means that their reward is twice that of others (JJ, Q, Ṭ). *A generous provision* refers to a life of ease in Paradise (Ṭ).

32 Previous verses (vv. 28–31) clarified some aspects of the Prophet's relations with his wives and their special status; this verse follows upon v. 6 in clarifying the relationship between the Prophet's wives and the Muslim community. Although the Prophet's wives are the "mothers of the believers" (see 33:6c), they are not to have any unduly familiar interactions with the men of the community. This was ordered to avoid any misunderstandings that could arise. *Be not overly soft in speech,* though addressed to the wives of the Prophet, is also understood as counsel for all Muslim women; they should avoid the soft, sweet, and flirtatious affectations employed by women in the pre-Islamic period (Q), as this can give rise to sexual desire (Ṭ). More broadly, the Quran enjoins speaking *in an honorable* (or *goodly*) *way* to others (2:83, 235; 4:5, 8) as well as speaking *justly* (4:9; 33:70).

33 As with the previous verse, although the injunction is directed to the Prophet's wives, this verse is understood by some as an injunction pertaining to all Muslim women (IK, Q), as in 24:31: *And tell the believing women to lower their eyes and to guard their private parts, and to not display their adornment except that which is visible thereof. And let them draw their kerchiefs over their breasts, and not display their adornment.*

*Abide* translates *qarna,* which derives from either *waqara* or *qarara* (R, Ṭ, Z), both of which mean "to stay" or "to settle," but carry different implications. The latter derivation indicates that one should remain in one's residence, and viewed in this manner, it has led to strident puritanical interpretations that severely limit the freedom of women. *Waqara,* however, conveys a sense of dignity and sobriety. *Abide in your homes* can thus be understood as counsel to be people of sobriety and tranquility (Ṭ). The phrase is understood to mean that the Prophet's wives should not leave the home unnecessarily (IJ, IK), an injunction that is then interpreted by some as applying to all women (Q). The "flaunting of charms" renders *tabarruj,* which is understood to mean "walking flirtatiously" (IJ, IK, Ṭ), exposing one's ornaments (IJ, Ṭ), or exposing one's ornaments that arouse the desire of men (IJ, Sh); see 24:31c.

This is one of four verses counseling Muslims to abandon the ways of pre-Islamic Arabia, referred to as the *Age of Ignorance* (*jāhiliyyah;* 3:154; 5:50; 48:26), or the age of impetuous and destructive behavior; for the *zealotry* of this period, see 48:26c. In this context, *the prior Age of Ignorance* may mean the period between the prophets Adam and Noah or Idrīs and Noah, the time in which Abraham lived, or the period between Jesus and Muhammad (IJ, Ṭ, Z). To *obey God and His Messenger* (8:1, 20, 46; 58:13; cf. 3:32; 4:59; 5:92; 24:54; 47:33; 64:12; see also 3:132) is held to be a virtue of the believers (see also 5:80; 24:56; 49:14), since from a Quranic perspective *whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God* (4:80; see also 24:56; 49:14c).

Messenger. God only desires to remove defilement from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely. (34) And remember that which is recited unto you in your homes from among the signs of Wisdom and God. Truly God is Subtle, Aware. (35) For submitting men and submitting women, believing

According to some commentators, *People of the House* refers to the wives of the Prophet (IK, JJ, Ṭ, W, Z). Other commentators understand it as a reference to the Prophet's blood relations, and still others say that it refers to both (Bḍ, Q). In this regard, in the famous "*Ḥadīth* of the Cloak," the Prophet's wife Umm Salamah is reported to have said that the Prophet was in her house when he said to his daughter Fāṭimah, "Call for me thine husband and thy sons!" Then ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, came in and sat down to eat while the Prophet was sitting on his bed on top of a cloak. He grabbed the extension of the cloak and covered them with it. Then he raised his hands toward Heaven and said, "O God, these are the people of my house and my closest family members; remove defilement from them and purify them completely." Umm Salamah reported that when she asked, "And I am with thee, O Messenger of God?" he answered, "Thou shalt obtain good. Thou shalt obtain good" (IK, Sy, Ṭb, W; similar versions of this *ḥadīth* can be found in Bḍ, Bg, and Qm, among others). Based upon this event, some say *People of the House* applies only to those who descended from the Prophet through Fāṭimah and ᶜAlī. But others say that it also applies to his cousins, such as the families of ᶜAbbās and Jaᶜfar ibn Abī Ṭālib, or to those among them who were close to the Prophet (Ṭb). The Shiite commentator al-Qummī argues that the use of the second-person plural masculine pronoun in *from you* means that this verse applies to blood relations and not the Prophet's wives. Such a position would hold when arguing against limiting the term "People of the House" to the wives of the Prophet, but it does not preclude them from being among the People of the House.

*Defilement* indicates the evil deeds and false beliefs that arise from the sickness of the heart, as in 9:125: *As for those in whose hearts is a sickness, it added defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are disbelievers.* God's desire to purify the People of the House completely of all defilement is thus understood as a reference to God's wanting to remove any incorrect action or belief from them and to provide them with *ᶜiṣmah,* an innate protection against any and all false beliefs or evil deeds (Ṭb). *ᶜIṣmah* can be understood as a God-given form of knowledge or consciousness that is completely different from other types of knowledge in that it can never be overpowered by any other faculty; rather, it overpowers all other faculties and uses them according to its own wisdom. In this way, one who is endowed with *ᶜiṣmah* is completely protected from going astray and committing sins (Ṭb).

Regarding the importance of the *People of the House,* the Prophet is reported to have said to his followers, "I am leaving behind two things with you, the first of which is the Book of God, in which is guidance and light; so seize the Book of God and hold fast to it, and [the second] the People of my House. Heed God with regard to the members of my family. Heed God with regard to the members of my family. Heed God with regard to the members of my family" (IK). The Prophet is also reported to have said regarding those who did not exhibit love for his family members, "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, faith will never enter a person's heart until he loves them for the sake of God and for the fact that they are my kin." Furthermore, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The likeness of the People of my House is the ship of Noah: whosoever boards it is saved and whosoever abandons it is drowned."

34 The wives of the Prophet are enjoined to remember their special blessings in living in houses in which the verses of the Quran were revealed (Ṭ, Z). *The signs of . . . God* refers to the verses of the Quran, while *Wisdom* refers to the wont, or *sunnah,* of the Prophet (JJ, R, Sy, Ṭ). According to some, this verse is meant to encourage the Prophet's wives to memorize the Quran and his sayings (Ṭs). For the combination of the Divine Names the Subtle and the Aware, see 67:14c.

35 Regarding the revelation of this verse, it is reported that when Asmāᵓ bint ᶜUmays returned

men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, men who fast and women who fast, men who guard their private parts and women who guard [their private parts], men who remember God often and women who remember [God often], God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. (36) And it is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when God and His Messenger have decreed a matter, to have a choice regarding the matter. Whosoever disobeys God and His Messenger has strayed into manifest error. (37) And [remember] when thou saidst unto him whom God has blessed and whom thou hast blessed, "Retain your wife for yourself and reverence God," thou wast hiding in thyself that

with her husband, Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib, from Abyssinia, she went to the wives of the Prophet and asked, "Has anything from the Quran been revealed about us [women]?" When they answered that nothing had been revealed about them, she went to the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God, women are disappointed and at a loss!" He asked, "How is that?" She replied, "They are not mentioned [in the Quran] in goodness as are the men," after which this verse was revealed (Ṭs, W). Others say that it was revealed after Umm ʿUmārah al-Anṣāriyyah came to the Prophet and said, "I do not see but that everything is about men, and I do not find the women mentioned with regard to anything." According to another account, Umm Salamah said to the Prophet, "Why is it that we are not mentioned in the Quran as are the men?" Then later that day she heard him reciting this verse in the mosque (IK, Ṭ). This verse may also be related to 4:32 and 3:195, both of which explicitly confirm an otherworldly reward—without differentiation—for both men and women who uphold the moral requirements of Islam; see 4:32c.

Regarding men and women *who remember God often,* al-Tustarī writes, "One who observes true remembrance (*al-dhākir ʿala'l-ḥaqīqah*) is one who is aware that God witnesses him. He perceives Him with his heart as being close to him, and therefore feels shame before Him. Then he gives Him priority over himself and over everything else in every situation."

36 The meaning of this verse is general, indicating that one cannot contravene the Divine Law. In this way, it reiterates the Quranic injunction to *obey God and obey the Messenger* (3:32; 4:59; 5:92; 24:54; 64:12; see also 3:132; 4:80; 7:156–57; 8:1, 20, 46; 33:33; 49:14; 58:13); see 3:32c; 4:59c. The revelation of this verse was reportedly connected to one of two historical events. In the first account, it is said to refer to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, who at first declined the Prophet's recommendation that she marry Zayd ibn Ḥārithah (IJ, IK, Ṭ, Z), but then accepted after the revelation of this verse (IK, Ṭ). In the second account, it is said to refer to Umm Kulthūm, who offered herself in marriage to the Prophet, but the Prophet suggested she marry Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, to which both she and her brother objected (IJ, IK, Ṭ, Z). For *manifest error,* see 36:24c.

37 *Him whom God has blessed and whom thou hast blessed* refers to Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, who was blessed by God when He guided him to Islam and by the Prophet when he set him free (JJ). When Zayd told the Prophet that his wife, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, wished to divorce him, the Prophet replied, *Retain your wife for yourself and reverence God* (IJ, IK, Q), in order to dispel the appearance that he was in favor of the divorce so that he himself could marry Zaynab. Apparently he was *hiding* what was in his soul, which could have been his love for Zaynab, or that God had willed Zaynab to be his wife, or that he preferred that she divorce

which God was to disclose; and thou didst fear the people, though God has more right to be feared by thee. Then when Zayd relinquished his claim upon her, We wed her to thee, so that there should be no restriction for the believers in respect to the wives of their adopted sons when the latter have relinquished their claims upon them. And the Command of God shall be fulfilled. (38) There is no restriction for the Prophet in what God has ordained for him. [That is] the wont of God with those who passed away before—and God's Command is a decree determined, (39) those who convey God's messages and fear Him, and fear none but God. And God suffices as a Reckoner. (40) Muhammad is not the

Zayd, or that he would marry Zaynab, were Zayd to divorce her (IJ). That the Prophet "feared the people" refers to his worrying that people would misunderstand and say, "He commands a man to divorce his wife and then marries her" (IJ, Q), or, "He has married his son's wife," since at that time Zayd was still known by his adopted name, Zayd ibn Muhammad (JJ). The Prophet is thus reminded that *God has more right to be feared* than do people. Given the rebuke that is here delivered to the Prophet, it is said that no verse was more severe with him and that were the Prophet to have hidden any verse of the revelation, it would have been this verse (IJ, Q).

Despite the Prophet's advice to remain married, Zayd divorced Zaynab. Then God reportedly announced to the Prophet that Zaynab was now his wife. Thus Zaynab is said to have boasted to the Prophet's other wives, "You were given in marriage by your family, but I was given in marriage by God from above the seven heavens" (Q).

38–39 As God is reported to have commanded the Prophet to marry Zaynab, he is here reminded that he cannot be blamed for following anything that God *has ordained for him* (IK, JJ), even though others may deride him for it. That is *the wont of God* (cf. 3:137; 33:62; 35:43; 40:85; 48:23) with the prophets who came before him (IK, JJ, Q). These verses also refer to God having allowed the Prophet to now take more than four wives, which was *the wont of God* with previous prophets such as David and Solomon (Q). The prophets *fear none but God*, as their function is to implement His Law rather than follow human laws. In this vein, 49:7 states, *Know that the Messenger of God is among you. Were he to obey you in many matters, you would suffer.* In the context of this passage, the idea that *God suffices as a Reckoner* (cf. 4:6) thus alludes to the belief that in the end the only account with which one must reckon is the one kept by God.

40 *Muhammad is not the father of any man among you* refers to the Prophet's relationship with Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, whom the Prophet had claimed as his son after Zayd's father disowned him and whom others had referred to thereafter as the "Son of Muhammad" before the revelation of this *sūrah;* see 33:5c. Although this proclamation clarifies the Prophet's biological relationship with members of his community and the rights and restrictions pertaining thereto, it is also understood as opening onto the spiritual reality of the Prophet as the father of all true believers (Aj, Ṭs); see 33:6c. That the Prophet is *the Seal of the prophets* is understood to mean that he is the last Prophet sent to humanity. The Prophet is reported to have said, "No prophethood shall remain after me, save for true visions" (IK, Q), and "Messengerhood and prophethood have ceased. There will be no messenger or prophet after me" (IK). The most frequently cited *ḥadīth* pertaining to his place as the *Seal of the prophets* states, "My likeness among the prophets before me is that of a man who has built a house, completed it, and beautified it, yet left empty a place for a brick. Then the people come to the house, are amazed by it, and say, 'If only you were to place this brick, your house would be complete!' I am this brick" (IK, Q). According to the Prophet, being *the Seal of the prophets* is one of six qualities

father of any man among you; rather, he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the prophets. And God is Knower of all things. (41) O you who believe! Remember God with frequent remembrance, (42) and glorify Him morning and evening. (43) He it is Who blesses you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out of darkness into light. And He is Merciful unto the believers. (44) Their greeting on the day they meet Him will be "Peace." And He has prepared for

that distinguish him from other prophets: "I have been favored above the prophets in six things: I have been endowed with consummate succinctness of speech; I have been made triumphant through dread; war booty has been made lawful for me; the whole earth has been made a place of worship for me and a means of purification; I have been sent to all created beings; and the succession of prophets has been completed in me" (IK).

41 This verse instructs one to not forget God ever, at any moment (Aj), as when the Prophet counseled a man, "Let thy tongue be always moist with the remembrance of God," and when he is reported to have said, "Remember God much, till they call [you] mad" (Aj). Regarding this verse, Ibn ᶜAbbās is reported to have said, "God did not enjoin any duty upon His servants without setting known limits and accepting the excuses of those who have a valid reason, except for remembrance, for God has not set any limits for it, and no one has any excuse for not remembering God, unless he is oppressed and forced to neglect it" (IK). It is said that remembering God frequently arises from the sincerity of the heart, while remembering God little arises from hypocrisy, like the remembrance that is only upon the tongue (Q). Thus Ibn ᶜAjībah says that what is meant by this verse is remembrance of the heart, as that is the one type of remembrance that does not cease. The remembrance and invocation of God (*dhikr Allāh*) is considered the quintessential prayer and thus to be at the core of every act of worship. In this vein, it is reported that when the Prophet was asked, "Which of those who strive has the greatest reward?" he responded, "Those who remember God most." When asked, "Which of the righteous has the greatest reward?" he replied, "Those who remember God most." Then when asked the same about prayer, alms (*zakāh*), pilgrimage, and charity, he said, regarding each, "Those who remember God most." Then Abū Bakr said to ᶜUmar, "Those who remember have acquired every good," to which the Prophet replied, "Indeed" (Aj). For more on the remembrance of God, see 13:28c; 29:45c.

42 *Glorify Him morning and evening* (cf. 6:52; 18:28; 19:11; 24:36; 48:9; 76:25) can be understood as an injunction to glorify God at all times. It is also interpreted as a reference to the morning prayer and the afternoon prayer, or to the five daily prayers, or to performing supererogatory devotions such as night vigil (R, Ṭ); cf. 30:17–18. Some relate this verse specifically to acts of prayer and invocation performed between the morning prayer and sunrise, and then between the sunset prayer and the night prayer.

43 God has mercy upon the believers who remember God much and perform the prayers enjoined in the previous verses, and His angels watch over them and make supplications for them, thus bringing them *out of darkness into light* (2:257; 5:16; 14:1, 5; 57:9; 65:11; see also Isaiah 42:16: "I will turn the darkness before them into light," and 1 Peter 2:9), which is understood to mean bringing them from being astray to being guided (Ṭ), from disbelief to belief (Aj, JJ), from disobedience to obedience (Aj), or from the darkness of heedlessness to the light of awareness (Aj). For a fuller discussion of the Quranic symbolism of light, see 6:1c; 24:35c.

44 The greeting of "Peace" may be from God, the angels (Aj), the other people of Paradise (Ṭ), or perhaps all of them. This is one of several verses that speak of the greeting of "Peace" that awaits believers in the Hereafter, as in 16:32: *Those whom the angels take while they are in a state of goodness. They will say, "Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden for that which you used to do"* (see also 7:46; 10:10; 13:23–24; 14:23; 19:62; 25:75; 36:58c; 39:73; 56:25–26).

them a generous reward. (45) O Prophet! Truly We have sent thee as a witness, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner, (46) as one who calls unto God by His Leave, and as a luminous lamp. (47) Give glad tidings to the believers that there will be for them a great bounty from God. (48) Obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites; disregard their affront, and trust in God. God suffices as a Guardian. (49) O you who believe! If you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them, there shall be no waiting period for you to reckon against them. But provide for them and release them in a fair manner. (50) O Prophet! We have made lawful for thee thy wives to whom thou hast given their

45 Cf. 48:8. The Prophet is a witness to the Oneness of God and for the people, as in 2:143: *Thus did We make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you* (cf. 4:41; IK), or against the disbelievers and for the believers in the Hereafter, as in 73:15: *We have indeed sent you a messenger as a witness concerning you, just as We sent unto Pharaoh a messenger.* This is one of several passages that refer to the Prophet as *a bearer of glad tidings* and as *a warner* (5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 25:56; 34:28; 35:24; 48:8); in other verses these functions are also attributed to all prophets (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56).

46–47 That the Prophet was sent *as a luminous lamp* refers foremost to his function as a spiritual guide. According to many reports this inner reality was also manifest in his outward physical nature and countenance. When asked to describe the Prophet, one of his Companions replied, "My son, had you seen him, you would have seen the shining sun." The Prophet's stepson is also reported to have said, "He was dignified and awe-inspiring, and radiant like the radiance of the moon on the night when it is full." In this same vein, the Prophet's servant Anas ibn Mālik is reported to have said, "On the day when the Messenger of God entered Madinah, everything in it was illuminated. Then, on the day when he died, everything in it became dark. And we had barely dusted off our hands after burying him when our hearts changed."

48 The Prophet is enjoined to not follow the disbelievers' and hypocrites' caprice and thus not assent to what contravenes the revelation. Similarly, the believers are told, *And know that the Messenger of God is among you. Were he to obey you in many matters, you would suffer* (49:7). Here, *disregard their affront* means not to retaliate against them unless a command to do so is issued (JJ) and to bear their insults patiently (Ṭ). In this regard, the Prophet is also told to *bear patiently that which they say* (20:130; 38:17; 50:39; 73:10). That *God suffices as a Guardian* (4:81, 132, 171; 33:3; see also 17:65) means that one should entrust all of one's affairs to Him (Ṭ).

49 *Before you have touched them* refers to the consummation of marriage; see also 2:236c. This verse clarifies that women do not need to observe any waiting period before contracting another marriage, if the previous marriage had not been consummated (IK, Q). Nonetheless, some jurists maintain that a woman must still observe the waiting period of four months and ten days, if the woman's husband dies before the consummation of the marriage (IK). In the case of divorce, when the bridewealth has been paid, women are entitled to retain half the bridewealth even if the marriage has not been consummated (JJ), and all of it if the marriage has been consummated. When the amount of the bridewealth has not yet been settled, the man should provide something for the woman according to his means; this is what some understand by *release them in a fair manner* (IK).

50 That God has *made lawful* the Prophet's *wives* indicates that God has made lawful the various means by which the Prophet obtained his wives (IJ). In this context, *those whom thy right hand possesses . . . as spoils of war* refers to two of the Prophet's wives, Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy, who had

bridewealth, as well as those whom thy right hand possesses of those whom God has granted thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thy paternal uncles and the daughters of thy paternal aunts, and the daughters of thy maternal uncles and the daughters of thy maternal aunts who emigrated with thee, and any believing woman if she gives herself [in marriage] to the Prophet and if the Prophet desires to marry her—for thee alone, not for [the rest of] the believers. We know well what We have enjoined upon them with respect to their wives and those whom their right hands possess, that there may be no blame upon thee. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (51) Thou mayest put off whomsoever of them thou wilt and receive whomsoever thou wilt. And as for whomsoever thou mightest desire of those whom thou hast set aside, there is no blame upon thee. Thus is it likelier that they will be comforted, that they will not grieve, and

been among the captives of the Battle of Khaybar and whose father had been among the staunchest opponents of the Prophet, and Juwayriyah bint Ḥārithah, whom the Prophet had purchased from Thābit ibn Qays after the Muslims had defeated her tribe, the Banū Muṣṭaliq. After the marriage, the Muslims released the captives from the Banū Muṣṭaliq, as they were now kinsmen of the Prophet. In both instances the Prophet freed his prospective wives before marrying them (IJ).

The reference to women *who emigrated with thee* is understood to mean that Muslim women who had the opportunity to emigrate and did not do so were not permitted to become wives of the Prophet (IJ, Q). The Prophet is then told that he may take in marriage the believing women who offered themselves to him, without the need to pay a bridewealth (IJ, IK), a ruling for him alone, *not for [the rest of] the believers.* Some maintain that despite the permission granted here and in the following verse, the Prophet did not marry any of the women who had offered themselves to him (IK), while others maintain that he did, but that he did not consummate the marriages (IJ, Q), and they were thus annulled. *We know well what We have enjoined upon them with respect to their wives* refers to the limit of four wives for Muslims, which this verse makes clear is not the same limit set for the Prophet. With this verse, all the limitations of marriage set for other Muslims were removed for the Prophet. He does not need to pay the bridewealth, the woman does not need a protector (as in the case of Zaynab), the marriage does not need to have witnesses (as in the marriage to Zaynab), and he may marry as many women as he wishes.

51 *Put off . . . and receive whomsoever thou wilt* means that the Prophet may accept or decline marriage to the women who offered themselves to him as he desires (IK). The next sentence then allows the Prophet to return to those whom he had previously declined to marry (IK). According to others, this verse was revealed in relation to those to whom the Prophet was already married. Some of his wives were jealous of other wives and asked that their own maintenance be increased. Their jealousy reached the point where they became harsh with him, and the Prophet said to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, "They ask of me what I do not have." The Prophet was vexed by this matter and did not sleep in the same bed with them for a month until vv. 28–29 were revealed, granting them the choice between remaining wed to the Prophet or accepting an amicable divorce. God commanded him to ask them to choose between this life and the Hereafter and then to divorce those who chose this life and keep those who chose the Hereafter. They all chose the latter, were then referred to as "mothers of the believers," and undertook to never remarry after him. Then in this verse he was given permission to receive any

that they will be content, all of them, with that which thou hast given them. God knows what is in your hearts. And God is Knowing, Clement. (52) Women are not lawful for thee beyond that, nor [is it lawful] for thee to exchange them for other wives, though their beauty impress thee, save those whom thy right hand possesses. And God is Watcher over all things. (53) O you who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for its time to come, unless leave be granted you. But if you are invited, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse. Linger not, seeking discourse. Truly that would affront the Prophet, and he would shrink from telling you, but God shrinks not from the

of his wives he wanted to receive and defer anyone he wanted to defer (W), meaning that he could postpone the days allotted to spending time with them. He nonetheless continued to divide his time equally between each of his wives. This made it *likelier that they will be comforted, that they will not grieve,* because they would know that he did not spend time with them out of an obligation toward God, but out of a genuine desire on his own part (IK). Some reconcile these two interpretations by saying that this verse applied to both those who had offered themselves to the Prophet in marriage and his wives (IK, Ṭ).

52 According to many early commentators, although the permission granted to the Prophet to marry Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (see 33:50c) allowed him to marry more than four wives, this verse, revealed some time later, restricted the Prophet to the wives he had already chosen (IK, Ṭ). In this way it was revealed as a reward to the wives for their decision to choose the Prophet in vv. 28–29 (IK, Ṭ). Though the Prophet is said to have been granted the opportunity to take more wives again before he died (IK, Q), he nonetheless took no more wives after the revelation of this verse. *Beyond that* would thus refer to the number of his wives, which was nine at this time, and the prohibition against exchanging them for other wives would mean that he could not divorce them and take other wives (IK). According to others, *beyond that* means beyond the types of women described in v. 50 (IK, Ṭ).

53 The first part of this verse, known as the "Veiling Verse," was reportedly revealed to clarify proper conduct with the Prophet. Anas ibn Mālik said, "When the Messenger of God married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, he invited people to a wedding ceremony. People ate and then remained in their seats talking to each other. The Prophet acted as if he was preparing himself to leave, but people did not take the hint. He then left the room and people left with him, except for three people who remained sitting. When the Prophet returned and found them still sitting, he went out again. When they saw this, the three men left. I went and informed the Messenger of God that they had left. He returned and entered his room. I wanted to enter with him, but he drew the curtain between us. Then God revealed [this verse]" (IK, Q, Sy, Ṭ, W). *If you are invited, enter* is also understood as a general injunction to accept invitations from other Muslims, as in a saying attributed to the Prophet, "When one of you invites his brother, be it for a wedding or something else, he should respond" (IK). In the immediate context, *God shrinks not from the truth* refers to God's telling others to respect the Prophet's privacy (JJ). More broadly, it means that God does not prevent truth from being manifested and clarified (Q).

That men must ask the Prophet's wives *from behind a veil* indicates that, just as it is forbidden for a man to be alone in an intimate manner with a woman to whom he is not related, so too it is forbidden for a man to look upon the wives of the Prophet. This injunction may be a clarification, lest anyone think that the Prophet's wives' status as "mothers of the believers" would allow for the same familiarity that a man would have with his

truth. And when you ask anything of [his wives], ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And you should never affront the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him. Truly that would be an enormity in the sight of God. (54) Whether you disclose something or conceal it, surely God is Knower of all things. (55) There is no blame upon them with regard to their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their own women, or those whom their right hands possess. And reverence God. Truly God is Witness over all things. (56) Truly God and

biological mother. The prohibition against marrying the Prophet's wives is linked by some to the prohibition against marrying one's mother (4:23) and against marrying *those women whom your fathers married* (4:22), since *the Prophet is closer to the believers than they are to themselves, and his wives are their mothers* (33:6). This may also be because the Prophet's wives are believed to continue to be his wives in the Hereafter (IK, Q).

54 All human beings will be taken to account for everything that they have done and said in this world, as in 2:284: *And whether you disclose what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it* (cf. 4:149), an idea mentioned throughout the Quran, since *God knows what lies within breasts* (3:119, 154; 5:7c; 8:43; 11:5; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13).

55 This verse clarifies which of the relations of the Prophet's wives were exempt from the requirement to address them *from behind a veil* (Q). The list is similar to those men in whose presence women are not required to wear the veil in 24:31. For God as *Witness over all things,* see also 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 34:47; 41:53; 58:6; 85:9. Regarding the requirements of the veil, or *ḥijāb,* see 24:31c.

56 This frequently cited verse is among the most important in the Quran for understanding the place of the Prophet in Islam. In its immediate context, it answers questions one might ask of the previous verses: why the Prophet should be obeyed (v. 33), why he is *a beautiful example* (v. 21), and how it is that he is *a luminous lamp* (v. 46). That he is a human being of another order also explains why he is permitted more than four wives (v. 50), why he can marry without giving a bridewealth (v. 50), why his wives are "the mothers of the believers" (v. 6), and why they may not remarry after his passing (v. 53).

*Invoke blessings* translates the verb *ṣallā/yuṣallī,* which is from the same root as *ṣalāh,* "prayer." In this context, commentators differentiate between the manner in which this verb relates to God and the angels, saying that God's *ṣalāh* is loving Mercy and that of the angels is seeking forgiveness (IK, Ṭ). Human beings then *invoke blessings* by supplicating for the Prophet (Aj) and by following him and loving him (Su). Regarding the role of human beings in invoking blessings upon the Prophet, the Companions are reported to have asked the Prophet after this verse was revealed, "We know how to give thee greetings of peace, but how do we invoke blessings upon thee?" To which he answered, "O God! Bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as Thou hast blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham. And shower grace upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad as Thou hast showered grace upon Abraham and upon the family of Abraham in all the worlds. Truly Thou art Praised, Glorious" (IK, Ṭ, R). As al-Ālūsī observes, the manner in which human beings invoke blessings upon the Prophet, by calling for God's Blessings upon him, means that they are in fact realizing their inability to do anything more than to ask God to shower His Blessings upon the Prophet. In this sense, to say, "O God! Grant blessings upon the Messenger!" is not so much a request as it is participation in and affirmation of the Divine Act (see also 3:194c). Thus from a metaphysical perspective, in all modes of asking blessing upon the Prophet, it is only God Who invokes blessings upon him (K).

His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace! (57) Truly those who affront God and His Messenger, God has cursed them in this life and the Hereafter, and has prepared for them a humiliating punishment. (58) As for those who affront believing men and believing women for other than what they may have committed,

On one occasion the Prophet told his Companions that the Angel Gabriel came to him and said, "O Muhammad, does it not please thee that thy Lord says, 'No member of thy community invokes blessings upon thee but that I bless him tenfold, and no member of thy community offers thee greetings of peace but that I offer him greetings of peace tenfold?'" To which the Prophet responded, "Indeed!" (IK). In another account, the Prophet said, "The miser is one who when I am mentioned in his presence does not invoke blessings upon me" (IK). Once when the Prophet overheard a man making supplications in a hasty manner, he called to him and said, "When one makes supplication, let him begin by praising God. Then let him invoke blessings upon the Prophet. Then let him make supplication after that as he wishes" (IK). In this regard, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have said, "A supplication is suspended between Heaven and earth and does not ascend any further until you invoke blessings upon your Prophet" (IK).

In all such sayings, invoking blessings upon the Prophet is not a benefit for the Prophet, but for the believers themselves. For this reason this verse is understood as a command for all believers. Some say that invoking blessings upon the Prophet is a commendable deed (*mandūb*), while others consider it to be obligatory (*wājib;* IK, Q, R). Some maintain that its being obligatory may simply mean that such blessings must be invoked at some point during the course of one's life, while others maintain that it must be said in every prayer (Aj). According to Imam al-Shāfiʿī and many followers of his legal tradition, one must invoke blessings upon the Prophet in every prayer in order for that prayer to be valid (Aj, Q). From a spiritual perspective, invoking blessings upon the Prophet is essential for drawing closer to God. Increasing invocation of blessings upon the Prophet therefore engenders love for him, which in turn engenders love for God, and God's Love for the human being attracts the human being to His Presence (Aj).

The injunction to *invoke . . . greetings of peace* refers to the standard Muslim greeting, "Peace be upon you," but it also indicates being at peace with the Prophet, in accord with what he has brought, and yielding to him and the Divine Law (Āl). According to Islamic tradition, just as trees, stones, and all creation prostrate to God (see 16:40; 22:18; 55:6), so too do they extend *greetings of peace* to the Prophet. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "I went out with the Prophet through the environs of Makkah. Every rock and tree welcomed him, saying, 'Peace be upon thee, O Messenger of God.'"

57 An *affront* to God is understood as disbelief and attributing partners to Him (Q). Although this verse is addressed to all who do the Prophet harm in word or deed (IK), it is said to have been revealed in response to those who criticized the Prophet for his marriage to Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy (IJ, IK), whose father had been among the staunchest of the Prophet's opponents. It may also refer to all those who remained opposed to him (IJ, Ṭ). Others say that it refers to those who created graven images (IJ, IK, Ṭ).

58 This verse is understood by some as a reference to those who accused others falsely (IK, JJ), as calumny is considered a serious crime in 24:4: *And as for those who accuse chaste women, but then do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty lashes, and never accept any testimony from them.* See also 49:12c. Others understand this verse as having been revealed regarding fornicators who would follow women when they would leave their houses at night to answer a call of nature. When they saw a woman, they would make an advance. If the woman did not say anything, they would follow her; but if she rebuked them, they would leave her alone. These fornicators were only after slave girls. But at that time, free women were indistinguishable from slave girls, since all women used to go out wearing a long dress and a headscarf.

they bear the burden of calumny and manifest sin. (59) O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters, and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks over themselves. Thus is it likelier that they will be known and not be disturbed. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (60) If the hypocrites do not desist, and likewise those in whose hearts is a disease, as well as those who spread false rumors in the city, We shall surely spur thee against them; then they will not be thy neighbors therein, save for a short while. (61) Accursed! They will be seized wheresoever they are found and utterly slain. (62) [That is] the wont of God with those who passed before; and you will find no alteration in the wont of God. (63) People question thee concerning the Hour. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies

The women complained of these advances, and so God revealed this and the following verse (W, Z on v. 59).

59 This is one of the most important verses for understanding the Quranic teaching regarding wearing the veil (see also 24:31c). As with the previous verse, it seeks to establish social norms that will protect all members of society. The injunction to *draw their cloaks over themselves* is thus meant to ensure modesty and distinguish the free women from the slave women (Ṭ), so that men do not seek illicit relations with the former (R). *Cloaks* translates *jilbāb,* which means a piece of fabric that is larger than a shawl but smaller than a large sheet and derives from the root *j-l-b,* which describes an object that completely covers something, like the darkness of night (*Lisān al-ʿarab*). It is here employed to mean the outer cover (IK), which would cover the entire body (Āl, Ṭ). The manner in which one draws the cover has been debated. Some say that it is to be done in such a way that it covers all but one eye, while others say it means that it must cover the forehead and most of the face, but not the eyes (Āl, IK, Q, Ṭ).

60–61 *Those in whose hearts is a disease* describes those of impure intentions (v. 32) or those who "secretly harbor in their souls" deep religious hypocrisy or doubt (2:8–11; 5:52; 24:47–50; 33:12; 47:20; 74:31). In this instance, some understand it as a specific reference to adulterers (IK, Ṭ, Z), and others see it as a general reference to those whose faith is weak (Z). *Those who spread false rumors* refers to hypocrites who would attempt to undermine the Madinan community by reporting that the Prophet's expeditions had been defeated or its members slain (Z). *We shall surely spur thee against them* means that God will grant the Prophet power over the hypocrites and inform him about them, after which they will soon cease to dwell in Madinah (IK, Ṭ). Then, wherever they may flee, they will be seized by God, taken to task for their disbelief, and *utterly slain* if they manifest their hypocrisy in word or deed (Ṭ).

62 *The wont of God* (cf. 3:137c; 33:38; 35:43c; 40:85; 48:23) refers in general to the manner in which God conducts all affairs. In this context, it refers specifically to the manner in which God deals with the likes of the hypocrites mentioned in v. 60, who seek to sow dissension among the followers of a prophet. That there is *no alteration in the wont of God* (cf. 35:43; 48:23) thus means that God will not deal differently with the hypocrites of Madinah than He did with the hypocrites and disbelievers among previous communities (Ṭ, Z); see 35:43c.

63 That knowledge of the end of time *lies only with God* is mentioned in several Quranic verses; see, e.g., 7:187; 31:34; 41:47; 43:85; 67:25–26; 79:42–46. That the Hour may be nigh (cf. 42:17) is understood as an injunction to prepare for death and the end of time, since both will come upon people *while they are unaware* (12:107; 26:202; 29:53; 43:66; cf. 39:55). It is said that the time of the final hour is hidden and known only to God so that people will always be prepared for it (Q); see 42:17c.

only with God. And what will apprise thee, perhaps the Hour is nigh." (64) Truly God curses the disbelievers and prepares for them a blazing flame, (65) therein to abide forever; they will find no protector or helper. (66) On the Day when their faces are turned about in the Fire, they will say, "Oh, would that we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger!" (67) They will say, "Our Lord! Truly we obeyed our leaders and elders, and they caused us to stray from the way. (68) Our Lord! Give them a twofold punishment, and curse them with a great curse." (69) O you who believe! Be not as those who affronted Moses, whereat God declared him

64–65 That *God curses the disbelievers* means that God casts them far from any good and drives them far away from Himself (Ṭ). It also indicates that no one can save them from this predicament, since *whomsoever God curses, thou wilt not find for him any helper* (4:52).

66 That *their faces are turned about in the Fire* indicates that whichever way they turn, the Fire smites their faces (Ṭ) and that they are tormented by the Fire in different ways (Q). As the face is considered the most noble part of the human body, revealing the soul most directly, that it is subject to the Fire indicates that they are completely debased (Z). Elsewhere it is said that *their faces shall be cast down into the Fire* (27:90), and the Fire is said to cover their faces (14:50) or to smite their faces (23:104), while the angels are said to strike their faces (8:50) and they are *gathered upon their faces* (25:34; cf. 17:97), all of which points to their utter humiliation and suffering in the Hereafter. This is one of several passages to convey the regrets of the disbelievers in the Hereafter. Elsewhere, it is reported that *they will say, "Would that we were sent back! Then we would not deny the signs of our Lord, but we would be among the believers!"* (6:27). That they express such regrets and *admit their sin* (67:11; cf. 40:11) is, nonetheless, of no avail to them, since they had been offered ample opportunity to repent and make amends during the life of this world; see 32:12c; 35:37c.

67–68 Rather than following God and His Messenger, the disbelievers followed human beings who led them astray (R). Leaders are often considered partially responsible for people's rejection of the messages with which prophets have been sent, since the leaders have influence over their communities and usually stand to gain the most from the maintenance of a corrupt social order, alluded to in 6:123: *Thus have We made great ones among the guilty in every town, that they may plot therein* (cf. 25:31), and stated most clearly in 43:23: *We sent no warner unto a town before thee, but that those living in luxury therein said, "We found our fathers upon a creed, and we are surely following in their footsteps"* (cf. 34:34). One who chooses to follow the leaders and reaffirm their creed will then *bite his hands, saying, "Would that I had taken a way with the Messenger! Oh, woe unto me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend!"* (25:27–28). But when people realize they have been led astray, they ask that the leaders receive twice the punishment that they themselves are to receive (JJ), that is, punishment for having been astray and punishment for having led others astray (Z). In this vein, 29:13 says of those who sought to lead others astray, *Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own* (see also 7:38–39c).

69 This verse was reportedly revealed to chastise those who spoke ill of the Prophet because of his marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (Z); see 33:37c. The affront to Moses is said to refer to the people's suspicion that Moses had a physical defect, because he was extremely modest and never showed his skin. Then at one point when bathing, he was forced to chase after his clothing and suddenly came upon a group of his followers, who then knew that what had been said of him was false, because God had shown him to be *innocent of what they alleged* (IK, Q).

innocent of what they alleged, and he was honored with God. (70) O you who believe! Reverence God and speak justly, (71) that He may set your deeds aright for you, and forgive you your sins. And whosoever obeys God and His Messenger has achieved a great triumph. (72) Truly We offered the Trust unto the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were wary of it—yet man bore it; truly he was ignorant, a wrongdoer. (73) That God may punish the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, the idolatrous men and the idolatrous women, and that God may relent unto the believing men and the believing women. And God is Forgiving, Merciful.

70–71 *Speak justly* (cf. 4:9) enjoins testifying truthfully, speaking in a manner that is upright and free from any corruption, and speaking so that the outward locution corresponds to the inward meaning (Ṭs). The injunction to truthful testimony is most evident in 6:152: *And when you speak, be just, even if it be [against] a kinsman* (cf. 4:135). The injunction to speak with integrity is found in other verses that enjoin speaking *in an honorable* (or *goodly*) *way* (2:83, 235; 4:5, 8; 33:32). If one does so, then God will rectify one's deeds by facilitating travel upon the straight path and purifying them (Ṭs). Forgiveness in this context is understood to be manifest through the ability to perform good deeds that will be accepted by God (ST, Ṭs). Obeying God and His Messenger leads to the Garden, the attainment of which is referred to as *a great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of the Garden, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57. In contrast, *whosoever takes Satan as a protector apart from God has surely suffered a manifest loss* (4:119).

72 *The Trust* is understood as relating to the dictates of faith and belief, as in a famous saying: "Whosoever has no trust has no belief" (Q, Sy). Many relate *the Trust* to obedience (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), and it is thus understood by most as a reference to the requirements (*farāʾiḍ*) of religion (IJ, JJ, Q, Ṭ), though others see it as a reference to prayer alone (Q). *The Trust* can also be understood as pertaining to the manner in which one manages each aspect of one's being, such as the tongue, the eye, the stomach, the private parts, and so forth (IJ, Q). Thus some connect it to 8:27: *Betray not God and the Messenger, and betray not your trusts knowingly* (M). It is also said that *the Trust* pertains to faith inwardly and performing the requirements of religion outwardly (Aj). Some also allow that *the Trust* refers to the pact or covenant of *tawḥīd* (Divine Oneness) and the witness to God's Lordship made with all of humanity before they came into this world (Aj; see 7:172c).

That *the Trust* was offered to *the heavens and the earth and the mountains* is taken literally by many commentators, but is understood by some to mean that it was offered to their inhabitants (R), that is, to all the people of the earth, the jinn, and the angels (Ṭs, Ṭū). They *refused to bear it* not out of defiance, but because they shrank from what they knew to be too heavy a burden. Many understand this to mean that they knew they would be subject to reward and punishment and thus chose to remain passively obedient rather than risk the consequences of being held accountable before God (Bḍ, IJ, IK, Q, Ṭ). In this sense, the heavens, the earth, and the mountains saw their own weakness, but human beings realized their place and assumed their responsibility (R) as creatures possessing intellect and thus fit to observe the obligations of religion (Z).

This passage can also be seen as a metaphorical account to show that the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, despite their tremendous size and magnificent bearing, do not have the capacity to undertake the burdens of revealed laws (Q, Ṭū), as in 59:21: *Had We made this Quran descend upon a*

*mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God.* That *man bore it* thus indicates the unique responsibility human beings bear to remain in a state of *tawḥīd* and to follow the practices of their respective religious laws. When they do not, they break the covenant they made with God before entering this world (see 7:172c) and thus fail to live in accord with their true nature.

*Man . . . was ignorant, a wrongdoer* insofar as he has failed to bear the full weight of *the Trust.* Thus some understand this phrase as a reference only to disbelievers and hypocrites, who are ignorant of God, and tyrants or wrongdoers (Q), though others take it as a reference to Adam, meaning that when he accepted *the Trust,* he did not realize its full import (M). It can also be understood as a reference to all human beings who are ignorant of the responsibility of *the Trust* and wrong themselves by committing acts of disobedience (Ṭū), thus failing to fulfill *the Trust* (Z).

In a minority reading, the expression "bear the Trust" is understood to mean failing to uphold it and thus failing to bear the burden that it implies (IJ, Ṭū). In this sense it is said that Cain bore the burden of the Trust for having murdered Abel (IJ).

73 God punishes the hypocrites and the idolaters, because they have broken *the Trust* that *man bore;* yet God relents to the believers who keep *the Trust* and forgives their sins (JJ, M).



# 34

# Sheba

## *Saba'*

*Saba'* is a Makkan *sūrah,* although some scholars maintain that v. 6 is from the Madinan period (Aj, Āl, IJ, Q). It takes its name from the mention of the story of *Sheba* in vv. 15–21. Although some relate the story here to the queen of Sheba mentioned in 27:22–44, it more likely refers to a tribe in the same region of Yemen from later times. When asked, "O Messenger of God, what is Sheba, a land or a woman?" the Prophet is reported to have replied, "Neither a land nor a woman, but a man who had ten Arab sons, six of whom he regarded auspicious and four inauspicious" (Āl).

The beginning of this *sūrah,* with the mention of God's Praise and Omnipotence, can be seen as following upon the mention of *the Trust* in the second to last verse of the previous *sūrah* (Aj, Bq). Such praise reiterates God's complete independence of those who carry the Trust and those who neglect to carry it, thus emphasizing that those who carry the Trust do so to their own benefit, while those who neglect to carry it do so to their own detriment (Aj); they do not do so for God, because all praise is already His.

After the first two verses reaffirming the Nature of God, *Saba'* launches into its primary subject, a critique of the disbelievers that emphasizes the vacuity of their claims (vv. 3–9). Brief allusions to the accomplishments of the prophets David (vv. 10–11) and Solomon (vv. 12–14) are then followed by a discussion of the people of Sheba, whose arrogance at their good fortune led them to be destroyed by a flood (vv. 15–19). Two verses regarding the nature of Iblīs (vv. 20–21) then segue into a series of challenges the Prophet Muhammad is told to pose to the disbelievers (vv. 22–30). An account of the discussion described as taking place sometime in the Hereafter between the leaders among the disbelievers and those who followed them in rejecting the prophets (vv. 31–33) then leads into a critique of those whose wealth, power, and social status delude them into believing they are arbiters of truth (vv. 34–45). This is followed by injunctions to the Prophet Muhammad to clarify the nature of his mission (vv. 46–50), which transitions into a concluding section on the consequences that will befall the disbelievers (vv. 51–54).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Praise be to God, unto Whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. His is the praise in the Hereafter, and He is the Wise, the Aware. (2) He knows that which enters the earth and that which issues therefrom, that which descends from Heaven and that which ascends thereto. And He is the Merciful, the Forgiving. (3) Those who disbelieve say, "The Hour will never come upon us." Say, "Nay! By my Lord, by the Knower of the Unseen, it will surely come unto you." Not a mote's weight evades Him in the heavens or on the earth, nor smaller than that, nor larger, but that it is in a clear Book, (4) that He may recompense those who believe and perform

1 This is one of five *sūrahs* that begin with *Praise be to God* (see 1:2; 6:1; 18:1; 35:1). That *whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth* belongs to God is reiterated in several verses (cf. 2:255, 284; 3:109, 129; 4:126, 171; 14:2; 22:64; 42:4, 53) and mentioned in various ways throughout the Quran. In this verse *His is the praise in the Hereafter,* but elsewhere it is stated that *His is the praise in the heavens and on the earth* (30:18) and *at the beginning and at the end* (28:70), meaning that God is praised in every place and at every time; see 1:2c.

2 *That which enters the earth* could refer to rain (JJ, Q), corpses (Q, R), or seeds (R), among other things, while *that which issues therefrom* refers to vegetation and things extracted from the ground (JJ, Q), such as minerals and jewels. *That which descends from Heaven* can refer to natural elements, such as rain (Q, R), or to God's decrees (*maqādīr*) and blessings (*barakāt;* Q), or other mercies, such as His angels and the Quran (R), while *that which ascends thereto* can refer to the angels (Q), a *good word* (35:10) and righteous deeds (Q, R), or the souls of human beings that ascend upon death (R). Together these four realities can also be seen as allusions to all the phases of existence. God is *the Merciful* in what He sends down to the earth and *the Forgiving* in allowing souls to return to Him (R).

3 That the disbelievers deny the coming of the Hour (cf. 25:11; 41:50; 45:32) indicates that they do not understand the full cycle of life alluded to in v. 2. *Nay* translates the emphatic particle *kallā,* which in this context can be read as either "Nay" or "Yea." The former negates their belief that the Hour will not come upon them. The latter affirms that the Hour will come even though they do not believe in it. To deny the Hour in which there is no doubt (see 18:21; 40:59; 45:32) is to also deny the meeting with God; thus 6:31 states, *Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with God till, when the Hour comes upon them suddenly, they say, "Alas for us, that we neglected it!"* In this context, the idea that *not a mote's weight evades Him* (cf. 10:61; 99:7–8) alludes to the reckoning when all deeds will be weighed on the Day of Judgment. From one perspective, what does not evade God *in the heavens* refers to the inner reality of the human spirit, as the spirit is closer to the heavens than the body. What does not evade God *on the earth* then refers to actions performed with the body, whose realm is this world (R). That everything is recorded *in a clear Book* (6:59; 10:61; 11:6; 27:75; see also 20:52; 22:70; 35:11; 57:22; 78:29) refers to all deeds being recorded in the books that are handed to people on the Day of Judgment (see commentary on 18:49; 84:7–12) or to all that exists being inscribed upon the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22).

4 Cf. 30:45. From one perspective, God's Forgiveness is the reward for faith and belief, while *a generous provision* is the reward for performing *righteous deeds* (R). Elsewhere, those who believe

righteous deeds; theirs shall be forgiveness and a generous provision. (5) But those who endeavor to thwart Our signs, for them there shall be a painful punishment of torment. (6) Those who have been given knowledge see that what is sent down upon thee from thy Lord is the truth and that it guides to the path of the Mighty, the Praised. (7) And those who disbelieve say, "Shall we show you a man who will inform you that, when you have been completely torn to pieces, you shall be in a new creation? (8) Has he fabricated a lie against God, or is he possessed?" Nay, but those who believe not in the Hereafter shall be in punishment and extreme error. (9) Have they not considered that which is

and perform righteous deeds are promised *recompense with justice* (10:4).

5 Cf. 45:11. Those who *endeavor to thwart* God's signs are also said to be *the inhabitants of Hellfire* (22:51) who *will be arraigned unto the punishment* (v. 38; 30:16). In all of these verses, *signs* could refer to revelations in general, the verses of the Quran in particular, the signs of God in the created order, the signs of the end of time, or to all of these, as each is one type of God's signs; for the different meanings of *sign* in the Quran, see 2:106c. In an alternate reading of the present verse, *punishment* is read as the attribute of *torment* (*rijz*), meaning, "Theirs shall be the torment of a painful punishment." *Rijz* (also used in 2:59; 7:134) can also be understood either to mean "defilement," as in 8:11, where God purifies Lot and his people from *the defilement* (*rijz*) *of Satan*, or to mean "plague." This verse could then be read, "Theirs shall be a painful punishment due to defilement," or it could allude to punishment through the sending of a plague.

6 *Those who have been given knowledge* (cf. 22:54; 29:49; 58:11) is understood to mean the Companions of the Prophet (T) or the People of the Book (JJ, Q, T); see 22:54c. The latter interpretation likely follows upon 17:107, which refers to *those who were given knowledge before it,* meaning before the Quran. Nonetheless, *those who have been given knowledge* could simply be understood to mean anyone who has knowledge, since from a Quranic perspective authentic knowledge leads to truth and guidance (R). In this way, they stand in direct opposition to those mentioned in v. 5. Regarding the place of knowledge in the spiritual life and its relationship to faith and belief, see commentary on 58:11: *And God will raise in degrees those among you who believe and those who have been given knowledge. God is Aware of whatsoever you do.*

7 This is one of several verses where the disbelievers are said to mock the claim of bodily resurrection, though it is usually expressed with reference to bones and dust, as in 17:49: *What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?* (cf. 13:5; 17:98; 23:35, 82–83; 27:67; 36:78–79; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 56:47–48; 79:11). Although *new creation* usually refers to the Resurrection (see 13:5; 14:19; 35:16), it can also be understood as a reference to the ongoing renewal (*tajdīd*) of the world in which God's creative act renews the world at every instant, an interpretation often evoked by Sufis and philosophers.

8 The first sentence of this verse is either a continuation of what the disbelievers say in the previous verse or a sarcastic response from those who hear their charge against the Prophet (R). To have *fabricated a lie against God* implies having invented false teachings knowingly, while being *possessed* implies having imagined it under the influence of psychic forces such as the jinn. Those who make such accusations experience punishment in this life and the next because they are in *extreme error,* which could also mean "far astray." The punishment can also be seen as what is received for claiming that the Prophet is a fabricator, while being in *extreme error* describes those who say that he is possessed (R), although from another perspective to be in *extreme error* is already a kind of grievous punishment.

9 Here, as in many verses, the created order is cited as evidence of God's Oneness and

before them and that which is behind them of the sky and the earth? If We will, We cause the earth to engulf them or fragments from the sky to fall upon them. Truly in that is a sign for every penitent servant. (10) And indeed We gave David bounty from Us: "O mountains! Echo God's praises with him, likewise you birds!" And We made iron supple for him, (11) [saying], "Make coats of mail, and measure well the links thereof, and work righteousness. Truly I see whatsoever you do." (12) And unto Solomon the wind, whose morning course was a month and whose evening course was a month. And We caused a fount of molten copper to flow for him. And of the jinn some worked before him by the leave of his Lord—and those of them that deviated from Our Command, We would

Omnipotence, as in 30:25: *And among His signs is that the sky and the earth stand fast by His Command;* and 36:81: *Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof?* (R); see especially the story of Abraham's spiritual argument in 6:75–78. That the heavens and the earth continue to function as they do is also a sign of God's Mercy, for they could crumble at any moment, as they did in some of the forms of punishment that came upon certain disbelievers in the past. In this regard, the prophet Shu'ayb's people challenged him, saying, *so make fragments from the sky fall upon us, if you are among the truthful* (26:187), and the Quran asks whether wrongdoers *feel secure that God will not cause the earth to engulf them* (16:45; cf. 17:68; 67:16). Several verses speak of signs for the believers (15:77; 29:44; 48:20) and those who reflect (16:11, 13, 69; 45:13), but this is the only reference to signs for *every penitent servant*. In the present context, it implies that reflecting upon the true nature of the created order can protect one from the punishments mentioned in this verse, as an understanding of them would bring one to believe and thus to turn to God in repentance. Elsewhere, the wonders of the created order are cited as *a source of insight and a reminder for every penitent servant* (50:8) and for *a people who understand* (16:67).

10–11 *Bounty from Us* may be a reference to prophethood and revelation (JJ), as in 4:163, *And unto David We gave the Psalms,* or to the *judgment and knowledge* that God is said to have given both David and Solomon (21:79; cf. 27:15). The mountains and birds are compelled to glorify God with David (cf. 21:79; 38:18–19), because he has been appointed *as a vicegerent upon the earth* (38:26), meaning that in him are all things contained in principle (see 6:165c; 35:39c). That *iron* was made *supple for* David indicates that God taught him the art of metalworking, which allowed him to make *coats of mail* (cf. 21:80) and weapons. The prophets David and Solomon are cited in several Quranic passages as rulers who were given power over certain aspects of nature and who exercised these powers wisely. For a more extensive discussion of the powers bestowed upon David, see 38:17–20c.

12 The verb in the first clause is implied and could be either "gave," following upon v. 10, or "made . . . subservient," as in 38:36: *So We made the wind subservient unto him, coursing gently by his command whither he wished* (cf. 21:81). Though David figures more prominently in the Bible than does his son Solomon, Solomon figures more prominently in the Quran and is described as having greater powers. In addition to inheriting David's kingdom and being given *judgment and knowledge* (21:79) and the ability to communicate with the animals, Solomon was also given power over the winds. Similarly, he is said to have had power over the jinn. Just as iron was made pliable for David, so too were more aspects of metallurgy taught to Solomon. The jinn who deviated from God's Command to serve Solomon are said to have been punished in the Fire in the Hereafter (JJ, Ṭ) or to have been punished in this world with a strike from an angel that would scorch them (JJ).

cause them to taste the punishment of the Blaze, (13) making for him whatsoever he willed: places of worship, statues, basins like reservoirs, and cauldrons firmly anchored. "Work, O family of David, in thankfulness, though few of My servants are thankful." (14) And when We decreed death for him, naught showed his death to them save a creeping creature of the earth eating his staff. And when he fell down, the jinn saw clearly that, had they known the Unseen, they would not have tarried in humiliating punishment. (15) For Sheba too there was certainly a sign in their dwelling—two gardens, one to the right and one to the left: "Eat of the provision of your Lord and give thanks to Him—a good land, and a forgiving Lord." (16) But they turned away. So We sent the flood of ᶜArim upon them and exchanged their two gardens for two gardens bearing bitter fruit, tamarisks, and a few lote trees. (17) Thus did We recompense them for

13 *Places of worship* translates *maḥārīb,* the plural of *miḥrāb,* which is the word most commonly used to designate the niche that marks the direction of prayer in a mosque. In pre-Islamic times, *miḥrāb* was used to designate the private chamber within a house or a large Bedouin tent to which one could retire alone and which was thus a sanctuary of sorts, or the most honored sitting place in the tent. Thus *miḥrāb* came to be used to designate the prayer niche, because it was regarded as a place of honor in the mosque (Iṣ). Other etymological derivations propose that the *miḥrāb* is so named because it is the place in which one combats (*ḥāraba,* from the same root as *miḥrāb*) Satan and caprice, or because it is a place in which one is displaced from (*ḥarīb min*) the preoccupations of the world (Iṣ). In this context, it can also be understood to mean the honored places in which people would sit, alluding to castles (Ṭ), or places in which the direction of prayer was clearly delineated, thus *places of worship* or prostration (Ṭ).

Here the Command to *work* is understood to mean work in obedience to God (Aj, Ṭ) and strive to serve or worship God (Aj). *In thankfulness* can also be read as a direct object (Aj), so that the sentence would mean, "Work or offer thanks to God." *Though few of My servants are thankful* can be understood as the end of God's address to Solomon or as the beginning of a new sentence (Aj), in which case "though" would be replaced with "and" or "yet."

14 When Solomon died, he reportedly remained supported by his staff while the jinn continued working to carry out his command, until, when a termite ate through his staff, he fell to the ground (JJ, Q). This was reportedly done at Solomon's request to demonstrate to the jinn that they did not have the knowledge of the Unseen that they had claimed (Q). That *they would not have tarried in humiliating punishment* is understood to mean that, had the jinn been aware that Solomon had passed away and thus had the knowledge they claimed, they would have immediately ceased to carry out the tasks that he had appointed them (JJ).

15–17 *Sheba* is the name of a tribe in Yemen whose land is said to have had pure air and to have been free of dung, gnats, flies, fleas, scorpions, and snakes (JJ). Despite the great fortune that God had bestowed upon them, they *turned away,* meaning from worshipping God alone (IK), failed to give thanks, and thus became disbelievers (IK, JJ). Some commentators connect these verses to the reference to the people ruled by the Queen of Sheba, who are said to have prostrated to the sun (see 27:22–24; IK), but as the people ruled by the Queen of Sheba lived at the time of Solomon, the present verses likely refer to a much later group of people from the same region. *ᶜArim* can be

having disbelieved. And do We recompense any but the disbeliever? (18) And We set between them and the towns that We had blessed towns easily seen, and We measured the distance between them: "Journey between them in security by night and by day." (19) But they said, "Our Lord, increase the distance of our journeys." And they wronged themselves; so We made them as tales [of old] and tore them completely to pieces. Truly in that are signs for all who are patient, thankful. (20) And Iblīs did indeed prove his opinion of them to be true; and

understood as a proper name, to mean "powerful" or "violent," or to mean "dam." The latter meaning appears to be substantiated by inscriptions from around AD 450 to 540 that use this same root, *ʿayn-rā'-mīm,* to refer to a dam system in southern Arabia. This passage would then refer to the ancient society of Mārib, whose people had constructed a sophisticated dam system that enabled them to create two vast irrigated tracts. When the dams gave way, the rich landscape of these irrigated tracts, or *gardens,* was then returned to desert, thus *bearing bitter fruit.*

The last sentence of v. 17 can also be read, "And is any recompensed but the disbelievers" (Q, Ṭ). In both readings the implication is that God forgives the sins of believers but makes the disbelievers bear the consequences of their sins (Q). In both readings, the Arabic interrogative particle *hal* can alternately be read as a particle of negation, meaning, "We do not recompense any but the disbeliever," or "None but the disbeliever is recompensed" (Ṭ).

18 Another of the blessings God had given Sheba was to facilitate trade for them by providing towns where they could rest and obtain water during their journeys from Yemen to those lands blessed with water and trees in Syria (IK, JJ). *Measured the distance between them* indicates that the towns were spaced so that they would always find a resting place where they could renew their provisions without needing to travel too far (IK). The final enjoinder thus means that one should journey in security and peace protected by God. In this manner it is similar to the blessings that God is said to have bestowed upon the Quraysh; see 106:1–2c.

19 The people of Sheba had reportedly wanted the distances between the way stations of their journeys to be lengthened, so that they could boast of traveling long distances and of being able to carry all of their provisions with them (JJ). God *made them as tales [of old],* that is, as a bygone people of whose might, wealth, and destruction others would speak, and *tore them completely to pieces,* that is, scattered them throughout the land (IK, JJ). In this context, *Truly in that are signs for all who are patient, thankful* (cf. 14:5; 31:31; 42:33) indicates that reflecting upon the manner in which past societies had their fortunes and blessings removed from them should cause one to be thankful for what one has received from God and to bear afflictions with patience.

20 The opinion of Iblīs, or Satan, regarding human beings is most likely what he expresses in 17:62: *If Thou dost grant me reprieve till the Day of Resurrection, I shall surely gain mastery over his progeny, all save a few;* and in 7:17: *And Thou wilt not find most of them thankful.* The phrase *and they followed him* would then mean that his assessment was correct (JJ), except with regard to *a group among the believers.*

21 That *he had no authority over them* means that the only ability Satan has to make human beings swerve from the truth is what was granted to him by God. Satan only has authority to lead astray those who already have the tendency to stray; thus God says to him in 15:42, *As for My servants, truly thou hast no authority over them, save for those in error who follow thee* (cf. 16:99; 17:65). God grants Satan the opportunity to lead human beings astray, so that He *might know one who believes in the Hereafter from one who is in doubt thereof,* meaning to let their true natures become manifest, for ultimately God already *knows those who are truthful, and surely He knows the liars* (29:3; see 29:3c).

they followed him, save for a group among the believers. (21) And yet he had no authority over them, save that We might know one who believes in the Hereafter from one who is in doubt thereof. And thy Lord guards over all things. (22) Say, "Call upon those whom you claim apart from God; they have not a mote's weight of power in the heavens or on the earth, and they have no share in either; nor has He a helper among them." (23) And intercession will benefit none with Him, save whomsoever He gives leave, such that when terror is banished from their hearts, they will ask, "What did your Lord say?" They will reply, "The truth, and He is the Exalted, the Great." (24) Say, "Who provides for you from the heavens and the earth?" Say, "God. And surely either we or you are upon guidance or in manifest error." (25) Say, "You will not be questioned concerning that of which we were guilty; nor will we be questioned concerning that

22 *Those whom you claim* means "those whom you claim to be gods" (JJ). Whereas the Prophet is commanded to challenge the disbelievers to call upon their deities here and in 7:195; 10:38; 11:13; 17:56; 46:4, a statement with similar effect is made in 35:13: *As for those upon whom you call apart from Him, they do not possess so much as the husk of a date stone* (cf. 7:194; 22:73). Then on the Day of Judgment, *it will be said, "Call upon your partners." So they will call upon them, but they will not answer them. And they will see the punishment—if only they had been rightly guided!* (28:64), and *that is because God, He is the Truth, and whatsoever they call upon other than Him is false* (31:30). The statement that God has *no helper among them* is a response to the attitude of some of the idolaters who maintained that their idols and deities could function as intercessors, saying, *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God* (39:3).

23 Continuing the last line of the previous verse, this verse responds to those who maintained that their gods could intercede for them with God (JJ). *Whomsoever He gives leave* then clarifies that there can be intercession through others, understood in Islamic tradition to mean specifically prophets, angels, and God's pious servants, but only insofar as God permits. For the Quranic understanding of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. *When terror is banished from their hearts*—that is, from the hearts of the angels—the angels will turn to one another and ask, *"What did your Lord say?"* meaning, "What did He command?" (Q). The angels' hearts are filled with terror or fear, because of the awe they have for God, as in 21:28, *They are wary, for fear of Him* (Q), where they are in awe of His Word or in awe of the end of the world (IJ). They thus do nothing until they receive the Command from God.

24 The question means, "Is there a creator other than God who provides for you from the heavens and the earth?" (35:3; cf. 10:31; 27:64); *from the heavens* alludes to rain and *the earth,* to plants (IJ). These verses can also be understood to imply, *Who is it that will provide for you if He withholds His provision?* (67:21). In the second part of the verse, some commentators interpret *or,* which here translates the particle *aw,* to mean "and" and thus interpret this verse to mean, "And surely we (the believers) are guided and you (the disbelievers) are in manifest error" (IJ, Ṭ). Others maintain that the verse means, "We are astray or guided and you are astray or guided" (IJ, Ṭ). The slight ambiguity that disbelievers might see in this verse is then understood by some as a gentle invitation to embrace faith (JJ). For *manifest error,* see 36:24c.

25 On the one hand, this verse recalls that the Muslims and the disbelievers bear no responsibility for the religion of the other, similar to 10:41,

which you do." (26) Say, "Our Lord will gather us together; then He will decide between us with truth; and He is the Arbiter, the Knower." (27) Say, "Show me those whom you have joined with Him as partners. Nay! Rather, He is God, the Mighty, the Wise." (28) And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner to mankind entire. But most of mankind know not. (29) And they say, "When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" (30) Say, "Yours shall be the tryst of a Day that you cannot delay by a single hour, nor advance." (31) The disbelievers say, "We shall not believe in this Quran, nor in that which was before it." Couldst thou but see when the wrongdoers are made to stand before their Lord, hurling reproach upon one another! Those who had been

where the Prophet is enjoined, *And if they deny thee, say, "Unto me, my deeds, and unto you, your deeds. You are quit of that which I do, and I am quit of that which you do"* (IK). On the other hand, it evokes the general principle that *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38).

26 On the Day of Judgment, God will gather all human beings together on *an open plain* (18:47) and judge between them, and their differences will be made clear. Those who are truthful will then be admitted to the Garden and the deniers to the Fire (IK, JJ). Hence it is also known as *the Day of Gathering* (42:7; 64:9). *The Arbiter* translates *al-Fattāḥ,* from the root *f-t-ḥ,* which can also mean "to open." It could thus also be rendered "the Opener." Here *al-Fattāḥ* indicates the One Who judges in accord with the truth and makes that truth clear by piercing through what had been closed.

27 Regarding the challenge to disbelievers to show those whom they claim to be God's partners, see 34:22c. Here *Nay!* means that there are no equals to God (IK) or that there is no way that they could show them, since in reality they do not exist.

28 That the Prophet is sent *to mankind entire* is taken as an indication that his mission is of universal scope for all races and lands (IK, R, Ṭ), as in 21:107: *And We sent thee not, save as a mercy unto the worlds* and 4:79: *We sent thee as a messenger unto mankind* (see also 7:158). *Entire* translates *kāffah,* which could also be understood to modify the manner in which the Prophet was sent, thus meaning that he was sent "combining" the functions of bearing glad tidings and delivering warnings (Q, R, Z). The Prophet is referred to as both *a bearer of glad tidings* and *a warner* in several verses (5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 25:56; 33:45; 35:24; 48:8), while in other verses these functions are attributed to all prophets (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56).

29 Cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 36:48; 67:25. This line of questioning is one of the ways in which the disbelievers would mock the Prophet when he spoke of matters pertaining to the Resurrection and Judgment; see 36:48c.

30 In other verses the assertion that the moment in question cannot be delayed by a single hour, advanced, or hastened comes in reference to the particular end that iniquitous civilizations face (see 7:34c; 10:49; 15:5; 16:61; 23:43). Here it most likely refers to the Day of Judgment, *the tryst,* which is the moment of gathering that is fixed and cannot be changed, as in 71:4: *Truly when the term of God comes, it will not be delayed;* see also 11:104.

31 In the preceding verses the idolaters' disbelief in the Oneness of God, the reality of prophethood, and the reality of the Resurrection were exposed. It thus follows that they do not believe in the revelations that contain these teachings, namely, the Quran and *that which was before it.* This phrase is understood by the majority of commentators to mean the Torah and the Gospel, but could also be seen as a general reference to every revealed book denied by disbelievers in any land. The implied answer to the conditional phrase beginning *couldst thou but see* is "thou

weak and oppressed will say to those who had waxed arrogant, "If not for you, we would have been believers." (32) Those who waxed arrogant will say to those who had been weak and oppressed, "Did we turn you away from guidance after it had come unto you? Nay! But you were guilty." (33) Those who had been weak and oppressed will say to those who waxed arrogant, "Nay! But there was plotting by night and day when you ordered us to disbelieve in God, and to set up equals unto Him." And they will hide their remorse when they see the punishment, and We put shackles upon the necks of those who disbelieve. Will they be requited for aught but what they used to do? (34) And We sent no warner

wouldst be amazed" (R) or something to this effect. *Those who had been weak and oppressed* refers to the followers of disbelievers, while *those who had waxed arrogant* refers to their leaders (IK, JJ, R), whose influence prevented many of their followers who otherwise would have believed from doing so (R). Those who merely claim that they were *weak and oppressed* and thus unable to practice religion as they desired are understood to *have their refuge in Hell* (4:97), but in some instances for those who truly were oppressed *it may be that God will pardon them, for God is Pardoning, Forgiving* (4:99).

32 The response of the oppressors to those whom they oppressed and sought to turn from the way of God is to say that they had only called them; the oppressed who followed went against the evidence and proof that the messengers brought because of their own desires (IK). They thus disbelieved of their own accord (IK, JJ), because they followed freely the wealthy and influential rather than God and His Messenger; see 33:66–68; 71:21.

33 *The weak and oppressed* here claim that, although they did follow the wealthy and influential, they would not have done so had they not been confused by the lies and false deities set up by their oppressors (IK). *They*—that is, both the oppressors and the oppressed (JJ)—*hide their remorse* (cf. 10:54). That the dispute concludes in a state of remorse for both sides could be understood to mean that they realize the truth of one another's claims. On the one hand, the rulers have a greater share in guilt for having sought to preserve their power by establishing false religions and false deities. On the other hand, many of those who followed them still chose to do so without attempting to discern the matter for themselves. The concealment of their remorse is understood by some to come after their having made it manifest, as in 32:12: *Couldst thou but see when the guilty bend their heads low before their Lord: "Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard; so send us back that we may work righteousness. Truly we are certain."* Then, after being informed that there is no opportunity for them to make amends, they are no longer able to voice their remorse (R). Regarding the *shackles* that are put upon them, see 36:8c. The concluding rhetorical question is answered in 37:39: *And you shall not be requited, save for that which you used to do* (cf. 40:40). In this context it indicates that both the oppressors and the oppressed will be requited in accordance with the degree of their guilt (IK), though some verses allude to the leaders receiving *a twofold punishment* (33:68; cf. 7:38), one punishment for having been astray and another punishment for leading others astray.

34 Cf. 43:23. Here, *those living in luxury* translates *mutrafū*, which could also be translated "the indulgent" or "the sybarites." In other verses, it is *the notables* (*malaʾ*) who are said to reject God's prophets and revelations; see 7:60, 66, 75, 88, 90, 103, 109, 127; 10:75, 83; 11:27, 38, 97; 23:24, 33, 46; 38:6. Like Jesus in the New Testa-

unto a town, but that those living in luxury therein said, "We disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent." (35) And they say, "We are greater in wealth and children, and we shall not be punished." (36) Say, "Truly my Lord outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will, but most of mankind know not." (37) It is not your wealth or your children that bring you nigh in nearness unto Us, save those who believe and work righteousness—theirs is a manifold reward for what they did, and they will be secure in lofty chambers. (38) And those who endeavor to thwart Our signs, they will be arraigned unto the punishment. (39) Say, "Truly my Lord outspreads and straitens provision for whom-

ment and many prophets in the Hebrew Bible, the Prophet Muhammad was rejected by those of his native city and suffered for his testimony. As in the Hebrew Bible, it is implied that Divine Punishment will soon come for those who reject God's prophets; see Kings 19:10–14; Jeremiah 11:18–19; 18:18–20; 20:1–2; 26:7–11; 38:4–6. This widespread teaching of the Abrahamic scriptures is perhaps best expressed in Luke 4:24: "Truly, I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown" (see also Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; John 4:44).

35–37 The objection expressed in these verses reflects a common response of those who reject revelation because they think only in terms of this world, rather than in terms of this world and the next, as when the people said to Noah, *We see none who follow you, save the lowliest among us* (11:27), and asked, *Shall we believe you, when the lowliest follow you?* (26:111). On the one hand, wealth and status should be a cause for gratitude and should be managed properly, as in 28:77: *And forget not your portion in this world.* On the other hand, the Quran cautions, *Your property and your children are only a trial* (8:28; 64:15). In this sense, God *outspreads . . . provision for whomsoever He will* as a test, and then *straitens provision* as a trial (JJ); cf. 13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12. From this perspective, the provisions of wealth and children, among other things, can only be a source of good when one conducts oneself righteously in relation to them, for *wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world, but that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord* (18:46). The Day of Judgment is thus described as *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89). Those who meet the challenge, dealing justly with their worldly possessions and responsibilities, shall be rewarded, but for *those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them aught against God* (3:10, 116). In this vein, 9:55 and 9:85 caution, *And let not their wealth or their children impress thee. God desires but to punish them thereby in the life of this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers* (cf. 68:14c); see also 2:212; 3:14; 9:69; 26:88; 60:3; 63:9; 64:14–15; 68:14; 71:21. *Those who believe and work righteousness* will then have a *manifold reward,* meaning their good deeds will be multiplied ten to seven hundred fold (IK); see 2:261c; 6:160c. They are *secure* from any harm (IK) and from death (JJ).

38 Cf. 22:51; 34:5. See 34:5c. All human beings will be arraigned before God (see 36:32, 53; 36:32c), but only the disbelievers will be *arraigned unto the punishment* (cf. 30:16).

39 The first instance of God *outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36; 39:52; 42:12) in this *sūrah* (v. 36) points to the fact that one's worldly status and possessions do not indicate one's true status before God (R). Here the addition of *among His servants* can be understood to mean that the phrase relates specifically to the

soever He will among His servants. Whatsoever you have spent, He will replace; and He is the best of providers." (40) Upon the Day when He will gather them all together, then He shall say unto the angels, "Were these the ones worshipping you?" (41) They will reply, "Glory be to Thee! Thou art our Protector, apart from them!" Nay, they worshipped jinn, most of them believing in them. (42) And on that Day no one of you will have power over what benefit or harm may come to the other, and We shall say to those who do wrong, "Taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny!" (43) And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, they say, "This is naught but a man who desires to turn you from that which your fathers used to worship." And they say, "This is naught but a fabricated perversion." And those who disbelieve say to the Truth when it comes to them, "This is naught but manifest sor-

believers (R). *Whatsoever you have spent* means what believers have spent in the way of God. God *will replace* it with something else in this world and with something better in the Hereafter (IK, Q), because *He is the best of providers* (cf. 5:114; 22:58; 23:72; 62:11). Regarding this verse, al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "*Provision* is of two kinds. One is a provision that is remembrance, which is for the spirit itself, the intellect, and the heart. This is like the sustenance of the angels—their very life is through remembrance. Were it withheld from them, they would die. The other provision is that which is eaten, drunk, and the like for the benefit of one's [physical] nature" (ST).

40 *Gather them* refers to either the gathering of all human beings or the gathering of the disbelievers. Here it is the angels who are questioned, rather than the jinn and idols that were worshipped, because the angels are the highest of those beings to whom the idolaters had attributed divinity and whom they worshipped (R). Regarding the manner in which God questions the angels, 25:17 states, *And on the Day He gathers them and that which they worship apart from God, He will say, "Was it you who caused these servants of Mine to go astray, or did they [themselves] go astray from the way?"* (see 25:17–18c).

41 That the angels say to God, *Thou art our Protector, apart from them* indicates that the angels claim to have no bonds of association with those who worshipped them (JJ).

42 This verse can be understood as an address to the angels, saying that they will have no power to aid those who worshipped them, as in 19:87: *They have no power of intercession, save the one who has made a pact with the Compassionate;* see 25:3c. It can also be understood as an address to the disbelievers, saying that they cannot harm or aid one another (R), since the Day of Judgment is *a day when no soul will avail another soul in any way, and no intercession shall be accepted from it, nor ransom taken from it; nor shall they be helped* (2:48; cf. 2:123; 82:19).

43 This is one of many verses to speak of the negative reactions of the disbelievers to the recitation of God's signs, that is, the verses of the Quran; see 8:31; 19:73; 22:72; 31:7; 42:25; 46:7c; 68:15; 83:13. Their assertion that it is *naught but a fabricated perversion* can be understood to mean the Quran or the belief in the Oneness of God, as in 37:86, when Abraham asks his father and other disbelievers, *Is it a perversion, gods apart from God, that you desire?* and in 46:22, when the disbelievers ask, *Have you come to us to pervert us from our gods?* (R). This latter interpretation is most likely, since their assertion that *this is naught but manifest sorcery* would then refer to the Quran.

cery," (44) though We have not given them any books that they study; nor have We sent them a warner before thee. (45) And those before them denied; and these have not attained a tenth of that which We gave them; yet they denied My messengers. How, then, was the change I wrought! (46) Say, "I exhort you unto one thing only: that you stand for God in pairs or singly and then reflect. There is no madness in your companion. He is naught but a warner unto you before a severe punishment." (47) Say, "I ask not of you any reward; that shall be yours. My reward lies only with God, and He is Witness over all things." (48) Say, "Truly my Lord doth cast the truth, Knower of things unseen." (49) Say, "Truth

44 *We have not given them any books* means they have not been given any revealed scriptures, as the force of their claims regarding the nature of the unseen implies that they are privy to such information. Elsewhere, the Quran asks rhetorically, *Or did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?* (35:40; cf. 43:21; 46:4; 52:36–37, 41; 68:37–38); see 35:40c; 46:4c.

45 The disbelievers in the time of the Prophet do not have *a tenth of* the power, blessings, wealth, and length of life as the communities that had been destroyed before them. If God was able to punish those previous communities for having rejected His messengers, then how is it that the disbelievers of this generation think they will be protected from punishment (R)? *How, then, was the change I wrought!* (cf. 22:44; 35:26; 67:18) could also be rendered, "And how was the nature of My reproach?" Both translations indicate that their punishment will be as severe as the punishment that befell earlier generations; also see 22:44–45c.

46 The Prophet is told to enjoin his followers to one characteristic above all others (Bd, Z), to *stand for God* or to "rise up for God," meaning to stand before God in complete sincerity without being influenced by caprice, falsehood, or tribalism (IK) and thus to turn away from doubt and blind imitation (*taqlīd;* Bd). They are to do so *in pairs,* that is, discussing the matter with one another, *or singly,* that is, thinking individually to themselves and reflecting upon what the Prophet says and does without being swayed by inherited beliefs (Z). Or they are not to allow the crowds to sway them from the remembrance of God or leave off the remembrance of God when alone (R). *In pairs or singly* can also be taken together as a reference to reflecting upon religious issues away from large crowds of people who may influence one's mind and cloud one's thoughts (Aj, Bd). Then, having dropped these matters, they should reflect honestly upon the Prophet and what he has brought (Bd, Z), implying that when they reflect honestly upon the evidence at hand, they will see that he is indeed a messenger from God and is not mad, as in 7:184: *Have they not reflected? There is no madness in their companion. He is naught but a clear warner.*

47 Cf. 10:72; 26:109. Just as the Prophet displays no signs of being mad, neither does he display signs of having brought the message for worldly gain, as he asks nothing of the people other than that they follow the message with which God has sent him. The Prophet is enjoined to make similar statements in 6:90; 25:57; 36:21; 38:86; 42:23, and other prophets are reported to have made the same statement in 11:29; 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180. For *He is Witness over all things,* see 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 33:55; 41:53c; 58:6; 85:9.

48 *Cast the truth* refers to both God's casting of the truth into the hearts of believers (R) and God's overcoming falsehood with truth, as in 21:18: *We cast truth against falsehood, and it crushes it, and, behold, it vanishes* (cf. 17:81; IK, R).

49 *Truth has come* implies that falsehood has been vanquished, as in 17:81: *Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing."* That *falsehood originates naught, nor restores* refers back to the criticism of those who

has come, and falsehood originates naught, nor restores." (50) Say, "If I have gone astray, I have only gone astray to my own loss. And if I am rightly guided, it is through that which my Lord reveals unto me. Truly He is Hearing, Near." (51) Couldst thou but see when they are terrified and there is no escape, and they are seized from a place near at hand. (52) And they will say, "We believe in it." But how can they attain from a place far off, (53) when they had disbelieved in it beforehand, while impugning the unseen from a place far off? (54) And a barrier is set between them and that which they desire, as was done with the likes of them before. Truly they were confounded by doubt.

worshipped idols and jinn in vv. 40–42, as such objects of worship have no ability to create anew or to resurrect, as does God, since nothing will come of nothing; see commentary on 25:3: *But they have taken gods apart from Him, who create naught and are themselves created, and who have no power over what harm or benefit may come to themselves, and who have no power over death, or life, or resurrection.*

50 Here the implication is that if the Prophet is astray, then his condition is just like that of those who oppose him, but if he is indeed guided, then his guidance comes directly from revelation and is not the same as the guidance that others may claim to have obtained. The Divine Name *the Hearing* is employed throughout the Quran, but this is the only verse where it is combined with *Near*, thus indicating that the *Lord is the Hearer of supplications* (14:39), which evokes 2:186: *When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they may be led aright.*

51 In this context, *from a place near at hand* further emphasizes that there is no possible escape from God's Judgment (IK, R), as disbelievers are seized immediately upon being resurrected from their graves (IK).

52–53 Those who denied the Prophet and the Quran *disbelieved in it beforehand,* meaning during the life of this world, but now, having seen the truth on the Day of Judgment, they believe, as in 32:12, in which the guilty say on the Day of Judgment, *Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard; so send us back that we may work righteousness. Truly we are certain* (IK). The disbelievers thus admit their sins (see 40:11; 41:47; 67:11) and are terrified of what will become of them. *How can they attain from a place far off?* means, "How can they attain to the opportunities for repentance and guidance that were offered them during the life of this world, as that is a place to which they can never return?" (R). *It* in *They had disbelieved in it* can mean the truth (R), discussed in vv. 48–49, but it can also mean God (Q) in which case it would be translated, "He," the Prophet (Q, R), or the Quran (R). In Arabic the phrase translated *impugning the unseen* is directly related to *my Lord doth cast the truth* (v. 48), as both "impugn" and "cast" render the same verb, *qadhafa*. In this sense, those who disbelieve are the exact opposite of those who believe, as God casts the truth into the hearts of the believers, while the disbelievers cast the truth away. That they impugned or cast off the unseen *from a place far off* indicates that they had no knowledge upon which to base their position.

54 *That which they desire* refers to a return to the world in order to repent and make amends, though now it is too late (R), or to repentance itself (IK), or to the delights of this world (R) in which they used to indulge. Regarding their being *confounded by doubt,* see 11:62, 110; 14:9; 41:45; 42:14.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 35

# The Originator

## *Fāṭir*

A Makkan *sūrah, Fāṭir* was reportedly revealed immediately after *Sūrah* 25, *al-Furqān*. According to some, vv. 27 and 32 are from the Madinan period (Ṭs), while others maintain that vv. 29 and 32 are Madinan (Āl). The *sūrah* takes its name from the reference to God as the *Originator of the heavens and the earth* in v. 1, but is often known as *al-Malāʾikah,* "The Angels" (Āl; IJ; Sy, *al-Itqān*), since v. 1 provides the only description of some aspects of the angels' physical appearance in the Quran.

The main focus of the *sūrah* is upon the Oneness of God as the only Creator and Sustainer of existence. It begins with an affirmation of God as the sole Originator and Provider (vv. 1–3) and returns to this theme throughout (vv. 13–17, 27–28), contrasting the Power of God with the claims the polytheists make for their idols (vv. 13–14, 40–41). A discussion of Satan as the Deluder and enemy (vv. 5–8) leads into the other major theme of this *sūrah,* the contrast between the believers and the disbelievers (vv. 7–8, 10); vv. 19–22 provide one of the most poetic contrasts between the two groups. The longest comparison between the two groups (vv. 29–39), followed by a final contrast between the Power of God and that of the idols (vv. 40–41), segues into a final passage on the nature of disbelief and the ends to which it leads (vv. 42–45).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Praise be to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Who appoints the angels as messengers, of wings two, three, and four, increasing creation as He will. Truly God is Powerful over all things. (2) Whatsoever mercy God opens unto mankind, none shall withhold. And whatsoever He withholds, none shall release thereafter. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (3) O mankind! Remember God's Blessing upon you. Is there a creator other than God who provides for you from Heaven and earth? There is no god but He. How, then,

1 This is one of five *sūrahs* that begin with *Praise be to God* (see 1:2; 6:1; 18:1; 34:1). *Originator* translates *Fāṭir,* a Divine Name related to the verb *faṭara,* meaning to "split" or "cleave." In the Quran, *Fāṭir* always occurs as part of the larger phrase *Originator of the heavens and the earth* (cf. 6:14; 12:101; 14:10; 39:46; 42:11). The verbal form of this word, however, is also used in the context of God's creation of human beings (11:51; 17:51; 20:72; 32:22; 43:27), hence its etymological relation to the *fiṭrah,* or *primordial nature,* in which God creates or "originates" human beings (see 30:30c). That God is *Fāṭir* can also be understood to mean that He is the "Cleaver" or "Splitter," in that God cleaves open the heavens to prepare for the descent of spirits into bodies and then cleaves open the earth for the ascension of the spirits of human beings at the moment of resurrection (R). This relates directly to the function of the *angels,* who are messengers "conveying" the spirits from Heaven to earth and from earth to Heaven (R), though others understand their function as messengers to be related to the role they play in bringing revelation to the prophets (IK). *Increasing creation as He will* can be understood to mean that God increases the number of angels (Q) or their wings (Q, Z), as there are many reports of angels with more than two or three wings, and the Angel Gabriel is reported to have appeared to the Prophet with six hundred wings (IK). The phrase can also be understood more generally to mean that God increases whomever and whatever He wills in creation (Ṭ, Z).

2 The reference to God "opening" mercy can be understood as an allusion to 42:12, *Unto Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth. He outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (cf. 39:63), since none can open these treasuries but God (Ṭ). In this sense, this verse provides a general assertion that none can withhold what God wills to bestow or *release* what He withholds, as in 10:107: *And if God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He; and if He desires some good for thee, none can hold back His Bounty* (IK). The order of the present verse, in which God's opening of mercy is mentioned before the withholding of mercy is related to the idea found in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī:* "My Mercy precedes My Wrath" (R, Z). *None shall release thereafter* could also be rendered, "none shall release after Him" (R), meaning that no one can dispense what God has chosen to withhold. In this regard the Prophet is reported to have said, "I cannot put mercy in your heart after God has removed it."

3 This is one of six verses to enjoin *Remember God's Blessing upon you* (2:231; 5:7, 11, 20; 14:6; see 5:7c). Though some read the present verse as being addressed specifically to the people of Makkah, it can also be extended to all human beings, since all human beings have benefitted from God's blessings (Z). Throughout his commentary, al-Rāzī maintains that there are two general categories of blessings: those of creation, or bringing into being (*ījād*), and those of perpetuation (*ibqā'*). He interprets *Is there a creator other than God* as a reference to the blessing of creation and *who provides*

are you perverted? (4) If they deny thee, messengers before thee were denied, and unto God are all matters returned. (5) O mankind! Surely God's Promise is true. So let not the life of this world delude you, nor let the Deluder delude you concerning God. (6) Truly Satan is an enemy unto you; so take him as an enemy. He only calls upon his party that they may be among the inhabitants of the Blaze. (7) Those who disbelieve, theirs shall be a severe punishment. And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be forgiveness and a great reward. (8) And what of one, the evil of whose deeds

*for you from Heaven and earth* as a reference to the blessing of perpetuation. In this context, *How, then, are you perverted?* (cf. 6:95; 10:34; 40:62) is answered by the statement *There is no god but He,* meaning that, since God has provided all the blessings of both creation and perpetuation, how can any turn away from Him and attribute partners to Him (R)?

4 That previous messengers and prophets have been denied is a major theme of the Quran found in the stories of previous prophets and stated explicitly in several verses; see 3:184; 6:10; 13:32; 21:41; 35:4; 38:12; 40:5; 41:43; 54:9. Elsewhere, this reminder to the Prophet is followed by an additional reminder: *And they bore patiently their being denied and persecuted till Our Help came to them* (6:34). In this sense, the denial and persecution of previous prophets serves to console the Prophet Muhammad and encourage him to bear denial on the part of disbelievers patiently, since from a Quranic perspective all prophetic missions are ultimately victorious (see 9:33; 37:171–73; 40:51; 48:28; 58:21; 61:9). In this context, *unto God are all matters returned* (cf. 2:210; 3:109; 8:44; 22:76; 57:5) indicates that those who denied God's messengers will be requited in full for what they have done (IK).

5 Cf. 31:33. Here the statement that *God's Promise is true* (cf., e.g., 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21) refers to the promise of Divine Punishment for the disbelievers in the previous verse (Ṭ) or to all of the events pertaining to the Hereafter (IK, JJ). Concerning the last phrase, see 31:33c.

6 That Satan is an *enemy* of human beings is stated throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:168, 208; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 36:60; 43:62) and voiced by Satan himself in 4:119: *And surely I will lead them astray, and arouse desires in them. I will command them and they will slit the ears of cattle; I will command them and they will alter God's creation;* and 7:16–17: *Because Thou hast caused me to err, I shall surely lie in wait for them on Thy straight path. Then I shall come upon them from in front of them and from behind them, and from their right and from their left. And Thou wilt not find most of them thankful.* The warning to *take* Satan *as an enemy* is understood as an injunction to obey God rather than Satan (JJ, Ṭ) and to perform righteous deeds (R). In this regard, al-Rāzī writes: "Whosoever knows that he has an enemy from whom he has no escape and is certain of that, then focuses upon [opposing him], and forbears in fighting him and being patient shall triumph. Likewise for Satan, the human being cannot escape him, for he is with him. And he ceases not to follow him until he focuses upon him and routs him, for routing Satan comes through a human being's determination, and the path is being firm in intent and trusting in servitude [to God]."

Those who are in the *party* of Satan are those who do not take him as an enemy and follow him rather than God and the messengers (JJ). *He only calls upon his party* thus means that Satan summons "the people of caprice, innovation, and error" who obey him and hearken to those who declare such things (ST). Then when they are *among the inhabitants of the Blaze,* Satan declares himself innocent of all that they have done; see 14:22c; 59:16.

7 This verse juxtaposes those who follow Satan and are thus among his party with those who take him as an enemy and follow God.

8 One for whom the evil of his deeds *has been made to seem fair to him* is one who has failed to

has been made to seem fair to him, such that he thinks it beautiful? Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will; so let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them. Truly God knows that which they do. (9) And God is He Who sends the winds; then they cause clouds to rise. Then We drive them to a land that is dead, and thereby revive the earth after its death. Thus shall be the Resurrection! (10) Whosoever desires might—to God belongs might altogether. Unto Him ascends the good word, and He uplifts the

consider Satan an enemy, since it is Satan who has *made their deeds seem fair unto them* (8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38). Deeds seeming fair and being led astray are one and the same, since it is as a result of following caprice that one comes to see what is ugly as beautiful and what is beautiful as ugly (Z). Such people think their bad deeds are good or that their vice is virtue, for few who commit evil deeds are aware of it, just as few who are ignorant are aware of their ignorance (R). In this context, that *God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:27; 14:4; 16:93; 74:31) can be understood as the reason why the Prophet should not expend regrets over their being astray (Ṭ). *Let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them* is one of several injunctions enjoining the Prophet not to grieve for those who reject the message (see 3:176; 5:41, 68; 6:33; 10:65; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 31:23; 36:76). Such passages indicate that the Prophet need not worry about the condition of the disbelievers, but should simply spread the Word of God as he has been enjoined, since *God knows that which they do.*

9 The positive, revivifying dimension of *winds* (in the plural) occurs ten times in the Quran and each time conveys an aspect of God's Mercy, as in 7:57 and 25:48: *He it is Who sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy* (see also 30:46). In contrast, *wind* (in the singular) is often used to express God's Wrath and Punishment (see 3:117; 10:22; 17:69; 22:81; 30:51; 33:9; 41:16; 46:24; 51:41; 54:19; 69:6). This verse is one of many where the manner in which God revives the dead earth is employed as a metaphor for the Resurrection (IK); see also 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 25:48–49; 29:63; 30:19, 24, 50; 36:33; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11.

10 *Whosoever desires might* means whoever desires honor, power, and glory in this world and the next. *To God belongs might altogether* reminds one to be obedient toward God, as all such qualities come from God (IK); it is thus understood as a command not to seek such might from idols or other gods (IK, Ṭ) or from disbelievers, as in 4:139: *Those who take disbelievers as protectors instead of believers—do they seek might through them? Truly might belongs altogether to God* (IK). It is also understood to mean that any who seek true honor, power, and glory and are sincere in their desire, so that they seek with humility and poverty before God, will find these qualities with God and they will be unveiled to them (Q); see 10:65c.

The *good word* may refer to the remembrance and invocation of God, the recitation of the Quran, and supplicatory prayer (IK) or to the declaration of God's Oneness (Q). This sentence can be understood to mean that all good words and righteous deeds ascend to God and that one is thus rewarded for them, or that God *uplifts the righteous deed* over the *good word* because the deed constitutes the verification of the word (Q), since it is putting faith into action. The subtle phrasing of this verse also allows for it to be read, "Unto Him ascends the good word and the righteous deed uplifts it," meaning the deed uplifts the word (Q), as in a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās: "The *good word* is the remembrance of God, which is taken up to God, and the righteous deed is the performance of obligatory duties. Whosoever remembers God while performing an obligatory duty, his deed carries his remembrance of God and takes it up to God. Whosoever remembers God and does not perform the obligatory duties, his words will be rejected, as will his deed" (IK). But it must also be recognized that the *good word* is a good deed in and of itself (Q). The phrase could also be understood to mean, "Unto Him ascends the good word, and as for the righteous

righteous deed. As for those who plot evil deeds, theirs shall be a severe punishment, and their plotting shall come to ruin. (11) God created you from dust, then from a drop, then He made you pairs; and no female bears or brings forth save with His Knowledge. And none who grows old grows old, nor has aught lessened of his life, but that it is in a Book. Truly that is easy for God. (12) Not equal are the two seas: one sweet, satisfying, pleasant to drink, and the other salty, bitter. Yet from each you eat fresh meat, and bring out ornaments that you wear. And you see the ships therein plowing through, that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. (13) He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and He has made the sun and

deed, it uplifts it" (Q), meaning that the *good word* uplifts the righteous deed in the sense that no good deed is accepted by God unless there is a sincere declaration of faith that precedes or accompanies it (Q). *He uplifts it* is thus understood to mean that God makes it reach Him "due to the presence of sincerity toward God within it" (ST). *Those who plot evil deeds* is understood as a reference to people of duplicity and hypocrisy (IK, Q, Ṭ) who perform "righteous deeds" only to deceive others into thinking that they obey God (IK) and whose deeds do not ascend. *Their plotting shall come to ruin,* because God knows that they perform such deeds only *to be seen of* others (see 2:264; 4:38, 142; 8:47) and not because of belief in God (see 4:37–39c).

11 Following upon v. 9, the mention of the stages of creation here is in part a reminder of God's Ability to resurrect, as in 22:5: *O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you.* As the *drop* from which human beings were created (cf. 16:4; 18:37; 22:5; 36:77; 40:67; 53:46; 76:2; 80:19) is *a draught of base fluid* (32:8; cf. 77:20) and was preceded by *dust,* that *God created you from dust, then from a drop* also serves to remind human beings of their lowly origins. That God created *mates* for human beings is attested in several verses (4:1; 16:72; 42:11; 78:8). Here, as in 16:72 and 42:11, the connection to procreation is emphasized. Elsewhere, the emotional, psychological, and spiritual benefits of marriage are emphasized; see 2:187; 30:21c. The remainder of the verse means that the term of one's life has been decreed by God, that one *may reach a term appointed* (40:67); see 40:67c.

12 Regarding the *two seas,* also see 25:53, which adds that God has *set between them a divide and a barrier, forbidden* (cf. 55:20). The *fresh meat* refers to all the fruits of the sea, and the *ornaments that you wear* to *pearls and coral stones* (55:22; JJ, Z). Many commentators understand the two seas as a metaphor for the believer and the disbeliever (Bḍ, Z). But, as al-Rāzī observes, the fact that one brings fresh meat from each sea makes this metaphor difficult to apply. Drawing a spiritual lesson from this metaphor, Ibn ʿAjībah likens the Law to the ocean that is *sweet, satisfying, pleasant to drink* and the ocean of Reality to the one that is *salty, bitter,* because the latter requires exerting one's innermost self, lowering one's head, spending of one's wealth, and abandoning the world and its people, whereas the Law does not require as much. Fresh meat and ornaments are retrieved from each sea: From the ocean of the Law "one obtains the sweetness of proper conduct," while from the ocean of Reality one tastes "the sweetness of witnessing [God] and of spiritual knowledge" (Aj). The *ships* are then seen as the spiritual reflections that are *plowing through* the seas of Dominion (*malakūt*) and Majesty (*jabarūt*) to the completion of spiritual knowledge from God's *Bounty* in order to be among those who *give thanks* (Aj).

13–14 Regarding the first sentence of v. 13, see commentary on the almost identical phrasing in 31:29. That the deities called upon *do not possess*

the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed. That is God, your Lord; to Him belongs sovereignty. As for those upon whom you call apart from Him, they do not possess so much as the husk of a date stone. (14) If you call upon them, they hear not your call, and even if they heard, they would not respond to you; and on the Day of Resurrection they will disown your ascribing partners unto God. And none informs you like one who is Aware. (15) O mankind! You are needful of God; and He is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised. (16) If He will, He could remove you and bring a new creation. (17) That

*so much as the husk of a date stone* reaffirms God's absolute sovereignty in that it underlines the complete powerlessness of all upon whom people call apart from God, as in 22:73: *Truly those upon whom you call apart from God will never create a fly, even if they gathered together to do so. And if the fly should rob them of aught, they could not rescue it from it. Feeble are the seeker and the sought!* (cf. 34:22). Elsewhere, the idolaters are challenged, *So call upon them! Let them answer you, if you are truthful* (7:194). The idols and gods they call upon *are heedless of their calling* (46:5). They then disown the idolatry of the disbelievers, as in 10:28, where it is reported that they will say, *It was not us that you worshipped,* which reflects the manner in which Satan disavows the disbelievers, saying, *Surely I am quit of you. Truly I fear God, the Lord of the worlds* (59:16), and *I cannot respond to your cries for help, nor can you respond to my cries for help. Truly I disbelieved in your ascribing me as partner aforetime* (14:22; see commentary). Thus, *when mankind is gathered together, such will be enemies unto them and deniers of their worship* (46:6). In general, that *none informs you like one who is Aware* means that no one can inform you in the manner that God informs you (Aj, Q, Z). In context, this phrase can also refer to the account of the idols, meaning that only God tells you the truth regarding this matter (Aj, Z), especially as it pertains to the Unseen and cannot be deduced through reasoning (R). That *none informs you like one who is Aware* can also refer to the events on the Day of Resurrection (IK, Ṭ).

15 Like *God is the Rich, and you are the poor* in 47:38, this verse has played an important role in the Sufi understanding of the relationship between the Divine and the created order, especially human beings: God is completely Rich and Self-Sufficient and human beings completely poor, in utter need of God with regard to being both brought into existence and provided sustenance (Aj). From this perspective, realizing the Fullness or Richness of God depends upon the realization of one's complete poverty before God. As al-Tustarī writes, "You [depend] upon Him in your very selves, for when God created creation, He ordained (*ḥakama*) poverty for His servants in relation to Him, while He is the Rich. So whosoever claims wealth has been veiled from God. And whosoever shows his poverty in relation to Him, God will join his poverty to His wealth. The servant must feel poverty toward Him in his innermost being (*sirr*), cutting himself off from all that is other than Him, so that his servanthood may be pure; for pure servanthood is abasement and humility" (ST). From this perspective one must cut oneself off from all that is other than God, because poverty toward and need for God is intrinsic to human nature, whereas poverty toward or need for other things is accidental. Therefore, every need that one experiences is ultimately a need for God, since the phenomena for which one experiences need are veils that hide God and also reveal God. That God is *the Praised* thus indicates that being praised is intrinsic to the Divine Nature and not dependent upon anything to praise Him. In this respect, al-Maybudī states that only those who fully realize poverty truly praise God.

16–17 In this context, that God can make people disappear underlines His Self-Sufficiency (R) and the utter poverty of human beings in that God's making them disappear depends only upon God's Will. *Bring a new creation* means that God will replace them with other people (IK), either another people who already exist or a whole new

is no great matter for God. (18) And none shall bear the burden of another. And though a burdened soul should call for its burden to be borne, naught of it will be borne, even if it be kin. Thou warnest only those who fear their Lord unseen and perform the prayer. And whosoever purifies himself purifies himself only for his own soul. And unto God is the journey's end. (19) Not equal are the blind and the seeing, (20) nor the darkness and the light, (21) nor the shade and the scorching heat. (22) Not equal are the living and the dead. Truly God causes whomsoever He will to hear, but thou canst not cause those in graves to

people whom He will create who are better and more perfect than the previous ones (R); see also 4:133; 5:54c; 6:133; 14:19–20; 47:38.

18 That *none shall bear the burden of another* (cf. 6:164; 17:15; 39:7; 53:38)—that is, that no one will bear the sins or duties of others (Aj, IK, R, Ṭ)—points to God's Justice (Aj). In this context, the phrase can be understood as the introduction of a new discussion (Q), or as connected to the previous verses in that being poor in relation to God (see 35:15c) also means that one cannot take on the burden of another or cast one's burden upon another (R), since human beings are powerless to make such determinations. Commentators reconcile this phrase with 29:13, *Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own,* by saying that *their own burdens* refers to what corrupt leaders will endure for the sin of having been misled themselves and that *others' burdens* refers to that for having misled others (Aj). That one who *purifies himself purifies himself only for his own soul* means that whoever performs good deeds receives the benefit of those deeds (IK), just as the first part of this verse indicates that only those who commit evil deeds suffer the punishment for such deeds. This verse thus demonstrates a moral reflexivity in which the ultimate impact of actions, good or bad, is always upon the one who performs these actions (see 2:9, 272; 3:69; 6:123; 8:60; 9:34–35; 10:23; 29:6).

19 Here, *seeing* is used as a metaphor for belief and blindness for disbelief (Aj, Ṭ, Q), as in 40:58: *And the blind and the seer are not equal; nor are those who believe and perform righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you reflect* (cf. 6:50; 11:24; 13:16). This juxtaposition can also be seen as a metaphor for knowledge and ignorance, as in 39:9: *Are those who know and those who do not know equal?* Some also read the present verse as a contrast between God and the idols (Aj), since the Quran often notes the powerlessness and lifelessness of the idols (e.g., 7:194; 22:73; 34:22).

20–21 The contrasts between *the darkness and the light* and *the living and the dead* (v. 22) are combined in 6:122: *Is he who was dead, and to whom We give life, making for him a light by which to walk among mankind, like unto one who is in darkness from which he does not emerge?* Combining vv. 19–22, Ibn Kathīr writes, "The believer sees and hears, and walks in the light upon a straight path in this world and the Hereafter, so that he comes to settle in Gardens wherein are shade and springs. The disbeliever is blind and deaf, walking in darkness from which he cannot escape; he is lost in his misguidance in this world and the Hereafter, so that he ends up *amidst scorching wind and boiling liquid, and the shadow of black smoke, neither cool nor refreshing* [56:42–44]."

22 This verse can be seen as a response to the rhetorical questions posed in 6:122 and 39:22; that is, not equal are *the living,* those whose hearts are alive with faith in God, and *the dead,* those whose hearts are dead because they are covered with disbelief (Ṭ). That *God causes whomsoever He will to hear, but thou canst not cause those in graves to hear* is related to the first part of the verse in that those whose hearts are alive are those who hear the truth of the revelation, while those whose hearts are buried in the grave of ignorance cannot hear it (Ṭ). God's causing them to hear thus refers to His guiding them and supporting them (Aj); see also 30:52–53.

hear. (23) Thou art naught but a warner. (24) Truly We have sent thee with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. And there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them. (25) If they deny thee, those before them also denied: their messengers brought them clear proofs, scriptures, and the luminous Book. (26) Then I seized those who disbelieved. How, then, was the change I wrought! (27) Hast thou not considered that God sends down water from the sky, wherewith We bring forth fruits of diverse colors? And in the mountains are streaks of white and red, of diverse hues, and others pitch-black. (28) And of mankind, beasts, and cattle there are, likewise, those of

23 In this context, that the Prophet is *naught but a warner* (cf. 11:12; 13:7; 27:92; 34:46; 38:65; 79:45) indicates that it is not his function to *cause those in graves to hear;* it is only his function to deliver the message, so that those who believe or may come to believe will hear, as in 30:53: *Thou makest none to hear, save those who believe in Our signs and are submitters.* The Prophet is thus enjoined to leave their belief or disbelief in the Hands of God. In this way, this verse is an extension of v. 8: *So let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them* (Ṭ).

24 The Prophet is also referred to as both *a bearer of glad tidings* and *a warner* in 5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 48:8; in other verses these functions are attributed to all prophets (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56). According to Islamic belief, every human collectivity has been sent a warner (cf. 16:36) or messenger (10:47) and will thus be held accountable for heeding or ignoring the warning; see 67:9c.

25 Cf. 3:184. Regarding the denial of previous prophets, see 35:4c. That *their messengers brought them clear proofs* (cf. 7:101; 10:13; 14:9; 30:9; 40:83) refers to the miracles that bear witness to the truth of their prophetic missions (Q, Z) as well as the revealed laws (Q). *Scriptures* translates *zubur,* which is the plural of *zabūr;* a word employed elsewhere to designate the revelation sent to David, hence "the Psalms" (see 4:163; 17:56; 21:105). *Zubur,* however, is used more broadly in the Quran to denote various different revelations (see 3:184; 16:44; 23:53; 26:196; 54:43).

26 God's seizing the disbelievers indicates that they are being punished, as in 40:5: *they disputed by means of falsehood in order to reject the truth thereby; so I seized them. How, then, was My Retribution!* (cf. 13:32). *How, then, was the change I wrought!* (cf. 22:44; 34:45; 67:18) could also be rendered, "How was the nature of My reproach!" Both translations imply "How severe was My Punishment!" (Q), indicating that the punishment that befalls the disbelievers of this generation will be as severe as the punishment that befell earlier ones.

27 *Hast thou not considered* is addressed to the Prophet, but can also be read as a direct address to the reader or listener (R). It refers to seeing with the vision of the heart (Q), which enables one to know the true nature of things. In this vein, Ibn ʿAjībah relates the *fruits of diverse colors* to different forms of knowledge, and the different *streaks* upon mountains to the various paths by which knowledge is obtained; regarding the many signs in God's sending down *water from the sky,* see 6:99c.

28 This verse refers to the differentiation between races and ethnicities, as in 30:22, *And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your tongues and colors* (IK), but it can also be understood as a reference to the manner in which the inner states of human beings differ (Q). *Those . . . who know* is understood by many to mean those who know that God is Powerful over all things (IK, Q, Ṭ). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The one among you who has the most knowledge of God is the one whose fear of Him is most intense" (Z). That *only those among His servants who know fear God* is understood to indicate the superiority of knowledge over worship (R), as in a famous *ḥadīth:* "Whosoever sets upon a path to

diverse colors. [Yet] only those among His servants who know fear God. Truly God is Mighty, Forgiving. (29) Truly those who recite the Book of God, perform the prayer, and spend from that which We have provided them secretly and openly hope for a commerce that will never perish, (30) that He may pay them their rewards in full and increase them from His Bounty. Truly He is Forgiving, Thankful. (31) And that which We have revealed unto thee from the Book is the truth, confirming what came before it. Verily God is of His servants Aware, Seeing. (32) Then We bequeathed the Book to those of Our servants whom We had chosen. Among them are those who wrong themselves, those who take a middle course, and those who are foremost in good deeds, by God's Leave.

seek knowledge, God will set him upon a path to the Garden. Verily the angels lower their wings being content with the one who seeks knowledge. And whosoever is in the heavens and on earth, even the fish in the sea, ask forgiveness for the person of knowledge. The superiority of one who has knowledge over the worshipper is as that of the moon over all other heavenly bodies. Those who have knowledge are the heirs of the prophets, for the prophets did not leave behind *dīnārs* and *dirhams*; they only left behind knowledge; and whosoever receives it, receives an abundance of good fortune." Yet the manner in which this verse is followed by the mention of the obligatory acts of worship demonstrates that such knowledge must be combined with worship and manifest in one's actions in order to be of benefit (Bḍ).

29 Both the obligatory and supererogatory manifestations of the three religious practices mentioned here are extolled (Q). The mention of the three together may be understood as an allusion to worshipping with one's tongue, worshipping with one's body, and expending one's wealth, while the reference to fearing God in the previous verse alludes to remembering God with one's heart (R). Regarding the recitation of the Quran, see 73:3–4c; 47:16c. In this context, some see *those who recite the Book of God* as a reference to those who recite the Quran constantly (Aj). The injunction to spend of one's wealth *secretly and openly* (cf. 2:274; 13:22; 14:31; 16:75) indicates that one should give both openly, so that others are encouraged to do the same, and privately, so as not to be boastful. That those who perform these actions *hope for a commerce that will never perish* (cf. 61:10) alludes to their sincerity in seeking only the Face of God (R), as they do not perform such deeds *to be seen of men* (2:264; 4:38, 142; 8:47).

30 Cf. 3:57; 4:152, 173. God will reward the devout believers mentioned in the previous verse for what they have done and increase it to an extent that they could not fathom (IK). That God is *Forgiving, Thankful* (cf. 35:34; 42:23) indicates that He forgives bad deeds and accepts good deeds.

31 *From the Book* refers either to the guidance and clarifications from the Quran or else to the Quran itself being from the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; R), which is held to be the source of all revelation. *The Book* confirms *what came before it*, so that there is no difference between it and previous revelations (R), as in 41:43, which addresses the Prophet, saying, *Naught has been said unto thee save that which has been said unto the messengers before thee.* From this perspective, the Quran cannot but confirm previous scriptures; see 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 5:48; 6:92; 10:37; 46:30.

32 *The Book* refers to the Quran (IK, JJ) or to all revealed books (Ṭ). With regard to the latter, that God has *bequeathed* it means that God has bequeathed the truth conveyed by all revelations to those who follow the Quran, as these truths are preserved in this revelation. Some see God's having bequeathed it after having revealed it (in v. 31) as an allusion to the fact that there is no revelation after the Quran (R, Ṭs). The *chosen* to whom the Book is bequeathed refers to the prophets (Ṭb, Ṭs); or the people of knowledge, as in a famous *ḥadīth*, "The people of knowledge are the heirs

That is the great bounty: (33) Gardens of Eden which they will enter, adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments therein will be of silk. (34) And they will say, "Praise be to God, Who has dispelled grief from us.

of the prophets" (Ṭs, Ṭū); or the whole of the Muslim community (Ṭb, Ṭs). In this last sense, it would be similar to 40:53, which says of the Jews, *And indeed We gave Moses guidance, and We bequeathed the Book to the Children of Israel* (Ṭb). According to the Shiite tradition, *Our servants whom We had chosen* refers to descendants of the Prophet (Ṭb) or to the Imams specifically (Qm). The fifth and sixth Shiite Imams are reported to have said of this verse, "This refers specifically to us" (Ṭs). From this perspective, *those who wrong themselves* refers to *those of Our servants* who do not follow the Imams (Qm).

From a Sunni perspective, the three types of people listed here refer to three categories of believers (R): *those who wrong themselves* are believers who are careless, omitting some obligatory actions and committing some that are forbidden; *those who take a middle course* are those who perform the obligatory actions and avoid what is forbidden, but neglect praiseworthy deeds and do some things that are disliked by God; and *those who are foremost in good deeds* are those who perform both obligatory and praiseworthy acts and avoid both what is forbidden and what is disliked (IK). *Those who wrong themselves* are thus forgiven, while *those who take a middle course* are given an easy reckoning, and the *foremost* enter the Garden with no reckoning (IK, Q, Ṭ). From this perspective, the Book has been bequeathed to all three groups, and even those who believe yet *wrong themselves* will be forgiven (IK, Q). Others understand *those who wrong themselves* as a reference to disbelievers or hypocrites, *those who take a middle course* as a reference to believers who may still be disobedient, and the *foremost* as a reference to those who are truly reverent (Q, Ṭ). In this vein, they liken *those who wrong themselves* to *the companions of the left* (56:9), *those who take a middle course* to *the companions of the right* (56:8), and *those who are foremost in good deeds* to *the foremost* (56:10; Q, Ṭ). *Those who wrong themselves* are then said to be in the Fire, while the two categories of believers attain Paradise (Ṭ). Al-Tustarī is reported to have related these three categories to the attainment of knowledge: "The one who is *foremost* is the one who is learned; the one who takes *a middle course* is the one who is learning; and the one who wrongs himself is the one who is ignorant" (ST). Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is also reported to have said, "The foremost are those whose good deeds outweigh their misdeeds; those who *take a middle course* are those whose good deeds and misdeeds balance each other; and the wrongdoers are those whose misdeeds outweigh their good deeds" (ST).

*That is the great bounty* may refer to the *Gardens of Eden* (v. 33), but is also understood as a reference to the bequest of the Book (JJ) or to the fact that being *foremost in good deeds* is a bounty that God may bestow upon *those who take a middle course* and *those who wrong themselves* (Ṭ), as it is a degree only attained *by God's Leave*.

That the Book is bequeathed to all of God's servants may not necessarily introduce the complication that all of the commentators are trying to address here, namely, "How it is that the Book can be bequeathed to *those who wrong themselves*"? From an Islamic perspective, revelation can be understood as bequeathed to all human beings, even the disbelievers, in that, as the Prophet has said, "The Quran is a proof, either for you or against you," since its truth shows each human being his or her true nature (see 36:7c; 40:6c). This verse could then be understood as addressing the three tendencies within human beings: *those who wrong themselves* are those who experience God's Anger; *those who take a middle course* are those who at times are astray; and the *foremost* are those who follow a straight path. The way they are presented here, from lowest to highest, could also be understood as an allusion to the manner in which the bequest of the Book can bring one from the lowest state, in which one wrongs oneself, to the highest state, in which one is among the foremost, *by God's Leave*, which is *the great bounty*.

33 Other references to the raiment and ornaments of the inhabitants of the Garden include 18:31; 22:23; 44:53; 76:21. Regarding *bracelets of gold*, see 18:31c. The inhabitants of the Garden are also said to be *adorned with silvern bracelets*

Truly our Lord is Forgiving, Thankful, (35) Who, of His Bounty, has caused us to dwell in the Abode of Everlasting Life, wherein no weariness shall touch us, nor fatigue befall us." (36) As for those who disbelieve, theirs shall be the Fire of Hell. They will neither be done away with so as to die; nor will aught of its punishment be lightened for them. Thus do We requite every disbeliever. (37) They will cry out therein, "Our Lord! Remove us, that we may work righteousness other than that which we used to do." "Did We not give you long life, enough for whosoever would reflect to reflect therein? And the warner came unto you,

(76:21). Elsewhere, their *garments* are said to be *of fine silk and rich brocade* (18:31; 76:21).

34 Those who *praise God* for removing their *sorrow* are either all those who enter Paradise or *those who wrong themselves* (v. 32) when the latter is understood to mean those believers who nonetheless remained somewhat disobedient to God. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "As for one who wrongs himself, he will be afflicted by distress and sorrow in that state, and that is [the meaning of] *Praise be to God, Who has dispelled grief from us*" (Ṭ). In either interpretation, the *grief* that God dispels is the sorrow that arises from the fear of the Fire (Ṭ), the anxieties of this life and the next (IK, Z), or Satan and his whispering (Z). It may also refer to death (Ṭ), as they will not die again. Hence the Quran says of those who attain Paradise, *No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve* (2:38, 62, 112, 262, 274, 277; 3:170; 5:69; 6:48; 7:35; 10:62; 46:13).

35 *Of His Bounty* is understood by some as an allusion to the fact that entry into the Garden is entirely in God's Hands, as when the Prophet said to some of his Companions, "None will enter Paradise by virtue of good deeds, not even me, unless God encompasses me with Mercy and Bounty" (IK). In Arabic, *weariness* (*naṣab*) and *fatigue* (*lughūb*) are practically synonymous. Here, however, many commentators distinguish between them by saying that *lughūb* is fatigue and weariness, while *naṣab* is the toil and work that brings it about (R). Others say that these synonyms are used to refer to different types of "weariness," *naṣab* being weariness of the body and *lughūb* being that of the soul or spirit (IK).

36 *They will neither be done away with so as to die* is similar to 20:74: *Verily, whosoever comes unto his Lord guilty, surely his shall be Hell, wherein he neither dies nor lives.* The *punishment* is not *lightened* after the disbelievers have been sentenced, because they had already been granted respite and thus had many opportunities to repent during the life of this world; see 2:162 and 3:88: *The punishment shall not be lightened for them; nor shall they be granted respite* (cf. 2:86; 16:85; 43:74–75). Rather, God promises, *Every time it abates, We shall increase for them a blazing flame* (17:97; cf. 78:30).

37 Having witnessed the realities of Resurrection and Judgment that they had denied (see 32:12; 19:38) and been made to *admit their sin* (67:11; cf. 40:11), the disbelievers ask for a reprieve, claiming that they will now *work righteousness*, or as they say in 6:27: *Would that we were sent back! Then we would not deny the signs of our Lord, but we would be among the believers!* (cf. 7:53; 26:102). Yet the warners who had been sent to them and the opportunity to reflect throughout their life constitute such a reprieve; thus 4:18 says, *And repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly now I repent," nor from those who die as disbelievers. For those We have prepared a painful punishment.* In 23:100 it is said of their requests to be sent back and of their repentance, *Nay, indeed these are words that he speaks.* God thus denies all such requests, because *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden* (6:28). Thus *the wrongdoers shall have no helpers* (cf. 2:270; 3:192; 5:72; 22:71), because they turned away from God and the help that He sent them during their life in this world. For the manner in which this and other verses can be seen as part

so taste [the punishment]! The wrongdoers shall have no helpers." (38) Truly God knows the unseen of the heavens and the earth. Truly He knows what lies within breasts. (39) He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth. So whosoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his detriment. The disbelief of the disbelievers increases them with their Lord in naught but odium. And the disbelief of the disbelievers increases them in naught but loss. (40) Say, "Have you considered your partners upon whom you call apart from God? Show me what they have created of the earth. Do they have a share in the heavens, or did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?" Nay, the wrongdoers promise one another naught but delusion. (41) Truly God maintains

of an extended discourse between God and the denizens of Hell, see 40:11–12c.

38 Elsewhere God is said to be *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18), but this is one of only two verses to assert that *God knows the unseen of the heavens and the earth* (cf. 49:18). That God *knows what lies within breasts* is repeated in 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13. This warning can be understood as a reminder not to break the covenant either outwardly or intentionally or secretly, for God always knows and holds one accountable for what *lies within breasts* (R, in commentary on 5:7).

39 Just as God created Adam as *a vicegerent upon the earth* (2:30), so too has God appointed all human beings as *vicegerents upon the earth* (cf. 6:165). Thus humanity is asked, *Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you* (22:65; cf. 14:33; 31:20; 45:13); see 2:30c; 6:165c. That a person's *disbelief is to his detriment* (cf. 30:44) relates to v. 18 (*None shall bear the burden of another*), since no one can carry the burden of another's disbelief. It also relates to the role of human beings as vicegerents, for insofar as any disbelief is concerned, they reject their true nature and responsibility toward God. Their disbelief increases them *in naught but odium* means that the longer they persist in their disbelief, the more they will lose on the Day of Resurrection (IK). For other passages where the call of God's messengers increases disbelievers in opposition and other negative reactions, see, for example, 9:125; 17:41; 25:60; 35:42; 71:6.

40 This is one of several verses that challenge the idolaters to bring proof that their idols do indeed have the powers attributed to them. Elsewhere, the Prophet is told to say, *Bring me your proof!* (21:24). This verse and several others (46:4; 10:34; 21:24) address the inability of their "gods" to create; 25:3 denies all of the powers attributed to them: *But they have taken gods apart from Him, who create naught and are themselves created, and who have no power over what harm or benefit may come to themselves, and who have no power over death, or life, or resurrection.* The question *Do they have a share in the heavens?* (cf. 46:4) is connected to the preceding mention of *your partners,* meaning, "Do the idols they worship have a share in God's Powers?" Alternately, it is connected to what follows, meaning, "Do the idolaters have some access to the heavens by which they perceive these things they claim?" (R). *A book* means a revelation; so the question asks, "Were they given a revelation that tells them of the things they claim?" (R). This second interpretation could thus allude to their having no way to substantiate their claims through intellect (*ʿaql*) or transmission (*naql;* R). Their claims are thus based upon nothing more than their promises to one another, which, having no foundation, are *naught but delusion. Did We give them a book?* is similar to challenges posed to the idolaters in several verses, such as 43:21: *Or did We give them a book beforehand to which they hold fast?* (cf. 34:44; 46:4; 68:37–38); see 46:4c.

41 Similar to 22:65, *And He maintains the sky lest it fall upon the earth, save by His Leave,* this

the heavens and the earth, lest they fall apart. And were they to fall apart, none would maintain them after Him. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving. (42) And they swore by God their most solemn oaths that, were a warner to come unto them, they would be more rightly guided than any of the communities. Yet when a warner came unto them, it increased them in naught but aversion, (43) waxing arrogant upon the earth and plotting evil; yet evil plotting besets none but those who plot. So do they await aught but the wont of those of old? Thou wilt find no alteration in the wont of God, and thou wilt find no change in the wont

verse confirms that none but God maintains the created order, since *the sky and the earth stand fast by His Command* (30:25). In this context, that God *is Clement, Forgiving* (cf. 17:44) alludes to God continuing to uphold the heavens even when the disbelievers declare that others uphold them, thus giving them time to repent (IK, R, Ṭ).

42 Whereas the previous verses (vv. 38–41) discussed the disbelievers' denial of Divine Oneness (*tawḥīd*), this verse addresses their denial of the Prophet. Before the Prophet had been sent to them, they denied only *tawḥīd;* afterwards they denied the Prophet and hence the revelation as well (R). It thus increased the idolaters *in naught but aversion*. Similarly, the disbelievers "increase in aversion" when the Prophet calls them to *prostrate before the Compassionate* (25:60), and when God expounds His signs in the Quran *that they might reflect* (17:41); see also 17:60, 82; 71:6, 24. According to some accounts, the Makkans had criticized the Jews, claiming that, were a messenger to be sent to them (the Makkans), they would not deny the messenger in the same way that previous communities had denied their messengers (R), as in 6:157: *Or lest you should say, "If the Book had been sent down upon us, we would surely have been better guided than they." Now there has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord, a guidance and a mercy. So who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God and turns away from them?*

43 *Waxing arrogant* translates *istikbāran,* which can be also be read in relation to the previous verse to mean, "It increased them in naught but aversion and arrogance," or "aversion due to arrogance" (R, Z). The verse could also be read to mean, "It increased them in naught but delusion, waxing arrogant upon the earth, and evil plotting" (Z). According to some, *waxing arrogant* refers to their preventing the weaker ones among them from following the Prophet, while *plotting evil* refers to their polytheism (Ṭ). Their *plotting evil* (or evil plotting) could also mean their plotting against the Prophet (Z). That *evil plotting besets none but those who plot* evokes the Quranic theme of moral reflexivity, as in 10:23: *O mankind! Your tyranny is only against yourselves;* see 35:18c.

This is one of several verses that reference the wonts or customs of previous peoples (see 3:137; 4:26; 8:38; 15:13; 17:77; 18:55). In this context, the *wont of those of old* is understood to mean God's wont concerning them (Bḍ, R, Ṭ), thus the forms of punishment with which God afflicted them (Q). That there is *no change in the wont of God* (cf. 33:62; 48:23) can be understood as a reference to the permanence of the laws and principles God established for creation. In this context, it indicates both that God always allows the plotting of the disbelievers to close in upon them and that the outcome is something decreed, *which none can avert* (70:2; R). It also has a note of irony, as if to say to those who persist in disbelief, "You want to follow the wont of those of old? Then God will bring a wont in which there is no alteration or change" (R), meaning that their end will be like the end of those before them. The absence of alteration in God's wont can be seen as a reference to the fact that God will always recompense the disbelievers with their just deserts, while the absence of change can be seen as a reference to the fact that none can avert God's Punishment by making the recompense due for one fall upon another (Bḍ, Q, R); for *the wont of God,* see also 3:137c; 33:38, 62; 40:85; 48:23.

of God. (44) Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end, though they were greater than they in strength? Naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God. Truly He is Knowing, Powerful. (45) Were God to take mankind to task for that which they have earned, He would not leave a single creature upon the surface of the earth. But He grants them reprieve till a term appointed. And when their term comes, truly God sees His servants.

44 The injunction to observe *how those before them fared in the end,* which is here directly connected to the mention of *the wont of those of old* in v. 43, is repeated several times in the Quran (12:109; 30:9, 42; 40:21, 82; 47:10). The Quran frequently mentions the fate of the guilty, the corrupt, the wrongdoers, and those who denied God's messengers as an admonition to the disbelievers (see 3:137; 6:11; 7:84, 86, 103; 10:39, 73; 16:36; 27:14, 69; 37:73; 43:25). *Those before them* is thus understood as a reference to previous tribes and peoples who were destroyed despite being mightier than those who opposed the Prophet (see also 40:21, 82). For more on the Quranic discussion of journeying upon the earth and the spiritual and moral edification to be derived from it, see 30:9c.

In this context, that *naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God* (cf. 8:59; 9:2–3; 11:20; 24:57; 29:22; 42:31; 46:32; 72:12) reaffirms that *those of old* could not in any way escape the punishment merited by their aversion, arrogance, and plotting, despite their great material and physical strength (R); thus the disbelievers to whom these verses are addressed will also not be able to avert the punishment that is their due, as in 6:134: *Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart [it].*

45 Were God to give human beings the recompense for their acts of disobedience immediately, rather than granting them respite (Ṭū), no creature would remain upon the face of the earth (Ṭū). The reference to *a single creature* can be understood to mean only human beings and jinn (Q) or only human beings (Bḍ, Q). But it most likely refers to all living creatures, who will suffer from the sins of human beings, as they did in the flood of Noah (Q), though others say the reference to *a term appointed* indicates that this applies only to human beings. It is proposed that one of the ways in which God would *not leave a single creature upon the surface of the earth* is by withholding the rain, which would destroy all living things (Q, Z). The elimination of the creatures of the earth can also be seen as part of the punishment for human beings, since creatures are a means of provision (R). Their elimination from the surface of the earth can also indicate the severity of the punishment and point to the fact that the lives of human beings are integrated with those of the creatures around them, so that the punishment they bring upon themselves cannot but affect other forms of life (R).

In this context, *a term appointed* (cf. 6:60; 7:34; 10:49; 14:10; 16:61; 39:5, 42; 71:4) indicates the Day of Resurrection (Q, Z). All individuals and communities (7:34; 10:49) as well as all created phenomena (see 13:2; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 46:3) have *a term appointed,* meaning a final end that has been determined or "measured out" by God. That people are granted reprieve until *a term appointed* points to God's Mercy, but also warns that one has only this life to repent and perform good deeds; otherwise when the punishment comes, *those who did wrong will say, "Our Lord! Grant us reprieve for a term nigh, that we might respond to Thy call and follow the messengers"* (14:44). The respite granted to all in this life may give some the opportunity to repent, but 3:178 warns, *Let not those who disbelieve suppose that the respite We grant them is good for them. We only grant them respite that they may increase in sin, and theirs shall be a humiliating punishment* (see also 11:8; 14:42). That *God sees His servants* when the appointed term has come alludes to His requiting them for all that they have done (Aj, Bḍ).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 36

# Yā Sīn

## *Yā Sīn*

There is consensus among all scholars that *Yā Sīn* is a Makkan *sūrah* from the early part of the middle Makkan period. Some maintain that the whole of the *sūrah* is Makkan, though many commentators believe that v. 12 is from the Madinan period. The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the Arabic letters *yā'* and *sīn* in the opening verse. Some also refer to it as "The Heart of the Quran," after a well-known *ḥadīth:* "Everything has a heart, and the heart of the Quran is *Yā Sīn*. Whosoever recites *Yā Sīn*, God records for him the recitation of the Quran ten times for his recitation of it" (Āl, Q).

Seen as the heart of the Quran, this *sūrah* plays a very important role in traditional Islamic piety. Many Muslims recite *Yā Sīn* regularly as part of their supererogatory devotions, and it is often the only *sūrah* longer than a page or so that Muslims have memorized in full. A famous *ḥadīth* says, "Recite *Yā Sīn* over your dead" (Q, Sy). It is thus recited for those who are close to death, those who have just died, and at the graves of loved ones. It is also recited for those who are sick, for another *ḥadīth* states, "Verily in the Quran there is a *sūrah* that intercedes through its recitation and forgives through its being heard—indeed, that is *Sūrah Yā Sīn*" (Āl, Q). *Yā Sīn* is also recited by many Muslims after the performance of the obligatory prayers in the morning and the evening. Regarding the latter, another report, sometimes recorded as a *ḥadīth*, states, "Whosoever recites *Sūrah Yā Sīn* at night, desiring the Face of God, is forgiven during that night" (IK, Q). Although many believe that the exhortation to recite *Yā Sīn* in the morning is a *ḥadīth*, it most likely derives from a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās: "Whosoever recites *Yā Sīn* when he awakens is given ease for his day until the evening comes. And whosoever reads it in the midst of the night is given ease for his night until he awakens" (Q).

Several scholars maintain that *Yā Sīn* is the heart of the Quran because it addresses its central teachings regarding God, prophethood, and the Hereafter. The *sūrah* begins with an address to the Prophet that clarifies both his mission and the nature of revelation (vv. 1–12) followed by a parable regarding those

who reject prophets (vv. 13–30) that segues into a discussion of Resurrection and the signs of it in the natural world (vv. 31–44). Responses to various objections common to the disbelievers and the consequences of them (vv. 45–52) then lead into a discussion of the disparate ends of the disbelievers and the believers (vv. 53–68), which concludes with another reflection on the nature of Muhammad's prophethood (vv. 69–70). The final section returns to a discussion of the signs in the created order that serve to inform one of God's creative Power and ability to resurrect (vv. 71–81) and concludes with an affirmation of God's Omnipotence (vv. 82–83).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Yā. Sīn.* (2) By the Wise Quran, (3) truly thou art among the message bearers, (4) upon a straight path, (5) a revelation of the Mighty, the Merciful, (6) that thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were not warned; so they were

1 The Arabic letters *yāʾ* and *sīn* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meaning is considered by most to be known only to God; see 2:1c. Some allow that *yāʾ sīn* could be an abbreviation meaning "O human being" (Q). In this interpretation, the *yāʾ* is the vocative "O," used in many Quranic verses, and the *sīn* is an abbreviation for *unsayn,* the diminutive of *insān* ("human being"). In this context, the diminutive "O little human being" is a term of endearment interpreted as God's address to the Prophet Muhammad. Others say that *Yā Sīn* is a name given to the Prophet by God whose exact meaning is unknown (Q). For this reason it is sometimes used in the Islamic world as the name for a male. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "I heard the Messenger of God say, 'Verily God has named me by seven names in the Quran: Muhammad [3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29], Aḥmad [61:6], *Ṭā Hā* [20:1], *Yā Sīn* [36:1], *thou enwrapped* [*al-Muzzammil;* 73:1], *thou who art covered* [*al-Muddaththir;* 74:1], and *servant of God* [*ʿAbd Allāh;* 72:19]'" (IA, Q). Other commentators take *Yā Sīn* to be a name of the Quran itself, while al-Qushayrī identifies it with the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mīthāq*), when God made a covenant with all the children of Adam (see 7:172c).

2 *Ḥakīm,* here translated *Wise,* can also mean "determined" or "made firm" (*muḥkam*), as in 11:1, where the Quran is described as *a Book whose signs have been determined* (*uḥkimat;* Q). According to Ibn Kathīr, its being determined (*muḥkam*) indicates that *falsehood comes not upon it from before it or from behind it* (41:42). *Ḥakīm* could also mean something that makes firm (*muḥkim*), indicating that the Quran teaches the truth. According to Ibn Kathīr, the use of *ḥakīm* here alludes to the Quran as a revealed book. The Quran is also described as *wise* in 10:1; 31:2; 43:3–4.

3–4 These verses affirm the Prophet's mission, thus supporting the interpretations that see *Yā Sīn* as a reference to the Prophet himself. For *straight path,* see 1:6c.

5 *Revelation* can be read as the object of an implied verb, meaning, "We revealed it as a revelation," in which case it refers back to the *Wise Quran,* or it can be read in the nominative, meaning, "It is a revelation." Most commentators say *revelation* in either reading refers to the Quran, although some say it refers to the Prophet (Q, R), in which case "it" in the elided phrase would be rendered "he." Both interpretations are possible, as the Prophet is also said to be *sent down,* as in 65:10–11: *God has certainly sent down unto you a reminder: a Messenger reciting unto you the clear*

heedless. (7) The Word has indeed come due for most of them, for they do not believe. (8) Truly We have put shackles upon their necks, and they are up to their chins, so that they are forced up. (9) And We placed a barrier before them

*signs of God.* The juxtaposition of *Mighty* and *Merciful* here and in other verses (esp. throughout *Sūrah* 26) is seen as an allusion to God being both just and merciful, vengeful toward those who oppose Him and merciful toward those who obey Him.

6 This verse is similar to 32:3, which states that the Quran was sent so that the Prophet might *warn a people to whom no warner has come before.* Regarding the absence of a previous Arabic revelation, 34:44 says of the Arabs, *We have not given them any books that they study; nor have We sent them a warner before.* Although the Arabs had been sent messengers before in the intervening generations from the time of Ishmael, who was both a prophet and the progenitor of the Arabs (as Isaac was of the Jews), the pure monotheism of Abraham had become lost, and from the point of view of the Arabs the religion of their fathers was pagan. Read in connection to the following verse and the context of the entire Quran, there is an ominous tone to this verse, for as other verses state, *Thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs* (28:59), and *Never did We destroy a town save that it had warners* (26:208); see also 6:131; 10:13. Some propose that the verse should be read, "of that of which their fathers were warned."

7 *The Word has indeed come due for most of them* translates *ḥaqqa al-qawlu ʿalā aktharihim*; which could also be translated, "the Word has indeed proved true against most of them." The *Word* most likely refers to *the Word of punishment* (39:71; see also 22:18); it indicates that they will be in Hell, for as 40:6 states, *Likewise did the Word of thy Lord come due for those who disbelieve, that they are the inhabitants of the Fire.* This is because *they do not believe* in the warning referred to in v. 6, in the *Wise Quran* (v. 2), or that the Prophet Muḥammad is *among the message bearers* (v. 3). The *Word* that comes due or proves true is seen by some as God's threat in 32:13: *But the Word from Me comes due: "I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together!"* Similar threats occur in 11:119 and 38:84–5. The *Word* could also be a reference to the Quran itself, for it is thought that when one turns away from revelation, it proves one's true nature. In this regard, a famous *ḥadīth* states, "The Quran is a proof, either for you or against you."

8 The disbelievers' hands are bound to their necks with *shackles,* which translates *aghlāl,* specifically indicating iron shackles that bind the hands in cuffs that are attached to an iron ring around the neck. *They* is thus taken by most to indicate the hands that are bound to their necks (Q, Ṭs) and is seen as related to 17:29, *And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck* (IK, Q, Ṭ), which is a warning against miserliness. The binding of their hands to their necks is taken by some to indicate their state on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭs) or in the Hereafter, as in 40:71: *They will be dragged, with shackles and chains around their necks* (Q). Others say it refers to the state of the idolaters in this life, meaning that those who turn away from the Prophet's call are like those whose hands are shackled to their necks so that they cannot extend them toward what is good (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). In this interpretation their chins being *forced up* alludes to their arrogance in the face of the truth (Q).

9 This verse is interpreted to mean, "We have placed a barrier between them (the disbelievers) and the truth" or "We have blinded them to the truth" (IK), in light of 10:96–97: *Truly those for whom the Word of thy Lord has come due will not believe, though every sign should come unto them, till they see the painful punishment.* Understood in this way, it means that they cannot benefit from guidance, no matter what the Prophet does. Thus God counsels the Prophet in v. 76, *Let not their speech grieve thee.* Some say the *barrier before them* refers to their being deluded in the life of this world and the *barrier behind them* refers to their denying the life of the Hereafter (Q). Others maintain that vv. 8–9 refer to a specific incident in which a leader from the tribe of Quraysh saw the Prophet praying and went to smash his head with a rock; as he moved his hand forward to cast the rock, his hand returned to his neck and the rock was stuck in it (Q, Ṭs). Then another man took the rock with the same purpose, but when he

and a barrier behind them and veiled them; so they see not. (10) It is the same for them whether thou warnest them or warnest them not; they do not believe. (11) Thou only warnest whosoever follows the Reminder and fears the Compassionate unseen. So give such a one glad tidings of forgiveness and a generous reward. (12) Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in

did so, he could hear the Prophet but not see him. When a third man went to smash the Prophet's head, he saw before him a tremendous camel that was about to swallow him (Q). These particular examples of the incident to which this verse may refer are not, however, taken to contravene the more general implications, but rather to be manifestations of particular forms of denial and disbelief represented by the acts described.

10–11 Cf. 2:6. The last phrase of v. 10 could also be read, "they will not believe." For similar verses where warnings and guidance are of no avail to disbelievers, see 7:193; 26:136; 63:6. These verses remind the Prophet that he cannot guide those whom God has not guided and should simply leave them to God: *Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will; so let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them. Truly God knows that which they do* (35:8). *The Reminder* is a reference to the Quran itself (IK, Q, R, Ṭ); for the Quran as *Reminder,* see 36:69c. *Fears the Compassionate unseen* (cf. 50:33) can be interpreted as a reference to worshipping God while God remains unseen or to worshipping God in seclusion (Q, Ṭs). *A generous reward* here means Paradise or *the Garden.* See also 67:12c.

12 This verse follows upon the counsel to the Prophet to deliver the warning and leave the disbelievers to their own devices, since the price of their wrongdoing will come due upon the Resurrection. *We give life to the dead* can be seen as a reference to the Resurrection; to God's bringing the earth back to life, as in 57:17: *Know that God revives the earth after its death* (IK); to bringing people from idolatry to faith (Z); or to the revivification, through knowledge and truth, of hearts made dead through heedlessness and ignorance (Aj, IK). *That which they have sent forth* refers to the deeds that will testify for or against them in the Hereafter; see 5:80; 75:13c; 82:5c. Here, *that which they have left behind* literally means "their footsteps" or "their traces." It is said to refer to one of the tribes of Madinah, the Banū Salamah, who were settled far from the Prophet's mosque and desired to relocate closer to it. This verse was then revealed. So the Prophet said to them, "Your footprints are recorded [i.e., you receive reward for walking to the mosque]. Why then do you want to move?" (IK, Q, Ṭ, W). More broadly, it is understood as a reference to the traces of good deeds that one leaves behind (Aj, Ṭ). As a well-known *ḥadīth* states, "When the son of Adam dies, all his deeds come to an end except three: knowledge that is beneficial, a righteous child who prays for him, or ongoing charity that he leaves behind" (IK); see 75:13c. *And We have counted all things in a clear registry* (*imām*) is taken by some to allude to the inscription of all things from the beginning of time to its end on the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Aj, Ṭb, Ṭs), which is the *imām* ("leader") of all other books (Aj) and which is said to comprise all of God's Decrees (Ṭb, Ṭs); for the inscription of God's Decrees, see 68:1c. Others say *imām* refers to the book or "registry" in which all human actions are recorded (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭs); see 17:71c; 18:49c. This is also one of the central verses cited by Shiite theologians as Quranic support for the Shiite understanding of Divinely ordained leadership in the form of the imamate after the death of the Prophet. In this vein al-Qummī relates a saying from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: "I, by God, am the *clear imām;* I clarify truth from falsehood. I inherited it from the Messenger of God" (Qm, Ṭb). Shiite sources also relate that the Prophet said regarding ʿAlī, "He is the Imam in whom God records the knowledge of all things" (Qm, Ṭb).

a clear registry. (13) And set forth for them as a parable the people of the town, when the message bearers came unto it. (14) When We sent two unto them, they denied them. So We strengthened them with a third, and they said, "Verily, we have been sent unto you!" (15) They said, "You are but human beings like us, and the Compassionate has not sent down anything. You are but lying." (16) They said, "Our Lord knows. Verily we have indeed been sent unto you! (17) And naught is incumbent upon us save the clear proclamation." (18) They said, "Truly we augur ill of you. If you cease not, we shall certainly stone you, and a painful punishment will certainly befall you from us." (19) They said, "Your auguring ill is upon yourselves though you have been reminded. Nay, you are a prodigal peo-

13–14 The Prophet is here commanded to provide the Quraysh with an example of the fate that befell those who treated previous *message bearers* as they were treating him. The first phrase of v. 13 could also be rendered, "Set forth for them a parable, the people of the town." Most identify the town as Antioch (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), though this identification cannot be verified (IK). Most commentators view the *message bearers* (*mursalīn,* rather than *rusul,* "messengers") as apostles sent to the town by Jesus. In this interpretation, that God is said to have sent them indicates that Jesus was commanded by God to send them (Q, Ṭs). After the first two were sent, the people of the town beat and imprisoned them (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Some say this punishment was ordered by the king (Aj), after which a third *message bearer,* whom some identify as Jonas, was sent.

According to another opinion, the *message bearers* are prophets (Aj, Ṭs) rather than apostles sent by a prophet. This interpretation seems more likely, as the Prophet Muhammad is referred to as a *mursal (message bearer)* in v. 3 and in 2:252, and other prophets are referred to as *mursalūn (message bearers)* in over a dozen verses. *We have been sent unto you* here and in v. 16 could also be rendered, "we are message bearers unto you."

15 In other passages, many communities reject prophets because they are human, claiming that if God had wanted to send a message, He would have chosen an angel as His message bearer or messenger. As 17:94 states, *And naught hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?"* (see also 6:8–9, 50; 11:12; 14:10; 23:33; 41:14; 64:6). In other verses, this same objection is attributed to those who opposed the Prophet Muhammad: *And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?"* (25:7).

16 The message bearers' second statement of their mission is more emphatic than the first (v. 14), because it is a reaffirmation in the face of denial and rejection.

17 Like the Prophet Muhammad, the *message bearers* are only instructed to deliver the message and to guide those who heed it; they are not responsible for those who deny it; see 36:10–11c. That the prophets are only responsible for delivering the message is emphasized in many passages; see, e.g., 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 42:48; 64:12.

18 This is the response of the disbelievers to the *message bearers,* meaning, "We see an ill omen or foretell a punishment that will befall you."

19 The response from the *message bearers* to the disbelievers is that the punishment the disbelievers foretell will befall them because of their disbelief. In the most widespread reading of this verse, *though you are reminded (in dhukkirtum)* is read *a in dhukkirtum,* meaning, "Even if you are reminded..." In this reading, the ellipsis indicates a rhetorical elision that constitutes the object of

ple!" (20) And from the outskirts of the city, a man came running. He said, "O my people! Follow the message bearers! (21) Follow those who ask not of you any reward and who are guided. (22) Why should I not worship Him who originated me, and unto Whom you will be returned? (23) Shall I take gods apart from Him? If the Compassionate desired harm for me, their intercession would avail me naught, nor would they save me. (24) Truly would I then be in manifest error.

an interrogative and serves as a rebuke, as if to say, "Do you augur ill and disbelieve, even when you have been reminded?" In another canonical reading, *a 'in dhukkirtum* is read *ayna dhukkirtum,* meaning, "now that you have been reminded" (*al-āna dhukkirtum;* Q, Ṭ). Another reading is *an dhukkirtum,* meaning, "because you have been reminded" (Z). Cf. 17:13: *And [for] every man We have fastened his omen upon his neck, and We shall bring it forth for him on the Day of Resurrection;* see also 7:131; 27:47. That the disbelievers' auguring ill rebounds upon them indicates the "reflexive" nature of good and evil deeds, which is emphasized throughout the Quran. For example, if one spends in charity, one spends it for oneself, as in 2:272: *Whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves, when you spend only seeking the Face of God.* Conversely, *whosoever is miserly is only miserly unto himself* (47:38); if one tries to deceive, one only deceives oneself (2:9); if one tries to lead astray, one only goes astray (3:69; 4:113); and if some devise a plot against God and His Messenger, God will devise a plot against them (52:42); see 4:111c. For the meaning of *prodigal people,* see 10:12c.

20 The *man* in this verse is usually identified by the name Ḥabīb al-Najjār. Some claim that he worshipped God in seclusion, and when the news of the *message bearers* came, he proclaimed his faith (Aj). Others attribute a saying to the Prophet: "The foremost among the people are three who did not disbelieve in God for the blinking of an eye: ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the companion of *Yā Sīn,* and the believer among the people of Pharaoh [see 40:28–29]. They are the truthful (*ṣiddīq*)" (Sy, Th, Ṭs). Another interpretation says that Ḥabīb al-Najjār followed the first two *message bearers* after they healed his son (Aj, Q).

21 A mark of prophethood is to ask for nothing from the people, except that they follow the message the prophets are sent to deliver. As Noah says, *And if you turn your backs, I have not asked of you any reward. My reward lies only with God, and I am commanded to be among those who submit* (10:72). Thus the Prophet Muhammad is commanded in 6:90; 38:86; and 42:23, *Say, "I ask not of you any reward for it"* (see also 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180).

22 *Originated me* translates *faṭaranī,* which derives from the same root as *fiṭrah,* or *primordial nature,* alluded to in 30:30: *Set thy face to religion as a* ḥanīf, *in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not.* Read in light of 30:30 and 51:56, *And I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me,* this verse implies that the worship of God is central to the primordial nature with which human beings were created.

23 The question means, "Shall I take gods other than God, worship them, and leave the worship of the One Who is worthy of worship?" (Sh). The Quran indicates that angels and prophets will be able to intercede on the Day of Judgment, but that *intercession* is entirely by the Will of God. As 20:109 states, *On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose word He is content.* Thus 2: 255 asks rhetorically, *Who is there who may intercede with Him save by His Leave?* For intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c.

24 *Manifest error* (*ḍalāl mubīn*) is employed throughout the Quran to indicate one whose wrongdoing makes him stray from the path of truth (Ṭ). It can also be understood to mean "error that makes manifest" or "makes clear." It is also read by some as *ḍalāl mubayyan* (Bḍ), which would then indicate "error that has been made manifest" or "made clear."

(25) Truly I believe in your Lord, so listen to me." (26) It was said unto him, "Enter the Garden!" He said, "Would that my people knew (27) how my Lord forgave me and placed me among the honored." (28) And after him We did not send down a host from Heaven against his people; nor would We send down. (29) It was but a single cry. Then, behold, they were extinguished. (30) Alas for the servants! Never did a messenger come unto them, but that they mocked him. (31) Have they not considered how many generations before them We destroyed, such that they return not unto them? (32) Each of them shall be a group arraigned before Us. (33) A sign unto them is the dead earth: We revive it and bring forth grain therefrom, that they may eat thereof. (34) And We place gardens of

25 According to some, *so listen to me* is a call to the people to follow God and His *message bearers;* others say it is a call to the *message bearers,* asking them to bear witness for the man before God (IK).

26 Some say that after his declaration to the people (v. 25), the man was stoned and killed (Aj, IK, Ṭs). Then he was told by God, or by the angels and the righteous, *Enter the Garden!* (Aj, R). Others maintain that God took him alive to heaven.

27 This verse could also mean "for what my Lord forgave me and that He placed me among the honored" (Ṭs), which may imply the bad deeds that were forgiven or the good deed(s) for which God forgave him his sins. According to Qatādah (d. 117/726), one of the foremost commentators from the third generation of Muslim scholars, the people began to stone him while he was praying for God to guide them, and as they continued to stone him, he continued to pray for them, even while suffering a gruesome death at their hands (IK).

28 This verse is taken by many as a reference to the punishment that God inflicted upon his people for rejecting the *message bearers* and for killing (or seeking to kill) Ḥabīb al-Najjār, in which case it indicates that God wiped them out with *a single cry* (v. 29) rather than sending angels against them (IK, Q). Others say that *a host from Heaven* refers to the angels of revelation (Ṭs), meaning that God did not send another revelation after having sent *the message bearers* (Ṭ). The second interpretation is more consistent with this story in its function as a warning to the Quraysh, for it implies that accepting the revelation sent to the Prophet Muhammad is their only opportunity and they will not receive another. The last phrase could also be rendered "nor what We used to send down" (Ka, Ṭs).

29 This verse indicates that the destruction for having disbelieved was instant.

30 Cf. 15:11. *Alas for the servants!* is interpreted by most to indicate amazement at the extreme injustice disbelievers do to themselves and the punishment they will suffer (IK, Q). Others take *servants* as a reference to the prophets, in which case the verse expresses God's lament for the hardships they endure when mocked by disbelievers (Q, Ṭs).

31 *They* and *them* can be read as a reference to the former peoples who were destroyed, to the inhabitants of Makkah who deny the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad, or to both.

32 This verse and v. 53 indicate that all human beings, believers and disbelievers alike, will be *arraigned* on the Day of Judgment. But other verses indicate that only the disbelievers will be *arraigned unto the punishment* (30:16; 34:38). It appears that these verses indicate two arraignments: the first is the gathering of all human beings referred to here and in v. 53; the second, which comes after the gathering of all human beings, is the Reckoning the disbelievers will endure before they are cast into Hell.

33–34 These verses mark the beginning of what can be seen as the second section of the *sūrah*. They employ a common Quranic rhetorical

date palms and grapevines therein and make springs flow forth, (35) that they may eat of its fruit and of that which their hands have worked. Will they not, then, give thanks? (36) Glory be unto Him, Who has created the pairs, all of them, from what the earth makes grow, and from themselves, and from what they know not. (37) And a sign unto them is the night: We strip the day therefrom, and behold, they are in darkness. (38) And the sun runs to a dwelling

device by which the wonders of creation are cited as signs of God's Oneness, Perfection, Wisdom, and Omnipotence; see 3:190–91c; 41:53c. The phrase *a sign unto them* can have three meanings: it is something to be contemplated; it is a blessing upon human beings; or it is a warning to human beings (Q). Here God's ability to revive the earth is cited as evidence of His ability to resurrect (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 29:63; 30:19, 24, 50; 35:9; 41:31, 39; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11). As in v. 12, it can also be seen as an allusion to the revivification, through faith and knowledge, of a heart that has been hardened. *Gardens of date palms and grapevines* (cf. 2:266; 23:19) are specified because they were thought by Arabs to be the best of fruits; they can thus be seen as an allusion to all forms of plant life by which people are nourished (Q).

35 *Its fruit* refers to the fruit produced by plants through the water from the springs (Q). Or it could be rendered "His fruit," meaning the fruit that God has produced (Aj, IK). As translated, the verse can be read as a positive affirmation of eating the fruits of one's own labor, for as a *ḥadīth* says, "No one eats any food that is better than that from the work of his own hand." *That which their hands have worked* could also be rendered "though their hands did not make it" (IK, Q, R, Ṭ), a reference to the fact that all fruits are ultimately produced by God (cf. 27:60; 56:64). People's lack of gratitude is a common Quranic theme, as in 2:243: *Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind, but most of mankind do not give thanks* (cf. 10:60; 12:38; 22:66; 25:50; 40:61).

36 *Glory be* indicates both God's being beyond all that the idolaters associate with Him and amazement at what they say. *Pairs* translates *azwāj,* which can also mean "kinds" in the sense of species, thus indicating the many different kinds of things that God has created (Q). It can also be seen as a reference to the creation of all things in pairs, as in 51:49: *And of all things We created pairs, that haply you may remember* (IK). *From themselves* could also mean "from their souls," in which case it can be seen as a reference to the male and female, as in 53:45, *And that He creates the two (zawjayn)—male and female,* which are said to be *mates (azwāj)* created *from a single soul* (4:1; 6:98; 7:189; 39:6). *From what they know not* can be seen as an allusion to the unseen realm or to the many things in the created world that humans have not experienced, as in 16:8: *And He creates that which you know not.*

37 The alternation of night and day are cited throughout the Quran as a sign of God's Power and Perfection, as are the sun and the moon. As 39:5 says, *He rolls the night up into the day and rolls the day up into the night, and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed.* For the relationship between night and day, see 10:6c; 17:12c. *Strip* translates *naslakhu,* which originally means to remove the skin from an animal.

38 It is reported that a Companion of the Prophet, Abū Dharr, said, "The Prophet asked me at sunset, 'Do you know where the sun goes [when it sets]?' I replied, 'God and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'It travels till it prostrates itself underneath the Throne and asks permission to rise again, and it is permitted. Then it is about to prostrate itself, but its prostration will not be accepted, and it will ask permission to go on its course, but it will not be permitted and will instead be ordered to return whence it has come, and so it will rise in the west'" (IK). In light of this account, the verse alludes to the sun's final *dwelling place* on the Day of Judgment. Others see the verse as a reference to the sun following its winter and summer orbits until each solstice, when it reaches its northernmost or southernmost extreme before reversing direction (IK). *Dwelling place* then indicates the solstice. In this interpretation it bears a close resemblance to the

place of its own. That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. (39) And for the moon, We have decreed mansions, till it returns like an old palm stalk. (40) It befits not the sun to overtake the moon, nor the night to outstrip the day. Each glides in an orbit. (41) And a sign unto them is that We carried their progeny in the full-laden Ark. (42) And We created for them the like thereof upon which they ride. (43) And if We will, We drown them, such that they would have none to call upon and would not be saved, (44) save as a mercy from Us and an en-

word "solstice," which derives from the Latin *solstitium,* meaning "sun-stopping." Another reading, "And the sun runs; it has no dwelling place (*lā mustaqarra lahā*)," was reportedly preferred by some of the Prophet's Companions, such as the famous Quran scholars Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs).

39 This verse is a reference to the waxing and waning of the moon through the twenty-eight stations (*manāzil*) of a single lunar month (Q). *Like an old palm stalk* is a reference to the appearance of what remains from a date cluster after its fruit has been removed and it has withered, when it resembles the thin crescent moon in shape, width, and color (Q, Z).

40 Cf. 21:33. The sun, moon, and other celestial bodies move in separate measurable orbits that are essential for navigating space and calculating time; without them human beings would lose their bearings and not be able to continue their lives on earth; more specifically, they would not be able to perform the religious rites required of them. In this way they can be seen as manifestations of God's Guidance and Mercy. As 10:5 states, *He it is Who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time]* (see also 17:12). In 2:189 the stations of the moon are specifically linked to performing the pilgrimage: *They ask thee about the new moons. Say, "They are markers of time for mankind and for the ḥajj."* In this way, the sun and the moon serve humanity in this life, though on the Day of Judgment *the sun and the moon are brought together* (75:9).

41 According to most commentators, this verse refers to Noah's Ark, by which God preserved one generation of humanity and thereby all of humanity (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Others interpret it as a reference to past generations being carried in the wombs of women, which are here likened to the *full-laden Ark* (Q, Z).

42 This verse is taken by many as a reference to other ships that are similar to Noah's Ark (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs,), though many understand it as a reference to camels, which were known as "the ships of the desert" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Others say that it is a reference to all beasts of burden (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

43 This verse indicates that God could drown people at any moment (IK). In this sense it is a reminder that one's life is always in God's Hands, as in other passages that speak of those who remember God when they are on the verge of drowning, yet forget Him when danger is no longer imminent; see 10:22–23; 17:66–67. They *would have none to call upon* for help or protection. This phrase could also be rendered, "None would call upon them," indicating that they are completely forgotten. This latter interpretation is supported by several verses that speak of the disbelievers being forgotten (e.g., 7:51; 9:67; 20:126; 32:14; 45:34; 59:19).

44 *For a while* indicates that God will postpone the disbelievers' punishment, thus giving them time until the moment of their death to repent or to prove their true nature, as in 3:178: *And let not those who disbelieve suppose that the respite We grant them is good for them. We only grant them respite that they may increase in sin, and theirs shall be a humiliating punishment.* In this context, *enjoyment for a while* indicates the ephemeral delights of this world, which are *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20) and stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the next life (see 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 40:39; 42:36).

joyment for a while. (45) And when it is said unto them, "Be mindful of that which is before you and of that which is behind you, that haply you may receive mercy." (46) Never did a sign from among the signs of their Lord come unto them but that they turned away from it. (47) And when it is said unto them, "Spend of that wherewith God has provided you," those who disbelieve say to those who believe, "Are we to feed one whom, if God willed, He would feed him? You are in naught but manifest error." (48) And they say, "When will this

45 *That which is before you* can be taken as a reference to the Hereafter, which is to come and for which one must work, and *that which is behind you* as a reference to this world, by which one should not be deluded (Q, Ṭs). According to others, the first phrase refers to what is apparent, and the second to what is hidden (Q), as in 34:9: *Have they not considered that which is before them and that which is behind them of the sky and the earth? If We will, We cause the earth to engulf them or fragments from the sky to fall upon them. Truly in that is a sign for every penitent servant.* According to Mujāhid and Ibn ʿAbbās, the former refers to the sins one has committed (IK, Q), and the latter to the sins one will commit (Q), meaning that one should be mindful of God so as to avoid sin in the future and repent for the sins of the past (Ṭs). "They turn away from it" could be placed at the end of the verse as an implied response to the conditional phrase *when is it said unto them* (Q, Ṭs).

46 Cf. 6:4. This verse can be understood as a reference to the signs mentioned in the preceding verses, to the whole of the created order, to the whole of revelation, or to all three, as all are said to be *signs for those who possess intellect* (3:190). Thus 18:57 says, *And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them and forgets that which his hands have sent forth? Surely We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand not, and in their ears a deafness. Even if thou callest them to guidance, they will never be rightly guided* (see also 32:22). It is not that these people cannot see the signs, but that God veils them due to their arrogance and disbelief, as in 7:146: *I shall turn away from My signs those who wax arrogant upon the earth without right. Even if they were to see every sign, they would not believe in them.*

47 Although there are several different accounts identifying the subject of this verse, they all agree that it responds to those who scoffed at the injunction to *spend in the way of God*—to feed the poor—found throughout the Quran. It is said that some disbelievers among the Quraysh said to Abū Bakr, who used to feed the destitute among the Muslims from his own wealth, "O Abū Bakr, do you claim that God is able to feed these people?" He replied, "Yes." To which they replied, "So why is it that He does not feed them?" He said, "Some people are tried with poverty, others with wealth. The poor are commanded to be patient, and the wealthy are commanded to give." So they replied, "O Abū Bakr, surely you are in error. Do you claim that God is able to feed these people, yet He does not feed them, then you feed them?" Then this verse was revealed, as were 92:5–6 (Q).

48 Cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 67:25. The disbelievers are said to have mocked the Prophet for not knowing exactly when the Hour and the Day of Resurrection, about which he warned them, would come to pass, for they expected a prophet to be able to see the future. In response to this expectation, 7:187 states: *They question thee about the Hour, when it will set in. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with my Lord. None save He shall manifest it at its proper time. Heavy shall it weigh upon the heavens and the earth. It shall not come upon you but suddenly." They question thee as if thou knew it well. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with God, but most of mankind know not."* According to some, the disbelievers referred to the Resurrection as *this promise*, because they thought they would be the ones to be rewarded with good. Thus Ibn Kathīr glosses this verse with 42:18: *Those who believe not in it seek to hasten it.*

promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" (49) They await naught but a single cry that will seize them while they dispute among themselves, (50) and then they can make no bequest, nor return to their people. (51) And the trumpet will be blown. Then, behold, they will rush forth from their graves unto their Lord. (52) They will say, "Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us from our place of sleep?" "This is that which the Compassionate did promise; and the message bearers spoke true." (53) There shall be but a single cry. Then, behold, they will all be arraigned before Us! (54) This Day no soul will be wronged in any way, and you will not be recompensed, save for that which you used to do. (55) Truly the inhabitants of the Garden on that Day will be busy rejoicing, (56) they and their spouses

49 *A single cry* refers to the first blast of Seraphiel's trumpet (see 39:68c), which will level all that is on the earth. It will come while they are oblivious to it, disputing, bargaining, eating and drinking, and engaging in other affairs of the world.

50 The Hour will come upon people in an instant, so that they cannot attend to any affairs of this world, thus indicating that one should be ready for death at every moment. *Make no bequest* could also mean, "Do not exhort or enjoin" or "Give no advice," which would then imply that there must be no delay in following the command to *exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience* (103:3).

51 The second blast from Seraphiel's trumpet will herald the Resurrection. Between the two blasts there is said to be an interval of forty years (Āl, IK, Q, Ṭ); see also 76:43. For the relation between the two cries or blasts, see 39:68–70.

52 In an alternate reading, *Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us* (*waylanā man baʿathanā*) is understood to mean, "Oh, woe unto us for our having been raised" (*waylanā min baʿthinā;* Āl, Q). *From our place of sleep* could also be read "from our sleep" (Āl). The last sentence of the verse is an answer to the question posed by the disbelievers in v. 48, as if to say that it does not matter when the promise will come to pass, only that people must be prepared for it. It can be seen as a continuation of what the disbelievers say to themselves, or as words of the angels addressed to them (IK).

53 Cf. 79:13–14; that it is *but a single cry* is said to imply that *the matter of the Hour is as the blinking of an eye, or nearer still* (16:77). For *arraigned,* see 36:32c.

54 This verse does not mean that none shall be punished; rather, it indicates that the punishment the disbelievers receive is because they have wronged themselves by having disbelieved and turned away from God's signs. This idea is mentioned throughout the Quran, as in 3:117: *God wronged them not, but themselves do they wrong;* and 10:44: *Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves.* In this respect, even those who receive the worst of punishments are not wronged in the sense of having been treated unjustly; rather, *Judgment will be made between them in truth, and they shall not be wronged* (39:69); see also 45:22; 46:19.

55 This verse implies that the *inhabitants of the Garden* are busy with the delights of Paradise and spiritual realities (IK, Q) rather than preoccupied by the concerns of this world. According to some, those in different levels of Paradise are occupied with different delights (Q), the highest of which involves being absorbed in the vision of God (R).

56 Cf. 43:70. Those in Paradise are *reclining upon couches,* indicating that they are content and at peace (R on 18:31; 55:54). Some also view the couches as thrones, indicating that they have attained a high rank. Believers are to be rewarded with *spouses made pure* (2:25; 3:15; 4:57), which can

reclining upon couches in the shade. (57) Therein they have fruit and whatsoever they call for. (58) "Peace!"—a word from a Lord most Merciful. (59) Stand apart this Day, O guilty ones! (60) Did I not enjoin upon you, O Children of Adam, that you not worship Satan—truly he is a manifest enemy unto you— (61) and that you worship Me? This is a straight path. (62) For indeed he has led many among you astray. Did you not understand? (63) This is the Hell that you were promised. (64) Burn therein today for having disbelieved! (65) On that Day We

be understood as an allusion to spiritual beings particular to Paradise, spouses of this world who have also attained to Paradise, or both. For the connotations of the Quranic use of *shade,* see 56:30c.

57 According to several *aḥādīth,* the fruits of Paradise are far superior to those of this world. There are several accounts in which the Prophet is said to have stretched forth his hand as if reaching for something and, when asked about it, responded, "I was shown the Garden and wanted to have a bunch of fruit from it. Had I taken it, you would have eaten from it as long as the world remains." The inhabitants of Paradise will receive *whatsoever they call for* (cf. 41:31; 44:55), will, or desire (see 16:31; 25:16; 39:34; 41:31; 42:22; 43:71; 50:35; 52:22; 56:20–24; 77:41–44), whereas for the disbelievers *a barrier is set between them and that which they desire* (34:54).

58 According to a saying attributed to Ibn ᶜAbbās, "God Himself is peace upon the people of the Garden" (IK), perhaps referring to Peace (*al-Salām*) as one of the Names of God. This is similar to 33:44: *Their greeting on the day they meet Him will be "Peace"* (IK). According to a *ḥadīth,* "While the people of the Garden are in their bliss, a light shines upon them. Then they lift their heads, and it is God beholding them from above. Then He says, 'Peace be upon you, O people of the Garden.' And that is [the meaning of] His saying, *'Peace!'—a word from a Lord most Merciful.* So He looks at them and they look at Him, and they are not distracted by anything from that bliss so long as they are looking upon Him, until He is unveiled to them and His Light and His Blessing remain upon them in their abodes" (IK, Q).

59 This verse is an allusion to the separation of believers and disbelievers on the Day of Judgment, which because of this separation is also referred to as *the Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17; see also 10:28; 30:14).

60–61 *Enjoin* translates *aᶜhad,* which is from the same root as *ᶜahd,* meaning "vow," "pact," or "covenant." In this sense it relates to the covenant that all human beings made with God before coming into this world, for in acknowledging that God is their Lord, they acknowledge that only He is worthy of worship; see 7:172c and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." For references to Satan as a *manifest enemy,* also see 2:168; 2:208; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 43:62. For *straight path,* see 1:6c.

62 This verse asks, "Did you not understand the fundamental difference between worshipping God and worshipping Satan?" (IK).

63–64 These verses say essentially, "This is the Fire the prophets warned you about, but you denied, so *taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny!*" (32:20; 34:42).

65 On the Day of Judgment people will no longer be able to make excuses and hide their sins with lies and duplicity. *Hands* and *feet* are also spoken of in 24:24 as testifying on the Day of Judgment, but there tongues are mentioned as well. According to 41:20, *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do.* For a more extensive account of the manner in which one's members and faculties bear witness against one's soul, see 41:20–23. A famous *ḥadīth* reported by Anas ibn Mālik (d. ca. 91/709), who served the Prophet for many years, says, "We were with the Messenger of God when he laughed and said, 'Do you know at

shall seal their mouths, their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn. (66) And had We willed, We would have blotted out their eyes. Then they would race to the path; yet how would they see? (67) And had We willed, We would have transformed them in their places. Then they could neither advance nor go back. (68) And whomsoever We give long life, We cause him to regress in creation. Do they not understand? (69) And We have not taught him poetry; nor would it befit him. It is but a reminder and a clear Quran, (70) to warn whosoever is alive, and so that the Word may come due

what I am laughing?' We replied, 'God and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'At what a servant says to his Lord. He says, "O Lord will you not protect me from injustice (*ẓulm*)?" He replies, "But of course." He says, "I will not accept any witness against myself but myself." God replies, "Today your soul suffices as a witness against you, as do the noble scribes [i.e., the angels who have recorded your deeds; see 80:15–16c]." Then his mouth will be sealed and it will be said unto his limbs, "Speak!" So they will speak of his deeds. Then he will be permitted to speak and will say [to his limbs], "Away with you! Be doomed! It was on your behalf that I contended"" (IK, Q).

66 *Blotted out their eyes* indicates that God will make them blind to guidance and the straight path (Q, Ṭ); cf. 4:47.

67 *In their places* could also mean "in their dwellings." In either reading it indicates that no matter where they may be, God can alter people's state instantly or destroy them if He wills. This is seen by some as an allusion to God punishing disbelievers by transforming them into animals such as monkeys and pigs (Ṭs). See also 4:47c.

68 *We cause him to regress in creation* refers to physical and mental decline in old age. Here it is meant as an argument, as if to say, "Does not the One who has power to do this have the power to resurrect you?" This is similar to 30:54: *God is He Who created you from weakness, then ordained strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and old age after strength.* See also 22:5, in which all of the stages of earthly life from conception to old age are cited as signs of God's Power.

69 This verse returns to the discussion of the nature of revelation from the beginning of the *sūrah*. As in 26:224–27, it alludes to those who accused the Prophet of being merely a poet. According to several accounts, the Prophet did not have any facility with poetry, either its rhyme or meter (IK, Q). Regarding the accusations that the Prophet had himself authored the Quran, 29:48 replies, *And thou didst not recite before this any Book; nor didst thou write it with thy right hand, for then those who make false claims would have doubted.* That the Quran is *but a reminder* is repeated in several verses (6:69, 90; 12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 74:31; 81:27). To remind is the function of all revelation; hence the Torah is called *a Reminder* (40:54) and the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) are referred to as *the people of the Reminder* (16:43; 21:7). In this vein, the Quran is presented as a continuation of the previous Reminders that clarifies what humans may have forgotten from them. Thus 16:44 addresses the Prophet Muhammad: *And We have sent down the Reminder unto thee that thou mightest clarify for mankind that which has been sent down unto them, that haply they may reflect.*

70 From one perspective, *to warn whosoever is alive* indicates all of humanity, as in 6:19: *And this Quran has been revealed unto me, that thereby I may warn you and whomsoever it may reach* (IK). From another perspective, it refers to those whose hearts are alive (Q) and thus able to hear the warning and *soften unto the remembrance of God* (39:23). For the meaning of *the Word* coming due, see 36:7c.

for the disbelievers. (71) Have they not considered that among that which Our Hands have wrought We created cattle for them, and that they are their masters, (72) and that We have subdued these for them, such that some are a mount for them and of some they eat? (73) And they have benefits and drinks therein. Will they not, then, give thanks? (74) Yet they have taken gods other than God, that perhaps they might be helped. (75) They cannot help them, though they be a host made ready for them. (76) So let not their speech grieve thee. Truly We know what they hide and what they disclose. (77) Has man not seen that We

71–73 God created Adam as *a vicegerent upon the earth* (2:30) and has also appointed human beings as *vicegerents upon the earth* (6:165; 35:39); humanity is thus told, *Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you?* (22:65). But this vicegerency requires that a human being remain a servant of God (*ʿabd Allāh*), recognizing that all these benefits are from *that which* God's *Hands have wrought,* and thus be thankful. For *vicegerent,* see 2:30c; 6:165c.

This passage is one of several to invoke the benefits of cattle—their usefulness for riding and transporting goods, for providing clothing and furnishings, food and drink, and even their beauty—as signs of God's beneficence toward human beings; see 6:142; 16:5, 66, 79; 23:21–22; 40:79; 43:12–13. For v. 73, cf. 16:66; 23:21. *Drinks* could also mean "drinking places."

74 This verse refers not only to polytheism and idolatry, but also to the fact that in not giving thanks to God and failing to acknowledge that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, human beings arrogate powers to themselves and others that have in fact only been lent to them by God. In a *ḥadīth* the Prophet warns against the subtler forms of idolatry: "The most frightening thing that I fear for my community is associating others with God. I do not mean that they will worship the sun, the moon, or idols. I mean that they will perform works for other than God with a hidden desire."

75 *Though they be a host made ready for them* may be seen as a reference to the idolaters who are ready to fight on behalf of their gods, though their gods will not be able to fight for them (Ṭ). Some take it as a reference to the gods they worship becoming a host who will testify against them at the Reckoning (IK, Q, Ṭ), but this interpretation is problematic, because it implies that such gods are real beings. The verse also implies that the hidden desires for which deeds are performed are a host of difficulties that continue to create obstacles in this life until one achieves full sincerity and strives only for God.

76 On the one hand, this verse counsels the Prophet that he should not be grieved by the disbelievers' accusations or their plotting against him in secret, since God will protect him in this world and they will receive the proper punishment for their deeds, either in this life or the next. On the other hand, it indicates that the Prophet must not be concerned with their continuing disbelief, for once he has warned them, he has fulfilled his responsibilities (see 3:176; 5:41, 68; 6:33; 10:65; 15:88; 16:127; 18:6; 26:3; 27:70; 31:23; 35:8). As 2:272 says in addressing the Prophet, *Thou art not tasked with their guidance, but God guides whomsoever He will* (also see 28:56).

77 Cf. 16:4; the creation of the human being from *a drop* (cf. 18:37; 22:5; 35:11; 40:67; 53:46; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19), meaning sperm or as phrased elsewhere *a draught of base fluid* (32:8; cf. 77:20), is cited in several verses as testimony to God's ability to resurrect human beings in the Hereafter; see commentary on 32:7–11. For the phases of gestation, see also 22:5; 23:14. An argument implied here and elsewhere is that in not recognizing the nature of one's own creation and that to which it bears witness, one is *a manifest adversary* to oneself.

created him from a drop, and behold, he is a manifest adversary? (78) And he has set forth for Us a parable and forgotten his own creation, saying, "Who revives these bones, decayed as they are?" (79) Say, "He will revive them Who brought them forth the first time, and He knows every creation, (80) Who made for you fire from the green tree, and, behold, you kindle from it." (81) Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? Yea, indeed, He is the knowing Creator. (82) His Command when He desires a thing is only to say to it, "Be!" and it is. (83) So glory be to Him in Whose Hand lies the dominion of all things, and unto Whom you shall be returned.

78–79 These verses express a common objection to the Quranic understanding of bodily resurrection (cf. 13:5; 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82–83; 27:67; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 56:47–48; 79:11). Regarding this particular instance, it is reported that a man by the name of Ubayy ibn Khalaf brought some withered bones to the Prophet and crushed them into pieces saying, "Do you think that God can revive these [bones] after they have decayed and become rot?" The Prophet answered, "Yes, indeed! And He will also throw you into the Fire." Then these verses were revealed (IK; JJ, Q, W). *And forgotten his own creation* could also be rendered "having forgotten his own creation." For a passage similar to v. 79, see 17:51.

80 Just as God makes fire emerge from wood that is wet and moist, or that had been wet and moist, so too can He make life emerge from bones that are dead and decayed (Q). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, this refers to the Markh and ʿAfār trees that grow in the Hijaz, in western Arabia; rubbing two green branches from these trees together is known to produce fire (IK).

81 Several passages maintain that the first creation itself is clear evidence of God's Ability to re-create and to resurrect: *He created you the first time and unto Him shall you be returned* (41:21); *As We began the first creation, so shall We bring it back—a promise binding upon Us. Surely We shall do it* (21:104); see also 50:1; 79:27.

82 This verse is one of the most frequently cited verses of the Quran (cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68), and points to the fact that God's creative act is dependent upon no other and is *like the blinking of an eye* (54:50); see 2:117c. *Be! and it is* (*kun fa-yakūn*) has become an aphorism in Arabic and other Islamic languages that is used often in daily discourse.

83 *Glory be* indicates both God's being beyond all that the idolaters associate with Him and amazement at what they say. *Dominion* translates *malakūt,* which is closely related to *mulk,* meaning *sovereignty* and found in the recurring phrase *Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (e.g., 2:107; 3:189; 5:17, 18, 40, 120; 9:116). Both words derive from the same root, *m-l-k,* which in verbal form means "to possess," "to control," "to rule," or "to reign." According to some, *malakūt* and *mulk* have the same meaning (IK). According to others, *malakūt* refers to God's Lordship over the unseen realm, and *mulk* refers to His Lordship over the visible world. In some Islamic cosmologies, this world is designated by *mulk,* while *malakūt* is understood as the level of being above this world, and above that lies the archangelic realm, which is designated by the term *jabarūt.* From one perspective this verse is an answer to the question posed in 23:88: *Who is it in Whose Hand lies the dominion of everything, who protects but is not protected against, if you know?* The phrase *shall be returned* could also be rendered "are being returned," which would emphasize the ongoing process of return to God experienced by all beings. The fact that both renderings are in the passive voice indicates that humans have no choice regarding whether they return or not.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 37

# Those Ranged in Ranks

## *al-Ṣāffāt*

A Makkan *sūrah, al-Ṣāffāt* is believed to have been revealed directly after *Sūrah* 6, *al-Anᶜām* (JJ). It takes its name from the reference to *those ranged in ranks* in vv. 1 and 165, both of which refer to the angels. The *sūrah* can be seen as connected to the previous *sūrah* in that it tells the stories of several generations or civilizations that were destroyed for rejecting God's messengers, material upon which readers or listeners are enjoined to reflect in 36:31: *Have they not considered how many generations before them We destroyed, such that they return not unto them?* (Āl).

After a brief reaffirmation of God's Oneness and Omnipotence (vv. 1–5), *al-Ṣāffāt* describes the futility of the efforts of those who attempt to obtain knowledge of the Unseen through the jinn (vv. 6–10). It then chastises the disbelievers for rejecting the Oneness of God, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the Resurrection, warning of the ignominious end they will face in the Hereafter and of the manner in which they will challenge and question one another regarding the fate that has befallen them (vv. 11–39). This is followed by a description of the rewards *God's sincere servants* receive in the Garden (vv. 40–49) and the exchange they will have with the disbelievers they had known in this world, who are now in Hell (vv. 50–60). A description of the punishments in the form of food and drink given to the denizens of Hell (vv. 61–68) is followed by an explanation of their fate (vv. 69–73).

The *sūrah* then provides accounts of several prophets and the blessings God bestowed upon them: Noah (vv. 75–82), Abraham (vv. 83–113, a passage in which the near sacrifice of his son is also discussed, vv. 101–8), Moses and Aaron (vv. 114–22), Elias (Elijah; vv. 123–32), Lot (vv. 133–38), and Jonah (vv. 139–48). In these accounts, it is only in the story of Jonah that the people repent (vv. 147–48); the people associated with all the others are destroyed for having rejected God's messenger. The discussion of the prophets is followed by a challenge to the worldview of the idolaters of the Prophet Muhammad's time (vv. 149–63) and a refutation in particular of the Divine powers they ascribe to the angels

(vv. 164–66). The *sūrah* concludes with a final address to the disbelievers and a promise that the Prophet and his followers will triumph, as did the other prophets mentioned in the *sūrah* (vv. 167–82).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By those ranged in ranks, (2) and the drivers driving, (3) and the reciters of a reminder, (4) truly your God is One, (5) Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, and Lord of the easts. (6) Truly We adorned the lowest heaven with an ornament, the stars, (7) and a guard against every defiant satan. (8) They listen not to the Highest Assembly, for they are repelled from every side— (9) cast out, and theirs shall be a punishment everlasting— (10) save

1–3 These verses are in the form of a Divine oath, common in the Quran, in which God swears by various created phenomena. The three verses can be understood as descriptions of a single reality or of three different realities (R). Most read them as references to three sets of angels: angels *ranged in ranks* before God, angels who drive the clouds, and angels who recite the Quran (IJ, Q, Ṭ, Z). *Ranged in ranks* renders *al-ṣāffāt ṣaffan,* which can also mean "the spreaders spreading," a reading that may refer to the angels spreading their wings (R) or to birds, as in 24:41, *by the birds spreading their wings* (*ṣāffāt;* cf. 67:19; Z). *Drivers* can also mean the angels who drive human beings away from committing acts of disobedience or who drive the satans away from human beings (Aj, R). *Driving* renders *zajara,* which can also mean "to rebuke." In light of this interpretation, some understand *reminder* as a reference to the Quran, by which God rebukes the disbelievers (Ṭ), or to everything that rebukes those who are disobedient to God (Z). *Reciters* is then read to mean anyone who recites the Book of God (Z). Additionally, these three verses could also be read as a description of the stages in prayer: *ranged in ranks* refers to people as they stand for prayer; *driving* refers to the recitation of the formula "I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan" (*aʿūdhu bi'Llāhi min al-shayṭān al-rājīm*), which is recited at the beginning of the prayer and at the commencement of the recitation of the Quran (see 16:98c); and *the reciters of a reminder* refers to the recitation of the Quran during the prayer (R). A few more speculative interpretations relate these groups to different types of scholars (AJ, R, Z), *mujtahids* (interpreters of Islamic Law; R), types of Quranic verses (R), or spiritual types (Aj).

4–5 These verses constitute the "answer to the oath" invoked in the previous three verses, as if to say, "The Lord of all that is mentioned above is One" (IJ). *Lord of the easts* refers to the succession of points on the horizon through the year from which the sun rises (IJ). The rising of the sun, *shurūq,* derives from the same root, *sh-r-q,* as the word for "east," *mashriq* (cf. 55:17; 70:40). In this sense, *easts* (*mashāriq*) evokes the sense of "places of rising" for the sun or even "horizons."

6–10 These verses refer to God's having prevented evil jinn, here referred to as *every defiant satan,* from listening to the discourse of the heavenly assembly, as in 67:5: *Truly We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and made them missiles against the satans; and We have prepared for them the punishment of the Blaze.* The role that certain jinn are said to have played in facilitating the work of fortune-tellers and sorcerers is alluded to in 15:16–18; 67:5; 72:8–9. Made of a more ethereal substance than human beings, the jinn

one who snatches a fragment as a piercing flame pursues him. (11) So ask them, are they more difficult to create, or those whom We created? Truly We created them from a viscous clay. (12) Indeed, but thou dost marvel, while they scoff. (13) And when they are reminded, they do not remember. (14) And when they see a sign, they seek to scoff, (15) and say, "This is naught but manifest sorcery. (16) What! When we have died and are dust and bones are we to be resurrected, (17) and our fathers of old?" (18) Say, "Yes, and debased will you be." (19) Then

gained access to some aspects of the discourse between the angels, but then deceived human beings, leading them astray with half-truths; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72; 72:8–9c; 67:5c. It is believed that after the Prophet Muhammad began receiving revelations, God cut off all such access to angelic discussions for the jinn, establishing angels as sentries and repelling the jinn with meteors.

The *Highest Assembly* (v. 8) refers to the assembly of the angels, regarding which no one has knowledge unless it is provided directly from God. The Prophet is reported to have said that God asked him about what the *Highest Assembly* disputed (see 38:69), to which he responded that he did not know. Then he said, "So He put His Hand between my shoulders, and I felt its coolness in my innermost being, and knowledge of all things between the East and the West came unto me." For more on the *Highest Assembly,* see 38:69–70c.

*Save one who snatches a fragment* (v. 10) refers to the few jinn who are able to eavesdrop on some part of the heavenly discourse, after which they are struck by *a piercing flame* (IJ, IK), though on occasion they are able to send what they have heard down to a soothsayer before being struck (IK).

11 A command to the Prophet to ask those who deny the Resurrection whether resurrecting them after they have died would be more difficult than resurrecting other beings God has created (T). *Those whom We created* refers either to the angels, the jinn, and all that is in the heavens and on the earth or to previous generations of human beings (IJ). The verse can also be seen as a reference to v. 5 and thus to all of the created order, as in 40:57: *Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind. But most of mankind know not* (T). Several verses describe the creation of the human being from various forms of earth: *from dust* (3:59); *from dried clay, made of molded mud* (15:26); *from dried clay, like earthen vessels* (55:14); and, in the present verse, *from a viscous clay;* for the manner in which these can be seen as representing different phases of human development, see 55:14c.

12 The Prophet marvels at the Quran, while the disbelievers *scoff* at it (T). Or the Prophet marvels at their disbelief in the Quran and the Resurrection, *while they scoff* at him (IJ).

13–14 The disbelievers do not benefit from being reminded (T), or when the Quran admonishes them, they do not remember or take heed (IJ). They then scoff at the Quran or at clear evidence and proof of Muhammad's prophethood, such as the splitting of the moon (see 54:1c; IJ).

15 This verse may be a response to the miracles sent as proofs (IJ) or to the Quran itself, as in 46:7: *Yet when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, those who disbelieve say to the truth when it comes to them, "This is manifest sorcery."* In deriding the Prophet, the disbelievers often labeled him a sorcerer (see also 10:2; 11:7; 34:43; 38:4; 46:7; 51:52; 54:2; 74:24), a charge also leveled against Moses (see 7:109; 10:76; 20:57, 63; 26:34; 27:13; 28:36; 40:24; 51:39) and Jesus (see 5:110; 61:6) by those who rejected the messages they brought.

16–18 These verses express a common objection to the Quranic understanding of bodily resurrection (cf. 13:5; 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82–83; 27:67; 36:78–79; 37:53; 50:3; 56:47–48; 79:11); see 36:78–79c.

19 Cf. 79:13. This is the cry that will call human beings to rise from the grave for the Day of Judgment. *Cry* translates *zajrah,* which indicates a sudden cry or shout that directs some kind of

there will be but a single cry. And they will then behold. (20) They will say, "Oh, woe unto us! This is the Day of Judgment." (21) This is the Day of Division that you used to deny. (22) Gather those who did wrong together with their spouses and that which they used to worship (23) apart from God, and guide them unto the path of Hellfire. (24) And stop them. Surely they are to be questioned: (25) "What ails you that you do not help one another?" (26) Nay, but this Day they will surrender. (27) And they will turn to one another, questioning each other, (28) saying, "Truly you used to come to us from the right." (29) They reply, "Nay, but you were not believers. (30) And we had no authority over you. Rather,

behavior, like halting an animal or making it start (Z). Two cries or blasts are spoken of in 39:68: at the first creation will come to an end, *whereupon whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth will swoon, save those whom God wills;* at the second everyone will be resurrected for the Judgment. *A single cry* (*ṣayḥah* or *zajrah*; cf. 36:29; 36:49; 38:15; 79:13) is understood as a reference to the second blast (Z), at which the disbelievers *will then behold* what they had denied.

20–21 *Woe unto us* translates *yā waylanā; wayl,* or *woe,* is an exclamation of existential and spiritual regret found elsewhere in the Quran (see 2:79c; 5:31; 18:49; 21:14, 47, 97; 25:28; 36:52; 68:31), often when the certainty of Divine Punishment is realized. Here it comes when the disbelievers behold the realities of the Judgment that they had denied. *The Day of Division* (44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17; see also 10:28; 30:14, 43) is another name for the Day of Judgment, evoking the manner in which God will judge between the virtuous and the iniquitous and then divide them from one another in a categorical manner.

22–23 Here *those who did wrong* may refer to all wrongdoers, only to the idolaters (IJ), or to all those who disbelieve in God (Ṭ). *Their spouses* translates *azwājahum,* meaning that the idolatrous men and women would be gathered together (Q, R, Z). *Azwājahum* can also mean "their companions" or "those of their kind," indicating that those given to particular vices would be gathered with wrongdoers of the same disposition (IJ, IK, Q, Z). It could also mean those of their particular sect or creed (IJ) or their comrades among the satans (IJ, Z, R), to which reference is made in 43:36: *And whosoever turns blindly away from the remembrance of the Compassionate, We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him.* Three different things can be meant by *that which they used to worship:* idols, Satan himself, or the many satans (IJ). In this context, some understand *guide them* to mean "show them" or "demonstrate to them" (IJ, Q, R) by informing them about the *path of Hellfire* that they are following (Z). It can also be understood as a command to the angels to lead them to the Fire (IK).

24 *Stop them* means to detain them (IJ, R, Ṭ). The content of the question appears in v. 25, but some propose that *they are to be questioned* means the disbelievers will be asked whether the Fire pleases them (Ṭ) or about the deeds they have committed (IJ, Ṭ).

25–26 By way of rebuke, the disbelievers are asked why they did not *help one another* as they had claimed they would (IK). But they will be subject to God's Command and Decree; they will not be able to avoid them (IK, Ṭ), and should thus be certain of receiving punishment (Ṭ).

27 Human beings will turn to the jinn and question them (Ṭ), or human beings will question one another, blaming each other for their fate (IK), similar to their lamenting the companionship of other disbelievers in 25:28–29, when they say, *Oh, woe unto me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend! He did indeed cause me to go astray from the Reminder after its having come to me.*

28–34 Those who were weak and oppressed will say to those who were in power and used their

you were a rebellious people. (31) So the Word of our Lord has come due for us; truly we shall taste [it]. (32) We caused you to err for truly we were errant." (33) Verily that Day they will share in the punishment. (34) Thus do We deal with the guilty. (35) Indeed, when it was said unto them, "There is no god but God," they waxed arrogant, (36) saying, "Are we to forsake our gods for a poet possessed?" (37) Nay! He has come with the truth and confirmed the messengers. (38) Truly you shall taste the painful punishment. (39) And you shall not be requited, save for that which you used to do. (40) Not so for God's sincere

power to lead others astray, *You used to come to us from the right,* meaning, "You came to us from a position of power and influence over us and led us astray," or "You made falsehood attractive and concealed the truth" (IK; see also 33:66–68; 34:31–33; 40:47–48). To which the leaders respond that they (their followers) would not have been led astray if they had not already been inclined to disbelief. The leaders' saying, *We had no authority over you,* is similar to Satan's statement to his followers, *And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves* (14:22). Neither the leaders nor Satan had any *authority* or proof to substantiate their claims; thus the people who followed them did so because they themselves *were a rebellious people.* For this reason, the corrupt leaders remind those who followed them of their own folly, saying, *Nay! But you were guilty* (34:32). Although the leaders among the disbelievers and those they led astray *will share in the punishment,* 29:13 says of those who sought to lead others astray, *Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own.* Those who were led astray by others are also said to request, *Our Lord! Give them a twofold punishment, and curse them with a great curse* (33:68); see 7:38–39c.

35–36 When, during their life in this world, the disbelievers were told to testify that *There is no god but God,* they rejected it. And when they were told to hearken to the revelation, their reaction was the same, as in 5:104: *And when it is said unto them, "Come unto that which God has sent down, and unto the Messenger," they say, "Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing."* In the same vein, *when it is said unto them, "Believe as the people believe," they say, "Shall we believe as fools believe?"* (2:13). They accuse the Prophet of being *a poet possessed* (see also 52:30; 69:41), because they have no ability to address the content of the message; they thus seek to discredit the messenger, as when the disbelievers scoff, *Confused dreams! Nay, he has fabricated it! Nay, he is a poet!* (21:5).

37 This is a response to the accusation that the Prophet is *a poet possessed* (v. 36). Here *the truth* refers to the Quran (IJ, Q, Ṭ) and its message of Divine Oneness (IJ, Q). Just as the Quran confirms the revelations before it (see 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31; 46:30), so too does the Prophet Muhammad confirm the messengers before him, meaning that he brings what they had brought (IJ).

38 See commentary on 32:14: *And taste the punishment everlasting for that which you used to do:* and 32:20: *Taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny.*

39 That the disbelievers are only requited for *that which* they *used to do* (cf. 27:90; 52:16; 66:7) indicates that they are only punished for what they have committed and brought upon themselves, as in 10:44: *Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves.*

40 Those who are sincere will be spared being taken to account for their bad deeds and will be forgiven (IJ); see commentary on 39:10: *Surely those who are patient shall be paid their reward in full without reckoning.*

servants. (41) For them there shall be a known provision, (42) fruits. And they will be honored (43) in Gardens of bliss, (44) upon couches, facing one another, (45) with a cup from a gushing spring brought round, (46) white, delicious to those who drink thereof. (47) No headiness lies therein; nor are they intoxicated by it. (48) And theirs shall be maidens of modest gaze with lustrous eyes, (49) as if they were hidden eggs. (50) And they will turn to one another, questioning each other. (51) One among them will say, "I had a companion (52) who would say, 'Are you among those who confirm? (53) What! When we have died and are dust and

41–44 Some say the *provision* is the Garden itself (IJ, IK), while others say it refers to the provisions of the Garden (IJ, Ṭ, Z). That it is *a known provision* indicates that, unlike the provisions of this world, those in Paradise are certain that heavenly provisions will always be available (R) or that they will receive the provision that they have merited for their deeds in this world (R). That they are *honored* is considered the greatest recompense (Z) in *Gardens of bliss* (cf. 5:65; 10:9; 22:56; 31:8; 56:12; 68:34). They are *facing one another* (cf. 15:47; 56:16), so that no one is facing the back of another (IK, Q, Ṭ); that no one shall be made to sit behind another is thus a sign that they are all being honored. Elsewhere the couches of Paradise are described as *embroidered couches* (56:15), *arrayed* (52:20), upon which they recline *in the shade* with *their spouses* (36:56); see 52:20c.

45 See also 43:71 and 76:15, where those in Paradise are served from goblets made of gold, silver, and crystal. That the *cup,* here indicating the drink within the cup, is from *a gushing spring* (cf. 56:18) indicates that it is pure and the source never runs dry. Every such mention of the heavenly cups or goblets is seen by some as a reference to the wine of heaven (Ṭ); for the positive nature of this paradisal wine, see 56:18–19c. That it is *brought round* implies that there are servants in attendance (Ṭ).

46 The wine of heaven is said to be whiter than milk (IJ, R), though here some say that *white* describes the cup rather than the wine (IJ, Ṭ, Z).

47 Cf. 56:18. *Headiness* translates *ghawl,* which derives from the verb *ghāla,* meaning to snatch or grab something or to destroy it. Here the absence of *ghawl* is understood to mean that heavenly wine does not cause headache or stomach ailment, that it does not destroy the intellect, or that there is nothing harmful, disdainful, or sinful in it (IJ, T). In fact, it can be understood to mean that this wine contains none of the negative effects found in earthly wine (IJ, Ṭ), in which there is *great sin and [some] benefits for mankind* (2:219), but the harm of which is greater than the benefits. In 5:90 wine is said to be *a means of defilement of Satan's doing* and is therefore forbidden in Islamic Law.

48 *Of modest gaze* indicates maidens who look at none but their own husbands (Aj, Q). For other references to the *maidens* who await the righteous in Paradise, see 38:52; 44:54c; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22; 78:33. Other verses indicate that righteous earthly spouses will join one in the Garden (see 13:23; 36:56; 40:8; 43:70). The sexual joys of Paradise alluded to in this verse are not a sublimated form of the joys of earthly sexuality, but symbolize spiritual union. What one experiences here below is a mere reflection of paradisal joy, but allusion cannot be made to it except by using the language of earthly sexual union, since it is the most intense form of pristine sensual pleasure known in this world.

49 The word for "egg" (*bayḍ*) is closely related to the word for "white" (*bayyāḍ* or *abyaḍ*), which in the context of the maidens of Paradise (Iṣ), as in English, is taken as an allusion to purity. The mention of *eggs* can also be connected to the use of *white* in v. 46 to describe the wine of Paradise. In 3:106–7 those who enter Paradise are spoken of as *those whose faces whiten.* Some say that what is intended by *eggs* is pearls (IJ, IK, Ṭ), as in 56:22–23: *Wide-eyed maidens, the likeness of concealed pearls* (Q). *Hidden* refers to the inside of the egg (or pearl), or it means that the egg (or pearl) itself is never touched (IK, Ṭ).

50–53 The inhabitants of the Garden ask one another about their state in the world (IJ).

bones, are we to be requited?' " (54) He will say, "Will you look?" (55) So he will look and see him in the midst of Hellfire. (56) He will say, "By God! You did well-nigh destroy me; (57) and if not for the blessing of my Lord, I would have been among the arraigned. (58) Are we then not to die, (59) but our first death, and are we not to be punished? (60) This indeed is the great triumph!" (61) For the like of this, then, let the laborers labor. (62) Is this a better welcome or the tree of Zaqqūm? (63) Truly We have made it a trial for the wrongdoers. (64) Truly it is a tree that emerges in the depths of Hellfire. (65) Its spathes are as the heads of satans. (66) They will eat thereof and fill their bellies therewith. (67) Then on top

*A companion* refers to the satan assigned to each person (see 43:36c; IJ, Ṭ) or to a believer's companion who denied the Resurrection and would ask the believer in astonishment, *"Are you among those who confirm* the Resurrection?" (IJ, IK, Ṭ). The first part of v. 53 reflects a question posed in several Quranic verses (cf. 13:5; 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82–83; 27:67; 36:78–79; 37:16–17; 50:3; 56:47–48; 79:11), while the second part of v. 53 mocks the belief in a final reckoning. When they have died, and the believer goes to the Garden and the idolater goes to the Fire, the believer sees the state of the disbeliever (Ṭ), and according to 7:46–50, the disbelievers in Hell can see the believers in Paradise. Thus some say this passage refers to the two companions discussed in 18:32–43 (IJ).

54–57 The believer then says to his companions in the Garden, *Will you look?* (IJ, IK, Ṭ). Then he sees his companion from this world *in the midst of Hellfire* in the Hereafter and knows that, had he followed him, he would have suffered the same fate and that if not for God's Blessing in guiding him, he too would have been *arraigned unto the punishment* (30:16; 34:38). Thus Ibn Kathīr glosses these verses with 7:43, where the believers say, *Praise be to God, Who guided us unto this. We would not have been rightly guided, had God not guided us.*

58–60 These verses are a continuation of the words of the believer from the previous verses or the words of all of the believers in Paradise expressing joy at realizing that they will not suffer death again and that they have avoided Divine Punishment. Attaining to the Garden is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of the Garden, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

61 The message of this verse is to let those in this world perform righteous deeds, so that they too may attain the honor that God has bestowed upon these believers in the Hereafter (Ṭ). This verse can be understood as the words of God (Z) or as the words of the believers in the Garden.

62–63 In contrast to the fruits bestowed upon the believers as a *known provision* in the Garden (vv. 41–42), the disbelievers are given the *tree of Zaqqūm,* which is said to bear pain and sorrow (Z). As it is known that there is no good in *Zaqqūm,* the rhetorical question is posed here as a rebuke to the disbelievers for the course they have chosen (Z). Its effects are best described in 44:43–46: *Truly the tree of Zaqqūm is the food of the sinner, like molten lead boiling in their bellies, like the boiling of boiling liquid* (also see 56:51–53; commentary on 44:43–46). That *Zaqqūm* is *a trial* (*fitnah*) means that eating from it is a punishment in the Hereafter (IJ, Z).

64 That the tree of *Zaqqūm emerges* from Hell or *in the depths of Hellfire* means that its roots grow from the bottom of Hell and it is nourished by fire (IK). Some say that its roots reach to the depths of Hell, while its branches rise through its other levels (Z).

65–67 That its spathes are *as the heads of satans* indicates that it bears sheer evil (Z) or that its spathes are like snakes (IJ). The disbelievers *eat thereof* because they are commanded to do so

of it they will have a brew of a boiling liquid. (68) Then their return shall be unto Hellfire. (69) Truly they found their fathers astray; (70) yet they hasten in their footsteps. (71) And before them most of those of old had indeed gone astray, (72) though We had indeed sent warners among them. (73) So behold how those who were warned fared in the end. (74) Not so for God's sincere servants. (75) And indeed Noah cried out to Us. How excellent are those who respond! (76) We saved him and his people from great distress, (77) and We made his

(see 56:53); they *fill their bellies* either because of severe hunger or because they are forced to eat it even though they despise it (Z). Both interpretations allude to the fact that their own avaricious natures have forced them to continue to eat from *Zaqqūm*. But if they are satiated, then thirst overwhelms them, and they are given a drink that burns their faces and tears apart their intestines (Z). The *brew of a boiling liquid* (cf. 6:70; 10:4; 18:29; 38:57; 44:46; 47:15; 78:24–25; 88:5) that the disbelievers are made to drink stands in sharp contrast to the cool and pleasing drinks presented to the believers in the Garden (see 37:45–47; 76:5–6, 17–18, 21; 83:25–28) and to the rivers of water, milk, honey, and wine described in 47:15.

68 After receiving the punishment outlined in vv. 62–67, the disbelievers will be returned to Hellfire (IJ, Z). This verse is thus understood to mean that the boiling water lies outside of Hellfire and that they go back and forth between these punishments, as in 55:43–44: *This is Hell, which the guilty denied; to and fro shall they pass, between it and boiling waters* (IK, R).

69–70 Because their fathers had followed a different set of beliefs, the disbelievers waxed arrogant when told to bear witness that there is no god but God (Ṭ), preferring the way of their forefathers to the one to which the Prophet called them (R), as in 2:170: *When it is said unto them, "Follow what God has sent down," they say, "Nay, we follow that which we found our fathers doing." What! Even though their fathers understood nothing, and were not rightly guided?* (cf. 5:104; 7:28; 11:109; 43:22–23).

71–72 These verses serve as an affirmation that most human collectivities have *gone astray* and rejected the prophets God sent to them. This aspect of history may be cited as counsel for the Prophet to be patient and to continue in calling the people to religion, since the prophets before him, whose stories are recounted in the remainder of this *sūrah*, had also been rejected, but ultimately prevailed (R).

73 Addressed to the Prophet, this verse also serves as a warning to the disbelievers (R) and as a segue to the stories of Noah, Abraham, Lot, and other prophets in the remainder of the *sūrah*. This verse, about *those who were warned*, is repeated as part of 10:73; other verses enjoin people to consider the final ends of *the deniers* (3:137; 6:11; 16:36; 43:25), *the guilty* (7:84; 27:69), *the workers of corruption* (7:86, 103; 27:14), and *the wrongdoers* (10:39; 28:40); see 10:39c.

74 This verse follows upon v. 71, meaning that those who are sincere have not gone astray, or upon v. 73, meaning that the end of those who are sincere is not the same as that of the disbelievers (R). The latter interpretation is borne out by the following accounts, in which prophets such as Noah and Lot are saved along with small groups of their followers.

75–82 These verses give the broad contours of Noah's story. For more detailed accounts, see 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21, and *Sūrah* 71. Additional brief accounts are also found in 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 21:76–77; 29:14–15; 54:9–15.

75 *Noah cried out* may be a reference to Noah's calling upon God to help him against his opponents or to save him from the flood (IJ) or to Noah's supplication to God in 71:5–26 (Ṭ). *Those who respond* would then refer to God and the blessings He brought upon Noah by saving him and his small group of followers from the flood (IJ).

76 *His people* refers to those who responded to Noah's call to follow God. According to traditional accounts, though Noah called people to

progeny endure, (78) and We left [a blessing] upon him among later generations: (79) "Peace be upon Noah throughout the worlds." (80) Thus do We recompense the virtuous. (81) Truly he was among Our believing servants. (82) Then We drowned the others. (83) And surely among his party was Abraham, (84) when he came unto his Lord with a sound heart, (85) when he said unto his father and his people, "What do you worship? (86) Is it a perversion, gods apart from God, that you desire? (87) What, then, think you of the Lord of the worlds?" (88) Then he cast a glance at the stars (89) and said, "Truly

God for hundreds of years (see 29:14), few people followed him. *Great distress* refers to the insults he suffered (IJ, IK) or to his being separated from his people (IJ).

77–79 As the only line of human beings to survive the flood, Noah's *progeny* endured. He was also blessed with being remembered well, in a manner befitting his status, by later generations (IK). His story is thus left as *a sign for the worlds* (29:15; cf. 54:15). The prayer for peace upon Noah *throughout the worlds* means, "May all of mankind, the jinn, and the angels wish him peace" (R, Z).

80 Cf. 6:84; 12:22; 28:14; 37:105, 110, 121, 131; 77:44. For *the virtuous,* see 29:69c. The manner in which God rewards the virtuous, or those who do what is good and beautiful, is with greater beauty, as in 42:23: *And whosoever accomplishes a good deed, We shall increase him in goodness thereby;* and 55:60: *Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?*

81 This refrain appears here for Noah and at the end of three of the other accounts of prophets that follow in this *sūrah* (Abraham, v. 111; Moses, v. 122; and Elias, v. 132).

82 Those who drowned are elsewhere said to be those who denied God's signs (see 7:64; 10:73), since *they were an evil people* (21:77).

83 *His party* could refer to the party of Noah or to that of Muhammad (IJ, R, Ṭ) and in either case means that they were of the same religion and creed (IJ, Ṭ). According to some, the only two prophets between Noah and Abraham were the Arabian prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ (R, Z).

84 That Abraham had *a sound heart* means that he never inclined to idolatry (IJ, R, Ṭ, Z), that his heart was free from doubt (Qm, Ṭb), that his heart was free from all vice and he only desired for others what he desired for himself (R), or that there was none but God in his heart (Ṭb), and that he was completely submitted to Him; see 26:89c.

85–96 This is one of several passages in which Abraham argues with his people regarding the inanity of their idolatry (cf. 2:258; 6:83; 21:51–67). As al-Rāzī observes, the Quran invokes the story of Abraham in the context of the Prophet Muhammad's disputations with the idolaters, because even the idolatrous Arabs had great respect for Abraham as one of their most prominent forefathers; see 43:26–27c.

86 The subtle grammatical structure of this verse allows it to be read in several different ways: "Do you perform perversion and worship gods other than God!" (IJ); "Do you desire gods apart from God out of perversion" (R, Z); "Do you desire perversion—gods apart from God?" (R); or "Do you desire gods apart from God in perversion?" (R). In all four readings, the verse is an expression of rebuke and amazement.

87 This verse may mean, "Do you think that God would permit inanimate objects to share in the worship that is His due alone, or do you think that He is of their same genus, such that you should make them equal in worship?" (R). It could also be understood to mean, "What, then, do you think God will do with you when you meet Him, while you have been worshipping other gods?" (IK, Ṭ).

88–89 *Cast a glance at the stars* is an idiomatic expression meaning to contemplate something, interpreted here to mean that Abraham cast his glance upward while contemplating what to do. Some say he feigned reading his own future, which is then the basis for his claiming to be *sick* (IJ). His claim to be sick could also mean that his

I am sick." (90) But they turned their backs on him. (91) Then he went quietly to their gods and said, "Will you not eat? (92) What ails you that you speak not?" (93) Then he turned upon them, striking with his right hand. (94) Then they came to him rushing. (95) He said, "Do you worship that which you carve, (96) while God created you and that which you make?" (97) They said, "Erect a building for him and cast him into the fire." (98) They desired to scheme against him, so We made them the lowest. (99) And he said, "Truly I am going unto my Lord. He will guide me. (100) My Lord, give unto me from among the righteous." (101) So We gave him glad tidings of a gentle son. (102) When he had

heart was sickened because of the worshipping of other gods (IJ, IK) or that he was feigning an illness in order to avoid going to a religious festival where idol worship would have occurred (IK, Ṭ). The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "Abraham did not lie, save three times: two were for the sake of God, his saying, *Truly I am sick,* and his saying, *Nay, but it was the largest of them that did this* [21:63]; and his saying regarding Sarah, 'She is my sister'" (Ṭ).

90–93 Elsewhere, Abraham warns his people, *And by God, I shall scheme against your idols after you have turned your backs* (21:57). The people had placed food before the idols, so Abraham mockingly asked why the idols did not eat it (IK). Then he destroyed all but the largest of them (see 21:58–59c), which he accused of having been responsible for smashing the other idols, as a means of mocking their beliefs; see 21:62–63c.

94–96 The question in these verses is, "Do you worship what you make rather than the One Who made you?" V. 96 can also be understood to mean that God creates human beings and all that they do (IK), since He is the only one who can create. In this latter sense, it is related to the affirmation of God's Omnipotence in such verses as 3:128: *Naught is thine in the matter;* 3:154: *The decision belongs entirely to God;* and 12:21: *And God prevails over His affair, but most of mankind know not.*

97–99 For the story of the attempt to burn Abraham in a fire, which God then commanded, *Be coolness and peace for Abraham* (21:69), see commentary on 21:68–70. Abraham says, *I am going unto my Lord,* when he decides to leave his people, declaring that he will go where God commands him; or he says it before he is cast into the fire, meaning that he is prepared to die and that God will guide him to the Garden or save him from the Fire (IJ). From a spiritual perspective, this passage alludes to the manner in which people should smash the idols of the things upon which they rely and depend only upon God (Aj).

100 This verse, which is understood by most to be a prayer for a righteous son, can also be interpreted as a prayer asking God to allow Abraham to be among the righteous.

101 The son announced here is understood to be either Isaac or Ishmael (IJ, Ṭ). Here it is God Who gives Abraham *glad tidings;* in all the other accounts angels come to Abraham with glad tidings of a son (see 11:69c; 15:53; 29:31; 51:28). Together these verses indicate that God gave glad tidings through the intermediary of the angels.

102 Although various aspects of Abraham's prophetic mission are addressed in over two hundred Quranic verses, this is the only passage to address what is known in the Biblical tradition as the Binding of Isaac. Partaking *of his father's endeavors* refers to joining Abraham in his work, being able to travel with him, or having reached the age at which he could worship (IJ, Ṭ). Some say this phrase refers to his being thirteen years old (IJ). It could also be understood as an allusion to his having begun to manifest some aspects of the gift of prophethood. The Arabic literally reads, "I see in the dream that I sacrifice you," but because the visions of all prophets are said to be true, it is interpreted to mean that he received the command to do so in his dream, not that he had

become old enough to partake of his father's endeavors, Abraham said, "O my son! I see while dreaming that I am to sacrifice you. So consider, what do you see?" He replied, "O my father! Do as you are commanded. You will find me, God willing, among those who are patient." (103) But when they had submitted and Abraham had laid him upon his forehead, (104) We called unto him, "O Abraham! (105) Thou hast been true to the vision." Thus indeed do We recompense the virtuous. (106) Truly this was the manifest trial. (107) Then We ransomed

a vision of the actual sacrificing (IJ, Ṭ). *What do you see* employs the same verb, "to see" (*raʾā*), used in the announcement of Abraham's dream. In this sense, it may allude to the prophethood of Abraham's son.

Commentators are divided as to whether the son to be slain was Isaac or Ishmael (IJ). While many earlier commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī, take Isaac to be the son in question, several later commentators, such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr, favor Ishmael, some of whom go so far as to assert that the attribution to Isaac derived from a corruption of the Bible (IK). Those who see this verse as a reference to Ishmael interpret 19:54–55 as a reference to his fulfilling his promise to allow himself to be sacrificed: *And remember Ishmael in the Book. Verily he was true to the promise, and he was a messenger, a prophet. He used to bid his people to prayer and almsgiving, and he was pleasing unto his Lord* (IK, Q, R).

Although this story may appear to be similar to the Biblical account, it differs in several significant details. Abraham does not act immediately upon his dream, but asks the potential "sacrifice," his son, for his opinion. His son then becomes a willing participant in the sacrifice, surrendering himself to the Will of God when he says, *You will find me, God willing, among those who are patient.* Some say that it was the son who suggested he be laid *upon his forehead* (v. 103) and that he told his father to use his garment as a shroud when the sacrifice was complete (IK, Ṭ). Thus Abraham's son is not a passive participant, as in the Biblical account, where he remains unaware of the Divine Command and asks, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7). Rather, he is a free and active participant who chooses complete obedience to God at the greatest personal sacrifice.

103 That *they submitted* means they submitted to God's Command (IJ, IK) or that they devoted themselves completely to God (R). Abraham laid his son upon his forehead, so that he would not have to see his face when sacrificing him (IK, Ṭ). According to Islamic tradition, the ritual of stoning Satan on the *ḥajj* is connected to this event, as Satan is said to have attempted to intervene in the performance of the sacrifice, at which time Abraham twice stoned him, each time with seven pebbles, until he disappeared (IK, Q, Ṭ).

104 Before Abraham could sacrifice his son, God *called* to him, and when he turned, Abraham found a fine white-horned ram to take his son's place in the sacrifice (IK). According to some accounts, the horns of this ram were kept in the Kaʿbah, but were lost when the Kaʿbah burned down in 63/683. This substitution of a ram for Abraham's son serves as the basis for the ritual of slaughtering an animal that is required as the final rite of the *ḥajj*.

105 That Abraham was *true to the vision* means that he carried out what he was commanded and that he achieved its goal by demonstrating complete obedience to God (R). Regarding the last sentence, which serves as a refrain in this *sūrah*, see 29:69c; 37:80c.

106 That the command to sacrifice is described as a *trial* is also understood to mean that it was a blessing (Q), as it is through severe trials that God brings His pious servants the best reward in this life and the next, if they are able to faithfully endure them, as did Abraham (Ṭb).

107 According to tradition, the *great sacrifice* that *ransomed* the son was a ram that had grazed in the Garden of Paradise for forty years (IK, Q, Ṭ) and was brought to Abraham by the Archangel Gabriel (Ṭb).

him with a great sacrifice. (108) And We left [a blessing] upon him among later generations: (109) "Peace be upon Abraham." (110) Thus do We recompense the virtuous. (111) Truly he was among Our believing servants. (112) And We gave him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous. (113) And We blessed him and Isaac. And among their progeny are the virtuous and those who clearly wrong themselves. (114) And We were gracious unto Moses and Aaron. (115) We saved them and their people from great distress (116) and helped them, so that they were the victors. (117) And We gave the two of them the Book that makes clear, (118) and guided the two of them upon the straight path. (119) And We left [a blessing] upon them among later generations: (120) "Peace be upon Moses and Aaron." (121) Thus indeed do We recompense the virtuous. (122) Truly they were among Our believing servants. (123) And truly Elias was among the message

108–9 See 37:77–79c.

110 Cf. 6:84; 12:22; 28:14; 37:80, 105, 121, 131; 77:44; see 29:69c; 37:80c.

111 See 37:81c.

112 Cf. 11:71; 15:53–54. That *Isaac* is mentioned here is cited by some as support for the argument that it is Ishmael who is mentioned in v. 101 (IK, Ṭb), since Abraham's fulfillment of the test with his first son is presented as the basis for his being given glad tidings of a second son. Others understand this verse as a separate statement affirming that Isaac was the subject of the sacrifice and was to be given the gift of prophethood (Q, Ṭ).

113 *Him* can refer to Abraham or Ishmael (Q). The blessing upon them is understood either as a multitude of offspring or the line of prophethood issuing through them (Q). That there will be both *the virtuous* and *those who clearly wrong themselves* among their progeny can be understood as a reminder that merely being descendants is not sufficient for salvation; they must also be believers and perform good deeds. In this way it is seen as a response to the attitude of some Jews and Christians when they say, *We are the children of God, and His beloved ones* (5:18).

114–20 For the Quranic account of Moses, see 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 17:101–4; 18:60–82; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46; 40:23–45; 43:46–56; 44:17–31.

114–15 That God was *gracious unto Moses and Aaron* is a reference to either all of the worldly and religious blessings they were given (Ṭs) or specifically the gift of prophethood (IJ). Their being saved from the *great distress* means either that they were saved from the rule of Pharaoh and his people (Z; cf. 44:30–31) or that they were spared from being drowned in the sea like Pharaoh and his host (Q, R, Z).

116 Some see *them* and *they* here as references to Moses, Aaron, and their people, though others maintain that *they* refers only to Moses and Aaron (IJ, Q).

117–18 *The Book that makes clear* is the Torah, which, like all revealed books, clarifies hidden matters of which people are ignorant (Ṭb). Thus it is also described as a Book *wherein is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who submitted [unto God] judged those who are Jews, as did the sages and the rabbis, in accordance with such of God's Book as they were bidden to preserve and to which they were witnesses* (5:44). Regarding their being guided *upon the straight path*, see 1:6c.

119–20 See 37:77–79c.

121 Cf. 6:84; 12:22; 28:14; 37:80, 105, 110, 131; 77:44; see 29:69c; 37:80c.

122 See 37:81c.

123 Elias (Ilyās) is regarded by many as another name for the prophet Idrīs (see 19:56–57; 21:85; IK, Q, Ṭ), though it is more likely that they

bearers (124) when he said to his people, "Will you not reverence? (125) Do you call upon Baal and leave the most beautiful of creators? (126) God is your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old." (127) But they denied him; so they are surely to be arraigned. (128) Not so for God's sincere servants. (129) And We left [a blessing] upon him among later generations: (130) "Peace be upon Elias." (131) Thus indeed do We recompense the virtuous. (132) Truly he was among Our believing servants. (133) And truly Lot was among the message bearers. (134) Behold! We saved him and his family all together, (135) save for an old woman who was among those who lagged behind. (136) Then We destroyed the others. (137) And truly you pass by them in the morning (138) and at night. Do you not understand? (139) And truly Jonah was among the message bearers. (140) Behold! He fled to the full-

are two different prophets, Elias (or Elijah) and Idrīs (or Enoch).

124–28 As in the story of Abraham above, Elias rebukes his people for failing to worship God alone. *Baal* is said to be the name of an idol that the people worshipped, a word in their language for "Lord" (IJ, IK, Q), or the name of a woman whom they worshipped (IJ, Q). For their denial, they are arraigned unto the punishment, except for *God's sincere servants* (Q).

129–30 See 37:77–79c. The Arabic for Elias in v. 123 (as well as 6:85) is Ilyās, but here it is Ilyāsīn, which many believe is another rendering of the same name (Q, Ṭ). But it can also be read as a plural form, meaning "the Ilyāses," or "the family of Ilyās," which is then understood to mean Ilyās and those who followed his religion (Q, Ṭ, Z).

131 Cf. 6:84; 12:22; 28:14; 37:80, 105, 110, 121; 77:44; see 29:69c; 37:80c.

132 See 37:81c.

133 For other narrative accounts of Lot, who is considered to be either Abraham's nephew or cousin, and Lot's people, see 7:80–84; 11:77–83; 15:57–77; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:26–35; 54:33–38, and the similar Biblical narrative in Genesis 19.

134–35 *Him and his family* refers either to Lot's immediate family or to all those who followed him. The *old woman who . . . lagged behind* is Lot's wife; see 7:83; 15:59–60; 26:171; 27:57; 29:32.

136 After they refused to pay him any heed, the people of Lot's town were destroyed by *stones of baked clay* (11:82; 15:74) or a *torrent of stones* (54:34) that are said to have rained down upon them as *a torment from Heaven* (29:34); see also 7:84.

137–38 These verses are addressed to the people of Makkah, who some say would pass by the remnants of Lot's town on their travels to Syria (IJ, Ṭ). Others say that they refer to God's having made the region of Lot's people into a foul body of water that is on a well-traveled route (IK). But they fail to reflect upon the implications of these ruins (Ṭ).

139 For other accounts of the story of Jonah, see 6:86; 10:98; 21:87–88; 68:48–50. As in the Bible, Jonah is said to have fled from his prophetic mission upon a ship. Thus in 68:48 Muhammad is counseled, *Be not like the companion of the fish, who cried out while choking with anguish.* Raised as a poor child and in the care of ascetics and scholars from the age of seven until the age of twenty-five, Jonah was called to deliver God's message to the people of Nineveh (Kisāʾī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*).

140–41 According to the Biblical book of Jonah, Jonah, having fled "from the presence of the Lord" (1:3), is presented as having brought a tempest upon the ship (1:4–6). Realizing that some evil had beset them, the sailors cast lots to see on whose account they were beset. When

laden ship, (141) and then cast lots and was among those rejected. (142) Then the fish swallowed him, for he was blameworthy. (143) And had he not been among those who glorify, (144) he would have tarried in its belly till the Day they are resurrected. (145) So We cast him, sick, upon the barren shore. (146) And We caused a gourd tree to grow over him. (147) Then We sent him unto a hundred thousand or more. (148) And they believed; so We granted them enjoyment for a

the lots fell to Jonah, they said, "Tell us why this calamity has come upon us? What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" (1:7–8). When they discerned that it was on account of Jonah's "fleeing from the presence of the Lord" that the tempest had come upon them, Jonah told them to cast him into the sea (1:12). They nonetheless strived to reach shore without sacrificing Jonah, but when the seas continued to rage, "they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging" (1:15). According to some Quranic commentators, the sailors remained hesitant to throw Jonah in the sea; so he threw himself directly into the fish's mouth when it rose, by God's Command, to carry him away (IK). He then remained in the belly of the fish for three, seven, or forty days according to different accounts; according to another account he was swallowed in the morning and cast out in the evening (IK).

142 Jonah was *blameworthy* for having fled Nineveh. It is reported that when he began calling them to repent, the Ninevites beat him. He continued preaching to them for forty days, but they dismissed him as mad (Kisāʾī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*). God then told Jonah to retreat to a hill above the city to watch the punishment come upon them, but when they repented and were spared, Jonah *went away in anger, and thought We had no power over him* (21:87). Some say that he was angry that they were not punished for having rejected him, and thus he fled on the ship (Kisāʾī, *Qiṣaṣ*).

143–44 Had it not been for the life of devotion lived before these events, Jonah would have remained in the belly of the fish (IK, Ṭ). Thus some relate this story to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "Seek to know God in times of ease, and He will know you in times of difficulty" (IK). This verse can also be understood as a reference to Jonah's having *cried out in the darkness, "There is no god but Thee! Glory be to Thee! Truly I have been among the wrongdoers"* (21:87; Aj, IK, Ṭ); for the more extensive prayer and repentance of Jonah in the Bible, see Jonah 2:1–9. If not for his praising God, he would have remained in the belly of the fish alive until the day on which human beings are resurrected (Aj), or the belly of the fish would have been his grave until the Day of Resurrection (Aj, Ṭ).

145 Jonah was washed up on the shore in answer to his prayers while in the belly of the fish, as in 21:88: *So We answered him, and saved him from grief. Thus do We save the believers.* Jonah's sickness was either that his body was weak or his heart was sick at having disobeyed God.

146 The *gourd tree* is understood to be beneficial for both the shade and the nourishment it provides (IK). In the Book of Jonah, the tree appears at the end of the story (4:6–10), growing and withering in a miraculous fashion.

147 Having repented, Jonah was then sent back to Nineveh, whose people had also repented and now accepted Jonah. Thus 10:98 says of them, *Why has not a single town believed and benefitted from its belief, other than the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We granted them enjoyment for a while.*

148 The people of Nineveh now heeded Jonah's warning and, according to the Biblical account, declared a fast to atone for their sins; the king issued a decree declaring that human beings and animals should refrain from food and water, and all people must turn away from evil and violence (see Jonah 3:7–9). God then allowed them to enjoy their life on earth, spared of any Divine Punishment, until their appointed end (IK).

while. (149) So ask them, does your Lord have daughters while they have sons? (150) Or did We create the angels female, while they were witnesses? (151) Behold! It is of their own perversion that they say, (152) "God has begotten," while truly they are liars. (153) Has He chosen daughters over sons? (154) What ails you? How do you judge? (155) Do you not reflect? (156) Or have you a manifest authority? (157) Bring your book, then, if you are truthful. (158) They have made kinship between Him and the jinn—yet the jinn know that they will surely be arraigned; (159) Glory be to God above that which they ascribe. (160) Not so

149–53 These verses, similar to 43:16 and 52:39, now turn to criticism of the belief that God has sons or daughters (cf. 2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 39:4; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39; 72:3). The idolaters are initially asked how they can attribute daughters to God, when they themselves prefer sons and are distressed by daughters, as in 16:57–58: *And they assign unto God daughters—glory be to Him!—while they have that which they desire. And when one of them receives tidings of a female [child], his face darkens, and he is choked with anguish* (cf. 43:17). Criticism is aimed not only at the belief itself, but also at its lack of internal logic; see also 43:16; 52:39; 53:21–22.

150 The question asks, "How have they been able to assign gender to the angels, whom they view as consorts of God, when they have no knowledge of their creation?" See also 43:19: *And they have made the angels, who are servants of the Compassionate, females. Did they witness their creation?*

151–52 *Perversion* renders *ifk,* which is also understood to mean "delusion," "deception," or "falsehood"; see 29:61c. The idolaters' assertion that *God has begotten* is related to their saying that angels are females, as some of them conceived of God as having consorts with whom He begat other deities. Thus 6:101 asks, *How should He have a child when He has no consort, and He created all things?*

153 Similar to this verse, 17:40 asks, *Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females from among the angels [for Himself]? Surely you speak a monstrous word!*

154 This verse asks, in effect, "What kind of reasoning would make you say such things?" (IK) or "Given the incoherency of your worldview, how can you maintain such things?" Cf. 10:35; 68:36.

155 This verse is one of the Quran's many invitations to reflect upon the nature of God's creation in order to facilitate spiritual understanding; see also 3:191c; 11:24, 30; 16:17; 30:8; 45:23c; 56:62. Here the implication is that if the idolaters did indeed reflect, they would see the falsity of their claims and the vacuity of their worldview.

156–57 *Manifest authority* is understood as a reference to revelation, as when Moses is reported to have been sent *with a manifest authority* (4:153; 11:96; 23:45; 40:23; 44:19; 51:38). Thus, while vv. 154–55 reproach the idolaters for having no intellectual proofs to substantiate their assertion that God has begotten offspring, these verses reproach them for having no revealed source to substantiate their claims. In the same vein, 35:40 asks rhetorically, *Do they have a share in the heavens, or did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?* (cf. 34:44; 46:4; 57:37–38; 68:47); see 35:40c; 46:4c.

158 Despite all of the claims that the idolaters make regarding the jinn, the jinn themselves know that they are powerless before God and that, like human beings, they will be arraigned before God on the Day of Judgment. Thus Satan, regarded by most as the head of the evil jinn, will say to human beings after they have disbelieved as a result of following his prompting, *Surely I am quit of you. Truly I fear God, the Lord of the worlds* (59:16; cf. 14:22).

159 Cf. 21:22; 23:91; 37:180c.

160 Cf. vv. 74, 128. *God's sincere servants* do not ascribe to the jinn kinship with God, as do the idolaters.

for God's sincere servants. (161) For truly neither you nor that which you worship (162) can tempt any against Him, (163) save he who is to burn in Hellfire. (164) "There is none among us, but that he has a known station. (165) And truly we are those who are ranged [in ranks]. (166) Truly we are those who glorify." (167) Indeed, they used to say, (168) "If only we had a reminder from those of old, (169) then we would indeed be God's sincere servants." (170) But they disbelieved in it. So soon they will know, (171) for indeed Our Word has already gone forth unto Our message bearers (172) that they will surely be helped, (173) and that Our host will surely be victorious. (174) So turn away from them for a

161–63 Neither the disbelievers nor the jinn have any power to misguide or mislead, as God has already decreed each individual's final end. This passage thus reflects another aspect of God's Words to Satan, *As for My servants, truly thou hast no authority over them* (17:65). Satan himself acknowledges this, saying, *I shall cause them to err all together, save Thy sincere servants among them* (38:82–83; cf. 15:39–40).

164 These are understood to be the words of the angels (R, Ṭ), each of whom is assigned a station that is never left; some remain bowing, never straightening their spines; others remain prostrating, never lifting their heads (Z). In the immediate context, this verse is a declaration that they, like the jinn, know that any worship of them is misplaced (R). More broadly speaking, that all angels have *a known station* indicates that they have, like all created things other than human beings and jinn, no freedom to move from one station or level of being to another. In contrast, human beings and jinn have unknown stations and only reach their final known stations at the moment of death. As Ibn ʿArabī writes of human beings and jinn, "[Their] stations are designated and ordained within God's Knowledge and unseen by them. Each of them reaches his station at the end of his breaths. Thus his last breath is in his *known station* upon which he dies. That is why they have been called to travel. Hence they travel, either upwardly by answering the summons or the revealed Law (*Sharīʿah*) or downwardly by answering the command of desire whence they know not, until after the object of desire has been attained. Hence each individual among man and jinn reaches in his traveling the *known station* for which he was created" (*Futūḥāt*, I 258.35–40).

165–66 The combination of the reference to their being *ranged [in ranks]* for prayer and worship (IK, R) and their glorifying God indicates that it is the angels who are meant. *Ranged [in ranks]* can also be understood as a reference to the hierarchy in which the angels are arranged, which is part of the universal hierarchy of existence.

167–70 Before the revelation of the Quran, the idolaters reportedly claimed that were *a reminder,* meaning a revealed Book like the Torah or the Gospel, to come to them, they would devote themselves to worshipping God. Then when the Quran came, they denied it (R); see also 6:155–57c. This is similar to their denial of the Prophet in 35:42–3. Nonetheless on the Day of Judgment, *they will know* the truth of what they rejected (cf. 15:3, 96; 29:66; 40:70; 43:89).

171–73 God has already informed His messengers that they will prevail over the disbelievers, in both this world and the next (IK), as in 40:51–52: *Truly We shall help Our messengers and those who believe during the life of this world and on the Day when the witnesses arise, the Day when the excuses of the wrongdoers will not benefit them and theirs will be the curse, and theirs will be the evil abode.* From a Quranic perspective, all prophetic missions are ultimately victorious, because *God has decreed, "I shall surely prevail, I and My messengers!"* (58:21).

174 Cf. 3:178. On the one hand, the Prophet is told to *turn away* from the disbelievers so that he can concentrate upon tending to the believers, as in 51:54–55: *So turn away from them, for thou shalt*

time, (175) and observe them; for they will soon observe. (176) Do they seek to hasten Our Punishment? (177) When it alights in their very midst, evil will be the morning of those who were warned! (178) So turn away from them for a time, (179) and observe; for they will soon observe. (180) Glory be to thy Lord, the Lord of Might, above that which they ascribe. (181) Peace be upon the message bearers. (182) And praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.

*not be blamed. And remind, for truly the reminder benefits the believers.* On the other hand, he is told to *turn away* from them, because God will deal justly with them in due time, as in 54:6: *So turn away from them on the Day wherein the Caller will call unto a terrible thing.* The words *for a time* are understood to mean until death (IJ, Q), until the Day of Resurrection (R), until the Command is given to fight the disbelievers (IJ), until the Battle of Badr, (IJ, Q, R), or until the conquest of Makkah (IJ, Q, R). Thus some claim that this verse has been abrogated by other verses enjoining the Prophet and his followers to fight (IJ, IK, Q); see also commentary on 9:1–5, 29.

175 Cf. 3:179. The Prophet is told to observe what befalls the disbelievers in this life and the next, for they will observe the Divine Aid and Support that comes to him in this life and the great reward that he will receive in the next (R). It could also be understood to mean that they will soon observe the punishment of the Day of Resurrection (Q).

176 The Prophet had warned the idolaters of an impending punishment, but they mocked the warning, saying things such as *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25), and going so far as to say, *O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring upon us a painful punishment* (8:32). For other passages where the disbelievers challenge the Prophet to *hasten* their punishment, see 10:50–51; 13:6; 22:47; 26:204; 27:46, 72; 29:53; 38:16; 51:14.

177 The punishment will then *alight* upon the disbelievers when they least expect it, as in 29:53: *And it will surely come upon them suddenly, while they are unaware* (cf. 21:40; 26:201–2; 39:56).

178–79 Cf. vv. 174–75. The repetition of these verses can be seen as a reaffirmation of this essential lesson (IK), or the first instance can be understood as a reference to observing things in this world and this second instance as a reference to observing the events of the Hereafter (R).

180 Cf. 23:91; 37:159. On one level, *above that which they ascribe* refers to the partners that the idolaters ascribe to God (IJ), but on another level it refers to God's complete transcendence beyond all that is other than Him (Q) and the inability of any human description of God to attain to God's true Nature, since *naught is like unto Him* (42:11). In this vein, the sixth Shiite Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, is reported to have said, "Whosoever likens God to His creatures assigns partners unto Him. God does not resemble anything, and nothing resembles Him. And whatever occurs to the mind, He is other than that."

181–82 Regarding the messengers, the Prophet is reported to have said, "If you send peace upon me, send peace upon the messengers, for I am a messenger among the messengers" (IK, Q, Ṭ); regarding *greetings of peace* upon the Prophet, see 33:56c. It is reported that the Prophet would often recite vv. 180–82 at the end of his prayers (Q) and that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, in a saying sometimes attributed to the Prophet (IK), counseled, "Whosoever desires that the greatest measure of reward be measured for him on the Day of Resurrection, let his last words at any gathering be *Glory be to thy Lord, the Lord of Might, above that which they ascribe. Peace be upon the message bearers. And praise be to God, Lord of the worlds*" (Bg).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 38

# Ṣād

## *Ṣād*

*Ṣād* is a Makkan *sūrah* believed to have been revealed directly after *Sūrah* 54, *al-Qamar* (JJ). It takes its name from the opening letter, *ṣād,* one of the separated letters with which twenty-nine *sūrahs* begin. It also is known to some as *Dāwūd,* or "David" (Aj), since it provides the most extensive account of the Prophet David in the Quran.

From one perspective, the opening verses are a response to the claim of the disbelievers in 37:168–69: *If only we had a reminder from those of old, then we would indeed be God's sincere servants* (Aj, Āl). V. 1 alludes to the fact that the Quran contains what they claim to desire, but v. 2 explains that they will not accept it, because of their disposition toward *vainglory and schism.* From another perspective, this *sūrah* follows upon the promise that God's *host will surely be victorious* (37:173) in that it begins by denouncing the Quraysh as a mere *host among the parties yonder routed* (v. 11), refers to other tribes that were routed for their defiance (vv. 12–16), and then shows the ways in which different prophets triumphed over the trials sent to them by God (Bq).

*Ṣād* begins by denouncing the Quraysh for their disbelief in the Prophet Muhammad and questioning the internal logic of their beliefs (vv. 1–11). A general recounting of the fate that befell *the parties* who had denied previous prophets (vv. 12–16) then leads into accounts of the trials that confronted the prophets David (vv. 17–26), Solomon (vv. 30–40), and Job (vv. 41–44). A brief mention of other prophets (vv. 45–48) then segues into a discussion of the blessings of Paradise (vv. 49–54), the punishments of Hell (vv. 55–61), and the way the denizens of Hell wonder why those whom they had thought to be astray are not in Hell with them (vv. 62–64). A brief affirmation of God's Omnipotence and the Prophet's inability to produce anything more than what God has revealed to him (vv. 65–70) introduces the last section (vv. 71–85), which discusses the creation of Adam, God's commanding the angels to prostrate to him, and the refusal of Iblīs, or Satan, to do so. The *sūrah* closes with a final address in which the Prophet is instructed to promise the Quraysh that they will eventually know the truth of the revelation (vv. 86–88).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ṣād.* By the Quran possessed of remembrance. (2) Nay, but those who disbelieve are in vainglory and schism. (3) How many a generation before them have We destroyed? And they called out when the time for escape had passed. (4) Now they marvel that a warner from among themselves has come unto

1 The Arabic letter *ṣād* is among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*), which are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. *Ṣād* is given several possible meanings. It may be an allusion to the Names of God beginning with the letter *ṣād* (IJ, Ṭs), such as *al-Ṣamad,* "the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself," *al-Ṣāniʿ,* "the Maker," and *al-Ṣādiq,* "the Truthful" (R); an abbreviation for a phrase, such as *ṣadaqa ʾLlāh,* "God has spoken the truth," or *al-Ṣādiq Allāh,* "the Truthful One is God," or *ṣadaqa Muḥammad,* "Muhammad has spoken the truth" (R); one of the names of the Quran (IJ, Ṭs); or a name for this *sūrah* (IJ, R, Ṭs). *Remembrance* translates *dhikr,* which in this context is understood to mean "honor" or "renown" (*sharaf;* IJ, IK, Ṭ), as it is also understood in 43:44 and 94:4 (R, Ṭs), or clarification (*bayān;* IJ, R), because the verse mentions those things that, when reflected upon, lead one to the truth (Ṭs). *Dhikr* is also employed in several verses as a name for the Quran, in which case it is rendered "the Reminder," as in 21:10: *We have indeed sent down unto you a Book wherein is your Reminder;* see also 36:69c. This verse can thus be understood as an oath invoking the Quran, which is *possessed of remembrance,* because it possesses those things that remind one of God, His Oneness, His Names and Attributes, His prophets, stories of previous communities, the Resurrection, and the Divine Decree, as alluded to in 6:38: *We have neglected nothing in the Book* (Ṭs).

2 *Vainglory* renders *ʿizzah,* which, when used to describe a human attitude, connotes the belief that one is exempt from following anyone other than oneself, as in 2:206: *And when it is said to him, "Reverence God," vainglory seizes him sinfully* (R). *Schism* renders *shiqāq* (cf. 2:137, 176; 22:53; 41:52), which conveys a sense of fracture or separation and connotes an attitude of enmity, disobedience, opposition, and defiance (Ṭs), because one deems oneself equal or superior to someone whom one opposes (R), in this case the Prophet.

3 God then warns the disbelievers of the destruction that befell those before them who had an attitude of *vainglory and schism* toward the prophets God had sent them. This is one of several verses to refer to towns (6:6; 7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13) and whole generations (17:17; 19:74; 20:128; 36:31; 38:3; 50:36) that were destroyed for their iniquities and their refusal to accept the messengers God sent. That they *called out when the time for escape had passed* means that only when the punishment came upon them did they actually believe, but as God had already given them warning and a reprieve so that they could heed the warning, there was no more opportunity for them to achieve salvation; see also 21:12–13; 23:63–65; commentary on 40:83–85; as well as the story of Pharaoh in 10:90–91.

4 Here and in the almost identical 50:2, the incredulity of the idolaters is directed toward God for having chosen as a prophet either someone who did not formerly have high social standing among them, as in v. 8, or a human being rather than an angel, as in 25:7, where the disbelievers ask, *What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?* (see also 6:8–9; 11:12; 14:10; 17:94; 23:33; 36:15; 41:14; 54:24; 64:6c). For other verses that speak of their marveling at this phenomenon, see 7:69; 10:2. In deriding the Prophet, the disbelievers labeled him a *sorcerer* (see also 10:2; 51:52), a charge also leveled against Moses (7:109; 26:34; 51:39) and Jesus (5:110; 61:6).

them, and the disbelievers say, "This is a lying sorcerer. (5) Has he made the gods one God? Truly this is an astounding thing!" (6) And the notables among them set out, [saying], "Go! Be steadfast to your gods. Truly this is a thing desired. (7) We did not hear of this in the creed of latter days. This is naught but an invention. (8) Has the Reminder been sent down upon him among all of us?" Nay, but they are in doubt regarding My Reminder! Nay, they have not yet tasted My Punishment! (9) Or have they the treasuries of thy Lord's Mercy, the

5–7 These verses reportedly repeat the words expressed by some of the leaders among the Quraysh. They had gone with the Prophet to his uncle and protector, Abū Ṭālib, to complain about the Prophet's preaching. When asked by his uncle, "What do you want from your people?" the Prophet responded, "O my uncle! I only want from them a single declaration, which if they say it, the Arabs will follow them and the non-Arabs will pay tribute to them." The leaders of the Quraysh said, "One declaration! By thy father! We will say ten! What is it?" And Abū Ṭālib asked, "What is the declaration, O son of my brother?" And the Prophet responded, "There is no god but God." At which the leaders stood up and scoffed, *Has he made the gods one God? Truly this is an astounding thing!* (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). According to other accounts, this event occasioned the revelation of vv. 1–7 (IJ).

Rather than heeding the Prophet or considering what he said, the leaders of the Quraysh hardened their opposition to him, agreeing to be *steadfast to* their *gods* and firm in their own religion. This was in part because they believed that if they abandoned the worship of their idols, they would be afflicted with famine and distress (Ṭs). Their reasoning was that if they had not heard this message from their predecessors, then it must be something false (R). Thus to their minds the Quran must have been *an invention* or a fabrication by Muhammad (see 21:5; 25:4; 32:3; 34:8, 43; 42:24; 46:8), a charge also brought against Noah by the leaders among his people (23:38) and against Moses by Pharaoh and his hosts (28:36). For responses to this charge, see 10:37–38; 11:13, 35; 12:11; 46:8. Regarding the tendency of leaders and notables to reject revelation, see 34:34c.

8 V. 4 reflects the disbelievers' astonishment that a human being rather than an angel was sent to them with a revelation, and this verse shows their reticence to accept the fact that, if God were to choose a human being, He would have chosen an orphan with little wealth or political power. Their reaction is similar to the idolaters' question in 43:31: *Why was this Quran not sent down to a great man from one of the two towns* (i.e., Makkah and Ṭā'if)*?* In this sense, while v. 4 expresses their amazement, this verse and 43:31 reveal their jealousy. They doubt God's *Reminder,* meaning the Quran. The last sentence can be understood to mean that they continue to doubt, because they have not yet tasted God's Punishment, but that, were they to taste it, they would know (R). *Nay* translates the emphatic particle *bal,* which can either negate or affirm. If understood as affirming, the verse would be rendered, "Indeed, they are in doubt regarding My Reminder! Indeed, they will taste My Punishment!"

9 This verse asks whether the disbelievers have the keys to prophecy, so that they can have it come upon whomever they will (IJ, Ṭs). It can also be understood more broadly as a reference to all of the mercies bestowed by God, as in 43:32: *Is it they who apportion the Mercy of thy Lord? We have apportioned for them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take others into service. And the Mercy of thy Lord is better than that which they amass.* Elsewhere, the Prophet is told to say to the disbelievers, *Were you to possess the treasuries of my Lord's Mercy, you would surely withhold them, out of fear of spending. Man is ever miserly!* (17:100).

Mighty, the Bestower? (10) Or have they sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them? Then let them ascend by some means; (11) a host among the parties yonder routed. (12) The people of Noah denied before them, as did ᶜĀd and Pharaoh of the tent poles, (13) Thamūd, the people of Lot, and the inhabitants of the thicket; they are the parties. (14) Each of them did naught but deny the messengers; so My Retribution came due. (15) They await naught but a single cry for which there is no delay. (16) And they say, "Our Lord, hasten our share unto us before the Day of Reckoning." (17) Bear patiently

10 This rhetorical question, posed as both rebuke and derision, is similar to questions posed in 4:53–55; 42:21; 43:79. If the disbelievers do indeed possess such power, then *let them ascend* through the doors of Heaven by their own machinations (IJ), then send the revelation down upon those whom they choose (R, Z). This verse also evokes imagery similar to that found in 22:15: *Whosoever thinks that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to Heaven.*

11 This verse serves as a segue into the discussion of earlier peoples who were destroyed for denying the messengers sent to them and promises that those who oppose the Prophet will face the same fate. *Yonder* is thus understood as an allusion to a point in the future when the disbelievers will be defeated or vanquished or to a place at a distance. Some say that it refers to the Battle of Badr (IJ, Ṭs), which would take place some years later in 2/624, while others consider it to be a reference to the Battle of the Trench in the year 5/627 (Ṭs).

12 For the Quranic account of Noah, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 21:76–77; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15, and *Sūrah* 71. ᶜĀd was a pre-Islamic Arabian tribe who rejected the prophet Hūd; see 7:65–72; 11:50–60. The precise meaning of *awtād* (cf. 89:10), here translated *tent poles,* is debated. Ibn ᶜAbbās says that *awtād* refers to the large army that served to establish Pharaoh's rule, as many tent poles bespeak a large army (IJ). *Awtād* is also said to refer to Pharaoh's alleged practice of using four stakes (*awtād*) to impale his victims and then leaving them for dead (IJ, Ṭs). *Awtād* can also mean "pillars," thus evoking an Arabic expression for someone who is always severe or firm, "He has firm pillars" (IJ).

13–14 Like the tribe of ᶜĀd, with whom it is often mentioned, the tribe of Thamūd was a pre-Islamic Arabian tribe who rejected the prophet sent to them; see 7:73–79; 11:61–68. For Lot's rejection by his people, see 15:57–77; 26:160–73. For the *inhabitants of the thicket,* who are said to have rejected the prophet Shuᶜayb, see 26:176–89. In this context, that *they are the parties* is meant to convey that the Quraysh constitute another of these parties (IJ, R, Ṭs), all of whom share the same fate of being punished for having denied the messengers sent to them, though in different ways. This last phrase could also be understood to mean, "They were the parties," alluding to the fact that the people of these previous tribes were wealthier and mightier than the Quraysh, but were defeated nonetheless (IK, R).

15 Here *they* refers either to the Quraysh or to all of the groups mentioned in the previous verses. When taken as a reference to the Quraysh, *a single cry* (cf. 36:29, 49; 37:19; 79:13) refers to the first blast of Seraphiel's trumpet, which will level all that is on the earth. When taken as a reference to all of the groups, *a single cry* refers to the second blast, which heralds the Resurrection. For the relation between the two blasts or cries, see 39:68c.

16 This verse is understood to be one of many verses in which the disbelievers mockingly seek to *hasten* their punishment (see 10:50–51; 13:6; 22:47; 26:204; 27:46, 72; 29:53; 37:176; 51:14). It may also refer to their asking for the rewards of the Garden when the Prophet described them (IJ, IK), thus alluding to their belief that they are in fact good and will receive reward rather than punishment when their account is taken, as in 2:11: *And when it is said unto them, "Do not work corruption upon the earth," they say, "We are only working*

that which they say, and remember Our servant David, possessed of might; truly he turned oft [unto God]. (18) Truly We compelled the mountains to join him in glorifying at eventide and at the break of day. (19) And the birds gathered, each turning oft unto Him. (20) And We strengthened his sovereignty and

*righteousness."* Here *our share* renders *qiṭṭanā*, which is also understood to mean "our book on which the record of our deeds is inscribed," "our account," or "our decree" (IJ).

17 The injunction to *bear patiently* in the face of insults from the disbelievers (cf. 20:130; 50:39; 73:10) is addressed to the Prophet (IJ, Q), but can also be understood as counsel for all believers. It can also be understood to convey an attitude of tolerance and forbearance that should prevail whenever circumstances permit, though many claim it is abrogated by 9:5 (IJ, Q). The combination of injunctions, to be patient and to tell the stories of David and other prophets, implies that conveying these stories may serve to persuade the disbelievers of the reality of Muhammad's prophethood (Q) or to console the Prophet to know of the trials that other prophets faced and their ability to overcome them. That David is *possessed of might* means that he had strength in both obeying and serving God (IK, Q, Sy) or in both prophethood and kingship, as he was given great strength in both domains (Aj). That he *turned oft [unto God]* (cf. 38:30, 44) means either that he repented, in the same way that the Prophet would regularly ask forgiveness of God a hundred times every day (Q), that he turned to God in all of his affairs (Aj, IK, R), or that he lived in a state of perpetual servanthood (*Futūḥāt* II 227.11). The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said of David, "The prayer most loved by God is the prayer of David, and the fast most loved by God is the fast of David. He would sleep half the night, stand in prayer one-third of the night, and then sleep for its sixth part. And he would fast one day and break fast another day" (IJ, IK).

18 It is already in the nature of the mountains and the birds to glorify God, since *whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorify God* (59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; cf. 57:1; 59:24). That they are *compelled* to glorify God with David (cf. 21:79; 34:10) thus alludes to his properly fulfilling the function of God's *vicegerent upon the earth* (v. 26; cf. 6:165), in whose prayer all of creation takes part. *At eventide and at the break of day* may be understood to mean at the two ends of the day or at all times. David's prayer *at the break of day* is understood by many commentators to mean in the early morning after the time of the obligatory *fajr* prayer. It is thus taken as an allusion to the supererogatory prayer after sunrise but before noon, *al-ḍuḥā* (Aj, IJ, IK, Q).

19 The birds would gather, many say, because of the beauty of David's voice when he sang his prayers and would turn to God with their own praise. The pronoun in *unto Him* could also be rendered "him" if understood as a reference to David, meaning that the birds followed his commands (Aj, IK) and glorified God with him (Q).

20 In the Islamic tradition, David's kingdom was considered to have been the most powerful in the world (IK), but its strength and power derived from Divine Aid (R). *Wisdom* is understood here as a reference to prophethood (IJ, IK, Q) or to understanding and sound reasoning (IJ, Q). This verse could also be understood to mean that his kingdom was strengthened through the gift of virtuous and truthful ministers to assist him (ST). *Decisive speech* means clarity and truth of speech, the knowledge of giving decrees and administering justice (IJ), or the ability to make clear and decisive judgments between a plaintiff and a defendant (IJ), and thus denotes sound reasoning or sage judgment. From another perspective, *decisive speech* is related to the gift of revelation, in which case it refers to God's Speech. *Decisive* renders *faṣl*, which means "division" or "separation." Here it connotes speech that makes a clear division between right and wrong or truth and falsehood. *Faṣl* is also related to *faṣṣala*, meaning "to expound," which is used to describe the Quran as *a Book whose signs have been expounded as an Arabic Quran for a people who know* (41:3; cf. 7:52; 11:1). The wisdom given to David and other prophets thus includes the ability to "differentiate" (*faṣṣala*) between different aspects of reality and to "expound" them for others in a decisive

gave him wisdom and decisive speech. (21) Has the report of the dispute come unto thee, when they scaled the sanctuary? (22) When they entered upon David, he was frightened of them. They said, "Fear not! We are two disputants: one of us has transgressed against the other; so judge between us with truth. Be not unjust, and guide us unto the right path. (23) Behold, this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. Yet he has said, 'Place her under my care,' and has overpowered me in speech." (24) He said, "He has indeed wronged you

and clear manner, just as God expounded them for the prophets.

21–24 The plain sense of this story provides an example of David's judging equitably between two parties. Many commentators, however, connect it to the Biblical account in which David fell in love with Bathsheba (transliterated as Bathshaba$^{c}$ or translated as Bint al-Qasam, "Daughter of the Oath") and then sent her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to the front lines of the battlefield, where he would be killed, so that David would be free to marry her (Q, Ṭ; see 2 Samuel 11). But the idea that David had adulterous relations with Bathsheba before Uriah's death, found in 2 Samuel 11:4–5, is considered by Muslims to be an abomination that could not have been committed by a prophet. Hence this detail is not found in most Islamic accounts.

The basis for relating these verses to the Biblical account of Bathsheba is interpreting the case of the one ewe being taken into the flock of ninety-nine ewes as a metaphor for David's actions—David, who had many wives, took Bathsheba, Uriah's only wife (IJ, Q, Ṭ)—and their similarity to the challenge that Nathan puts to David in 2 Samuel 12. This interpretation is supported by David's passing judgment after hearing the words of the plaintiff, representing Uriah's position, without having heard the argument of the defendant, representing David's position. Thus David realized that this was a metaphor for his own misdeeds, and his words in v. 24 are a condemnation of his own actions. He then sought forgiveness, fell prostrate, and repented. According to this interpretation, the two visitors were angels sent by God in the form of human beings (Āl, IJ, Q, Ṭ). God's trial of David (*that We had tried him*) would then refer to the entire story, from David's desiring Bathsheba to his moment of self-reckoning. It is said that God sent this trial because David had asked to be raised to the station of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God responded by sending him a trial similar to those he had sent upon them (Ṭ).

Other commentators maintain that such details do not in and of themselves merit a connection with the story of Bathsheba, especially as such an interpretation must extrapolate beyond the plain sense of the text. Furthermore, there is little in the Quranic text to substantiate this connection, and, as Ibn Kathīr observes, the basis for relating these verses to the story of Bathsheba is not grounded in sound accounts. Al-Rāzī also maintains that even the sanitized version of the story, in which there is no adultery, runs counter to the qualities attributed to David here and in other *sūrahs*. It also appears to be as a result of the effort to connect this verse to the story of Bathsheba that the disputants are said to be angels in the form of human beings, since it would then constitute a message coming directly from God.

David was most likely *frightened* when the disputants entered upon him, because his sanctuary was difficult to access and he had ordered that no one be allowed to enter (IK); he initially thought they sought to harm him (Āl, R). *This, my brother* means that they are either brothers in religion (Āl, Ṭ) or brothers by blood (Āl). That the one brother *overpowered* the other *in speech* means that he overcame him with his arguments (Āl), because his speech was clearer and more eloquent (Ṭ).

24 *Yet how few are they* is one of many places where the Quran laments the paucity of true believers, similar to 2:243 and 40:61: *But most*

in asking that your ewe be added to his ewes. Truly many associates transgress against one another, save those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Yet how few are they!" And David understood that We had tried him; so he sought forgiveness from his Lord, fell down kneeling, and repented. (25) Thus did We forgive him that. Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return. (26) O David! Truly We have appointed thee as a vicegerent upon the earth; so judge among the people with truth and follow not caprice, lest it lead thee astray from the way of God. Truly those who stray from the way of God, theirs shall be a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Reckoning.

*of mankind does not give thanks* (cf. 10:60; 12:38; 27:73) and 11:17: *But most of mankind believe not* (cf. 12:103–6; 13:1; 17:89; 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190; 40:59). Those who interpret the disputants to be angels say that David knew he was being tested when one of the angels looked to the other and smiled and they then ascended into the sky (Āl, IJ, Q, Ṭ). But it can also be understood to mean that David simply understood that the dispute was put before him by God to test his wisdom and justice. That David *sought forgiveness from his Lord* appears to be the main message of the text that leads many to link this pericope to the story of Bathsheba. But al-Rāzī argues that David more likely asked forgiveness because he initially suspected the disputants of entering upon him with ill intent and was thus *frightened of them,* when in fact they only sought his counsel (R). It may also be on account of his having passed judgment in favor of the plaintiff before hearing the testimony of the accused (R), an interpretation supported by the command to *judge among the people with truth and follow not caprice* (v. 26). It could also be understood to mean that David sought forgiveness for the disputants (R), in which case *repented* would be rendered "turned," and the first sentence of v. 25 would be rendered, "And we forgave that [sin] for him."

This is one of fifteen passages after which one should prostrate when reciting the Quran; see 19:58c. Whereas most other prostrations are considered obligatory, this prostration is considered one of gratitude (IK). The Prophet himself is said to have usually prostrated after the recitation of this verse, but to have told the people that it was not obligatory (IK).

25 Cf. v. 40. That one shall have *nearness unto Us* implies being among *those brought nigh* to God (56:11, 88; 83:21, 28), a term taken by some as a reference to the highest spiritual rank among human beings. It is said to result from obedient and virtuous acts (9:99; 34:37), while elsewhere those who seek to achieve nearness by other means, such as through the intercession of false deities, are rebuked (39:3; 46:28).

26 Regarding the meaning of *vicegerent upon the earth,* see 6:165c. Here *caprice* is understood by Ibn ʿArabī to mean everything that a person loves; thus he interprets this verse to mean, "Follow not that which you love, but follow that which I love" (*Futūḥāt* II 336.7). *Lest it lead thee astray from the way of God* then means, "Lest caprice confound you, ruin you, and make you blind to the way that I have laid down as Law for you and upon which I have asked you to walk" (*Futūḥāt* II 336.8). Those who have *forgotten the Day of Reckoning* refers to those who deny it, those who have forgotten the reality of the human condition (see 7:172c; 3:30c), and those who are heedless and have thus neglected to do what they must to prepare for the Day of Judgment (IK). The phrase can also be rendered, "for that which they have forgotten on the Day of Reckoning," in which case it can refer to their having forgotten the acts of obedience that were enjoined upon them (Ṭs), *a part of that whereof they were reminded* (5:13–14), *the remembrance of God* (58:19), or even their *own creation* (36:78). It can also be understood to mean that they have forgotten their very selves, as alluded to in 59:19: *And be not like those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls* (cf. 20:126; 45:34).

(27) And We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in vain; that is the conjecture of those who disbelieve. So woe before the Fire unto those who disbelieve! (28) Or shall We make those who believe and perform righteous deeds like those who work corruption upon the earth? Or shall We make the reverent like the profligate? (29) A blessed Book that We have sent down upon thee, that they may contemplate His signs and that those possessed of intellect may reflect. (30) And We bestowed Solomon upon David; how excellent a servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God]. (31) When at eventide noble steeds swift of foot were displayed before him, (32) he said, "I have preferred the love of good things over the remembrance of my Lord, until [the sun] was taken behind the veil. (33) Bring them back unto me!" Then he began to stroke their

27 A similar verse is 44:38: *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in play* (cf. 21:16); see 44:38–39c. In this same vein, other verses state, *We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth* (15:85; 46:3). *That is the conjecture of those who disbelieve* refers to their refusal to believe in a resurrection and a final abode to which human beings return (IK), as when they say, *There is naught but our life in this world: we die and we live, and we will not be resurrected* (23:37; cf. 45:24).

28 Here, *those who work corruption* are placed in direct opposition to *those who believe and perform righteous deeds,* though in the Quran the opposite of *working corruption* (*ifsād*) is usually *iṣlāḥ,* "setting things aright" or "making amends." For the Quranic understanding of *corruption* (*fasād*), see 30:41c. For more on the prohibition against working corruption upon the earth, see 7:56c. This verse is similar to 68:35: *Are We then to treat the submitters like the guilty?* The rhetorical questions posed in both verses are similar to the one posed and answered in 32:18: *Is one who believes like one who is iniquitous? They are not equal.* From this perspective, this verse can be read as a continuation of the counsel given in v. 17 (R), meaning *bear patiently,* since the disbelievers will surely receive their due.

29 This verse can be read with an implied "This is" at the beginning (IJ, Q). From an Islamic perspective, all scriptures are revealed so that people will contemplate and act in accord with them (Aj). That the Quran is *a blessed Book* is understood to mean that it contains good things and blessings pertaining to both religious and worldly affairs (Aj), for both ordinary believers and the spiritual elite (Ṭb). According to some commentators, when the people contemplate it, they are guided by it, while when *those possessed of intellect* (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54; 65:10) reflect upon it, they are guided to the truth by its proofs and by its capacity to make things clear (Ṭb), as they are literally "those who possess the kernel," meaning those who possess true knowledge of the inner essence of things; see 5:100c; 39:9c. From one perspective, it is only through the presence of the heart (*ḥuḍūr al-qalb*), understood to be the seat of the intellect, that one can contemplate and reflect, because the Quran *is a reminder for whosoever has a heart* (50:37). Thus 47:24 asks, *Do they not contemplate the Quran? Or do hearts have their locks upon them?*

30 Solomon was one of David's many sons, but among them *Solomon inherited from David* (27:16), meaning that he inherited the gift of prophethood and earthly sovereignty. Both David and Solomon were given *judgment and knowledge* (21:79; cf. 27:15). Regarding *he turned oft [unto God]* (cf. vv. 17, 44), see 38:17c.

31–33 It is reported that Solomon's horses, which he had inherited from David or which he was assembling for a campaign, were displayed before him and that he was so engrossed with

legs and necks. (34) And We did indeed try Solomon, and We cast a corpse upon his throne. He then repented, (35) saying, "My Lord, forgive me and bestow a kingdom upon me such as shall not befit anyone after me. Truly Thou art the

them that the sun had set and the time for performing the prescribed prayers had passed (IK, JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs). *Until [the sun] was taken behind the veil* could also be read, "until they were taken behind the veil," meaning that Solomon was engrossed with the horses until they left his sight (Ṭs). *Bring them back unto me* takes the pronoun as a reference to the horses, but some understand the pronoun *them* (which can also mean "it") as a reference to the sun, meaning that Solomon asked that the sun be brought back so that he could say his prayers during the proper time (Ṭs). *Stroke* translates *masḥan,* which can also mean "rub." In the interpretation preferred by most commentators, *masḥan* stands for the idiomatic expression "he stroked them with his sword," meaning that, to atone for having been distracted from the remembrance of God, Solomon sacrificed the horses (IJ, IK, JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs) and then offered the meat to the poor as alms (IJ, JJ). Others understand it to mean that he stroked them with his hand out of love for them (IJ, Ṭ), as it would seem unjust for Solomon to slay the horses for his own slip (Ṭ). The most reasonable interpretation, though rarely cited, is that he branded *their legs and necks* and committed them to God (IJ).

The interpretations given above reflect those found in almost all commentaries, with slight variations. But al-Rāzī gives this story a different interpretation. He begins by understanding *I have preferred the love of good things over the remembrance of my Lord* to mean, "I have loved the love of good things on account of the remembrance of my Lord"; that is, his love of anything in this world is by the Command of God. He then understands the horses to be what were taken behind the veil, meaning that they passed by him until they were out of his sight. Then he ordered that they be returned and rubbed them to honor them and to be sure that they were fit for battle. Although such an interpretation may arise from al-Rāzī's zealous defense of the infallibility of prophets, it also leads to a more internally consistent interpretation that is not based on accounts whose reliability is questionable.

34 The trial faced by Solomon is difficult to discern. It most likely refers to some manner in which his sovereignty was stolen by the jinn when a satan—referring to an evil jinn—was placed upon his throne (IJ). Most commentaries propose various ways in which the jinn took the ring to which the power of Solomon's rule was attached and explain that the corpse was that of a jinn who was punished for his rebelliousness. Many even go so far as to propose different names for the jinn (IJ, Q). Others propose that the corpse was that of Solomon's son, whom he had tried to conceal from the jinn (IJ, Ṭs). According to another interpretation, *a corpse* refers to Solomon's own body, which was like a corpse due to the severity of an illness with which God had tried him (Ṭs). But these various accounts are mutually contradictory, and as al-Rāzī observes, they are fanciful interpretations that rely upon unsubstantiated sources. *He then repented* can also be read as "then he returned," meaning that Solomon returned to health after the trial from God (Ṭs) or that he returned to his throne (IJ, Ṭ). Some of the accounts of how he returned to his throne indicate that he repented and as a result returned to his throne (Ṭ). Seen in this light, the story could be understood as an allegory foretelling what would beset the kingdom, were the king to succumb to his desires.

35 After passing the trial sent upon him by God, Solomon prayed for a kingdom that would never be surpassed. Here *kingdom* renders *mulk,* which can also be understood to mean "rule" or "sovereignty." *After me* renders *min baʿdī,* which in this context some interpret to mean "besides me" or "other than me" (Ṭs, Z). Viewed in the context of Solomon's trial (v. 34), in which his rule was threatened or even taken away, his supplication is understood to mean that he desired a kingdom that no one would be able to steal from him as the jinn had done (IJ, Ṭ). Solomon is reported to have presided over a kingdom (the united Northern and Southern Kingdoms) that no one after him was capable of ruling successfully. In contrast, al-Maybudī states that

Bestower." (36) So We made the wind subservient unto him, coursing gently by his command whither he wished, (37) as well as the satans, every builder and diver, (38) and others, bound together in fetters: (39) "This is Our Gift; so bestow graciously or withhold without reckoning." (40) Truly nearness unto Us shall be his, and a beautiful return. (41) And remember Our servant Job, when he called upon his Lord, "Truly Satan has afflicted me with weariness and punishment." (42) "Strike with thy foot; this is cool water wherewith to wash and to drink." (43) And We bestowed upon him his family and their like along with them as a mercy from Us and a reminder for possessors of intellect. (44) And, "Take with

Solomon did not seek an outward kingdom, but instead sought dominion over the inner kingdom, his own soul, so that it would not obey anything other than God.

36 Those who interpret vv. 31–33 as describing Solomon's distraction from the remembrance of God by the love of the world say that, when Solomon gave up his love for the things of this world and atoned for his sins, God compensated him with command over *the wind* (cf. 21:81), something better and swifter than the horses that some say he had sacrificed (IK, JJ), though this interpretation does not depend on his actually having slaughtered the horses.

37–38 Solomon was also granted power over *the satans,* that is, the evil jinn, as in 27:17: *And gathered for Solomon were his hosts of jinn and men and birds, and they were marshaled [in ordered ranks].* Here, *every builder and diver* means that the jinn would do whatever Solomon willed by way of building on the earth and extracting riches from the sea (Ṭ). When combined with his control over the wind, Solomon had sovereignty over air, land, and sea. Other jinn were *bound together in fetters* due to their recalcitrance (Ṭ, Ṭs).

39 *This* is understood as a reference to the *kingdom* or sovereignty that God gave Solomon (Ṭ, Ṭs), the power over the jinn (Ṭ), or all of the powers given to him (Ṭ). Solomon is then given permission to bestow or withhold these gifts as he deems best (Ṭ).

40 See 38:25c.

41 Vv. 41–44 provide the longest account of Job in the Quran; see also 4:163; 6:84; 21:83–84. In 6:84 he is listed with other Old Testament prophets among those whom God *guided aforetime,* and in 4:163 he is included among those to whom God gave revelation. As in the Bible and 21:83–84, Job provides an example of patience and forbearance. But unlike the Bible, the Quranic accounts do not comprise a didactic meditation on the problem of evil. The *weariness and punishment* with which Satan afflicts Job are understood to be the loss of property and family and incurring a painful disease (Ṭ); he is said to have been afflicted for seven years and seven months (Ṭ).

42 Cf. 21:84. Job is commanded to strike the ground in order to bring forth a spring whose water would heal the disease that afflicted him (Ṭ). Most commentators understand this verse as a reference to two separate springs; he washed with water from one and it healed his exterior ailments, and he drank water from the other and it healed his internal ailments (IJ, IK, R, Ṭ, Z). Sayings attributed to the Prophet report that God sent rain upon Job's fields until they were full (IK, Ṭ), and that "when the Prophet Job was taking a bath naked, golden locusts began to fall upon him. Job started collecting them in his clothes. Then his Lord addressed him, 'O Job! Have I not made thee rich enough that thou art not in need of what you see?' Job replied, 'Yes, O Lord! But I am not without need of Thy blessings" (IK).

43 That God *bestowed upon him his family* is understood to mean that he brought them back to life (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), that they too were healed, or that they were returned to him after having been absent for some time (R). *Their like along with them* means that he also received an increase in family members (Ṭ); see 21:83–84c. This presents

thy hand a bundle of rushes and strike therewith, and break not thine oath." Truly We found him to be steadfast. What an excellent servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God]. (45) And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, possessed of strength and sight. (46) Truly We purified them with that which is pure—remembrance of the Abode. (47) And truly in Our Sight they are among the chosen, the elect. (48) And remember Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhu'l-

an interesting contrast to the Biblical account, in which Job's livestock is doubled, but the number of his sons and daughters remains the same (see Job 42:12–16). *Possessors of intellect* (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54; 65:10) indicates those who possess true knowledge of the inner essence and meaning of things; see 38:29c; 5:100c; 39:9c.

44 To explain this verse, commentators report that Job's wife listened to Satan's promptings to urge Job to "say a single word" (which remains unmentioned) or perform some other act by which he would be healed and his property and family would be returned to him (IJ, R, Ṭ, Z), though there is no support for this story in the Quran or the *Ḥadīth*. Knowing that she had listened to "the enemy of God," Job rebuked her and vowed to punish her. God then told him to strike her with a sprig of leaves, so that he could fulfill his vow without harming her unjustly (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). As there is no support for this widespread interpretation in the Quranic text itself, it seems more consistent to read the *bundle of rushes* as a reference to herbs or leaves that were part of Job's treatment, and *break not thine oath* as a general injunction or an assurance that in using the herbs he was not breaking the oaths he had made to God. Regarding *he turned oft [unto God]* (cf. vv. 17, 30), see 38:17c.

45–47 *Possessed of strength and sight* refers to the three prophets' having strength in performing acts of worship and insight into religious matters (IK, Ṭ), and thus into truth, as their vision was that of the heart (Ṭ). That God *purified them,* or "chose them," through *remembrance of the Abode* means that God removed the love of this world from their hearts and made them always mindful of the Hereafter (IK). Al-Tustarī is reported to have said of this phrase, "God purified them for remembrance of God for God alone, not for attaining recompense.... They remembered Him through Him and for Him" (ST).

48 Cf. 21:85, which, like this verse, immediately follows the only other account of Job's story in the Quran and says that Ishmael, Idrīs, and Dhu'l-Kifl were *among the patient.* For the Quranic story of Ishmael, see 2:125–28. Elisha (al-Yasaʿ) is only mentioned here and in 6:86, where he is listed with Ishmael, Jonah, and Lot among those whom God *favored above the worlds.* Most understand him to be the same Elisha whose account is given in 2 Kings, a disciple of Elijah who took his place as a prophet in Israel (2 Kings 2:13–15) after Elijah ascended to Heaven (2:11).

Dhu'l-Kifl, here transcribed as a proper name, literally means "the possessor of *kifl,*" that is, of the "portion" or "share," as in 57:28: *He will give you a twofold portion (kiflayn) of His Mercy.* Thus he is said to be a prophet who had a twofold share of the work and reward of prophets (Q, R, Z on 21:85). As *kifl* derives from the same root, *k-f-l,* as the verb *takaffala,* meaning "to assume responsibility" or "to pledge," it is interpreted by some to indicate a prophet, or a righteous king or man, who "pledged himself to a prophet" (*takaffala li nabī;* R, Ṭ on 21:85) or who pledged to fast every day, stand in prayer every night, and judge between the people without succumbing to anger (JJ, Q, R, Ṭ on 21:85). As he is mentioned among other prophets here and in 21:85, commentators have endeavored to identify Dhu'l-Kifl with various prophets, such as Elias (Elijah), Joshua, or Zachariah (R, Z on 21:85). The basis for this last may be 3:37, where God is said to *place* Mary *under the care of* Zachariah; the Arabic for "place under the care" is *kaffala,* from the same root as *kifl.* Nonetheless, the majority maintain that he is not a prophet (Q on 21:85). Some translators link Dhu'l-Kifl to Ezekiel, which may derive from attempts to relate the idea of *kifl* and *takaffala,* "assuming responsibility," to

Kifl; each is among the excellent. (49) This is a reminder. And for the reverent there will surely be a beautiful return, (50) Gardens of Eden, the gates whereof are open unto them, (51) reclining therein, they call therein for abundant fruit and drink. (52) And theirs shall be maidens of modest gaze, of like age. (53) This is that which you are promised for the Day of Reckoning. (54) This indeed is Our provision which shall never be spent. (55) This it shall be! Yet for the rebellious there will surely be a most evil return, (56) Hell, wherein they will burn. What an evil resting place! (57) This it shall be! So let them taste it, a boiling liquid and a cold, murky fluid, (58) coupled with other [punishments] similar in kind. (59) This troop rushing in with you—no greeting for them! They will surely

Ezekiel 4:4, where God lays "the punishment of the house of Israel" upon Ezekiel. But such a link does not seem justified.

49 The Quran *is a reminder* (IK), or these stories recounted above are a beautiful reminder (Q, R). Here the reverent are promised the same reward that is promised to David in v. 25.

50 Paradise is said to have Gardens of many varieties. *Gardens of Eden* (cf. 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 40:8) are understood to refer to an especially exalted or blessed place within Paradise; see 9:72c. According to a *ḥadīth*, "Heaven has eight gates. [Four are:] Whosoever was among the people of prayer shall be called from the gate of prayer. Whosoever was among the people of fasting shall be called from the gate of fasting. Whosoever was among the people of charity (*ṣadaqah*) shall be called from the gate of charity. Whosoever was among the people of striving (*jihād*) shall be called from the gate of striving." See also 39:73: *Those who reverence their Lord will be driven to the Garden in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein]."* Elsewhere it is said, *Angels shall enter upon them from every gate. "Peace be upon you because you were patient." How excellent is the Ultimate Abode!* (13:23–24).

51 Those in Paradise recline *upon couches arrayed* (52:20), *facing one another* (37:44; 56:16), *in the shade* with *their spouses* (36:56), and are given *fruits and meat as they desire* (52:22) and *partake of every fruit* (47:15), while they *pass a cup to one another wherein is no idle talk, nor incitement to sin* (52:23).

52 *Of modest gaze* indicates that the maidens look upon none but their own spouses (Aj, Q). For other references to the maidens who await the righteous in Paradise, see 44:54c; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22; 78:33; and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

53–54 The food and drink that God promises the reverent is a *provision* that, unlike the provisions of this world, will never run out, as in 16:96: *That which is with you comes to an end, but that which is with God subsists*; also see 13:35.

55–58 After mentioning some provisions of the *beautiful return* in vv. 49–54, the Quran turns in these verses to the torturous provisions of the *evil return*. *The rebellious* are those who disobey God and oppose God's messengers (IK). The *boiling liquid* that they are here made to drink (cf. 6:70; 10:4; 37:67; 40:72; 44:46; 47:15; 56:42, 54; 78:24–25; 88:5) indicates something that has reached its maximum temperature and causes extreme pain. In 22:19 the *boiling liquid* is *poured over their heads* (cf. 44:48). *Cold, murky fluid* translates *ghassāq* (cf. 78:25), which means something so frigid that one cannot bear it. The two drinks show that Hell is a place of extremes; every time one escapes from one type of torture, one is cast into another that is its opposite. This is the meaning of punishments being *coupled with other [punishments] similar in kind* (IK).

59–60 Whereas the believers enter the gates of Heaven, the disbelievers *burn in the Fire*. And

burn in the Fire. (60) They will say, "Nay, but no greeting for you! You have sent it forth for us. What an evil dwelling place!" (61) They will say, "O Lord! Whosoever has sent this forth for us, increase him twofold in punishment in the Fire." (62) And they will say, "How is it that we do not see men here whom we had counted among the evil? (63) Did we take them in mockery? Or have our eyes swerved away from them?" (64) Surely that is true: the disputing of the people of the Fire. (65) Say, "I am only a warner, and there is no god but God, the One, the Paramount, (66) Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, the Mighty, the Forgiving." (67) Say, "It is a great tiding (68) from which you turn away. (69) I have no knowledge of the Highest Assembly, when they

whereas the believers are greeted with the greeting of "Peace" by the angels (see 10:10; 16:32; 19:62; 33:44; 36:58; 39:73; 56:25–26c), in Hell *every time a community enters, it curses its sister* (7:38).

61 Those in Hell are asking for a *twofold punishment* upon those who led them into disbelief, as in 7:38, where the disbelievers who followed those before them say, *"Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment in the Fire." He will say, "For each of you it shall be doubled, but you know not"* (cf. 33:67–68), meaning let them receive one punishment for having been astray and another punishment for leading others astray. In this vein 29:13 says of those who sought to lead others astray, *Surely they will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own.* Nonetheless, the punishment of those whom they led astray will not be lessened; see 7:38–39c.

62–63 The denizens of Hell will be surprised to see that those whom they thought to be misguided are not in Hell. Thus in 7:49, as they see the believers being told to *enter the Garden,* they are asked, *Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that God would not extend any mercy?* That they continue to ask such questions implies that, despite having received the punishment, they still do not fully understand. Alternatively, the first sentence of v. 63 can be read, "We took them in mockery" (Q, R).

64 *The people of the Fire* dispute with one another regarding what has led them to their final outcome, and with God. Though they do not dispute with the people of the Garden, in other passages they do speak with them (see commentary on 7:44–51; 57:13–15), asking for their light (57:13), some water, or some of what God has provided for them (7:50), though the inhabitants of the Garden cannot share these blessings, as such blessings are forbidden to the denizens of Hell.

65–66 That the Prophet is *only a warner* or, as expressed elsewhere, *naught but a warner* (11:12; 13:7; 27:92; 34:46; 35:23; 46:9; 79:45) means that his function is only to deliver the message; he does not have knowledge of the Unseen, save as is given to him by God, as indicated in vv. 69–70. The Divine Name *the Paramount* (*al-Qahhār*) derives from the same root as *the Dominant* (*al-Qāhir*) and always occurs in the phrase *the One, the Paramount* (12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 39:4; 40:16). The combination of the Divine Names *the Mighty* and *the Forgiving* (cf. 39:5; 40:42; 67:2) refers to God's threat to the disbelievers and God's promise to the believers (Aj), similar to the more frequent combination of the Names *the Mighty* and *the Merciful* (26:9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159, 175, 191, 217; 30:5; 32:6; 36:5; 44:42).

67–68 *A great tiding* refers to the Quran (Aj, Q, Ṭ) or, as in 78:1, to the Day of Resurrection (Aj, Q). It could also mean that the message the Prophet brings, that of God's Oneness, is *a great tiding* issuing directly from God, and only the heedless would turn from it (Aj).

69–70 The *Highest Assembly* refers to the assembly of angels (IK, Q, Ṭ). The dispute mentioned here is understood by most to be that re-

dispute. (70) Naught is revealed unto me but that I am only a clear warner." (71) [Remember] when thy Lord said unto the angels, "Behold! I am creating a human being from clay. (72) When I have proportioned him and breathed into

garding the creation of Adam (Q, Ṭ), as in 2:30, when they say to God, *Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy?* (IJ). In this sense, these verses instruct the Prophet to say that he could have no knowledge of the discussion that transpired between God, the angels, and Satan, were it not for the revelation from God (IJ, IK, Ṭ). The nature of the angels' disputation may also be the one conveyed in a saying of the Prophet: "My Lord came to me at night in the most beautiful form. He said, 'O Muhammad!' I replied, 'Here I am, my Lord, at Thy service.' He said, 'What is the *Highest Assembly* disputing about?' I replied, 'I know not, my Lord.' He said that two or three times. Then He placed His palm between my shoulders. I felt its coolness between my breasts, and everything in the heavens and on the earth was disclosed to me.... Then He said, 'O Muhammad! What is the *Highest Assembly* disputing about?' I replied, 'About expiations.' And He asked, 'What are expiations?' I said, 'Going on foot to gatherings, sitting in the mosque after the prayers, and performing the ablutions completely in difficult circumstances. He who does that lives well and dies well. His offenses are like the day his mother bore him'" (Q). In another version, the Prophet was then told that he could make supplication for anything, and he responded, "O God! I ask Thee that I may perform good deeds and shun bad deeds, and that I may love the poor, and that Thou shouldst forgive me and have mercy upon me, and that, when Thou decidest to put a people to trial, take me away without trial. And I ask Thee for Thy Love, for the love of those who love Thee, and for the love of deeds that bring one near to Thy Love."

70 See 38:65–66c.

71–85 This is the last account of the creation of Adam in the textual order of the Quran, but most likely the first in the chronological order of revelation. The other accounts are found in 2:30–39; 7:11–25; 17:61–65; 20:115–24; see also 15:28–43.

71 *I am creating a human being* is an abbreviated version of what God says to the angels in 15:28: *Behold! I am creating a human being from dried clay, made of molded mud;* and in 2:30 God tells the angels, *I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth.*

72 Cf. 15:29. Also see 32:9, where what is here God's statement to the angels is phrased in the third person. Insisting upon God's complete transcendence and the createdness of anything outside of God, most commentators seek to read *I breathed into him of My Spirit* figuratively. Some gloss *My Spirit* as "My Power" (Ṭ) or say that this is not God's Spirit, but that God refers to it as such as a means of honoring Adam (IK, JJ), or that *My Spirit* means "the Spirit that I possess and no one else possesses" (Q, Sh), while others make little comment on it (Bḍ). Al-Rāzī notes that the breathing of the Spirit into Adam indicates that the creation of the human being is only completed through both the formation of the physical body and the breathing of the Spirit into it, which he understands to mean that human beings have both a body and a soul. He then takes *My Spirit* to mean that the soul is a noble, heavenly (*ʿulwī*), and holy (*qudsī*) substance. He, nonetheless, maintains that it is a created, though subtle and luminous, substance. In this interpretation, he would appear to understand the soul as what arises to form the bridge between the body and the spirit. Some Sufi commentators also maintain that what is "breathed into Adam" is a created substance (Qu). But others understand this to mean that the spirit within the human being is of a supernal nature and this explains how it is that the angels could be commanded to *prostrate before Adam* (2:34; 7:11; 18:50; 20:116). Rūzbihān al-Baqlī thus glosses this passage: "I am creating a human being out of clay, that is, out of incapacity and weakness, whom I will clothe in the lights of My Greatness and Magnificence. Then when I have perfected him, distinguished him with My Attributes, illuminated him with the Light of My Essence, and *breathed into him of My Spirit,* that is, given him life through My Life and My Spirit, which came forth from the disclosure of Magnificence and Beauty, *prostrate unto him.*"

him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating." (73) Then the angels prostrated, all of them together. (74) Not so Iblīs. He waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers. (75) [God] said, "O Iblīs! What has prevented thee from prostrating unto that which I created with My two Hands? Dost thou wax arrogant, or art thou among the exalted?" (76) He said, "I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay." (77) He said, "Go forth from it! Surely thou art outcast! (78) And surely My Curse shall be upon thee till the Day of Judgment." (79) He said, "My Lord! Grant me respite till the Day they are resurrected." (80) He said, "Then verily thou art among those granted respite (81) till the Day of the Moment Known." (82) He said, "Then, by Thy Might, I shall cause them to err all together, (83) save Thy sincere

73–74 Regarding the prostration of the angels before Adam and Iblīs's refusal to follow God's Command to do so, key elements in all accounts of Adam's creation, see 2:34; 15:29–33; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; commentary on 7:11–12. In the present *sūrah*, Iblīs waxes arrogant, but in 7:13 he is told by God, *It is not for thee to wax arrogant here. So go forth! Thou art surely among those who are humbled.*

75 In 7:12, God asks, *What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee?* That God created the human being with His *two Hands* is understood in a symbolic manner, since God's *Command when He desires a thing is only to say to it, "Be!" and it is* (36:82; cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68). Thus some take the creation of the human being with God's two Hands as an allusion to the greatness of the human being (Q) or as an allusion to two of God's Attributes (Q), God's Majesty and Beauty, God's Dominance and Gentleness (*qahr wa lutf*), or all of the Divine Names that fall under the two categories of Dominance and Love (K), which would then allude to the human being as the locus in which such attributes become manifest. The rhetorical question posed by God to Iblīs would then mean, "Are you truly a creation more exalted than this creation?"

76 In 7:12, Iblīs makes this same explicit argument. In 15:33, he does so implicitly in his dismissive remarks about Adam's being *created from dried clay, made of molded mud;* and in 17:61, he asks, *Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?* See 7:12c; 15:32–33c; 17:61c.

77–78 See commentary on the identical verses, 15:34–35. Elsewhere God says to Satan, *Go forth from it, disgraced and banished!* (7:18).

79–83 Despite Iblīs's banishment, here he requests and is granted *respite* from God, so that he will neither die nor be punished (Bḍ), *till the Day they are resurrected* (7:14), referring to the Day of universal Resurrection and Judgment (cf. 7:14–15; 15:36–38; 17:62), which is *the Moment Known* to God. Vv. 80–81 are repeated verbatim in 15:37–38. While the accounts of the creation of Adam and Satan's refusal to prostrate in 2:30–34 and 7:14–18 are followed by accounts of the manner in which Satan causes Adam and Eve to fall from the Garden, the accounts here and in 15:25–33 are followed by more general discussions of the manner in which Satan vows to *make things seem fair unto them on earth* and to *cause them to err all together* (15:39). Making things seem fair to human beings is the way in which his misleading them is most often described (see 6:43; 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38). He is also referred to as *the stealthy whisperer* (114:4) and *the Deluder* (31:33; 35:5; 57:14), who enjoins indecency (2:268; 24:21) and makes false promises (4:120; 14:22; 17:64). From one perspective, while Satan is misleading people, he is in fact doing the work of God by bringing those whom God has already destined for Hell toward the end that God has decreed for them. Perhaps

servants among them." (84) He said, "This is the truth, and the truth I speak, (85) 'I shall surely fill Hell with thee and with such of them as follow thee, all together.' " (86) Say, "I ask not of you any reward for it, nor am I among the pretenders. (87) It is naught but a reminder for the worlds, (88) and you will certainly know its tiding after a time."

it is in this vein that God says to him, *So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice, and bear down upon them with thy cavalry and thy infantry, and be their partner in wealth and children, and make them promises* (17:64).

Although God has permitted Satan to tempt people and lead those who disbelieve astray, he has no authority over God's *servants* (cf. 17:65). Thus when those who followed Satan receive their punishment and turn to him on the Day of Judgment, he will say, *Verily God made you the promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help* (14:22).

84 This enigmatic verse, which literally reads, "The truth, and I speak the truth," can be understood as a continuation of God's Words to Satan (Ṭ), in which case it is interpreted to mean, "I am the Truth, and I speak the truth" (IK, Ṭ) or "The truth is from Me, and I speak the truth" (IK, Ṭ). It may also mean, "I establish the truth, and the truth that is spoken" (JJ), referring to what is said in v. 85, thus giving the meaning, "It is true that *I shall surely fill Hell with thee and with such of them as follow thee, all together*, and I speak the truth" (Ṭ). It could also be understood to mean, "God is the Truth, and I speak the truth" (Ṭ) or "To God belongs the truth, and I speak the truth" (Ṭ).

85 Similar threats to *fill Hell* with (wrongdoing) men, women, and jinn (which here includes Satan) are made in 11:119 and 32:13. Here and in 7:18 the promise is made directly to Satan; see 7:18c; 32:13c.

86 *I ask not of you any reward for it* (cf. 6:90; 25:57; 42:23) is also said by the prophets Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb in 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180, respectively. *It* is understood as a reference to delivering the revelation (IJ, IK, JJ). A mark of true prophethood is that those claiming it ask for *no reward* from the people. They only ask that the people follow the message with which they have been sent. As Noah says, in 10:72, *And if you turn your backs, I have not asked of you any reward. My reward lies only with God, and I am commanded to be among those who submit* (see also 36:21c).

The Prophet's statement that he is not from *among the pretenders,* or *mutakallifīn,* which can also mean "imposters," is addressed to the Quraysh, reminding them that he had never feigned or sought a position that was not his right or sought to claim something that was not his (Z). According to a saying attributed to the Prophet, but not in canonical collections, "The pretender has three characteristics: he contends with those above him; he claims [for himself] what has not been conferred [upon him]; and he speaks about that of which he knows not" (Q, Sy, Z). The phrase could also mean, "nor am I among those who impose [themselves]."

87 Cf. 6:90; 12:104; 68:52; 81:27. The Quran is only sent to remind people of God and the Hereafter and *is naught but a revelation revealed* (53:4).

88 People will come to see that what the Quran says is true after they die, after the Resurrection (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z), or after the victory and spread of Islam (Z).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 39

# The Throngs

## *al-Zumar*

Most of *al-Zumar* is believed to have been revealed in the middle of the Makkan period, directly after *Sūrah* 34, *Saba'* (JJ). Many commentators maintain that vv. 53–55 are from the Madinan period (Aj, Āl, IJ), as they are said to have been revealed regarding Waḥshī, an Abyssinian slave who gained his freedom by killing the Prophet's cousin Ḥamzah at the Battle of Uḥud in 3/625. Some say that only v. 53 pertains to this incident (IJ, Q, Ṭs), while others say that vv. 53–59 were all revealed in regard to it (Āl, Q). Others suggest that vv. 10 and 23 were also revealed during the Madinan period (Āl, IJ). The *sūrah* takes its title from the mention of the disbelievers being driven to Hell *in throngs* in v. 71 and the believers being driven to the Garden *in throngs* in v. 73. It is also known as *al-Ghuraf,* or "The Abodes," after the mention in v. 20 of the *lofty abodes* that await the reverent in Paradise (Āl, Bq, Q, Ṭs). The opening verse of the *sūrah* can be read as a continuation of the last two verses of the previous *sūrah* (Aj, Āl).

From one perspective, the central theme of *al-Zumar* is devout or pure religious practice, as it emphasizes *devoting religion entirely to* God (vv. 2, 11, 14) more than any other *sūrah* and maintains that *the pure religion* belongs only to God and is devoid of worship of anything other than Him (v. 3). To highlight the importance of *the pure religion,* the *sūrah* juxtaposes the believers and the disbelievers throughout. After an opening injunction to be sincere in worship (vv. 1–4), the *sūrah* turns to the contrast between the two groups, comparing their attitudes toward the signs of God and punctuating the discussion with rhetorical questions such as, *Are those who know and those who do not know equal?* (v. 9), and statements such as, *Whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. And whomsoever God guides, none shall lead him astray* (vv. 36–37).

A passage on death emphasizes the desperate circumstances of those who disbelieve when they meet their final end (vv. 42–52). But v. 53, which many have referred to as the most hopeful verse of the Quran, underlines the enduring availability of God's Mercy and Forgiveness even to those *who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls.* This is followed by an exhortation to

turn to God in repentance (vv. 54–67), which leads into the extended contrast between the disparate ends of the two groups in the Hereafter (vv. 68–75) with which the *sūrah* ends.

According to a report from the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, the Prophet would not sleep until he had recited *al-Zumar* and *Banū Isrāʾīl,* the latter being another name for *Sūrah* 17, *al-Isrāʾ,* "The Night Journey" (IK, Q).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Wise. (2) Indeed, We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth; so worship God, devoting religion entirely to Him. (3) Behold! Unto God belongs the pure religion, and those who take protectors apart from Him [say], "We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God." Truly God will judge between them regarding that wherein they differ. Truly God does not guide one who is a

1 Cf. 40:2; 45:2; 46:2. As this verse has no verb, it could alternately be rendered with an implied demonstrative at the beginning: "This is the revelation of the Book from God" (IJ, R, Z). In discussions of the levels of Quranic recitation, Sufis say that one should first hear the Quran as if it were being recited by the Prophet, then as if it were being recited by the Archangel Gabriel, and then as if it were being recited by God Himself. They sometimes cite this verse and 40:2, which differs only in that the last word is *the Knower,* in support of this third and last level.

2 Here God's revelation of the Quran *in truth* or *with truth* (cf. 2:176, 213; 3:3; 4:105; 5:48; 6:114; 39:41; 42:17) is followed by an injunction to worship God; in 4:105, it is *sent down . . . in truth, that thou mightest judge between men according to what God has shown thee.* In both verses, *the Book* refers to the Quran, but in 2:213, the same phrase refers to the revelations sent to all prophets: *And with them He sent down the Book in truth, to judge among mankind concerning that wherein they differed;* also see 5:48c. *Devoting religion entirely to Him* (cf. 7:29; 10:22; 29:65; 31:32; 39:11; 40:14, 65; 98:5) indicates sincerity, purification, and complete devotion; see 7:29c; 31:32c; 98:5c.

3 *Pure* translates *khāliṣ,* from the same root, *kh-l-ṣ,* as the word rendered *devoting* (*mukhliṣ*) in v. 2, and carries the same connotations of sincerity and devotion. Together the attributes of devotion and purity could be understood to mean that God requires that religion be devoted entirely to Him, so that obedience to Him is total and purified of any defects (Z), or to mean that *ikhlāṣ* (sincerity and purity of devotion) is the "leader of all devotional acts" (R). In contrast, the idolaters who, although they recognize that there is some power greater than themselves, nonetheless fall short of pure devotion, or *ikhlāṣ,* by worshipping many deities. Then they try to have it both ways, saying, *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God.* But since this is not *the pure religion,* God will not guide them and they will be forsaken by their deities, as in 46:28: *Why, then, did they—whom they had taken as gods apart from God and as a means of drawing nigh [unto God]—not help them? Nay, they forsook them* (cf. 34:40–41). For God's judging between them

disbelieving liar. (4) Had God wanted to take a child, He would have chosen whatsoever He willed from that which He created. Glory be to Him; He is the One, the Paramount. (5) He created the heavens and the earth in truth. He rolls the night up into the day and rolls the day up into the night, and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed. Is He not the Mighty, the Forgiving? (6) He created you from a single soul, then made from it its mate, and sent down for you of cattle eight pairs. He creates you in your mothers' wombs, creation after creation, in threefold darkness. That is God, your Lord; to Him belongs sovereignty. There is no god but He. How, then, are

*regarding that wherein they differ,* see 2:113c; 10:93; 16:124; 32:25; 45:17.

4 This verse is read by some as a rejection of the idolaters' attribution of offspring to God as well as the assertion by Christians that Jesus is the son of God and the claim attributed by Muslims to some Jews (see 9:30) that Ezra is the son of God (IK). But given the criticism of the Makkan idolaters in the previous verse and the widespread view that this *sūrah* is from the Makkan period, the rejection, as al-Zamakhsharī maintains, is most likely directed toward the idolaters' attribution of sons and daughters to God, a notion criticized in many verses (see, e.g., 2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39; 72:3). Regarding the Divine Name *the Paramount* (*al-Qahhār*), see 38:65–66c.

5 That God *created the heavens and the earth in truth* (cf. 6:73; 16:3; 29:44; 45:22; 64:3) is reiterated in various ways in several verses (see 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 30:8; 44:39; 46:3); see 29:44c; 44:38–39c. In this context, creation is related to God's sending revelation *in truth* (v. 2), alluding to the subtle way in which revelation and creation are bound together by the same underlying reality; creation itself is in a sense God's first revelation. God's rolling the day into the night and the night into the day is elsewhere expressed as His making *the night pass into the day and . . . the day pass into the night* (22:61; 31:29; 35:13; 57:6; cf. 3:27); see 31:29c. That *the sun and the moon* are made *subservient* (cf. 7:54; 13:2; 29:61; 31:29; 35:13) indicates the manner in which the truth in and through which they are created continues to determine their reality and evokes the dominion and responsibility that God has given human beings in making them His vicegerents (see 6:165c; 10:14; 35:39), which is made more explicit in 14:33: *And He has made the sun and the moon subservient unto you, constant, and He made the night and the day subservient unto you* (cf. 16:12; 22:36–37, 65; 31:20; 45:12–13).

6 That God created human beings *from a single soul* (see 4:1; 6:98; 7:189; 31:28) points to the origin of all human beings in Adam (IK); see 4:1c. Elsewhere, God's having created for human beings *mates from themselves* (or "from their souls") is a gift for which humanity should feel awe and gratitude; see 16:72; 30:21; 35:11; 42:11; 78:8. That God sends down *cattle* refers to His having provided all manner of grazing livestock for human use, *some for burden and some for slaughter* (6:142). The *eight pairs* refers to the male and female of sheep, goats, camel, and oxen; see 6:142c. *Creation after creation* most likely alludes to the three stages of gestation mentioned in 23:13–14: *Then We made him a drop in a secure dwelling place. Then of the drop We created a blood clot, then of the blood clot We created a lump of flesh* (cf. 22:5). *Threefold darkness* is then seen as an allusion to the layers in which the fetus is wrapped: the placenta, the uterus, and the belly (IK, JJ). *How, then, are you turned away?* (cf. 10:32) is an expression of amazement asking how one could possibly turn away from the worship of the One who is responsible for all the realities mentioned in vv. 5–6, preferring to worship the

you turned away? (7) If you do not believe, surely God is beyond need of you. He is not pleased with disbelief for His servants. And if you are grateful, He is pleased therewith for you; and none shall bear the burden of another. Then unto your Lord is your return, and He shall inform you of that which you used to do. Truly He knows what lies within breasts. (8) And when harm befalls man, he calls upon his Lord, turning unto Him. Then when He bestows a blessing from Himself upon him, he forgets the One upon whom he called before and sets up equals unto God to lead astray from His path. Say, "Enjoy your disbelief a little; truly you shall be among the inhabitants of the Fire." (9) What

sons and daughters falsely ascribed to Him who it is claimed will bring one *nigh in nearness unto God* (v. 3).

7 That God is *beyond need of you* (cf. 3:97; 29:6) is related to the idea that *unto God belongs the pure religion* (v. 3), for neither God nor His religion are in need of human beings, but human beings are in need of both. That God *is not pleased with disbelief* or ingratitude *for His servants* may imply God's Mercy toward the believers and guidance of them by preventing them from falling into a state that would lead to their ruin, which can be seen as following upon His declaration to Satan, *As for My servants, truly thou hast no authority over them* (15:42; 17:65; Ṭ, Z). Others say that this verse applies to all human beings (Ṭ). In this sense the verse clarifies that it is not because God has any need of people's belief in Him that He punishes them, but because it displeases Him (Ṭ). God is then pleased with gratitude, not for His own sake, but because it leads to His servants' salvation (Z). All of this together indicates that God Himself derives no benefit from human beings' faith in Him (Z), but rewards them for it out of His Mercy. In this vein, a *ḥadīth qudsī* reports that God says, "O My servants! If the first of you and the last of you, the jinn among you and the human beings among you, were to have hearts like the most profligate of hearts among you, it would not diminish aught from My Sovereignty" (IK). That *none shall bear the burden of another* (cf. 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 53:38) is a testament to God's Justice, meaning that no one will be forced to endure the punishments accrued through deeds committed by others; see 35:18c. This is one of several verses where it is said that at the Final Judgment, God will *inform* people about their actions in this life; see 5:14, 105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 29:8; 31:15, 23; 41:50; 58:6–7; 62:8; 64:7; 75:13. That God knows *what lies within breasts* (3:119; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 31:23; 35:38; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13) means that He knows what is within the hearts of all human beings (JJ) and implies that He will inform them not only of their deeds, but also of the intentions behind their deeds.

8 This is one of several verses to mention people's tendency to *call upon* the *Lord* in times of peril or adversity (Ṭ) or times of need (IK; see also 6:40–41c; 10:12; 17:67; 30:33). *Then when He bestows a blessing* upon them or *when He lets them taste of His Mercy* (30:33) by relieving them of such afflictions, they revert to heedlessness and the pursuit of their caprices (Ṭ, Ṭb); see also 7:189–90c; 10:12c. *Disbelief* translates *kufr*, whose root meaning is "covering over" and here invokes a sense of ingratitude, as one is "covering over" the blessings one has received. The phrase could thus be rendered, "Revel in your ingratitude *a little*, that is, for the duration of your life (JJ), which is little compared to the duration of the Hereafter. *A little* could also be understood as a reference to the delights of this world being "little" (Q) in comparison to the delights one would experience in the Hereafter.

9 The final phrase of the rhetorical question is elided, implying "Is he like those mentioned in the previous verse?" (IJ). The need for an elided phrase can be removed by reading *what of one who* (*am man*) as "O one who" (*a man;* IJ, Q, R, Ṭ). In this latter reading, "O one who is devoutly obedient," the verse would refer to those in a state of

of one who is devoutly obedient during the watches of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], wary of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord [...]? Say, "Are those who know and those who do not know equal? Only possessors of intellect reflect." (10) Say, "O My servants who believe, reverence your Lord. For those who do good in this world there is good; and God's earth is vast." Surely those who are patient shall be paid their reward in full without reckoning. (11) Say, "Truly I have been commanded to worship God, devoting religion entirely to Him. (12) And I have been commanded to be the first of

spiritual obedience, constancy, and serenity (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 4:34; 16:120; 30:26; 33:31, 35; 66:12). Regarding the state of being wary of the punishment that may befall one in the Hereafter and of hoping for mercy or forgiveness from God, the Prophet is reported to have asked a man who was on his deathbed, "How do you feel?" When the man responded, "I am fearful and hopeful," the Prophet said, "These two are not joined together in a man's heart at a moment like this, but that God grants him that for which he hopes and protects him from that which he fears" (IK).

The difference between believers and disbelievers is also likened to the difference between the blind and the seeing (6:50; 11:24; 13:16; 35:19; 40:58), the deaf and the hearing (11:24), and light and darkness (13:16). Such comparisons can also be used to differentiate between types of believers, as in a *ḥadīth:* "The virtue of the pious scholar over the devoted worshipper is as the virtue of the full moon over all the other heavenly bodies." *Possessors of intellect* (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100c; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29, 43; 39:18, 21; 40:54; 65:10) are those who possess true knowledge of the inner reality of things. *Intellect* renders *lubb* (pl. *albāb*), which literally means "kernel," "pith," or "core"; as an allusion to knowledge and insight, *intellect* represents the "pith" or "core" of the human being. In commenting upon this verse, Ibn ʿArabī gives the word another interpretation, seeing it as a reference to the "kernel" or "pith" of knowledge, which is sent down from God, while reason is its "shell," which must be used to reach the "pith" if reason is to be employed effectively. *Possessors of intellect* are thus those who employ reason as it should be employed, knowing that the "kernel" or "pith" is their true sustenance, not reason in and of itself independent of revelation (*Futūḥāt* III 120.32–35).

10 Those who are devoutly obedient and perform righteous deeds in this life will receive the gift of Paradise (JJ) or good in this life (such as health and peace) and in the next (Ṭs). *God's earth is vast* implies that one should emigrate away from the company of idolaters (IK, JJ, Ṭ) and is thus viewed as encouragement to the Muslims of the Prophet's time to emigrate from Makkah. It can also be understood as a reference to the "land of God" in the Garden, which one should seek by performing righteous deeds (Ṭs). In this context, *those who are patient* contrasts with those who waver in v. 8. *Without reckoning* refers to their not having to endure the weighing of their deeds in the balance on the Day of Judgment (Ṭ, Z).

11 *Devoting religion entirely to Him* (cf. 7:29; 10:22; 29:65; 31:32; 39:2; 40:14, 65; 98:5) indicates sincerity, purification, and complete devotion; see 7:29c; 31:32c; 98:5c.

12 That the Prophet was commanded *to be the first of those who submit* (cf. 6:14, 163) refers specifically to his community or his generation (IJ). Earlier prophets and their followers are also designated as *submitters* (*muslims*) in several verses; see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." Similarly, Moses declares, *I am the first of the believers* (7:143; cf. 26:51), not because he is the first to have ever believed, but because he is the first among his community to have believed in the revelation that has been sent to him. In such contexts, *the first* can also be understood to mean "the foremost"; see 3:96c; 6:14c.

those who submit." (13) Say, "Truly I fear, should I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous day." (14) Say, "God do I worship, devoting my religion entirely to Him. (15) So worship whatsoever you will apart from Him." Say, "Truly the losers are those who lose their souls and their families on the Day of Resurrection. Yea! That is the manifest loss." (16) Above them they shall have canopies of fire and below them canopies; with that does God strike fear into His servants. O My servants! Reverence Me! (17) And as for those who shun false deities and worshipping them, and turn unto God, unto them glad tidings. So give glad tidings to My servants, (18) who listen to the Word, then follow what is most beautiful of it. It is they whom God has guided; it is they who are the possessors of intellect. (19) What of one for whom the Word of punishment

13 This verse is repeated verbatim in 6:15 and 10:15; see 6:15c.

14 See 39:2c.

15 The first sentence of this verse is both a threat to the disbelievers and a means of repudiating them (IK), as in 6:19, where the Prophet is told to say, *He is only one God, and truly I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him* (cf. 6:78; 10:41). In this sense, this verse is similar to the declaration of a complete separation between Islam and the religion of the idolaters found in *Sūrah* 109, which concludes *unto you your religion and unto me my religion* (109:6). The losers, who have lost *this world and the Hereafter* (22:11), have lost themselves insofar as they have wasted the opportunity to perform righteous deeds and repent in this world, and they have lost their families insofar as they will have no family in the Hereafter (Ṭ). They are thus left with no one to whom they can turn and in whom they might find comfort, or even with whom they can commiserate. In contrast, when the righteous approach Paradise, they *shall enter along with those who were righteous from among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny* (13:23; cf. 40:8; 43:70).

16 *Canopies* here refers to layers of fire (JJ); cf. 29:55. With this threat *does God strike fear* into His believing servants, as indicated by the final address (JJ). Others take *servants* here as a reference to all human beings (Ṭ).

17 *False deities* translates *al-ṭāghūt*, which denotes a variety of false sources of authority, false objects of worship, and false causes (cf. 2:256–57; 4:51–52, 60, 76; 5:60; 16:36). To shun them thus implies shunning the worship of all that is other than God (Ṭ). Some take *al-ṭāghūt* to be singular and thus understand it to mean Satan (Ṭ); see also 4:51–52c.

18 Those who *listen to the Word, then follow* are those who understand it and act in accord with it (IK), similar to what is said to Moses regarding the commandments of the Torah in 7:145: *Take hold of them with strength, and command thy people to hold to the best of them* (IK). They are *possessors of intellect* because they follow and act in accord with revelation; see 39:9c; 5:100c. Following *what is most beautiful* of the revelation can also be understood to mean that one distinguishes between what is good and what is best, what is virtuous and what is most virtuous, and chooses the best or most virtuous course of action, desiring what is closer to God and what merits greater reward (Z).

19 The opening rhetorical question of this verse is answered by an elided or implied phrase something to the effect of "Is he to be delivered from the Fire." The question, posed to the Prophet, *Wilt thou save one who is in the Fire?* means that the function of the Prophet is simply to deliver the message and then help guide those whom God has chosen, since *God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will* (14:4; 16:93; 35:8). This verse resembles other verses that emphasize that human beings find guidance when God has

comes due? Wilt thou save one who is in the Fire? (20) But as for those who reverence their Lord, they will have lofty abodes above which are lofty abodes, and rivers running below. That is God's Promise; God will not fail the tryst. (21) Hast thou not considered that God sends down water from the sky, conducts it as springs in the earth, then brings forth crops of diverse colors? Then they wither and thou seest them yellowing. Then He turns them to chaff. Truly in that is a reminder for possessors of intellect. (22) What of one whose breast God has expanded for submission, such that he follows a light from his Lord? Woe unto those whose hearts are hardened to the remembrance of God! They are in man-

chosen to guide them, as in 16:9: *And it is for God to show the way, for some of them lead astray. Had He willed, He would have guided you all together* (cf. 13:31). According to another reading, this verse can also be read, "As for one for whom the Word of punishment comes due, wilt thou save one who is in the Fire?" (R, Z).

20 The *lofty abodes* of Paradise are described in several sayings of the Prophet: "In the Garden there are abodes whose inside can be seen from the outside and whose outside from the inside." When asked whom these rooms were for, he replied, "For those who speak kindly, feed the hungry, and stand in prayer at night while people are sleeping" (IK). In a *ḥadīth* that appears to allude to these *lofty abodes,* he said, "The people of the Garden will look upon one another in the abodes, just as you look upon the stars of the east and the stars of the west rising on the horizon according to their excellence in rank." When asked, "Are they the prophets?" he replied, "Yea! By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, and the people who believed in God and His Messenger and who affirmed the messengers" (IK). *God will not fail the tryst* (cf. 3:9, 195; 13:31) means that the Day of Reckoning is guaranteed and, in this context, that God will grant them what He has promised.

21 Regarding God's sending down *water from the sky,* see 6:99c. Here the various stages of plant life are posed as a metaphor for the stages of human life, as in 18:45: *Set forth for them a parable of the life of this world: [It is] like water We send down from the sky. Then it mixes with the vegetation of the earth. Then it becomes chaff, scattered by the winds* (cf. 57:20). Both verses indicate God's Power over all things and that *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88).

22 This first phrase is followed by an elided phrase that is understood to be something to the effect of "[is he] like he who is not" or "[is he] like one whose heart He has sealed" (JJ). The *breast* is understood to be the locus of the heart and the fountainhead of the spirit (Bḍ) and is thus identified with the seat of inspirations, thoughts, and intentions. The Quran mentions frequently that God knows *what lies within breasts* (e.g., 3:119, 154; 5:7c; 8:43; 11:5) and in 100:10 alludes to the Day of Judgment as a day on which *what lies within breasts is made known.* While the breast's expansion is associated with belief (see 94:1c), its contraction is associated with disbelief (see 6:125c). When one *follows a light from his Lord* it means that God has opened one's heart to spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifah*) and guidance (Bḍ). The manner in which light expands the breast is described by the Prophet: "When light enters the heart, it expands and it becomes spacious." When asked what the mark of that was, he responded, "Constant turning to the Abode of Eternity, shunning the abode of delusion, and preparing for death before it arrives" (Bḍ, N, Q). By contrast, those whose *hearts are hardened to the remembrance of God* stew in the dark recesses of desire and seek the things of this world, far from the lights of knowledge and guidance; see 8:29c. People's hearts may be described as "hardened," "sealed," or "covered" as a result of their own wrongdoing and the consequent loss of Divine Favor, so that they are no longer receptive to Divine messages or to the remembrance of God;

ifest error. (23) God has sent down the most beautiful discourse, a Book consimilar, paired, whereat quivers the skin of those who fear their Lord. Then their skin and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God. That is God's Guidance, wherewith He guides whomsoever He will; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. (24) What of one who guards with his face against the evil punishment on the Day of Resurrection? And it shall be said unto the

cf. 2:7, 74; 5:13; 6:25, 43; 7:101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57; 30:59; 47:16; 57:16; 63:3. Also see 10:88, where Moses asks God to *harden* the *hearts* of Pharaoh and his people.

23 *The most beautiful discourse* refers to the Quran (Bd, IK, Q), which is considered *most beautiful* in both meaning and expression, its verses being *consimilar* and *paired,* signifying aspects of this beauty (R). That it is *consimilar* can be understood to mean that each part is as eloquent as the next (R); to allude to the manner in which many parts resemble others, with various recurring phrases (IK, Ṭ); to refer to the manner in which particular qualities such as beauty and wisdom (Q) or truth and inimitability (Bd) are found throughout; or to mean that each part confirms the other parts (Q). *Consimilar* renders *mutashābih,* a word that is also used to describe some verses of the Quran in 3:7, but with a very different, more technical meaning of the word (IK); see 3:7c. *Paired* refers to the way that many opposites are juxtaposed in the Quran, such as Heaven and Hell, believers and disbelievers, the pious and the profligate, and reward and punishment (IK). An example of such juxtaposition is then provided through reference to the skin that *quivers* out of fear of God's Might and Punishment and the skins and hearts that *soften* out of hope for His Mercy and Forgiveness.

That the Quran makes skins quiver and then soften along with hearts is another attribute that makes it *most beautiful* (Aj). While other verses mention those whose hearts respond to the recitation of the Quran (see 8:2; 5:83), or *when God is mentioned* (22:35), this is the only verse to mention those whose skins quiver and *soften unto the remembrance of God.* According to some commentators, this is a description of the Companions of the Prophet, whose eyes would water and skins would quiver when the Quran was recited (Q). In this interpretation, *remembrance* is often understood to mean "Reminder," as a reference to the Quran, one of whose names is "the Reminder" (*al-Dhikr*). But as translated here, it is understood as a reference to the remembrance of God referred to in such verses as 13:28: *Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?* It could also be understood to mean that when God remembers a person, that person's heart cannot but soften; see commentary on 29:45: *But the remembrance of God is surely greater.*

*That is God's Guidance* refers to the Quran as described in this verse (Q) or to what God has granted by way of fear of His Punishment and hope for His Reward (Q). As for those whom *God leads astray,* the Quran says that there is *no way* (4:88, 143; 42:46), *no guide* (7:186; 13:33; 39:36; 40:33), and *no protector* (18:17; 42:44). In this context *no guide has he* can be understood to mean that for one whose skin does not quiver and then soften along with the heart, there is no guidance.

24 There is an elided phrase here something to the effect of "Is he as one who does right." In this sense this verse is similar in meaning to 41:40: *Is one who is cast in the Fire better, or one who comes in security on the Day of Resurrection?* (IK, Ṭ) and 67:22: *Is one who walks with his face stooped down more guided, or one who walks upright upon a straight path?* (IK). *Guards with his face* indicates either that the first thing to touch the Fire is his face or that he is dragged upon his face into the Fire (Q, Ṭ). *Taste that which you used to earn* evokes a similar statement in 7:39: *So taste of the punishment for that which you have earned.*

wrongdoers, "Taste that which you used to earn." (25) Those before them denied, and the punishment came upon them whence they were not aware. (26) Thus did God make them taste disgrace in the life of this world; yet the punishment of the Hereafter is surely greater, if they but knew. (27) And indeed We have set forth for mankind in this Quran every kind of parable, that haply they may remember, (28) an Arabic Quran, bearing no crookedness, that haply they may be reverent. (29) God sets forth a parable: a man in whom quarreling partners share, and a man belonging to one man: are the two equal in likeness?

25 *The punishment came upon them whence they were not aware* (cf. 16:26, 45) refers to the punishments that came upon peoples of the past, such as the flood upon the people of Noah, the plagues upon the Egyptians, and the storms upon the people of Lot as well as the destruction of the Arabian tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd, among others.

26 This verse is a warning to the disbelievers that, as bad as any disgrace they can imagine in this life may be, that of the Hereafter will be infinitely greater.

27 *Every kind of parable* can also be understood to mean "every parable," in which case it is read either as a reference to the accounts of the people alluded to in vv. 25–26 (Ṭ) or to mean all the parables that people would need for understanding religious matters (Bḍ, Q); see 30:58–59c. *That haply they may remember* can also be understood to mean "that they may take heed" (Bḍ). While the parables of the Quran are sent down for all of humanity, *none understand them, save those who know* (29:43).

28 *An Arabic Quran* is literally "an Arabic recitation" (cf. 12:2; 20:113; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3) and is understood as an allusion to the supreme eloquence of the Quran, which cannot be matched, as in 17:88, where the Prophet is enjoined, *Say, "Surely if mankind and jinn banded together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not bring the like thereof, even if they supported one another"* (R). *Bearing no crookedness* (cf. 18:1) is understood to mean that there is no contradiction in the Quran (IK, JJ, R), as in 4:82: *Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein.* That a verse ending with *that haply they may remember* is followed by this one ending with *that haply they may be reverent* can be understood to mean that remembrance, knowledge, and understanding precede and are thus necessary for true reverence (R).

29 In this analogy, *a man in whom quarreling partners share* represents the idolater, who serves many masters, while *a man belonging to one man* represents the believer, who serves only God (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). The two parts of this analogy can also be understood as representing a heart that is divided among many interests and one that is devoted entirely to God (Aj). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Whosoever makes his aspirations one aspiration—that is, God—God suffices him for aspiration in this world. Yet whosoever is dispersed by his aspirations, in whichever valley of the world he may be destroyed, God has no concern for him" (Aj). And in another *ḥadīth*, "One for whom the world is his aspiration, God divides his affairs for him, places his poverty (*faqr*) before his eyes, and nothing of the world comes to him but what has been apportioned for him. Yet one for whom the Hereafter is his aspiration, God gathers his affairs together for him, places his wealth (*ghināhu*) in his heart, and the world comes to him, though it be slight" (Aj). Read in this way, this verse echoes the underlying theme of this *sūrah, devoting religion entirely to Him* (vv. 2, 11, 14) and following *the pure religion* (v. 3), since only the heart that has God as its single aspiration can be completely devoted to Him.

*Most of them,* meaning humanity in general or the disbelievers in particular, *know not* (cf. 7:187; 16:75, 101; 21:24; 27:61; 30:30; 31:25; 34:36; 40:57; 45:26) or *understand not* (5:103; 29:63; 49:4), thus *most of mankind do not give thanks* (2:243; 40:61;

Praise be to God! Nay, but most of them know not. (30) Surely thou wilt die, and surely they will die. (31) Then on the Day of Resurrection, before thy Lord will you dispute. (32) So who does greater wrong than one who lies against God and denies the truth when it comes to him? Is there not in Hell an abode for the disbelievers? (33) And whosoever comes with the truth and confirms it, it is they who are reverent. (34) With their Lord they shall have whatsoever they will—that is the recompense of the virtuous— (35) that God may absolve them of the worst of that which they have done and render unto them their reward for the

cf. 10:60; 12:38; 27:73) because they are not believers (11:17; 12:103–6; 13:1; 17:89; 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190; 40:59).

30–31 After v. 31 was revealed, the Prophet is reported to have been asked by his Companion al-Zubayr, "Shall the worst sins that passed between us in this world return to us?" The Prophet said, "Yes. They will indeed return to you until everyone who has a claim has presented that to which he has a claim." Al-Zubayr replied, "By God, the affair is severe" (IK). This verse can thus be understood as a reference to those who have been wronged disputing with those who wronged them, the truthful disputing with liars, and other such pairings (IK, Ṭs). It is also reported that Ibn ʿAbbās said, "People will dispute on the Day of Resurrection to the point that the soul will dispute with the body. The soul will say to the body, 'You did such and such.' And the body will say to the soul, 'You told me to do it and you tempted me.' . . . Then an angel will say to them, 'You have passed judgment against yourselves'" (IK). In this sense, v. 31 is similar to 41:19–21: *And on that Day the enemies of God are gathered unto the Fire and are marshaled in [ordered ranks], till, when they come upon it, their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do. And they will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?"*

Some also read the present verses as a reference to the disputes that arose among the Muslims soon after the death of the Prophet (IK, Ṭs). Some Shiites interpret them as a reference to those they believe usurped ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's rightful place as the commander of the faithful (*amīr al-muʾminīn;* Qm).

32 *Lies against God* can also mean "lies regarding God," in reference to those who claim that God has partners or offspring (IK). It is similar to the frequently repeated question, *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God?* (6:21, 93, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68; cf. 61:7). Similarly, 6:157 asks, *Who does greater wrong than one who denies the signs of God and turns away from them?* Regarding the rhetorical question, *Is there not in Hell an abode for the disbelievers?* see 39:60; 29:68c.

33 This verse is best understood as a general statement referring to all who are called to believe in the Oneness of God, affirm the Prophet, and act in accord with the message with which he was sent, or to those who come with the Quran on the Day of Resurrection saying, "This is what you gave to us and we have followed what is in it" (Ṭ). Some, however, interpret *whosoever comes with the truth* as a reference to the Prophet (R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Ṭū) or to the Archangel Gabriel (Ṭs, Ṭū) and then read an additional but unstated phrase into the verse, so that it would be "and [he who] confirms it," referring to Abū Bakr, or "and [those who] confirm it," referring to Muslims in general (IK, R, Ṭ). But as al-Ṭabarī notes, such an addition is not warranted. Others read *whosoever comes with the truth and confirms it* as a reference to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Qm).

34 *Whatsoever they will* (cf. 16:31; 25:16; 42:22; 50:35) refers to the many bounties of Paradise that are said to be granted to the reverent (16:31) as *a binding promise upon your Lord* (25:16); see also 52:22; 56:21; 77:41–44.

35 This is one of several verses to confirm that the believers are rewarded *for the best of that which they used to do* (9:121; 16:96–97; 24:38; 29:7; 46:16); see 29:7c.

best of that which they used to do. (36) Does God not suffice His servant? Yet they would frighten thee with those apart from Him; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. (37) And whomsoever God guides, none shall lead him astray. Is not God Mighty, Possessor of Vengeance? (38) And wert thou to ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" They would surely say, "God." Say, "Then have you considered those upon whom you call, apart from God? If God desires some harm for me, could they remove His Harm, or if He desires some mercy, could they withhold His Mercy?" Say, "God suffices me; in Him trust those who trust." (39) Say, "O my people! Act according to your position; I, too, am acting. Soon will you know (40) upon whom shall come a punishment that disgraces him and upon whom shall fall a punishment enduring." (41) Truly We have sent down unto thee the Book for mankind in truth.

36–37 The initial question asks, "Did not God suffice Muhammad, as He sufficed the prophets before him?" The idolaters think that raising the specter of their idols' displeasure and wrath will somehow influence the Prophet (Ṭ). *His servant* can also be understood to mean any believer, meaning that God suffices for anyone who worships only Him and relies solely upon Him (IK). In this sense, it follows upon the analogy of v. 29: in addition to not being divided between many masters and having a heart dispersed by many aspirations like the idolater, the believing monotheist has in God all that he or she needs. The one who does not believe and trust in God is allowed to go astray and has *no way* (4:88, 143; 42:46), *no guide* (7:186; 13:33; 39:23; 40:33), and *no protector* (17:97; 18:17; 42:44); and *it is they who are the losers* (7:178). In contrast, *whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided* (7:178; 17:97; 18:17) and none can undo His Guidance, since *God is Powerful over all things* (2:20, 106, 148, 284; 3:29, 165). In this context, that God is *Mighty, Possessor of Vengeance* (cf. 3:5; 5:95; 14:47) indicates that, unlike the idols of whom the idolaters warn the Prophet, God will have vengeance upon those who deny Him.

38 When questioned about the source of creation, *they*—that is, the idolaters among the Quraysh—*would surely say, "God"* (cf. 10:31; 23:84–89; 29:61, 63; 31:25; 43:9, 87), because the agency of a Creator above all others is evident to them (Aj), given that many of them still believed in one supreme deity at the head of a pantheon. Their belief in a supreme deity is then used to argue that there is no way that any of their other deities could avert what God desires or has ordained, as in 10:107: *And if God should touch thee with affliction, none can remove it save He; and if He desires some good for thee, none can hold back His Bounty. He causes it to fall upon whomsoever He will among His servants* (cf. 3:160; 36:23; 48:11). *God suffices me* (cf. 3:173; 9:59, 129) means both that *God suffices as a Witness* (4:79, 167; 10:29; 17:96; 29:52; 48:29) between the Prophet and the disbelievers and that, since none can remove God's harm, only *God suffices as a Guardian* (4:81, 132, 171; 33:3, 48).

39–40 The injunction to *act* serves as a threat and a warning to the disbelievers (IK) meaning, "Perform the deeds prescribed by your religion, just as I will perform the deeds prescribed by my religion, and *soon will you know* whose religion is true" and thus who will be punished with *a punishment that disgraces him* (cf. 11:39, 93) in this life and who will have *a punishment enduring* (cf. 5:37; 9:68; 11:39) in the Hereafter.

41 Regarding the Quran having been sent down *in truth* or *with truth* (cf. 2:176, 213; 3:3; 4:105; 5:48; 6:114; 39:2; 42:17), see 39:2c. Here *for mankind* is added to the phrase, indicating that it

Whosoever is rightly guided, it is for the sake of his own soul. And whosoever goes astray only goes astray to the detriment thereof. And thou art not a guardian over them. (42) God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not, during their sleep. He withholds those for whom He has decreed death, and sends forth the others till a term appointed. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. (43) Or do they take intercessors apart from God? Say, "Even though they have not any power and do not understand?" (44) Say, "Unto God belongs intercession altogether. To Him belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. Then unto Him shall you be returned." (45) And when God is

is out of God's Mercy that such revelation occurs, communicating truth and guidance to human beings. That one is guided *for the sake of his own soul* (which can also mean "for himself") means that the benefit of guidance is for the human being alone; God has no need of it, but simply offers it as a mercy. In contrast, those who go astray harm only themselves, just as those who do wrong wrong only themselves; see commentary on the almost identical passages in 17:15 and 10:108. That the Prophet is *not a guardian over them* (cf. 6:107; 42:6; also 6:66; 10:108; 17:54; 25:43) also indicates that the Prophet should not torment himself (see 18:6; 26:3) or let his *soul be expended in regrets* (35:8) over the state and actions of the disbelievers (R). Elsewhere, the Prophet is told, *Thou art only a warner, and God is Guardian over all things* (11:12), and that he is not their *keeper* (4:80; 6:104; 11:86; 42:48), since in the end, only *God suffices as a Guardian* (4:81, 132, 171; 33:3, 48; see also 17:65).

42 God takes souls by sending the Angel of Death to them, as in 32:11: *Say, "The Angel of death, who has been entrusted with you, will take you; then unto your Lord shall you be returned."* In death souls are completely detached from the body, and in sleep they are partially detached (R), as in 6:60: *He it is Who takes your souls by night.* Regarding the relationship between the two, a *ḥadīth* states, "Sleep is the brother of death, and the people of the Garden do not die" (Q); see also 6:60–61c and the essay, "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife." Regarding the taking of the soul while human beings are sleeping, the Prophet advised his Companions to say when going to bed, "In Thy Name, my Lord, I lay down my body, and in Thee do I raise it. If Thou dost take my soul, have mercy upon it. And if Thou dost send it back, protect it with that with which Thou protectest Thy righteous servants" (IK, Q). *A term appointed* indicates the moment of death or the Day of Judgment, when all things are returned to God. For all human beings, as for all creation, this term is decreed, as in 6:2: *He it is Who created you from clay, then decreed a term. A term is appointed with Him* (see also 6:60; 10:49; 13:2; 42:14; 46:3). In this particular context, *till a term appointed* refers to the return of souls to their bodies when they awaken (R), thus granting them reprieve until they are taken in death and then called to account; see 35:45c.

43–44 Even though it is only God Who *takes souls,* the idolaters still turn to their idols for intercession or as a means of bringing them *nigh in nearness unto God* (v. 3), because they *do not understand* (Q). *Those upon whom they call apart from Him have no power of intercession, save such as have borne witness to the truth knowingly* (43:86; cf. 19:87). Thus although *unto God belongs intercession altogether,* others, especially prophets, can be granted powers of intercession *by His Leave,* as in 20:109: *On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose word He is content* (cf. 34:23; 53:26). Regarding the Quranic presentation of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c. *Then unto Him shall you be returned* is a common Quranic refrain, here referring to the Judgment before God (IK), when the disbelievers will be taken to account for their idolatry (T).

45 When God is mentioned without any acknowledgment of the deities and idols the idolaters worship, their hearts shudder and withdraw in

mentioned alone, the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter recoil. But when those apart from Him are mentioned, behold, they rejoice. (46) Say, "O God! Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the Unseen and the seen, Thou judgest between Thy servants regarding that wherein they differ." (47) Were those who work evil to possess all that is on the earth and the like of it besides, they would seek to ransom themselves with it from the terrible punishment on the Day of Resurrection. And there will appear unto them from God that which they had not reckoned. (48) The evils of that which they have earned will appear unto them, and that which they used to mock will beset

disgust and disdain (Ṭ), as they are filled with distress and rancor (Z). But when their deities are acknowledged, *they rejoice* (Z). That *they rejoice* in idolatry and *recoil* from monotheism reveals the depth of their disbelief. According to some commentators, this verse refers to their reaction on the day when, in front of the Kaʿbah, the Prophet recited to them *Sūrah* 53, *al-Najm,* "The Star" (Ṭ, Z), which some contend had at one point contained a mistaken reference to their idols as "exalted cranes" (see 22:52c; 53:19–20c). This caused the idolaters to *rejoice,* thinking their religion had found acceptance in the new revelation, until 53:23 was revealed and said of their deities, *They are naught but names that you have named—you and your fathers—for which God has sent down no authority.*

46 *Originator* translates *Fāṭir,* a Divine Name related to the verb *faṭara,* meaning to "split" or "cleave." In the Quran, *Fāṭir* always occurs in the phrase *Originator of the heavens and the earth* (cf. 6:14; 12:101; 14:10; 35:1; 42:11). Regarding God as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (cf. 6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18), see 59:22c. When the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah was asked how he began his supererogatory prayers at night, she replied that he would say, "O God, Lord of Gabriel, Michael, and Seraphiel, *Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the Unseen and the seen, Thou judgest between Thy servants regarding that wherein they differ.* By Thy Leave, guide me with regard to that of the truth wherein there is dispute. Truly Thou guidest whomsoever Thou wilt unto a straight path" (IK, Q, R).

47 The certainty of the reckoning after death is a central theme of the Quran, and it is considered futile to seek to *ransom* oneself with worldly goods from punishment in the Hereafter. Several verses are more emphatic, such as 3:91: *An earth full of gold would not be accepted from any one of them, were he to offer it in ransom* (see also 2:48, 123; 10:54; 13:18; 57:15). The overwhelming fright of the Day of Resurrection is said to be such that *the guilty would wish to ransom himself from the punishment of that Day at the price of his children, his spouse and his brother, his kin who had sheltered him, and all who are on the earth, that it might save him* (70:11–14). *That which they had not reckoned* may refer to the evildoers' denial that they would be taken to account for anything (Ṭ); to bad deeds that they had thought were in fact good deeds (Q), such as their worship of idols; to deeds from which they thought they would be able to repent before they died, though they were never able to do so; or to their failure to realize that they could not be forgiven without repentance (Q). It can thus be understood as a reference to everything of which a human being may be heedless in this life, as in 50:22, when every soul is addressed with the words, *You were indeed heedless of this. Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing.* In this vein, the present verse can also be seen as a warning. As the prominent Quran reciter Muhammad ibn al-Munkadir (d. 130/747–8) is reported to have said of this verse, "I fear that there will appear unto me from God that which I had not reckoned" (Aj, Q, Z).

48 The evil deeds committed in this life will be presented to the evildoers when they are given the books of their deeds (see 17:13–14c; 18:49c;

them. (49) And when harm befalls man, he calls upon Us. Then, when We confer upon him a blessing from Us, he says, "I was only given it because of knowledge." Nay, it is a trial, but most of them know not. (50) Those before them did say the same; yet that which they used to earn availed them not. (51) So the evils of that which they earned befell them. And as for those who do wrong among these, the evils of that which they have earned will befall them, and they cannot thwart [it]. (52) Do they not know that God outspreads and straitens provision

69:25; 78:29; 84:7–10) in their left hands (Ṭ); or what will appear are the effects of the evil deeds, that is, the types of retribution these deeds have earned them (R). *And that which they used to mock will beset them* (cf. 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26) indicates that there is now no escape from their punishment (Ṭ), which will come upon them from every direction (R), and that what they will receive is a direct result of their own iniquity, since *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44).

49 Cf. 10:12; 30:33; 39:8; see 39:8c. In this context, that people turn to God in a time of need and then turn away, waxing arrogant in a time of blessing, is another indication of utter corruption, since they have in effect acknowledged that none but God can protect them from what afflicts them, but then they ascribe their gains and achievements to their own striving. And this is a great contradiction (R). *I was only given it because of knowledge* means, "I was given these blessings because God knew that I deserved them" (IK, R), "because I have a special position" (IK, Q), "because I myself knew that I deserved them" (IK, R), "because my own knowledge earned this benefit for me" (Q, R), or "because of some knowledge that God has taught me" (Q). Such blessings are *a trial* from God because one must manifest gratitude upon receiving them and patience upon their disappearance (R).

50 *The same* refers to the statement *I was only given it because of knowledge* in v. 49 (Q, R, Ṭ, Z), which is similar to what Korah, a wealthy member of Pharaoh's court, says in 28:78, *I have only been given it on account of knowledge I possess.* But for those earlier people who made this statement, in this life and the Hereafter *that which they used to earn availed them not* (cf. 15:84; 40:82). That phrase can also be understood as a rhetorical question when the particle *mā,* here rendered as a negative particle, is understood as an interrogative particle; it would then read, "Then in what way did that which they used to earn avail them?" (Q). Both renderings indicate the frailty and ephemerality of the things that consume people in this life before *there will appear unto them from God that which they had not reckoned* (v. 47), on *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89).

51 The first part of this verse refers to *those before them* (v. 50), while *among these* refers to the disbelievers among the Quraysh and the contemporaries of the Prophet, who will be beset by the evil consequences of their disbelief and misdeeds, as were previous generations. They *cannot thwart* God in this life or the next (R; see 35:44; 72:12) or thwart the punishment they have been promised, as in 6:134: *Indeed, that which you are promised shall come to pass, and you cannot thwart it.*

52 *God outspreads . . . provision for whomsoever He will* as a test and *straitens provision* for whomsoever He will as a trial (JJ); cf. 13:6; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:39; 42:12. In this context, this phrase indicates that one does not receive blessings or suffer misfortune based on one's intelligence or ignorance (R), as the disbelievers are said to think in v. 49, or because of one's natural disposition or other outside forces (R), but rather because God provides and withholds provision as He wills. *People who believe,* affirming the truth and consenting to it when it is made clear to them, know that the one who does this could only be God (Ṭ), and *in that are signs for a people who believe* (cf. 6:99; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24; 30:37).

for whomsoever He will? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. (53) Say, "O My servants who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls! Despair not of God's Mercy. Truly God forgives all sins. Truly He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (54) Turn unto your Lord and submit to Him before the punishment comes upon you, whereupon you will not be helped. (55) And follow the

53 This verse is similar to 4:110: *Whosoever does evil or wrongs himself, and then seeks forgiveness of God, he will find God Forgiving, Merciful.* Many scholars consider this to be among the most hopeful verses of the Quran (others include 4:48, 116; 24:22; 33:47; 42:19, 22; 93:5) or among "the most joyous verses of the Quran" (Ṭ). Although this verse addresses all of humanity (Ṭ), many understand it to have initially addressed the situation of some Makkans who feared that they could not repent and follow the Prophet because they had worshipped idols, called upon other deities, killed people whose lives God had declared inviolable (IK, Ṭ), or fornicated (IK). Their being *prodigal to the detriment of their own souls* would then refer to all manner of sin, even their having killed innocent people in the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*; see 3:154; 5:50; 33:33; 48:26c; Ṭ); for the Quranic usage of "prodigal," see 10:12c.

Others understand this verse to have been revealed in reference to a small group of Muslims whom the Makkans had prevented from migrating to Madinah with the Prophet and then forced, under the pain of persecution, to renounce Islam; for this they feared they could not repent (Ṭ). According to Thawbān, a freed slave of the Prophet, the Prophet said, "I would not wish to have the entire world and all that is in it [in exchange] for this verse: *O My servants who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls! Despair not of God's Mercy.*" A man asked, "O Messenger of God, what about someone who associates partners with God?" The Prophet was silent and then said three times, "And why not one who associates partners with God?" (Ṭ). Such forgiveness would, however, be contingent upon the renouncement of idolatry and repentance for it, since 4:48 states, *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will* (cf. 4:116).

According to a third opinion, this verse was revealed to correct a group of Muslims who held that anyone who committed a major sin was among the people of the Fire (Ṭ). Regarding the manner in which God's Forgiveness is intrinsic to the human experience, the Prophet said, "If you did not sin [and seek forgiveness], God would remove you and come with a people who would sin and seek forgiveness from God, and He would forgive them."

54 Here *turn unto your Lord* indicates turning in repentance (Ṭ), responding to God, returning to obedience to God, and withdrawing from the acts of disobedience before one is punished for being a disbeliever (Ṭ). This verse thus provides the reason why one should *despair not of God's Mercy,* as in 9:104: *Know they not that God accepts repentance from His servants, and receives the charitable offerings, and that God is the Relenting, the Merciful?* The combination of turning to God in repentance and submitting to Him can then evoke the opening injunction of this *sūrah* to *worship God, devoting religion entirely to Him* (vv. 2, 11, 14), which can be seen as embracing the original or primordial human state of pure faith (Ṭ), as expressed in a prayer of Abraham, *Truly I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as a* ḥanīf, *and I am not of the idolaters* (6:79; Ṭ).

55 As in v. 18, *what is most beautiful* of what God has revealed is not understood to mean that one part is more beautiful than another (Q, Ṭ), but that one should act in accord with the revelation, thus maintaining obedience and avoiding disobedience (Q, R) or practicing what God has enjoined and avoiding what He has forbidden (Ṭ), since it is only when the injunctions contained in revelation have been put into practice that their purpose is achieved; see also 39:18c. Some understand this verse to mean that the Quran is the best or *most beautiful* of the books that God has sent down (IK, Q), as in v. 23, where it is referred to as *the most beautiful discourse* (R).

most beautiful of that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord, before the punishment comes suddenly upon you while you are unaware," (56) lest any soul should say, "Alas for me, for what I neglected of my duty to God! Indeed, I was among the scoffers." (57) Or lest it say, "If only God had guided me, I would have been among the reverent." (58) Or lest it say, when it sees the punishment, "If only I had another chance, I would be among the virtuous." (59) Nay, My signs did indeed come unto you; yet you denied them, waxed arrogant, and were among the disbelievers. (60) And on the Day of Resurrection thou wilt see those who lied against God having blackened faces. Is there not in Hell an abode for the arrogant? (61) And God saves those who are reverent by their

56 *Lest any soul should say,* that is, lest anyone should seek to repent only when it is too late. *Alas for me* is understood as an expression of utmost regret and grief (R) for having failed to perform the deeds enjoined by God (Q, R, Ṭ). *Of my duty to God* renders *fī janbi'Llāh,* which literally means "regarding the side of God" and is interpreted to mean, "of God's Right" (Bḍ), "of obedience to God" (Q, Ṭs, Z), or "of the reward of God" (Q, Ṭs). In Arabic, "side" (*janb*) can allude to physical, emotional, and spiritual closeness, as when one speaks of being by another's side in English. "Of the side of God" could then refer to being near to God and thus in Paradise, to being in the proximity of what leads to God (Q), or to seeking nearness to God (Ṭs). *The scoffers* are those who scoffed at the Quran and the Messenger (Q, Ṭ).

57 On the one hand, this lament is understood as correct (Q, R), since *God guides whomsoever He will unto a straight path* (2:213; 24:46; cf. 2:142; 10:25). But, on the other hand, people are responsible for not having followed God's guidance, for God offered signs, but some chose not to look at or reflect upon them, turning away from the Quran and being preoccupied with the world and its vanities. Thus God responds, *Nay, My signs did indeed come unto you* (v. 59; Ṭs).

58 While those represented in the previous verse blame God for their having not been guided, those represented in this verse acknowledge some culpability and ask to be given a second chance, as in 32:12, when the guilty say, *Send us back that we may work righteousness. Truly we are certain.* But as they have been given revelation in this world as well as a reprieve until the moment of death, such lamentations are not considered sincere and are of no avail, for *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden. Truly they are liars* (6:28).

59 This is God's response to the laments expressed in vv. 56–58, meaning that those voicing them had been informed of what would befall them through God's signs, meaning revelation as well as the Divine signs in the created order, that is, *God's signs upon the horizons and within themselves* (41:53), and thus have no excuse.

60 For the phenomenon of faces being blackened or covered, see 3:106–7c, where those with whitened faces are contrasted to those with blackened faces; commentary on 80:38–42, which contrasts *shining, radiant* faces with those that are *covered with dust, overspread with darkness*; as well as 10:27, which speaks of the faces being *covered with dark patches of night.*

61 *Their triumph* may refer to the virtues or deeds of the reverent (Ṭ), to their being delivered from the Fire (Ṭs), or to the triumph of spiritual concerns over worldly ones. Attaining to the Garden is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of the Garden, see 5:119; 44:51–57. The torments of Hell *will not befall them; nor will they grieve* regarding the things of this world, which have now passed (Ṭ). Alternately, that they are not touched by evil or grief refers to their being spared any punishment on the Day of Resurrection (IK).

triumph; evil will not befall them; nor will they grieve. (62) God is the Creator of all things, and He is Guardian over all things. (63) Unto Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth. And those who disbelieve in the signs of God, it is they who are the losers. (64) Say, "Do you bid me worship other than God, O ignorant ones?" (65) Surely it has been revealed unto thee and unto those before thee that if thou dost ascribe partners [unto God], thy work will surely come to naught and thou shalt be among the losers. (66) Rather, worship God and be among the thankful! (67) They did not measure God with His true measure. The whole earth shall be but a handful to Him on the Day of Resurrection, and the

62 Elsewhere the Prophet is told, *Thou art only a warner, and God is Guardian over all things* (11:12); see 39:41c.

63 That God holds *the keys of the heavens and the earth* (cf. 42:12) indicates that He has sovereignty over them and protects them (Z). It is understood to mean "the keys to the treasuries" (Ṭ) and thus to be an indirect reference to the treasuries themselves (R, Z), an allusion to 15:21, *Naught is there, but that its treasuries lie with Us, and We do not send it down, save in a known measure* (cf. 63:7), meaning that God opens the treasuries of provision and mercy unto whomsoever He wills and closes them as He alone desires (Z), dispersing provisions and mercy (Ṭs). It may also refer to God's Knowledge, as in 6:59: *And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He.* On a spiritual level, it can be understood to mean that God possesses the keys to all hearts (ST); see 6:59c. Having denied God's signs, the disbelievers lose any share of the good that God measures out from His treasuries, in this life and the next (Ṭ).

64 This rhetorical question serves as an expression of amazement that the disbelievers could ask the Prophet to worship those who have none of the keys to the treasuries alongside the One Who has them all, as in 38:9, which asks about their deities, *or have they the treasuries of thy Lord's Mercy, the Mighty, the Bestower?* (cf. 52:32).

65 This verse repeats the Quranic assertion that, in the absence of correct and proper belief, good deeds *come to naught,* providing no reward in the next life, because, as the Prophet is reported to have said, "Deeds are only in accord with their intentions, and every person has only what he intended." See also 2:217; 3:22; 5:5, 53; 6:88; 7:147; 9:17; 11:16; 18:105; 33:19; 47:9, 28, 32.

66 One should be thankful to God for His Guidance in worshipping Him alone and repudiating the worship of idols (Ṭ) and, in the context of the preceding verses, for what He has measured out for human beings from His treasuries.

67 The idolaters did not honor God as He should be honored (Q, Ṭ) when they assigned partners to Him, described Him by attributes that do not pertain to Him (Bḍ), and did not believe that God has complete power over all things (IK, Ṭ). Almost all commentators relate this verse to the idolaters of Makkah, but those who provide multiple opinions also relate it to an instance when a Jew, some say a rabbi, said to the Prophet, "O Muhammad! God will put the heavens on a finger, the earths on another finger, the mountains on a finger, and the rest of creation on another finger. Then He will say, 'I am the King.'" At this the Prophet smiled broadly until his molars could be seen and recited this verse (IK, Q, Ṭ), some say in confirmation of what had been said (IK, Ṭ), indicating that the Prophet recognized that the Muslims and the Jews were both monotheists, the opposite of the idolaters. Less reliable accounts say that this verse was actually revealed as a rebuke to the position expressed by the Jew (Ṭ); for *they did not measure God with His true measure,* see also 6:91c; 22:74c. That *the whole earth shall be but a handful to Him* indicates the ease with which God can bring creation to an end (Bḍ). *Glory be to Him, exalted is He above the partners they as-*

heavens will be enfolded in His right Hand. Glory be to Him, exalted is He above the partners they ascribe. (68) And the trumpet will be blown, whereupon whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth will swoon, save those whom God wills. Then it will be blown again, and, behold, they will be standing, beholding. (69) The earth will shine with the Light of its Lord, the Book will be set down, and the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forth. Judgment will be made between them in truth, and they shall not be wronged. (70) Every soul will be paid in full for that which it has done, and He knows best what they

*cribe* (cf. 10:18; 16:1; 30:40) is an affirmation of God's utter transcendence.

68 This verse stands apart from others that mention the blowing of the trumpet heralding the apocalypse and the onset of the Final Judgment (see 6:73; 18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 50:20; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18) in that it speaks of the trumpet being blown twice by the Archangel Seraphiel. The first blow, blast, or call (as it is named in other contexts) results in the destruction of all creation, and the second heralds the Resurrection. Those who are exempted from swooning at the first trumpet blast are said to be the archangels Gabriel, Michael, and Seraphiel and the Angel of Death, ʿIzrāʾīl (or Azrael; Ṭ, Ṭs). Others say that eventually everything swoons; then God resurrects Seraphiel to blow the trumpet another time, summoning the Resurrection (IK); this second blast is what is referred to in 79:13–14: *Yet it shall be but a single cry, then, behold, they will be upon a wide expanse* (cf. 30:25). The Prophet is reported to have said that the period between the two blasts will be forty, though he did not specify if he meant hours, days, months, or years. The Prophet continued, "Then God will send down a rain from the sky, and the dead body will sprout just as a green plant sprouts. Every part of the person will deteriorate except for one bone, and it is the coccyx bone. From it creation will be assembled on the Day of Judgment" (IK).

69–70 *The earth will shine* on the barren plain upon which all human beings will be gathered for the Resurrection, but it will not be as the earth we know, since *on that Day the earth shall be changed into other than the earth* (14:48). Rather, God *will leave it a barren plain. You will see no crookedness or curvature therein* (20:106–7). Human beings, and some say all creatures, will come from their graves to this plain *in throngs* (78:18). They will gather, according to a *ḥadīth*, "barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised, engulfed by their sweat, which will reach to their very nostrils." They will not, however, look upon one another, since *for every man that Day his affair shall suffice him* (80:37). Each person will then be presented the book of his or her deeds, which *leaves out nothing, small or great* (18:49); see 17:71c; 69:19–29c.

*The prophets and the witnesses* from among the angels who recorded their deeds in their books (IK, Ṭs; see 43:80c; 50:17–18c; 82:10–11) will then *be brought forth* to bear witness for or against human beings. Others understand *the witnesses* as a reference to those who bear witness that the prophets delivered the revelations and that the people denied them (Ṭs) or as a reference to those who were martyred in the path of God (Ṭs). It could also be understood as a reference to everything that will bear witness for them or against them (Ṭs), from the angels to their own limbs, regarding the latter of which 41:20 states, *Their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do.* When all of their deeds are laid bare, the deeds will be weighed against one another, as in 21:47: *We shall set the just scales for the Day of Resurrection, and no soul shall be wronged in aught. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it.* Thus *they shall not be wronged* (cf. 2:281; 6:160; 10:47, 54; 16:111; 21:47; 36:54c; 45:22; 46:19). Then *every soul will be paid in full* for what good or evil it has done (cf. 16:111) or *what it has earned* (2:281; 3:25).

do. (71) And those who disbelieve will be driven unto Hell in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, "Did not messengers from among you come to you, reciting unto you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?" They will say, "Yea, indeed!" But the Word of punishment has come due for the disbelievers. (72) It will be said, "Enter the gates of Hell, to abide therein." How evil is the abode of the arrogant! (73) And those who reverence their Lord will be driven to the Garden in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein]." (74) They will say, "Praise be to God, Who was faithful to us in His Promise, and has caused us to inherit the land, that we may settle in the Garden wheresoever we will." How excellent is the reward of the workers!

71–72 Those whose scales are heavy with good deeds will then be separated from those whose scales are light (see 23:102–3; 101:6–9c), and the latter are *driven* and *thrust into the Fire of Hell with [violent] thrusting* (52:13). After the gates of Hell are opened (cf. 16:29), its keepers, who are said to be nineteen angels (see 74:30c), will ask the disbelievers this rhetorical question by way of rebuke (cf. 40:50; 67:8–9). The disbelievers will answer in the affirmative, saying, *Indeed, a warner came unto us, but we denied him and said, "God did not send anything down; you are in naught but great error." . . . Had we listened or had we understood, we would not be among the inhabitants of the Blaze* (67:9–10). But their now belated affirmation can do nothing to forestall their impending punishment, because they were indeed "warned" and given ample opportunity to repent, thus *the Word of punishment has come due* (cf. 10:33; 22:18; 36:7; 40:6). Having been made to realize and admit their error, the disbelievers are then cast into Hell.

73 In contrast to the disbelievers, the reverent believers, whose scales are heavy, will enter the gates of the Garden, of which, according to several *aḥādīth,* there are eight (IK, Q, Ṭs). The *throngs* are understood as a reference to one throng coming after another, starting with the best, then the next best, and then the next (IK). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "I will be the first to enter Paradise" (IK). Among the *throngs,* the first to enter is said to be a group "appearing like the moon on the night when it is full, and they will be followed by a group that looks like the brightest star shining in the sky" (IK). In other *aḥādīth,* this group is reported to number seventy thousand or seven hundred thousand (IK). Elsewhere it is said that *angels shall enter upon them from every gate. "Peace be upon you because you were patient." How excellent is the Ultimate Abode!* (13:23–24). Regarding the gates of the Garden, see 13:23–24c; 38:50c. This is one of several verses that speak of the greeting of *Peace* or *Peace be upon you* that awaits believers in the Hereafter (see also 7:46; 10:10; 13:23–24; 14:23; 16:32; 19:62; 25:75; 33:44; 36:58c; 56:25–26).

74 These are the words of the inhabitants of the Garden in response to the greetings from the angels. *His Promise* refers to that given to all human beings in 10:4, whether they are destined for Heaven or for Hell: *Unto Him is your return all together; God's Promise is true,* a promise at which the disbelievers scoff in several verses, saying, *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25). In this case, *His Promise* also refers more specifically to the various promises given to the believers, as in v. 20 as well as 31:8–9: *Truly those who*

(75) And thou shalt see the angels encircling all around the Throne, hymning the praise of their Lord. Judgment shall be made between them in truth, and it will be said, "Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds."

*believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be Gardens of bliss, therein to abide—God's Promise in truth* (cf. 4:122). The righteous are also said to "inherit" Paradise in 7:43 and 23:10–11 and to *inherit the earth* in 21:105, which can be understood to mean that they may do with it as they please and, in their own words, *settle wheresoever we will.*

For more on the events pertaining to the end of time described in vv. 68–74, see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

75 While the *angels encircling all around the Throne* of God hymn His praise, *those who bear the Throne and those who dwell nigh unto it* (40:7), the latter of whom may be the same as those mentioned here, supplicate God saying, *Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive those who repent and follow Thy way, and shield them from the punishment of Hellfire. Our Lord, make them enter Gardens of Eden that Thou hast promised them and those among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny who were righteous. Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise* (40:7–8).

This final *Praise be to God* is uttered by the angels or by God Himself (IK). Some commentators note the significance of the fact that this account of the end of creation finishes with *Praise be to God* and another account of the beginning of creation starts in the same way (*Praise be to God, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made darkness and light,* 6:1; IK, Q, Ṭs); they take this to imply that creation begins and ends with God's praise.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 40

# The Forgiver

## *Ghāfir*

Some maintain that *Ghāfir,* a Makkan *sūrah,* was revealed directly after *Sūrah* 39, *al-Zumar* (JJ). According to some, vv. 56–57 are Madinan (IJ, JJ, Q, Ṭs), and others add v. 55 to those as well (Q, Ṭs). Still others say that only v. 55 is Madinan (Āl), since the injunction to *hymn the praise of thy Lord at eventide and at dawn* is interpreted as a reference to the morning and sunset prayers, which did not become obligatory until the last few years of the Makkan period. The *sūrah* takes its name from the reference to God as the *Forgiver of sins* in v. 3, but it is also known as "The Believer" (*al-Muʾmin*), because of the discussion of *a believing man from the House of Pharaoh* (v. 28). It is also known by the title "The Bounty" (*al-Faḍl*), because of the reference to God as *Possessed of Bounty* in v. 3 (IJ, Q).

*Ghāfir* is the first in a series of seven *sūrah*s whose opening verses begin with the separated Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are followed by a reference to the Quran. Revealed during the same period, these *sūrah*s are known collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm* and as "The Brides" (IK, Q). Addressing several recurring themes, they provide solace to the Muslim community at a time of persecution, foretelling the triumph of the revelation and the demise of those who oppose it.

The *sūrah* opens with an affirmation of the revelation and of God's Mercy and Forgiveness (vv. 2–3), followed by a repudiation of those who dispute the signs of God (vv. 4–6), which becomes a recurring theme of the *sūrah,* and an extended prayer uttered by the angels for human beings (vv. 7–9). Vv. 10–20 then tell of the place of the disbelievers in the Hereafter, warning of their ultimate demise. This section serves as the thematic backdrop for an extended account of the story of Moses and Pharaoh (vv. 21–50), the main feature of which is the story of *a believing man from the House of Pharaoh* who challenges Pharaoh's opposition to Moses (vv. 28–45).

An affirmation of the Divine Aid that God sends upon His messengers (vv. 51–60) concludes with a condemnation of those who are too arrogant to worship God (v. 60), which segues into a discussion of God's Power over all of

creation (vv. 61–68). The *sūrah* then discusses the punishment that awaits the disbelievers (vv. 69–76) and counsels the Prophet to have patience, citing the examples of prophets who prevailed before him (vv. 77–78). After a reflection on some signs of God's Generosity and Power (vv. 79–82), the *sūrah* concludes with an assurance that those who oppose God's messengers will be defeated in the end (vv. 83–85).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ḥā. Mīm.* (2) The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Knower, (3) Forgiver of sins, Accepter of repentance, severe in retribution,

1 *Ghāfir* is the first in a series of seven *sūrahs* that open with the Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm*. The Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and whose meaning is considered to be known only to God; see 2:1c. Some commentators connect all of the *sūrahs* that begin with *Ḥā Mīm* to 39:63—*to Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth*—and suggest that *Ḥā Mīm* is a name for the keys of God's treasuries (Q). Connecting *ḥāʾ mīm* to the separated letters at the beginning of other *sūrahs*, other commentators suggest that the letters *alif lām rāʾ* (*a-l-r*; 10:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1, 14:1; 15:1), *ḥāʾ mīm* (*ḥ-m*), and *nūn* (*n;* 68:1) combine to make the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān,* "the Compassionate" (Q). In this same vein, some suggest that each letter stands for a Divine Name that begins with that letter, such as, for the letter *ḥāʾ*, *al-Ḥamīd,* "the Praised," *al-Ḥalīm,* "the Clement," and *al-Ḥakīm,* "The Wise," and for the letter *mīm, al-Mālik,* "the Sovereign," *al-Majīd,* "the Illustrious," and *al-Mutakabbir,* "the Proud" (Q). Others say that *Ḥā Mīm* is a name of the Quran (Q) or of this *sūrah* (R).

2 Here and in similar verses (cf. 39:1; 45:2; 46:2) this statement could also be read, "This is the revelation of the Book from God" (Q, Ṭs), while here and in 45:2 and 46:2 it could be read, "*Ḥā Mīm* is the revelation of the Book" (Q). For the meaning of the verse, see commentary on 39:1, which differs from this verse only in that the last Divine Name is *the Wise.*

3 This is one of many verses that join the mention of God's Forgiveness and Mercy with that of God's Retribution and Rigor, as in 15:49–50: *Tell My servants that I am indeed the Forgiving, the Merciful, and that My Punishment is the painful punishment* (IK). According to some, the first of the Divine Attributes listed here indicates that God forgives small sins if one performs acts of obedience that outweigh these sins, but only forgives grave sins through acts of repentance. But al-Rāzī maintains that it is greater praise to say that God can and sometimes does forgive great sins even without repentance. The placement of *severe in retribution* between three descriptions of God's Mercy, the first two of which indicate the disappearance of Divine Retribution, shows the precedence and preponderance of God's Mercy over His Wrath (R), as in 7:156, *My Mercy encompasses all things,* and the famous *ḥadīth qudsī,* "My Mercy outstrips My Wrath." This relation is present in the structure of the text as well; in *Accepter of repentance, severe in retribution,* the absence of "and" (*wa*) between these two Attributes indicates that God's severity is not detached from His accepting repentance, hence not detached from His Mercy (R).

*Possessed of Bounty* indicates that God bestows blessings (Q), conferring largesse upon human beings (R). Attached as it is to *severe in retribution, Possessed of Bounty* can be understood to

Possessed of Bounty. There is no god but He; unto Him is the journey's end. (4) None but those who disbelieve dispute concerning the signs of God. So let it not delude thee that they are free to come and go in the land. (5) The people of Noah denied before them, as did the parties after them. And every community contrived against its messenger, to take him. They disputed by means of falsehood in order to refute the truth thereby; so I seized them. How, then, was My Retribution! (6) Likewise did the Word of thy Lord come due for those who disbelieve, that they are the inhabitants of the Fire. (7) Those who bear the Throne and those who dwell nigh unto it hymn the praise of their Lord and believe in Him and seek forgiveness for those who believe: "Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive those who repent

mean that God is magnanimous in bestowing absolution for sins and thus relinquishing His Retribution (R). Given the Divine Attributes that precede it, *there is no god but He* indicates that there is no other reality that possesses these seemingly contradictory attributes in perfect balance. One should thus worship God in full, with hope for His Mercy and fear of His Retribution (R), as God is the only One from Whom and to Whom one flees at the same time. That *the journey's end* is unto God then completes this verse, because there would be no purpose in fearing Him and hoping for the meeting with Him if this were not the case.

4 Those who *dispute concerning the signs of God* are a central concern of this *sūrah;* they are rebuked again in vv. 35, 56, and 69, and only once outside of this *sūrah,* in 42:35. This first instance clarifies that the freedom and affluence of the disbelievers in no way reflects any favor that God has bestowed upon them, as in 3:196–97: *Let it not delude thee that those who disbelieve are free to come and go in the land. It is a little enjoyment. Then their refuge is Hell, an evil resting place!* Thus the Prophet should not concern himself with their affairs or be grieved by their disbelief (see 3:176; 5:41; 10:65; 31:23; 36:76). Instead, he is enjoined to *dispute with them in the most virtuous manner* (16:125) and to respond to their disputes by saying, *God knows best what you do. God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein you used to differ* (22:68–69).

5 As in many other passages, the Prophet is here comforted by an example of a previous prophet who endured the same opposition. For the Quranic account of Noah and the manner in which his people denied him, see 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 21:76–77; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 37:75–82; 54:9–15; and *Sūrah* 71. In addition, other communities are said to have rejected their prophets, as in 51:52: *Likewise, there came no messenger unto those before them, but that they said, "A sorcerer or one possessed";* and 34:34: *We sent no warner unto a town, but that those living in luxury therein said, "Truly we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent"* (cf. 43:23). When the people disputed with their prophets, they are said to have used weak and specious arguments (IK), as they *dispute . . . without any authority having come to them* (40:35, 56). Therefore, God destroyed them because of the sins they had committed (IK). *How, then, was My Retribution!* (cf. 13:32) means, "How severe and painful was My Retribution!"

6 Just as punishment came upon those who rejected their prophets in the past, so too has *the Word of thy Lord has come due* (cf. 10:33; 22:18; 36:7; 39:71) for those who oppose the Prophet Muhammad (IK).

7 *Those who bear the Throne* are eight angels, as in 69:17: *And the angels shall be at its sides; that Day eight shall carry the Throne of thy Lord above them.* These may be the same as *the angels encircling all around the Throne* (39:75) or a

and follow Thy way, and shield them from the punishment of Hellfire. (8) Our Lord, make them enter Gardens of Eden that Thou hast promised them and those among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny who were righteous. Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise. (9) And protect them from evil deeds. Whomsoever Thou shieldest from evil deeds on that Day, upon him hast Thou had mercy. And that indeed is the great triumph." (10) Truly those who disbelieve shall be addressed: "God's odium is greater than your odium for yourselves when you were called to belief, but then disbelieved." (11) They will say, "Our Lord, Thou hast caused us to die twice over, and given us life twice over; so we admit our sins. Is there any way out?" (12) That is because when God was

distinct group among them. For the meaning of *the Throne,* from which God's Commands and Decrees issue and from which He directs the cosmos (Ṭb), see 7:54c. In this context the prayers of the highest angels, those *brought nigh* unto God (4:172), show the great difference between the believers and the disbelievers, whose fate is mentioned in the previous verse (R), thus giving the Prophet and his followers further evidence that they need not concern themselves with the disputations of the disbelievers.

That God encompasses all things in Mercy is attested in 7:156; that He encompasses all things in knowledge is also attested in 6:80; 20:98; 65:12. Some understand the structure of this sentence to indicate that God's Mercy precedes or outstrips His Knowledge (R, Ṭb); for the priority and principiality of God's Mercy in Islamic metaphysics and cosmology, see 1:3c. Here the angels seek forgiveness for *those who believe;* elsewhere they seek forgiveness *for those on earth* (42:5). For further discussion of seeking forgiveness for others (*istighfār*) and intercession (*shafāʿah*), see 2:48c; 2:255c. Regarding God's shielding *from the punishment of Hellfire,* see 44:56c.

8 *Gardens of Eden* (cf. 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50) is understood to refer to an especially exalted or blessed place in the Garden, a place entered only by prophets, the righteous, the witnesses, and just leaders (Q); see 9:72c. The righteous family members of those who believe will benefit from their rank in this station, as in 52:21: *And those who believe and whose progeny followed them in faith, We shall cause their progeny to join them and will not stint aught of their deeds* (cf. 13:23). Some understand these two verses to mean that all of one's family members who are righteous believers will be raised to the exalted *Gardens of Eden,* where, in addition to the beauties of that exalted domain of Paradise, they may delight in one another's company (IK, R). In this way, the pious deeds one performs may benefit both oneself and one's loved ones (IK, Ṭ).

9 *Protect them from evil deeds* is a plea to God to protect believers from performing evil deeds (IK), from the ill effects of the sins they committed before they repented (Ṭ), or from punishment (Ṭ, Ṭs). Those whom God has turned away from the evil of disobedience have had God's Mercy and Blessings bestowed upon them (Ṭ, Ṭs). Attaining Paradise is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

10 God's *odium* for the disbelievers when they were called to belief in God and turned away from it in this world is greater than their *odium* for themselves when they see their deeds (see 2:167) and realize the punishment that is to befall them from God's Anger (IK, Ṭ).

11–12 Now that they have experienced the Resurrection, the disbelievers admit their sins; see 67:10–11c. Realizing their fate, they plead with God to be offered a second opportunity. But it will not be granted, since *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden* (6:28). That God caused them to die and

invoked as One, you disbelieved, and when partners were ascribed unto Him, you believed. Judgment lies with God, the Exalted, the Great. (13) He it is Who shows you His signs and sends down provision for you from Heaven. And none reflect, save those who turn in repentance. (14) So call upon God, devoting religion entirely to Him, though the disbelievers be averse. (15) The Raiser of degrees, the Possessor of the Throne, He casts the Spirit from His Command upon whomsoever He will among His servants to warn of the Day of the

live twice refers to their death at the end of their worldly existence, then their resurrection for the questioning of the grave, then their dying again and being resurrected for the Hereafter (Q, Ṭs); or it refers to their being dead (as yet nonexistent) in the loins of their ancestors, after which they were given life, followed by their natural death, after which they were resurrected (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī interprets these verses as part of an extended discourse between God and the disbelievers. The denizens of Hell first say, *Our Lord, Thou hast caused us to die twice over, and given us life twice over; so we admit our sins. Is there any way out?* To which God responds, *That is because when God was invoked as One, you disbelieved, and when partners were ascribed unto Him, you believed. Judgment lies with God, the Exalted, the Great.* Then they say, *Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard; so send us back that we may work righteousness. Truly we are certain* (32:12). But God replies, *Did you not earlier swear that there would be no end for you?* (14:44). Then they cry out, *Our Lord! Remove us, that we may work righteousness other than that which we used to do* (35:37). To this God replies, *Did We not give you long life, enough for whosoever would reflect to reflect therein? And the warner came unto you; so taste [the punishment]! And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers* (35:37). Then they say, *Our Lord! Our wretchedness overwhelmed us, and we were a people astray. Our Lord! Remove us from it! Then if we revert, we shall be wrongdoers* (23:106–7). Then God replies, *Be gone therein, and speak not to Me* (23:108).

13 God surrounds human beings with *signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth* (41:53) or signs that He is the Truth and that He is One and Powerful over all things. So if one repents, the veiling over the intellect vanishes (R) and one is given insight (IK). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Be mindful of the insight of the believer, for verily he sees by the light of Truth."

14 The injunction to *call upon God* means to supplicate to God for one's needs, although some consider it to be a reference to canonical prayer or worship (R, Z); see 7:55c. As in several other verses, this injunction is followed by the mention of *devoting religion entirely to Him* (cf. 7:29; 10:22; 29:65; 31:32; 39:2, 11, 14; 40:65; 98:5), a phrase that indicates worship of God exclusively and invoking His Name (73:8) and connotes sincere worship for the sake of God alone (see 7:29c; 31:32c; 98:5c). According to several accounts, the Prophet used to recite this verse at the end of each prayer, saying, "There is no god but God, alone, with no partner. His is the Sovereignty and His is the Praise, *and He is Powerful over all things* [5:120; 11:4; 30:50; 57:2; 64:1; 67:1]. There is no strength and no power, save with God. There is no god but God, and we worship none but Him. His is the Blessing, His is the Bounty, and His is the Beautiful Praise. There is no god but God, *devoting religion entirely to Him*" (IK).

15 *The Raiser of degrees,* or in another rendering "Exalter of ranks," means the One who raises the seven heavens (Q) or the One who exalts the ranks of His saints and friends in the Garden (Q). For *Possessor of the Throne,* see 17:42; 81:20; 85:15. God is also described as *Lord of the Throne* (9:129; 21:22; 23:86, 116; 27:26; 43:82), which is borne by angels (40:7; 69:17). *Casts the Spirit* is understood to mean the Spirit of revelation or of prophethood (Q, Ṭs). It is also understood as a reference to the Quran itself, to all revealed books, or to the

Meeting, (16) the Day when they come forth with naught concerning them hidden from God. Whose is the sovereignty this Day? It is God's, the One, the Paramount. (17) On that Day every soul shall be recompensed for that which it has earned. No wrong will be done that Day. Truly God is swift in reckoning. (18) So warn them of the Day of the Imminent Event, when hearts will be in throats, choking in agony. The wrongdoers shall have no loyal friend, nor any intercessor to be obeyed. (19) He knows the treachery of eyes and that which

Archangel Gabriel (Ṭs). *The Day of the Meeting* most likely refers to the day of the meeting between God and His creation, but it can also be understood to mean the day on which many types of meetings will take place: the people of Heaven will meet the people of the earth (Ṭs); the first generations of human beings will meet the later generations of human beings (Q, Ṭs); the oppressed will meet their oppressors (Q, Ṭs), as it is also a day of retribution; and every person will meet his or her deeds (Q, Ṭs), since that is part of the Judgment.

16 When all human beings *come forth* from their graves and are gathered on a single plain, God will say, *Whose is the sovereignty this Day?* and then all who are gathered will respond, *It is God's, the One, the Paramount* (Q, Ṭs), or it is God Himself who answers the question (IK, Q, Ṭs).

17 Every soul is then recompensed in accord with the good or evil it has done (Q, Ṭs; cf. 3:161; 45:22; 74:38). *No wrong* or injustice *will be done that Day,* in that no good deed will remain unaccounted for, and no one will be punished for something he or she did not do. That *no wrong will be done* also indicates that all of the punishments that afflict the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment come from themselves, since *God wrongs them not, but themselves do they wrong* (3:117; cf. 3:165; 4:179). In this vein, a sacred saying, or *ḥadīth qudsī,* states, "O My servants! I have forbidden injustice for Myself and have made it unlawful among you; so be not unjust to one another. O My servants! Verily, these are your deeds. I record them for you; then I pay you back for them in full. Whosoever finds something good, let him praise God. And whosoever finds something other than that, let him blame none but himself" (IK). God's being *swift in reckoning* (2:202; 3:19, 199; 5:4; 13:41; 14:51; 24:39; cf. 6:62) or *in retribution* (6:165; 7:167) indicates that the Judgment is not something over which He will need to ponder and deliberate (Q), since the Command of God *is naught but one, like the blinking of an eye* (54:50; IK).

18 On the Day of Judgment, *hearts will be in throats* due to fear (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), *choking in agony,* so that they will be unable to speak (R). The second part of this verse is similar to both 2:254 and 14:31, which add *bargaining* (*bayʿ*) as another of those things that will no longer avail one on the Day of Judgment. *No loyal friend* indicates that on that Day everyone will be too consumed with his or her own state to ask about that of another, as in 70:10: *And no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend;* and 80:37: *For every man that Day his affair shall suffice him* (see also 43:67; 44:41). This condition will, however, be even more severe for the disbelievers, who are said to have no one upon whom they can rely, since the folly of everything upon which they had depended is now exposed and *all recourse will be cut off from them* (2:166); *so today* they have *no loyal friend here* (69:35); see commentary on 70:10–14. That no *intercessor* will be *obeyed* indicates that none of those idols or powers that human beings, the disbelievers in particular, thought would intercede for them will be able to do so, save by God's Leave. Regarding intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c.

19 *The treachery of eyes* refers either to eyes that have looked upon something forbidden (R, Ṭ, Ṭs) or to a person's false claims about what he or she saw (IK, Q, Ṭs). *That which breasts conceal* refers to the secrets of the heart (R), thus to the intentions behind actions and to one's true nature, since the Day of Judgment only benefits one *who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:89). Viewed in

breasts conceal. (20) God decrees with truth, and those upon whom they call apart from Him do not decree by means of aught. Truly God is the Hearer, the Seer. (21) Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were greater than they in strength and left firmer traces upon the earth; yet God seized them for their sins, and they had none to shield them from God. (22) That is because their messengers brought them clear proofs, yet they disbelieved; so God seized them. Truly He is Strong, severe in retribution. (23) And indeed We sent Moses with Our signs and a manifest authority (24) unto Pharaoh, Hāmān, and Korah. And they said, "A lying

light of the previous verse, this verse indicates that the disbelievers cannot plead their own case, as they will be *choking in agony,* and that no friends or intercessors will plead on their behalf (R); rather, they will be judged in accord with their true nature, which *their breasts conceal.*

20 In the context of the previous verse, that God *decrees with truth* (*al-ḥaqq*), or "in accord with the truth," means that He differentiates between people in accord with their true natures, which *their breasts conceal,* not according to their outward appearances, and gives each his or her due (*ḥaqq*). That those whom the disbelievers call upon *do not decree by means of aught* means both that their idols do not decree because they are simply inanimate objects (Ṭs) and that nothing they call upon possesses any authority or knowledge in accord with which it can decree (IK).

21–22 For journeying *upon the earth* and the spiritual and moral edification that derives from it, see 12:109; 22:46; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:82; 47:10; 30:9c. The Quran frequently mentions the fate of the guilty, the corrupt, the wrongdoers, and those who denied God's messengers in days gone by as an admonition to the disbelievers (see 3:137; 6:11; 7:84, 86, 103; 10:39, 73; 16:36; 27:14, 69; 37:73; 43:25). *Those before them* is thus understood as a reference to the ruins of previous people who were destroyed despite being mightier than those who opposed the Prophet (see 35:44; 40:82). Here, as in other instances, the destruction of previous generations despite their superior might is cited as evidence that the disbelievers among the Quraysh will not be able to withstand Divine Punishment when it comes upon them.

23–45 Moses is featured more prominently than any other prophet in the Quran. Here his account is given more as a spiritual example than as history and serves as an allegory for some of the Prophet Muhammad's own challenges (see also 43:46–56; 44:17–31; 51:38–40; 79:15–25). For more detailed accounts of Moses' mission, see 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 17:101–4; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46.

23 This verse is found verbatim in 11:96, and *We sent Moses with Our signs,* meaning with proofs and evidence (Ṭ, Ṭs), is also found in 14:5 and 43:46 (cf. 51:38); also see 23:45, where Moses and Aaron are sent *with Our signs.* More specifically, *Our signs* can be read as a reference to the *nine clear signs* mentioned in 17:101 (cf. 27:12; Q). *A manifest authority* means a clear proof and is understood as a reference to the Torah (Q) or to the miracles that Moses performed (Ṭs, Z).

24 Hāmān was a member of Pharaoh's court, most likely the head of his quarries, who was ordered to light a fire and *make me a tower* (28:38) to proclaim Pharaoh a deity; see 28:6, 8, 38; 40:36–37; 28:6c. Korah, another member of Pharaoh's court and a grandson of Levi (Numbers 16:21), had vast wealth, but was swallowed by the ground for opposing Moses (Numbers 16:41); see commentary on 28:76–82. The reaction of Pharaoh, Hāmān, and Korah to the signs and the *manifest authority* was to accuse Moses of being a sorcerer (see also 7:109; 26:34; 51:39), an accusation also

sorcerer." (25) So when he came unto them with the truth from Us, they said, "Slay the sons of those who believe with him and spare their women." The scheming of the disbelievers is naught but astray. (26) And Pharaoh said, "Leave me to kill Moses, and let him call upon his Lord. Truly I fear that he will alter your religion or that he will cause corruption to appear in the land." (27) And Moses said, "Truly I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord from everyone who is arrogant and believes not in the Day of Reckoning." (28) And a believing man from the House of Pharaoh who was concealing his belief said, "Will you kill a man for saying, 'My Lord is God,' though he has brought you

leveled against the Prophet Muhammad by the Quraysh (see 10:2; 38:4; 51:52).

25 This is the second time that Pharaoh commanded that the sons of the Israelites be slain: the first was to eliminate the possibility of a prophet such as Moses arising among them; the second was to humiliate them, to reduce their numbers, or both (IK). In 7:127 it appears to be a form of collective punishment for following Moses: *The notables among Pharaoh's people said, "Will you leave Moses and his people to work corruption in the land and to leave you and your gods?" He said, "We shall slay their sons and spare their women. Truly we are above them, dominant";* see also 2:49c; 7:141; 14:6; 28:4. The women were not spared out of mercy, but so that they could continue to live as servants (Ṭ), which was a further humiliation (Ṭ, Ṭs). According to some, God distracted Pharaoh and his people from carrying out this punishment by sending the plague upon them (Q), in which case *the scheming of the disbelievers is naught but astray* can be understood as a reference to the failure of Pharaoh's plan (Ṭ). Most commentators do not say whether the plan was carried out. Al-Rāzī, who says elsewhere that it was (see 7:127c), interprets *the scheming of the disbelievers is naught but astray* as a more general reference to the schemes of all disbelievers eventually coming to naught. In this context, it could also be understood as a reference to the fact that the first time Pharaoh ordered that the sons of the Israelites be slain, the plan failed, since Moses was spared; so this time it would fail again.

26–27 Pharaoh's command, *Leave me to kill Moses,* implies that among Pharaoh's retinue were some who feared Moses and warned against killing him, sensing that Moses would bring destruction upon them (IJ, Ṭs). Pharaoh's fear that Moses would *alter* their *religion* is in fact the fear that he would turn them away from their worship of Pharaoh himself (IJ) and their belief in his divinity (Ṭs). The accusation that Moses *will cause corruption to appear in the land* reflects the question posed to Pharaoh by his notables in 7:127: *Will you leave Moses and his people to work corruption in the land and to leave you and your gods?* Moses' response is then to seek refuge in God. In general, those who work corruption cast themselves as the righteous and their opponents as the corrupt, as in 2:11: *And when it is said unto them, "Do not work corruption upon the earth," they say, "We are only working righteousness."* For the greater Quranic significance of *working corruption,* see 30:41c.

28 The precise identity of the *believing man from the House of Pharaoh* is unknown. Many propose that he was a cousin of Pharaoh (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭ). Others say that he was an Israelite, in which case the meaning of this opening phrase is understood to be "a believing man who was concealing his belief from the family of Pharaoh" (IJ, Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī argues that he was a man from Pharaoh's family, since if he had been an Israelite or another person outside of Pharaoh's court, no one in the court would have listened to him. In either interpretation, the *believing man* is the same person to whom reference is made in 28:20: *Then from the outskirts of the city a man came running. He said, "O Moses! Truly the notables are conspiring against you, that they might slay you. So leave! Truly I am*

clear proofs from your Lord? If he is a liar, then his lying is to his own detriment. But if he is truthful, some of that which he promises you will befall you. Truly God guides not one who is a prodigal liar. (29) O my people! Sovereignty is yours this day, while you prevail over the land. But who will help us against God's Might should it come upon us?" Pharaoh said, "I show you naught but what I see, and I guide you unto naught but the way of rectitude." (30) And he who believed said, "O my people! Truly I fear for you [a day] like the day of the parties [of old], (31) like the plight of the people of Noah, ᶜĀd, and Thamūd, and those after them. Yet God does not desire wrong for His servants. (32) O my

*among your sincere advisers"* (IJ, IK). The question, *Will you kill a man for saying, "My Lord is God"?* is similar to the sorcerers' complaint to Pharaoh after he sentences them to death for believing in Moses, *You take vengeance upon us only because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came unto us* (7:126); see also 5:59 and 85:9, which chastise those who would "be vengeful" toward others simply on account of their belief in God and His signs.

The argument posed by the *believing man* is twofold. On the one hand, if Moses is truthful, he cannot be punished for speaking the truth, especially since he has brought *clear proofs* in the form of evidentiary miracles. On the other hand, if he is a liar, he will suffer the consequences of his lies; so there is no need to punish him. Furthermore, if he is punished for telling the truth, then even greater afflictions will befall those who punish him. In this context, some understand *prodigal* (*musrif*) to mean "idolater" (*mushrik;* Ṭ) or one who transgresses the limits set by God by lying about God (Ṭs); for the Quranic usage of *prodigal,* see 10:12c.

29 *The land* refers to Egypt. That the Egyptians have *sovereignty* over it and *prevail* over it indicates their power over the Israelites (Ṭ). Some understand the *believing man* to be enjoining them to have gratitude for their position of power (IK, Ṭs). In this context, he is also using their unsurpassed power to argue that they must recognize the God of Moses, since there is no one other than themselves to protect them against punishment from Him. In his response, Pharaoh avoids engaging the argument of the *believing man,* instead relying upon his authority. *I show you naught but what I see* means, "I do not indicate to you anything other than what I believe to be right," or "I do not teach you anything other than what I know" (Ṭs). Ibn Kathīr argues that in the context of other verses pertaining to the story of Moses, this statement is a lie, since 27:14 says of Pharaoh and his people: *They rejected them—though their souls were convinced of them—wrongfully and exultantly.* In Pharaoh's view *the way of rectitude* means denying and killing Moses and taking Pharaoh as a god (Ṭs). Thus *Pharaoh led his people astray, and guided them not* (20:79). Nonetheless, *they followed the command of Pharaoh, and the command of Pharaoh was not sound* (11:97).

30–31 *Parties [of old]* refers to those who joined forces to make common cause against a prophet (Ṭs). *The day of the parties [of old]* refers to the day that each of them eventually faced when God's Punishment came upon them and they had no one to protect them (IK). The ᶜĀd and the Thamūd are pre-Islamic Arabian tribes that rejected the prophets sent to them. For the account of the ᶜĀd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; for that of the Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68. This warning is akin to similar warnings issued to the disbelievers throughout the Quran, though it differs in that a prophet does not issue it. *Yet God does not desire wrong for His servants* indicates that God's destruction of them was just and equitable (Z) and that God does not desire the wrong or injustice that occurs in the world (Ṭs), a position that is central to both the Shiite and the Muᶜtazilite understanding of Divine Justice.

32 Here the Day of Resurrection is referred to as *the Day of Mutual Calling,* because *the inhabitants of the Garden will call out to the inhab-*

people! Truly I fear for you the Day of Mutual Calling, (33) the Day you will turn away to flee, having none to protect you from God. And whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. (34) And Joseph brought you clear proofs before; yet still you were in doubt regarding that which he brought unto you, so much so that when he perished, you said, 'God will not send a messenger after him.' Thus does God lead astray whosoever is a prodigal doubter, (35) those who dispute concerning God's signs without any authority having come to them, grievously odious is it in the sight of God and in the sight of those who believe. Thus does God put a seal upon the heart of every arrogant tyrant." (36) And Pharaoh said, "O Hāmān! Build for me a tower, that perhaps I may attain the means— (37) the means to reach the heavens—that I may look upon the God of Moses.

*itants of the Fire, "We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?" They will respond, "Yes"* (7:44); and *the inhabitants of the Fire will call out to the inhabitants of the Garden, "Pour some water down upon us, or some of that which God has provided you." They will respond, "Truly God has forbidden them both to the disbelievers"* (7:50; JJ, Q, R; Ṭ). In addition, the hypocrites will call out to the believers (see 57:13–14) and the angels will call out to the inhabitants of the Garden, *This is the Garden. You have inherited it for that which you used to do* (7:43).

33 The disbelievers *will turn away to flee* from the Fire, but they will also flee from one another; thus 80:34–36 describes the Day of Resurrection as *that Day when a man will flee from his brother, his mother and his father, his spouse and his children.* For those whom *God leads astray* the Quran says there is *no way* (4:88, 143; 42:46), *no guide* (7:186; 13:33; 39:23, 36), and *no protector* (18:17; 42:44); cf. 10:27.

34 The story of Joseph is found in *Sūrah* 12. According to some commentators, *clear proofs* refers to Joseph's rhetorical argument in 12:39–40: *Are diverse lords better, or God, the One, the Paramount? You worship apart from Him naught but names that you have named—you and your fathers—for which God has sent down no authority* (Q, R). Others say that *clear proofs* refers to Joseph's evidentiary miracles (R, Z) or his visions and his corresponding ability to interpret dreams (Q). Here the contention appears to be that the people were willing to follow Joseph's judgment in worldly matters related to his high position in the Egyptian government, but not with regard to religious matters (IK). Their saying, *God will not send a messenger after him,* would then express their wish and demonstrate their disbelief in and rejection of prophethood (IK, R). According to al-Ṭabarī, this is among the ways in which God turns disbelievers away from attaining the truth and following the way.

35 This is the second of four verses in this *sūrah* to rebuke *those who dispute concerning God's signs;* also see vv. 4, 56, and 69; 40:4c. To dispute without authority (cf. v. 56) means to argue without proof or from a position grounded in unquestioning imitation (*taqlīd*) and base sophisms (*shubuhāt;* R). God's sealing hearts indicates that He has closed their ability to understand (see also 2:7c; 6:46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 30:59; 63:3c). *The heart of every arrogant tyrant* can also be read, "every arrogant tyrannical heart" (Q, R, Ṭ). In one way, this reading is more apt because, as al-Qurṭubī observes, it is the heart that first becomes arrogant and then the rest of one's faculties follow, as in the famous saying of the Prophet, "In the body there is a lump of flesh. When it is sound, the entire body is sound, and when it is corrupt, the entire body is corrupt. Verily it is the heart."

36–37 Pharaoh's response provides an illustration of the manner in which the heart of an

Truly I deem him a liar." Thus was the evil of his conduct made to seem fair unto Pharaoh, and he was turned from the way. Pharaoh's scheming led to naught but ruin. (38) And he who believed said, "O my people! Follow me; I shall guide you unto the way of rectitude. (39) O my people! The life of this world is but fleeting enjoyment, whereas the Hereafter is truly the Abode of Permanence. (40) Whosoever commits an evil deed will not be requited, save with the like thereof; but whosoever, whether male or female, performs a righteous deed and is a believer shall enter the Garden wherein they will be

*arrogant tyrant* is sealed, as he seeks to dispute not only God's signs, but also God's very Being. Some interpret Pharaoh's response to mean that he feared that the words of the *believing man* would enter into the hearts of his people (Q). See commentary on 28:38, where Pharaoh says, *O notables! I know of no god for you other than myself. So kindle for me a fire, O Hāmān, for clay, and make me a tower, that haply I may behold the God of Moses, though truly I think he is among the liars.* Here *the means to reach the heavens* renders *asbāb al-samāwāt* (cf. 22:15), which is usually understood to mean "paths to the heavens" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), "doors to the heavens" (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), or those things by means of which one can attain what one seeks (Ṭ, Ṭs). Pharaoh's desire to *look upon the God of Moses* demonstrates his complete misunderstanding, in that he takes God to be a physical being occupying a particular space (Q). It also provides a notable contrast to Moses' request to God on Mt. Sinai, *My Lord, show me, that I might look upon Thee* (7:143). Moses, however, repents to God when he is unable to endure this vision; see 7:143c.

Those who are corrupt are often portrayed as deluded, sometimes by Satan (see 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38), but ultimately by God (see 27:4), into thinking that their conduct is good. Here it may also have been Pharaoh's council of notables that made *the evil of his conduct seem fair unto* him (Ṭs). Pharaoh was thus *turned from the way* by God, a phrase that could also be read, "and he turned from the way," meaning that he turned himself away and that he prevented others from following the right way (Q, Ṭs).

38 *The way of rectitude* is what Pharaoh promised to guide the people to in v. 29. The term renders *sabīl al-rashād,* which is similar to *the way of sound judgment* (*sabīl al-rushd*), in relation to which it is said of those who wax arrogant, *If they were to see the way of sound judgment, they would not take it as a way* (7:146). The latter phrase aptly describes the case of Pharaoh and his notables, who were presented not only with the arguments posed here and elsewhere, but also with evidentiary miracles whose Divine Origin they continued to deny (see 7:132c; 7:136c).

39 This is one of several verses to affirm that the ephemeral delights of this world are *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20) and stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the Hereafter, which *is life indeed* (29:64); see also 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 42:36; 57:20c. In this vein, a famous *ḥadīth* transmitted by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd states, "The Messenger of God was lying down on a straw mat, and it left marks on his side. Then when he woke up he began to rub his side. So I said, 'O Messenger of God! Will you allow us to spread something soft over this straw mat?' He replied, 'What have I and the world to do with one another? The likeness of me and this world is as that of a rider who rests in the shade of a tree, then passes on and leaves it.'"

40 This is one of several verses indicating that God shows mercy and bounty in judging human actions, but requites evil deeds with nothing but their like (cf. 6:160; 28:84), because *God commits not so much as a mote's weight of wrong* (4:40). Al-Rāzī notes that this is also a fundamental principle in Islamic Law, according to which the punishment must never exceed the crime. In contrast to God's treatment of evil deeds, He multiplies good deeds *ten times the like thereof* (6:160) or even seven hundred fold (see 2:261); also see

provided for without reckoning. (41) O my people! How is it that I call you unto salvation while you call me unto the Fire? (42) You call upon me to disbelieve in God and to ascribe as a partner unto Him that whereof I have no knowledge, whereas I call you unto the Mighty, the Forgiving. (43) There is no doubt that that unto which you call me has no call in this world or in the Hereafter, and that our return will be unto God, and that the prodigal are the inhabitants of the Fire. (44) You will soon remember what I have said to you. I entrust my affair to God.

27:89 and 28:84, where it is said that whoever brings a good deed, *he will have what is better than it*. Such rewards relate to the human condition irrespective of gender; for statements about the irrelevance of gender for moral and spiritual potential and reward, see 3:195; 4:124; 16:97; as well as 33:35, which goes to great lengths to affirm that men and women are rewarded equally for all their various acts of religious observance; see 33:35c.

*Without reckoning* could be understood as a reference to the rewards of Paradise being without end (R) or to the fact that the recompense for bad deeds requires a reckoning, while the recompense for good deeds does not (R, Z). Alternately, it could be understood to mean that were people to be recompensed in accord with their deeds alone, there would be a reckoning (Ṭs), implying that it is their faith and belief that allow them to enter the Garden *without reckoning*.

41–42 This verse means, "How is it that when I call you to belief, which leads to salvation, you call me to disbelief, which leads to the Fire?" (R). *That whereof I have no knowledge* indicates that there is nothing in revelation or reason that would verify the disbelievers' claims (Ṭs). The combination of the Divine Names *the Mighty* and *the Forgiving* (cf. 39:5; 38:66; 67:2) expresses the manner in which God brings together all of the seemingly disparate Divine Attributes (Aj), as in v. 3. This is similar to the more frequent combination of the Names *the Mighty* and *the Merciful* (26:9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159, 175, 191, 217; 30:5; 32:6; 36:5; 44:42).

43 *No call in this world or in the Hereafter* refers to the idols' inability to intercede on behalf of those who worship them, in this life or the next (Q), harm or benefit them (Ṭ), or respond to their pleas (R). It could also be understood to mean that although the idolaters call people to worship the idols, the idols themselves do not call them (Aj, R, Z). Both meanings can be present at the same time, as in 46:5–6: *Who is more astray than one who calls, apart from God, upon such as do not answer him, [even] unto the Day of Resurrection, and who are heedless of their calling. When mankind is gathered, such will be enemies unto them and deniers of their worship.* For the Quranic usage of *prodigal*, see 10:12c.

44 The man *who believed* (v. 38) closes his discourse with a final warning that the punishment of which he speaks will come upon the disbelievers and they will know the truth of what he enjoined, but then it will be too late for this knowledge to help them (IK). In this sense, the verse may foretell Pharaoh's belated testimony, uttered when the sea closes in upon him: *I believe that there is no god but the One in whom the Children of Israel believe* (10:90); see 10:90–92c. *I entrust my affair to God* could indicate that the man feared Pharaoh and that his followers intended to kill him (Q, R). In this way, it reflects the response of Moses to Pharaoh's threat to kill him, *Truly I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord from everyone who is arrogant and believes not in the Day of Reckoning* (40:27; R). According to some, "entrusting" (*tafwīḍ*) oneself to God precedes the execution of God's Decree, while "submitting" (*taslīm*) oneself to God follows it (Aj, Bq, Su). The famous Egyptian Sufi Dhu'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī was reportedly asked, "When does the servant entrust [his affair to God]?" to which he responded, "When he despairs of his own actions and his own soul, takes refuge in God in all his states, and has no attachment to anything except his Lord" (Aj, Bq, Su). According to the Persian Sufi Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, "The perfection of entrusting is to not see oneself or anything else

Truly God sees His servants." (45) So God shielded him from the evils of that which they had plotted, while a terrible punishment beset the House of Pharaoh— (46) the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the Day when the Hour is come, [it will be said], "Cause the House of Pharaoh to enter the punishment most severe!" (47) And when they are arguing with one another in the Fire, the weak will say to those who waxed arrogant, "Truly we were your followers; so can you avail us against any portion of the Fire?" (48) Those who waxed arrogant will say, "Truly we are all in it. God has indeed judged between His servants." (49) And those who are in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, "Call upon your Lord to relieve us from the punishment for a day." (50) They

as having any power to benefit or harm, and to see God through the existentiation of existence in every breath." *God sees His servants* in all of their affairs, knowing their states and their needs at all times (R).

45 For his faith and his affirming Moses, God protected the *believing man* from Pharaoh's people (Ṭ). *That which they had plotted* may refer to the severe punishments Pharaoh was known to inflict upon those who opposed him, as in 20:71, where Pharaoh tells the sorcerers who believed in Moses without Pharaoh's permission, *Now I shall surely cut off your hands and your feet on alternate sides, and I shall surely crucify you on the trunks of palm trees. And you will surely know which of us [inflicts] a more severe and lasting punishment!* (cf. 7:124). His being spared such punishment can be seen as a result of his entrusting his affair to God (Aj). While the *punishment* that encompassed Pharaoh and his people most likely refers to their drowning in the sea as they pursued Moses and the Israelites (see 2:50c; 10:90–92c), the use of *beset* (*ḥāqa bi*) or, more literally, "enclosed," alludes to the punishment resulting from their own plotting, as in 35:43, *Evil plotting besets none but its authors,* and to their mockery of Moses, as in 16:34, *That which they used to mock beset them* (also 40:83; 46:26; cf. 11:8; 39:48; 45:33).

46 This is one of several Quranic verses cited to support the Islamic understanding of a period in the grave that comes after death and before the final Resurrection (IK, R), a phase of existence spoken of in 80:21–22: *He caused him to die and buried him. Then, when He willed, He resurrected him.* This period in the grave is known as the *barzakh,* or "isthmus," between the two worlds, in which people experience their first rewards or punishments before experiencing greater reward or punishment after the Resurrection and Judgment; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." These two punishments are reflected in 9:101: *We shall punish them twice. Then shall they be relegated to a great punishment.* Interpreted in light of such verses, in the present verse *the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening* refers to the punishment that Pharaoh and his people experience in the grave, while *the punishment most severe,* which they will enter *on the Day when the Hour is come,* refers to the punishment of Hell.

47–48 This is one of several passages in which in the Hereafter those who were led astray by others challenge the leaders who led them astray. In this passage they still seek some form of intercession and remain deluded, but elsewhere they realize that they have been led astray and call upon God to increase the punishment of their leaders: *Our Lord! Truly we obeyed our leaders and elders, and they caused us to stray from the way. Our Lord! Give them a twofold punishment, and curse them with a great curse* (33:67–68). In 29:13, they are then promised that their leaders *will bear their own burdens, and others' burdens along with their own* (see also 7:38–39c), that is to say, punishment for being astray themselves and punishment for leading others astray.

49–50 Realizing that those whom they had followed and had taken as protectors in the

will reply, "Did not your messengers bring you clear proofs?" They will say, "Yea, indeed." They will say, "Then make supplications!" But the supplication of the disbelievers is naught but astray. (51) Truly We shall help Our messengers and those who believe during the life of this world and on the Day when the witnesses arise, (52) the Day when the excuses of the wrongdoers will not benefit them, and theirs will be the curse, and theirs will be the evil abode. (53) And indeed We gave Moses guidance, and We bequeathed the Book unto the Children of Israel, (54) as a guidance, and as a reminder for possessors of intellect. (55) So be patient. Surely God's Promise is true. And ask forgiveness for thy

world cannot avail them in the Hereafter, those who were astray now seek intercession from those angels who function as *the keepers of Hell;* see also 6:27–28c; 14:44. Rather than interceding, the angels remind the denizens of Hell that they had in fact been granted guidance before, but had rejected God's messengers (cf. 6:130; 39:71; 67:8–9). As in other passages, the denizens of Hell recognize their situation, but their now belated affirmation can do nothing to forestall or alleviate their punishment; nor can their *supplications;* see, for example, 14:44: *Our Lord! Grant us reprieve for a term nigh, that we might respond to Thy Call and follow the messengers;* and 32:12: *Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard; so send us back that we may work righteousness. Truly we are certain* (cf. 6:27). Yet, as 6:28 contends, *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden.*

51–52 This is one of several passages interpreted to mean that all prophetic missions are ultimately victorious (cf. 6:34; 37:171–73; 58:21). Such victory can be like that of the prophets David, Solomon, and Muhammad, who vanquished the armies of those who denied and opposed them, or like that of Noah and Moses, whose enemies God destroyed by means of natural disasters, or like that of Jesus, whose religion prevailed by means of those who carried out his message (Ṭ). Here *the witnesses* refers to those among the prophets, angels, and believers who will bear witness for the believers and against the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection and Judgment (Ṭ, Ṭs). Some say that it refers only to the angels (Ṭ, Ṭs) or only to the prophets (Ṭs). This reference to the Resurrection and Judgment then indicates that God will also make His messengers and the believers victorious in the Hereafter by taking vengeance upon those who opposed them. The wrongdoers' excuses will not benefit them, because the book of their deeds will be open and because *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do* (41:20), and they will even say, *We bear witness against ourselves* (6:130). *The curse* is their being made distant from God's Mercy, while *the evil abode* refers to Hell (Q).

53–54 *Guidance* is here read by some as "the Guidance," a title for or reference to the Torah (Q), in which there were clear indications of the Knowledge of God and God's Oneness (Ṭs). The Torah was then entrusted to the Israelites, and it contained instructions that made their religious affairs clear for them (Ṭ, Ṭs), and they were guided in accord with it so long as they remained patient (see 32:23c). *Possessors of intellect* (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29, 43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54; 65:10) refers to those who possess true knowledge of the inner meaning and essence of things; see 5:100c; 39:9c.

55 This verse is addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, counseling him to patience in a manner that implies that he will emerge victorious over his adversaries, just as Moses and other prophets did. That *God's Promise is true* (cf. 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21; 28:13; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17) refers in general to the promise of Divine Aid in this world and reward in the Hereafter (Ṭs) or to the specific promise given in vv. 51–52. For those who maintain that prophets do commit minor sins, the command to *ask forgiveness*

sin, and hymn the praise of thy Lord at eventide and at dawn. (56) Truly those who dispute concerning the signs of God without any authority having come to them, there is naught in their breasts but a conceit of greatness that they will never attain. So seek refuge in God. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer. (57) Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind. But most of mankind know not. (58) And the blind and the seer are not equal; nor are those who believe and perform righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you reflect! (59) Surely the Hour is coming; in it there is no doubt. But most of mankind believe not. (60) And your Lord has said, "Call upon Me, and

*for thy sin* (*dhanb*) means to repent for such sins. For the majority of Muslims, who maintain that prophets are protected by God from committing sins (*maʿṣūm*), it is understood as a command to the Prophet to devote himself to worship through supplications and asking forgiveness, so that God might raise him in degrees and his practice would become the model for those who would come after him (Q, Ṭs). *At eventide and at dawn* (cf. 3:41) refers to the time from the declining of the sun until its setting and the time from daybreak until sunrise, respectively, since in Makkah what was required before the full institution of the five daily prayers was two cycles of prayer in the morning and two in the evening (Bḍ). Others understand this phrase as a command to perform the night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*) and the morning prayer (*fajr;* Q).

56 This is the third of four verses in this *sūrah* to rebuke *those who dispute concerning the signs of God;* also see vv. 4, 35, and 69; 40:4c; 40:35c. Such individuals have a *conceit of greatness* or pride that prevents them from following the Prophet and accepting the truth when it comes to them (Ṭ). The *greatness that they will never attain* refers to the favors that God has bestowed upon the Prophet, which they envy, or to the fact that God will debase them (Ṭs), or to both. So the Prophet should *seek refuge* from the scheming of those who dispute him (R) and from being like the disputants (IK).

57 This verse presents one of the Quranic arguments for God's ability to resurrect human beings (IK, Q), an argument made more explicit in 46:33: *Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth and did not weary in their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Yea! He is Powerful over all things* (cf. 50:15). Nonetheless, *most of mankind,* or more specifically most of the disbelievers, *know not* (cf. 7:187; 16:75, 101; 21:24; 27:61; 30:30; 31:25; 34:36; 45:26) or *understand not* (5:103; 29:63; 49:4), because they turn away from God's signs (Ṭs), such as those pertaining to the cycles of life mentioned in vv. 61–68.

58 This same metaphor is employed in 35:19–20: *Not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor the darkness and the light* (cf. 6:50; 11:24; 13:16). This juxtaposition can also be seen as a symbol for the contrast between knowledge and ignorance, as in 39:9, *Are those who know and those who do not know equal,* or between faith and disbelief.

59 Although those who disbelieve maintain that *the Hour,* meaning the Final Judgment, *will never come upon us* (34:3), the Quran is adamant in maintaining that it is coming (cf. 15:85; 20:15; 22:7) and, moreover, that it *has drawn nigh* (54:1; cf. 33:63) as well as that it is an event in which *there is no doubt* (17:99; 22:7). Nonetheless, *most of mankind believe not* (11:17; 13:1; cf. 12:103–6; 17:89; 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190).

60 *Call upon Me,* or "Supplicate unto Me," is understood by many to mean, "Worship Me," as when the Prophet said, "Supplication is worship," and then recited this verse (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), and because it is followed by a reference to those whose pride prevents them from worshipping God (R). The verse can also be understood as an injunction to call upon God, which would itself imply worship, as the custom of many Muslims who follow the example of the Prophet is to supplicate God

I shall respond to you. Truly those who are too arrogant to worship Me shall enter Hell debased." (61) God it is Who made the night for you, that you might rest therein, and the day by which to see. Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind, but most of mankind do not give thanks. (62) That is God, your Lord, Creator of all things; there is no god but He. How, then, are you perverted? (63) In this way were those who used to reject the signs of God perverted. (64) God it is Who made the earth a dwelling place for you and the sky a canopy. And He formed you and made beautiful your forms, and provided you with good things. That is God, your Lord; so blessed is God, Lord of the worlds. (65) He is the Living;

immediately after the completion the obligatory canonical prayers. *I shall respond to you* is a promise from God, but it is not understood to mean that all supplications will be answered in this life. In this vein, Ibn ʿAjībah writes, "There is no believer who calls upon God and asks Him for something but that God gives it to him, in either this life or the Hereafter, where God says to him, 'This is what you requested in the world. I have stored it for you until this day.'" Supplication is considered among the most meritorious of acts, because in humbly imploring God one admits to one's servitude and abasement before Him (R) as well as complete poverty before God and utter need of Him (ST). Thus most who fail to call upon God do so out of pride and arrogance (R). There can, however, be those whose immersion in the remembrance of God keeps them from making a separate supplication, as stated in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī:* "For one whose remembrance of Me has distracted him from imploring Me, I shall give him that which is more bountiful than that which I give to those who implore Me" (R); for more on the importance of "calling upon God," see 2:186c.

61 That God created the *night* for *rest* and repose is invoked in several verses as a mercy God has bestowed upon human beings (cf. 25:47; 78:9; 10:67; 27:86; 28:73). That He *made the day by which to see,* or "made the day giving sight" (cf. 10:67; 28:73), indicates that it was made so that people could pursue their livelihood (IK, Ṭ); cf. 78:11. It could also be rendered "made the day seeing," indicating the manner in which the day bears witness to the good and bad actions that human beings perform; see also 10:67c. *Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind* (cf. 2:243; 10:60; 27:73), or *for the worlds* (2:251). Nonetheless, *most of mankind do not give thanks* (cf. 2:243; 10:60; 12:38), because they are unaware (7:187; 12:21, 40, 68; 16:38, 75; 27:61; 30:6, 30; 34:28, 36; 39:29, 49; 40:57; 44:39; 45:26) and are not believers (11:17; 12:103–6; 13:1; 17:89; 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190; 40:59).

62–63 In this context, *How, then, are you perverted* (or "How, then, are you turned away"; cf. 6:95; 10:34; 35:3) means, "How, given that there is only one God and that He has provided the day and the night and infinite bounty for you, could you turn away from Him, deny Him, and attribute partners to Him?" Just as the Quraysh went astray, worshipping gods apart from God, so too those before them were *perverted,* or turned away, from God, worshipping other gods with no evidence or proof, solely on the basis of ignorance and caprice, and rejecting God's proofs and signs (IK).

64 *Dwelling place* renders *qarār,* which indicates that God made the earth firm and stable so that people could dwell in it and travel upon it; see 21:30–31c . He made the sky a roof protecting the world (IK), holding it aloft *without pillars that you see* (31:10; Ṭ). That God *formed you and made beautiful your forms* (see also 64:3) can mean the form of the human body; the inner reality of the human being, as in 95:4, *Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature;* or the forms of all things, as it is God *Who made beautiful all that He created* (32:7); see 32:7c; 95:4c.

65 Regarding God as *the Living,* see 2:255c. Regarding the injunction to *call upon God,* see 40:14c; 40:60c. *Devoting religion entirely to Him*

there is no god but He. So call upon Him, devoting religion entirely to Him. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds. (66) Say, "I have been forbidden to worship those upon whom you call apart from God, since clear proofs have come unto me from my Lord, and I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds." (67) He it is Who created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot. Then He brings you forth as infants, that you may then reach maturity, then that you may grow old—though some of you are taken earlier—that you may reach a term appointed, and that haply you may understand. (68) He it is Who gives life and causes death. So when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is. (69) Hast thou not considered those who dispute concerning the signs of God, how they are turned away, (70) those who deny the Book, and that wherewith We have sent Our messengers? But soon they will know, (71) since they will be dragged, with shackles and chains around their necks, (72) into

(cf. 7:29; 10:22; 29:65; 31:32; 39:2, 11, 14; 40:14; 98:5) indicates practicing with total sincerity, in purity, and with complete devotion; see 7:29c; 31:32c; 98:5c.

66 Having put forward a series of arguments in the preceding verses, the Quran here enjoins the Prophet to declare his implacable rejection of the Quraysh's idolatry (cf. 6:56; 10:104; 109:1–6). In 6:56 he is enjoined to follow the same opening phrase with the declaration, *I will not follow your caprices, for then I would have gone astray, and I would not be among the rightly guided;* and in 6:71, the believers are instructed to join him in saying, *We are commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds.*

67 This is one of several verses to cite the stages of gestation and life as evidence of God's Mercy and Power as well as His ability to resurrect the dead; see 22:5–6c. As human beings are created *from dust, then from a drop* (cf. 16:4; 18:37; 22:5; 36:77; 53:46; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19), referring to a drop of sperm or to a recently fertilized egg (Ṭs)—that is *a draught of a base fluid* (32:8; cf. 77:20)—this verse also serves to remind human beings of the lowly origin of their material nature. To *reach maturity* indicates the completion of one's bodily strength and intellectual and mental capabilities (Q, Ṭs); see 46:15c. Yet some are *taken earlier*—that is, before they grow old (Aj, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), before they *reach maturity* (Aj, Ṭs), or even before they are brought forth *as infants* (Aj, Q). Here *a term appointed* refers to the term decreed for one's life span, short of which none die and beyond which none live (Ṭ), or to the Day of Resurrection (Ṭs).

68 That *He gives life and causes death* (cf. 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 44:8; 53:44; 57:2) indicates God's Power over all phases of existence at all times. *He only says to it, "Be!" and it is* (cf. 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82) points to the fact that God's creative act is dependent upon nothing else and instantaneous, *like the blinking of an eye* (54:50); see 2:117c.

69 This is the last of four verses in this *sūrah* to rebuke *those who dispute concerning the signs of God;* see also vv. 4, 35, and 56. *Signs* can refer to verses of the Quran, but their mention here follows directly upon the mention of the signs of God within the created order and the cycles of human life in vv. 61–68, so that the term would appear to refer in this instance first and foremost to the *signs upon the horizons and within themselves* (i.e., within human beings; 41:53). *Those who dispute concerning* these signs *are turned away* from the truth and sound judgment (Ṭ) or from the straight path to the path that leads astray (Ṭs).

70–72 Here *the Book* refers to the Quran, and *that wherewith We have sent Our messengers* refers to all revealed books (Ṭs); or *the Book* could

boiling liquid; then they will be set aflame in the Fire. (73) Then it will be said unto them, "Where are those whom you used to ascribe as partners (74) apart from God?" They will reply, "They have forsaken us. Nay, but we were not calling upon aught before." Thus does God lead astray the disbelievers. (75) "That is because you used to exult upon the earth without right and because you were insolent. (76) Enter the gates of Hell, therein to abide." How evil is the abode of the arrogant! (77) So be patient. Surely God's Promise is true. And whether We

refer to all revealed books, the Quran included (Aj), and *that wherewith We have sent Our messengers* could refer to the Divine laws (Aj) or to the teachings with which God sent His prophets (Ṭ). On the Day of Judgment, the disbelievers will know the truth of what they disputed and denied (cf. 15:3, 96; 29:66; 37:170; 43:89), when they are *dragged* in *shackles* (see 36:8c) *and chains* into *boiling liquid* and *set aflame in the Fire* of Hell, which is understood to mean that they will be dragged back and forth between the two, as in 55:43–44: *This is Hell that the guilty deny; to and fro shall they pass, between it and boiling waters* (also see 37:68c).

73–74 This is one of several passages stating that the partners the disbelievers ascribe to God, or in other instances "that which they fabricated," in this life will forsake them in the next life (cf. 6:22–24; 7:37, 53; 10:30; 11:21; 16:86–87; 28:62–65; 41:47–48). In some instances the disbelievers deny that they were in fact idolaters (see 6:23) or continue to call upon their false deities to no avail (see 28:64), but here and in 7:37 they admit their error, though it is too late for this realization to help them. In this same vein, Satan says to the disbelievers after God's Decree has been passed, *Verily, God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help. Truly I disbelieved in your ascribing me as partner aforetime* (14:22). Thus the disbelievers say about him, *Satan is a forsaker of man* (25:29).

75–76 These are the words of the angels to the denizens of Hell (IK), telling them that the punishments they are now receiving are the result of acts of disobedience and exulting in vanities not permitted to them (Ṭ). Though one can exult or rejoice rightfully (Ṭs), as in 13:36, *Those to whom We have given the Book rejoice in that which has been sent down unto thee,* in the Quran "exult" is almost always used with a negative connotation, implying that one is heedless of God while enjoying the life of this world. In contrast, "insolence" (*marah*) can only indicate enjoying something in complete vanity (Ṭs). Thus *you used to exult* indicates being heedless of the gifts God has given and not being grateful for them, while being *insolent* or haughty indicates direct acts of disobedience. Regarding the *gates of Hell,* which are said to number seven (Ṭs), see 39:71–72c and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." The abode in which those who were too proud and haughty to worship God will dwell forever is too evil to be described (cf. 3:151; 16:29; 39:72).

77 *Be patient* is an injunction addressed directly to the Prophet, as it is in the second-person singular, but by extension it applies to all his followers, as God's Promise will always be fulfilled, whether in this life or the next; see 40:55c on the identical phrase. Patience is said to be an attribute of *the resolute among* God's *messengers* (see 46:35c). Whether *We show thee a part of that which We promise them* refers to their receiving punishment while the Prophet is alive (Ṭ) and thus alludes to the possibility of the Prophet's triumph over his enemies during the life of this world in the manner of David and Solomon or Noah and Moses (see 40:55c). *Or We take thee* thus refers to the possibility of the Prophet's death before the punishment comes upon the disbelievers, meaning God's Promise coming upon them either in this world after the Prophet's death or on the Day of Judgment.

show thee a part of that which We promise them, or We take thee, unto Us will they be returned. (78) Indeed We have sent messengers before thee. Among them are those whom We have recounted unto thee, and among them are those whom We have not recounted unto thee. And it is not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave. So when God's Command comes, judgment is passed in truth; and those who make false claims will then be losers. (79) God it is Who made cattle for you, that some of them you may ride and some of them you may eat— (80) and there are benefits for you therein—and that through them you may attain any need that is in your breasts. And upon them and upon ships are you carried. (81) And He shows you His signs. So which of God's signs do you reject? (82) Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were more numerous than they, greater than they in strength, and left firmer traces upon the earth. But that

78 Here, as in 4:164, which speaks of *messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee,* the Quran explicitly indicates that there are prophets whose stories God *has not recounted* to Muhammad and his followers. The Quran mentions twenty-six prophets by name, but Islamic tradition holds that there were many more, 315 messengers (*rasūl*) and 124,000 prophets (*nabī*) according to a *ḥadīth;* see 4:164c and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." That *it is not for a messenger to bring a sign, save by God's Leave* (cf. 13:38) functions to let the Prophet know that he does not need to bring to his people everything that they demand of him in order to prove his claim to prophethood, just as it was not given to prophets before him *to bring a sign, save by God's Leave* (Ṭ). Were he in fact to do so, they still would not believe, as was demonstrated by the miracle of the splitting of the moon (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 54). For other instances of disingenuous requests made by the disbelievers, see, e.g., 6:8, 36; 17:90–93; commentary on 6:7–9.

79–80 This is one of many passages to invoke the benefits of cattle (referring not only to cows, but also other four-legged domesticated animals): their usefulness for riding and transporting goods, for providing warmth and clothing, for providing food and drink, and even their beauty, as signs of God's Beneficence toward humanity; see 6:142c; 16:5, 66, 79; 23:21–22; 36:72–73; 39:6; 43:12–13. As in 23:21–22 and 43:12–13, the mention of cattle is here combined with that of ships, alluding to God's providing for human beings on both land and sea; for seafaring as a blessing from God, see 2:164; 14:32; 17:66; 22:65; 30:46; 31:31; 35:12; 42:32–34c; 45:12.

81 Regarding God's showing people *His signs,* see 40:13c. *Which of God's signs do you reject?* could be understood to mean, "If you admit that the realities mentioned above are from God, how could you deny God's ability to resurrect?" (Q). Others take it as an expression of amazement and admonition, as if to say that one cannot deny God's signs and proofs unless one is stubborn and arrogant (IK). Another possible meaning is, "When you reflect upon these signs, how could you call upon or worship anything apart from God?" (Ṭ). See also the refrain *Which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?* throughout *Sūrah* 55 (beginning with v. 13).

82 *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end?* is repeated several times in the Quran (12:109; 30:9, 42; 35:44; 40:21; 47:10); see 40:21–22c; 30:9c.

which they used to earn availed them not. (83) And when their messengers brought them clear proofs, they exulted in the knowledge they possessed, and that which they used to mock beset them. (84) Then, when they saw Our Might, they said, "We believe in God alone, and we disavow that which we used to ascribe as partners unto Him." (85) But their believing benefited them not when they saw Our Might. [That is] the wont of God which has passed among His servants; and the disbelievers were then lost.

*That which they used to earn availed them not* (cf. 15:84; 39:50) means that when God's Promise of punishment was fulfilled for the disbelievers from generations of old, their great power and wealth could not defend them against it (Q, Ṭ). The phrase could also be rendered, "So what will that which they used to earn avail them?" (Q, Ṭ), in which case it refers to those among the Quraysh who disputed with the Prophet regarding God's signs, given that only traces remain of those who disputed God's messengers in the past (Ṭ).

83 That the disbelievers *exulted in the knowledge they possessed* implies that they declared that they knew more than the Prophet, saying that they would not be punished, resurrected (Q), or taken to account; or else that they exulted in what they knew of worldly affairs (IJ), as in 30:7: *They know some outward aspect of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless* (Q). *And that which they used to mock beset them* (cf. 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 45:33; 46:26) indicates that the punishment they receive is a direct result of their own iniquity, as in 10:44: *Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves.* Alternately, it could be read as a reference to the prophets exulting or rejoicing in the knowledge given to them by God (Ṭs).

84–85 When the disbelievers saw God's Punishment descending upon them, they declared belief in God and disavowed their idolatry, but their newly found belief was of no benefit to them, because they had already had ample time to repent yet had not done so. Thus their admission of wrongdoing comes too late for repentance. In this sense, it is similar to 4:18: *And repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly now I repent," nor from those who die as disbelievers* (cf. 23:106–8; 30:57; 74:43–48).

*[That is]* represents an elided word or phrase that some interpret as "Beware *the wont of God*" or "Like *the wont of God*" (Q). Here *the wont of God* (cf. 3:137; 33:38, 62; 35:43; 48:23) refers to God's establishment of the principle with all previous generations that He does not accept a declaration of belief at the moment when people are confronted with the punishment they had denied (IJ, Ṭs), since they had been warned and granted respite yet denied it up until that moment. The disbelievers were lost before that moment, but now the complete nature of their loss has become clear to them (IJ, Q), as they are cast into the Fire, suffer God's Vengeance, and lose the reward of the Garden (Ṭs).



# 41

# Expounded

## *Fuṣṣilat*

*Fuṣṣilat* is a Makkan *sūrah* believed to have been revealed directly after the preceding *sūrah, Ghāfir* (JJ). It takes its name from the reference to the Quran in v. 3 as *a Book whose signs have been expounded.* This *sūrah* is also known as *Sajdah,* "Prostration," and as *Ḥā Mīm Sajdah* (Āl). Other less common names for this *sūrah* are "The Lamps" (*al-Maṣābīḥ*), for the phrase *We adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and a guard* in v. 12 (Āl, IJ), and "Means of Sustenance" (*al-Aqwāt*), from the reference to God having apportioned *means of sustenance* for all things on the earth in v. 10 (Āl).

According to some, *Fuṣṣilat* follows the previous *sūrah,* because the discussion of the punishments that befell the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes of ᶜĀd and Thamūd and the similar punishments that are foretold for the Quraysh echo the warnings of 40:82: *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were more numerous than them, and greater than them in strength, and left firmer traces upon the earth. But that which they used to earn availed them not* (Āl). In this same vein, v. 2 can be seen as a warning to the Quraysh that echoes 40:83, *And when their messengers brought them clear proofs, they exulted in the knowledge they possessed, and that which they used to mock beset them,* since the Quraysh were said to mock the Quran, as in v. 26: *And those who disbelieve will say, "Listen not to this Quran, but speak dismissively of it, that haply you might prevail"* (Aj).

The *sūrah* begins with a brief discussion of the nature of the Quran (vv. 1–4), which is followed by advice to the Prophet regarding those who refuse to pay it heed (vv. 5–6), juxtaposing the disbelievers and the believers (vv. 7–8). After calling for reflection upon the manner in which God created the heavens and the earth (vv. 9–12), the *sūrah* invokes the calamities that befell the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes of ᶜĀd and Thamūd as examples of the fate that awaits disbelievers in this world (vv. 13–18), followed by a warning of the fate that awaits them in the Hereafter (vv. 19–25). A discussion of the fate that awaits those who reject the Quran (vv. 26–28) then transitions into another juxtaposition of the believers and the disbelievers (vv. 29–32) and an exhortation to the believers to

maintain respectful speech and conduct even with the disbelievers (vv. 33–39). This is followed by a return to a discussion of the nature of the Quran and the fate that awaits those who reject it (vv. 40–46). The final section (vv. 47–54), which reflects upon the vagaries of the human condition, includes one of the most important verses for the discussion of the manner in which God reveals the truth to human beings (v. 53).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① *Ḥā. Mīm.* ② A revelation from the Compassionate, the Merciful, ③ a Book whose signs have been expounded as an Arabic Quran for a people who know, ④ as a bringer of glad tidings, and as a warner. But most of them have turned away, such that they hear not. ⑤ They say, "Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and

1 *Sūrah* 41 is the second in a series of seven *sūrahs* that open with the Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm*. The letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. For some possible meanings of these letters, see 40:1c. Some propose that the *ḥāʾ* and the *mīm* here could allude to the "wisdom of Muhammad" (*ḥikmat Muḥammad;* Bq).

2 As with the other seven *sūrahs* that begin with the letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm,* this *sūrah* opens with a description of the Quran. For those who take *Ḥā Mīm* as a name of the Quran, vv. 1–2 can be read to mean, "*Ḥā Mīm* is a revelation from the Compassionate, the Merciful" (Q). The connection of revelation to the Divine Names of Mercy bespeaks its being sent to benefit the world and particularly religion, as when the Quran says of the Prophet, *And We sent thee not, save as a mercy unto the worlds* (21:107; Aj).

3 That the *signs,* or verses, of the Quran *have been expounded* means that they have been explained and made clear (Q, Ṭ) through the variety of arguments and proofs for the Oneness of God and the truth of prophethood given throughout (cf. 6:55, 97–98, 126; 7:32, 174; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 30:28). The Quran is thus described as *a Book whose signs have been determined, then expounded, from the Presence of One Wise, Aware* (11:1; IK). In this context, *Quran* is best understood in accord with its linguistic meaning, "recitation," indicating that God expounded the signs in the form of an Arabic recitation; see also 12:2; 16:103; 20:113; 26:195; 39:28c; 42:7; 43:3. In other verses this expounding is said to have been done *for a people who know* (cf. 7:32; 9:11; 10:5), *for a people who take heed* (6:126), *for a people who reflect* (10:24), and *for a people who understand* (30:28), *so that* people *may be certain of the meeting with* their *Lord* (13:2), and so *that haply they may return* (7:174).

4 The Quran is *a bringer of glad tidings* for the believers and *a warner* for the disbelievers (Q, Ṭs). But most of the people of Makkah at the time of the revelation of this *sūrah* (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs) had turned away from the Quran (Ṭ), or from belief in God (Ṭs), and refused to listen to it. This verse could thus be understood to refer to their failure to both hear with their ears and reflect, consider, and understand (Aj), meaning that they did not "hear" with their hearts, as alluded to in the next verse.

5 The objection posed here by the disbelievers is similar to that stated by the Jews of Madinah in 2:88: *And they say, "Our hearts are uncircumcised"* (see also 4:155c). The present verse is one of several where the hearts of the disbelievers are said to be "veiled," "covered," or "sealed" to prevent spiritual

between us and you there is a veil. So do [as you will]; we shall do [as we will]." (6) Say, "I am only a human being like you. It is revealed unto me that your God is only one God. So go straight unto Him and seek forgiveness from Him." Woe unto the idolaters, (7) those who do not give alms and who disbelieve in the Hereafter. (8) Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be a reward unceasing. (9) Say, "Do you indeed disbelieve in the One Who created the earth in two days, and do you set up equals unto Him? That is the Lord of the worlds." (10) He placed firm mountains therein rising above it, blessed it, and apportioned its means of sustenance therein in four days, alike for all who

comprehension (see 2:7c; 6:25c, 46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57c, 101; 30:59; 45:23; 47:16c; 63:3c; 83:14c; 83:15c). From one perspective, when the disbelievers say this of themselves, they in fact speak the truth about their spiritual condition, but it is God Who has *placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness* (6:25; 17:46; 18:57). Thus their hearts are veiled with the coverings of spiritual neglect, inclining toward worldliness, lust, caprice, and other sins, so that they cannot comprehend the call, and their ears are deaf to the good, so that they cannot hear the call of God (ST); see 6:25c. Their declaration that there is a veil between them and the Prophet indicates that they see no possibility of rapprochement with him. Thus they say, "Act and pray according to the dictates of your religion, and we will act and pray according to the dictates of our religion" (Ṭ, Ṭs). This is reported to have been a declaration by Abū Jahl and other leaders of the Quraysh (Ṭs).

6–7 Cf. 18:110. That the Prophet is *only a human being* is seen by the Quraysh as evidence that he has not come with a true revelation (see 6:8–9; 11:12; 14:10; 17:94; 21:3c; 23:33; 25:7; 36:15; 41:14; 54:24; 64:6c). But here it illustrates that there is not in reality a veil between them. Rather, the Prophet brings them a revelation in their language, *an Arabic Quran,* whose *signs have been expounded,* but they choose to ignore it and not act in accord with it. *Go straight unto Him* derives from the same word as the central Quranic concept of *the straight path.* It thus indicates not deviating from the worship of the One God and remaining steadfast; see 1:6c. In this context, *give alms* may refer to required alms (Ṭs), but as this is a Makkan *sūrah* and alms were not formally instituted until the second year of the Madinan period (see 2:43c; 2:215c), it most likely refers to charity in general, as in 19:31 and 19:55, where Jesus and Ishmael refer to alms (*zakāh*) and more broadly to the purification of the soul (IK); as in 91:9, which employs the same root, *z-k-w,* in saying of the soul, *Indeed, he prospers who purifies it* (*zakkāhā*); and as in 87:14: *He indeed prospers who is purified* (*tazakkā*).

8 Cf. 84:25; 95:6. *A reward unceasing* (cf. 68:3) indicates a reward that comes directly from God and is never cut off, as opposed to the rewards of this world; see 95:6c. Also see 11:108, which refers to *the Garden* as *a gift unfailing.*

9 This verse is an expression of rebuke in the form of a question (IK, R). As in other instances, this line of questioning is meant to challenge the logic of the pre-Islamic system of polytheism, since many idolaters believed in a supreme deity, but ascribed to that deity partners who had a share in the creative process; see 23:85–89; 29:61c; 31:25.

10 *Placed firm mountains therein* (cf. 13:3; 21:31; 27:61; 77:27) or *cast therein firm mountains* (15:19; 50:7; cf. 16:15; 31:10) refers to God's making the earth firm. That God *apportioned its means of sustenance* refers to God's placing the mountains, rivers, and trees in various lands (IJ, Ṭ); providing sustenance for human beings and animals (IJ, Ṭ, Ṭs); apportioning the rains (IJ, Ṭ); apportioning different things to each land, so that they would remain interdependent (IJ, Ṭ, Ṭs); or all of these functions. The *days* mentioned here and in the surrounding verses do not denote the same measure of time as the days ordinarily experienced by human

ask. (11) Then He turned to heaven while it was smoke and said unto it and unto the earth, "Come willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We come willingly." (12) Then He decreed that they be seven heavens in two days and revealed to each heaven its command. And We adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and a guard. That is the Decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. (13) So if they turn away, then say, "I warned you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ᶜĀd and Thamūd: (14) when messengers came unto them from before them and behind them, [saying], 'Worship none but God,' they said, 'Had our Lord willed, He

beings; see 22:47: *Truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of that which you reckon* (cf. 32:5). The reference to creating *the earth in two days* in v. 9, apportioning *its means of sustenance therein in four days* in this verse, then to creating the *seven heavens in two days* in v. 12 can be understood as further elaboration of other verses that state that God *created the heavens and the earth in six days* (7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 57:4; cf. 25:59; 32:4; 50:38; IK). The two days in v. 9 would then be a part of the four days in which the apportioning took place (IK, R, Ṭs). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "God created the earth on Sunday and Monday; He created the mountains on Tuesday; and He created the trees, the water, and the populated and the unpopulated [lands] on Wednesday; so these are the four days. Then He created the sky on Thursday, and the sun, the moon, the stars, the angels, and Adam on Friday" (Ṭs).

11 *Turned to* renders the verb *istawā,* which is also translated "mounted" when employed in relation to God's Throne (see 7:54c; 10:3; 20:5; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4). In this context, as in 2:29, it means that after creating the earth God turned His attention to the creation of the heavens (Ṭs). That the heavens and the earth agreed to come willingly indicates that all things are obedient and subservient to God, as in 2:116: *Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him* (cf. 16:52); and 19:93: *There is none in the heavens and on the earth, save that it comes unto the Compassionate as a servant.*

12 Most commentators understand the *two days* to be Thursday and Friday (IJ, Ṭ), though others who say that the heavens were created before the earth say that *the two* days are Sunday and Monday (IJ); for the *seven heavens,* see 23:17c; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15. That God *revealed to each heaven its command,* or its affair, is understood to mean that He created for each all that would pertain to it, such as angels, stars, the sun, and the moon (IJ, Ṭ). This is one of several instances where the Quran employs the verb "to reveal" (*awḥā*), which can also mean "to inspire," when speaking outside the context of sending prophetic revelations, as in 16:68: *And thy Lord revealed unto the bee;* and 99:5, which says of the earth at the end of time: *thy Lord inspired her* (*awḥāhā*). Such passages can be understood as references to making all aspects of creation fulfill the purpose for which they were created. Regarding the adornment of *the lowest heaven with lamps,* which are said to protect against intrusions from those who wish to listen to the heavenly discourse (cf. 15:16–18; 37:6–10; 67:5; 72:8–9), see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72.

13 Here the Prophet is told to warn the Quraysh that if they turn away, as did other Arabian tribes before them, namely, the ᶜĀd and the Thamūd, who rejected the prophets sent to them, they might suffer a similar fate. For the account of the ᶜĀd, also see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; and for that of the Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31. The tribe of Thamūd is also said to have been destroyed by a *thunderbolt* in 51:44, by *the Cry* in 11:67 (cf. 54:31), and by an *earthquake* in 7:78. These are not contradictory, but rather different aspects of *the overwhelming* (*ṭāghiyah*) that befalls them, as described in 69:5.

14 The ᶜĀd's and the Thamūd's rejection of their prophets, saying, *Had our Lord willed, He would have sent down angels,* reflects the manner in which other communities are said to have rejected their prophets. As 17:94 states, *And naught hindered men from believing when guidance came*

would have sent down angels; so truly we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent.'" (15) As for ᶜĀd, they waxed arrogant upon the earth without right and said, "Who is greater than we in strength?" Have they not considered that God, Who created them, is greater than they in strength? Yet they rejected Our signs. (16) So We sent a howling wind against them in days of ill fortune, that they might taste the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world; yet the punishment of the Hereafter is more disgraceful, and they will not be helped. (17) As for Thamūd, We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance; so the thunderbolt of humiliating punishment overtook them for that which they used to earn. (18) And We saved those who believed and were reverent. (19) And on that Day the enemies of God are gathered unto the Fire and are marshaled in [ordered ranks], (20) till, when they come upon it, their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do. (21) They will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They

*unto them, save that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?"* (see also 6:8–9; 6:50; 11:12; 14:10–11; 23:24, 33–34, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 54:24; 64:6c; 74:25). In other verses, this same objection is attributed to those who rejected the prophethood of Muhammad: *And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?"* (25:7). In 6:8 it is said that had an angel been sent, it would have come not with a revelation, but to carry out God's Judgment: *Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite;* see also 17:94–95c.

15–16 Here the tribe of ᶜĀd displays the same attitude as the tribe of Quraysh, believing that their worldly power will somehow protect them from God's Power. While this wind is also described as *howling* in 54:19 and as *the barren wind* in 51:41, 69:6 is more emphatic: *And as for ᶜĀd, they were destroyed by a howling, raging wind.* When employed in the singular, "wind" conveys God's Wrath and Punishment (also see 3:117; 10:22; 17:69; 22:31; 30:51; 33:9; 46:24). But the plural, "winds," conveys the coming of God's Mercy, as in 7:57: *He it is Who sends forth the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy* (see also 25:48; 35:9). Regarding the wind that came upon the tribe of ᶜĀd, the Prophet is reported to have said, "I have been helped by the east wind and ᶜĀd was destroyed by the west wind."

17–18 God guided the tribe of Thamūd by showing them the truth and making it clear when He sent them the prophet Ṣāliḥ. But they opposed and rejected him and slaughtered the she-camel that had been sent to them as a sign from God (IK); regarding the she-camel, see commentary on 7:73, 77–78; 11:64–65. In this way they willfully chose to ignore the sign God had sent them and thus *preferred blindness.* After three days (see 11:65) they were overcome by God's Punishment. After the punishment, *morning found them lying lifeless in their abode* (7:78; 11:67). But as in the case of other prophets, God *saved* Ṣāliḥ and those who believed in his message from the punishment He had sent upon those who opposed him (see 11:66).

19 On the *Day* when the *enemies of God* from all generations *are gathered* together before the Fire, they will be *driven unto Hell* (39:71) by those angels who are the keepers of Hell; see 39:71–72c. In a variant reading of the text, several commentators prefer "We gather" (*naḥshuru;* Aj, Q, R) in place of *are gathered* (*yuḥsharu*).

will reply, "God, Who makes all things speak, made us speak. He created you the first time, and unto Him shall you be returned. (22) You did not seek to conceal, lest your ears, your eyes, and your skins bear witness against you. But you thought that God knew not much of that which you did. (23) That thought which you thought about your Lord has destroyed you, such that you have come to be among the losers." (24) Then if they are patient, the Fire shall be an abode for them. And if they seek favor, they will not be granted favor. (25) We

20–21 This is one of a few passages asserting that human beings' faculties or body parts will *bear witness* against them on the Day of Judgment (cf. 24:24; 36:65); that is, they will testify to the deeds that issued from them (R). Human beings are thus forced to *bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers* (6:130; 7:37), and to each of them it is said, *On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you* (17:14). Some commentators understand v. 20 to mean that God will bestow upon each limb or organ a voice with which it will speak, or that each will exhibit states that indicate the actions committed with it (R). The reference to *skins* can be understood as an allusion to the sensation of touch (R), the hands and feet (IJ), or the private parts (Aj, IJ, Q, R, Ṭs); or it can simply mean the skins themselves (IJ).

According to several *aḥādīth,* the limbs and organs will speak after a man has denied some of the actions recorded for him: "Then he will say, 'My Lord, didst Thou not promise me that Thou wouldst not wrong me.' God will say, 'Yea.' The man will say, 'I will not accept anyone other than myself as a witness.' Then God will say, 'Does it suffice to have Me and My angels, the noble scribes [see 80:15–16c], as witness?' Then these words will be repeated several times, and a seal will be placed over [the man's] mouth [see 36:65c], and his limbs (*arkān*) will speak about what he used to do. Then [the man] will say, 'Away with you! For your sake did I argue' " (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭ).

The response of the limbs and organs indicates that they will not speak of their own volition, but only by God's Command (Aj). Their reference to God's creating human beings and returning them can be understood to mean that people should not be amazed that God made them speak, since His ability to create and resurrect human beings is even more amazing (Aj). According to some commentators, the response of the limbs and organs ends after *made us speak* (IJ, Ṭs), though most do not specify where the discourse ends.

22–23 Their limbs and organs continue speaking to the disbelievers, chastising them for having had no shame regarding the sins they committed in this world. Some say that these verses mean that they were not being reverent (Ṭ). *To conceal* can thus be understood to mean refraining from bad deeds and in this sense concealing them from oneself (Q, Ṭ). Those who do not conceal or leave off bad deeds act as if they are oblivious to the fact that *not a mote's weight evades Him in the heavens or on earth, nor smaller than that, nor larger, but that it is in a clear Book* (34:3; cf. 6:59; 10:61; 27:75). Their underestimation of God's Omnipotence has thus led to their being cast in the Fire. Expanding upon this issue, al-Ṭabarī observes that it leaves hope for those who are disobedient but nonetheless know that they will be taken to account for their actions, since such persons do not underestimate God or think poorly of Him, but instead hope for His Forgiveness, as in a saying attributed to the Prophet, "God is in accord with the thought that His servant has of Him; if it is good, then good; but if it is bad, then bad" (Aj, Ṭ, Ṭs).

24 Most commentators understand this verse to mean that evildoers will not be rewarded for patience in the Hereafter if they had not already turned to God (IJ, Ṭs), since God had provided them ample opportunity to repent and conduct themselves with virtue before the punishment came upon them (see 23:63–67; 40:84–85c; as well as the story of Pharaoh in 10:90–91). Alternately, this verse can be understood to mean that if they were patient with evil deeds during the life of this

assigned to them companions, and they made that which is before them and that which is behind them seem fair to them. So the Word among the communities of jinn and men that have passed away before them came due for them. Truly they were lost. ﴿26﴾ And those who disbelieve will say, "Listen not to this Quran, but speak dismissively of it, that haply you might prevail." ﴿27﴾ We shall surely make those who disbelieve taste a severe punishment, and We shall surely requite them for the worst of that which they used to do. ﴿28﴾ That is the recompense of the enemies of God—the Fire. The Abode of Perpetuity shall be theirs therein, a recompense for their having rejected Our signs. ﴿29﴾ And those who disbelieve will say, "Our Lord, show us those who led us astray among jinn

world, not seeking to avoid them or (at least) to conceal their own evil deeds, then the Fire will be their abode in the Hereafter (Q). Likewise, *if they seek favor* by asking that what they love be returned to them, it will not be returned to them, since they do not deserve that response (IJ), or by asking that God be pleased with them, God will not be pleased with them (Q, Ṭs), since their excuses will not be accepted (Ṭs).

25 The *companions* that God decrees for the disbelievers could be the human beings and jinn who lead them astray, both of whom are referred to as "satans" when they suggest evil to others, as in 6:112: *Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy—satans from among mankind and jinn, who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive.* God condemns these "satans" to one another, as in 43:36: *And whosoever turns blindly away from the remembrance of the Compassionate, We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him* (cf. 17:27). These companions then delude such human beings into preferring *that which is before them* of the adornments of this world, into working to attain such delusions, and into thinking that there will be no resurrection and no recompense in the Hereafter (Ṭ, Ṭs). Such people have thus become like communities before them for whom *the Word*—that is, God's threat of an impending punishment—*came due;* regarding the concept of "the Word coming due," see 10:33c; 36:7c.

26 The leaders among the Quraysh would tell people not to listen to the Quran. *But speak dismissively* renders the command *wa'lghaw,* which conveys the sense of "nullify" or "render ineffectual." The injunction is therefore understood to mean that the Quraysh should make a ruckus, whistle, or speak loudly when the Prophet is reciting the Quran, so that the noise would prevail over his recitation and prevent others from hearing it (Ṭs). Such conduct with regard to the revelation is precisely the opposite of what is enjoined in 7:204: *And when the Quran is recited, hearken unto it, and listen, that haply you may receive mercy.* In 49:3 it is stated that *those who lower their voices before the Messenger of God, they are the ones whose hearts God has tested for reverence. Theirs shall be forgiveness and a great reward.*

27–28 The *enemies of God* who seek to turn others away from the Quran will *taste a severe punishment* in this world and will also be requited in the Hereafter *for the worst of that which they used to do* (Ṭs). None of their good deeds, such as honoring guests and maintaining family ties, will avail them, because their actions have been rendered invalid by their disbelief (Aj), as in 47:28: *They followed that which angers God and were averse to His good pleasure; so He made their deeds come to naught.* In contrast, God is said to absolve the evil deeds of those who believe and perform righteous deeds and to *recompense them according to the best of that which they used to do* (29:7; cf. 9:121; 16:96–97; 39:35; 46:16). The *Abode of Perpetuity* refers here to the Fire itself (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

29 Those who were misguided by the companions that God decreed for them in v. 25 will

and men. Let us put them under our feet, that they might be among the lowliest." (30) Truly those who say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm, the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Fear not, nor grieve, and rejoice in the Garden that you have been promised. (31) We are your protectors in the life of this world and in the Hereafter; therein you shall have whatsoever your souls desire, and therein you shall have whatsoever you call for: (32) a welcome from One Forgiv-

seek vengeance against the satans among human beings and jinn whose deceptions led them to the Fire. Elsewhere the disbelievers say of those who led them astray, *Our Lord! Give them a twofold punishment, and curse them with a great curse* (33:68; cf. 7:38), and God responds by promising, *For each of you it shall be doubled* (7:38). Some say that in this verse *those who led us astray among jinn and men* refers specifically to Satan and Cain, as they began the practices of disbelief and murder, respectively (IJ, Z).

30 Cf. 46:13. *Stand firm* translates *istaqāmū,* a word closely related to the common phrase "perform the prayer" (*aqīmu 'l-ṣalāh*) and to the central Quranic idea of the "straight path" (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm;* see 1:7c). In this context, it is understood to mean those who continue to say that God is One and do not turn to other gods (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭs), those who remain obedient to God and maintain their religious obligations (IJ, Q, Ṭs), or those who remain sincere and continue to perform good deeds until death (IJ). These and other interpretations all indicate maintaining obedience toward God in belief, speech, and action (Q). It is reported that the Prophet recited this verse and then said, "Some people have said it ["Our Lord is God"], and then most of them disbelieved. So whosoever says it until he dies is among those who *stand firm*" (Ṭs). The angels *descend upon* such believers either at the moment of death, at the moment they are drawn from their graves (Aj, IJ, Ṭs), or at the Resurrection, when all human beings are gathered (Aj, Ṭs). It can also be understood as a reference to angels descending upon people in this world, inspiring them to do good, expanding their breasts, and helping them in religious matters (Aj). *Fear not* refers to what is to come, while *nor grieve* refers to what has passed (IJ, Ṭs). *And rejoice in the Garden,* for *Blessed indeed is the reward of the workers [of righteousness]!* (3:136; My).

31 *Protectors* translates *awliyā'* (sing. *walī*), which can also mean "friends" or "allies." In this context it means both that the angels take responsibility for the believers by guarding them and that they love them (IJ). That they continue to do so in the Hereafter means that they will watch over the believers until the believers enter Paradise (IJ, Ṭs), providing them comfort while they are in their graves and when the trumpet is blown (see 39:68c) and escorting them across the traverse that leads from the plain of Judgment to the Garden (IK). Drawing upon the multiple meanings of *awliyā'* and the various functions of angels in relation to human beings, al-Qushayrī and al-Maybudī provide several interpretations for this verse: *In the life of this world* through the realization of gnosis *and in the Hereafter* by obtaining forgiveness; *in the life of this world* through contentment with the Decree *and in the Hereafter* through the meeting in the Abode of Subsistence; *in the life of this world* through faith *and in the Hereafter* through forgiveness; *in the life of this world* through love *and in the Hereafter* through nearness.

For the idea that the believers will have whatsoever they desire in the Hereafter, see commentary on 56:20–24. That such protection is afforded those who *say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm* could also be an allusion to the salvific nature of all revealed religions, as in 2:62: *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve* (cf. 5:59).

32 *A welcome* renders *nuzul,* which derives from the root *nazala,* meaning, "to descend," and

ing, Merciful." (33) And who is more beautiful in speech than one who calls unto God, works righteousness, and says, "Truly I am among those who submit"? (34) The good deed and the evil deed are not equal. Repel by that which is better; then behold, the one between whom and thee there is enmity shall be as if he were a loyal, protecting friend. (35) Yet none shall receive it, save those who are patient; and none shall receive it, save those who possess great fortune. (36) And should a temptation from Satan provoke thee, seek refuge in God. Truly He is the Hearing, the Knowing. (37) Among His signs are the night and the day, the sun and the moon. Prostrate not unto the sun, nor unto the moon.

refers to what has been prepared for and offered to a guest. Here it could also be rendered "as a welcome," meaning, "Therein you will have whatsoever your souls desire, as a welcome from God." That it is *from One Forgiving, Merciful* means that it is not from the angels, but only from God (Ṭs) and alludes to the idea that were it not for God's Mercy, none would attain His Forgiveness (Qu).

33 The *one who calls unto God* is understood to be a reference to the Prophet (Qu, Ṭs, Z), to all the prophets (Qu), to those who call to prayer (IJ, IK, Ṭs, Ṭū, Z), to the leaders who call people to God (Qu), or to everyone who calls people to the good, *works righteousness,* and is among the submitters (IK, Z). For many Shiites, it is considered to refer to the Prophet and the Imams (Ṭs) or to the Prophet and his family (Ṭū). The combination of qualifications listed in this verse indicates that people cannot call to God unless they also act in accord with what they truly know, so that people will accept it (Ṭs). From a Sufi perspective, *those who call unto God and work righteousness* are those who seek no share for themselves in calling to God (Su) and "Those who know the path of God, then traverse upon the path of God, then call the people to God" (Qu).

34 Cf. 23:96: *Repel evil by that which is better* (see also 29:46). *Better* can also mean "more beautiful" or "more virtuous." In the present verse, the absence of a direct object after *repel* opens the meaning to other possibilities: people should repel anger with patience (IJ), error with truth (Ṭs), ignorance with clemency (Ṭs), and the commission of evil with pardon (IJ, Ṭs); if others disobey God in how they treat an individual, then that person should obey God in how he or she treats them (IK). Such conduct can lead to reconciliation, love, and empathy (IK). To repel evil with good (cf. 13:27; 23:96; 28:54) does not mean to surrender before one's enemy or to accept falsehood over truth, but instead to avoid reciprocating harm whenever such avoidance will not lead to greater evil. In this vein, a *ḥadīth* taken by many as a foundational principle of Islam states, "Let there be no harming and no reciprocating harm." Another states, "Keep relations with those who cut them off with you, give to those who deny you, and ignore those who oppress you." *Repel with that which is better* can also be understood to apply to oneself, meaning that one should repel one's own base tendencies toward vice by practicing virtue.

35 The ability to repel evil with good is attained only by those who conceal their anger and bear what harm is done to them with patience (Ṭs). *A great share* refers to one of good fortune (IJ), an abundance of intellect and vision (Ṭs), or a high degree of virtue, spiritual strength, and inner purity (R). *Great fortune* may also be understood as a reference to Paradise (IJ, Ṭ, Ṭs).

36 Cf. 7:200; 23:97–98. This verse repeats a general injunction stated in various ways in the Quran. In this context it also implies that if one is enticed to anger and thus to requite evil in a manner that is not *better* or "more virtuous" than the action of which one has been the object, one should seek refuge in God (Ṭ); see 7:200c.

37 This is one of many verses to mention the signs that can be found in the *night* and the *day,*

Prostrate unto God, Who created them, if it is He Whom you worship. (38) And if they wax arrogant, then those who are with thy Lord glorify Him night and day, and they never weary. (39) Among His signs is that thou seest the earth diminished; then, when We send down water upon it, it quivers and swells. He Who gives it life is surely the One Who gives life to the dead. Truly He is Powerful over all things. (40) Truly those who deviate with regard to Our signs are not hidden from Us. Is one who is cast in the Fire better, or one who comes in security on the Day of Resurrection? Do what you will; truly He sees

and the movement of the *sun* and the *moon,* as in 31:29: *Hast thou not considered that God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and that He made the sun and the moon subservient* (cf. 16:12; 35:13; 39:5); see commentary on 36:37–40. Outwardly, the command to *prostrate* only to *God* is clear, but it can also be understood as an injunction to overcome the baser self, which turns toward all kinds of worldly distractions at the expense of remembering God (Aj, Q).

38 Whether the disbelievers prostrate to God or not makes no difference to God or to those who worship God; it is only to the detriment of those who fail to do so (see 41:46c). *Those who are with thy Lord* is understood by most commentators as a reference to the angels (Aj, IJ, IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), but it can also mean all human beings who are near to God and honored by Him (Z) and could thus be understood as a reference to the foremost among them (K), who are said to be *the ones brought nigh* (56:11). The angels *never weary* of worshipping, since they never *disobey God in what He commands of them* (66:6); see also 21:19–20c. The foremost among human beings *never weary,* because they worship God devoid of veils, remembering Him at all times (K).

Together with the previous verse, this is one of fifteen passages after which one should prostrate when reciting the Quran; see 19:58c. In this instance, there is debate as to whether one should prostrate at the end of v. 37 or at the end of v. 38 (IJ, Ṭs).

39 This is one of several verses to invoke God's ability to revive barren land as an argument for His ability to resurrect human beings (cf. 7:57; 16:65; 22:5; 25:48–89; 29:63; 30:19, 24, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 43:11; 45:5; 50:9–11). The use of this metaphor can also been seen as a reference to the state of the soul that has become desiccated through heedlessness and hardened by ignorance. Yet when the water of life or the wine of Divine Love is poured upon it, it stirs and rises and is revived by the remembrance of God and knowledge of Him (Aj). Similarly, al-Qushayrī sees this verse as a metaphor for the condition of a heart to which God draws near when it is humbled by the awareness of the sins that afflict it and then exhibits the blessings of regret and repentance.

40 *Deviate* translates *yulḥidūn,* which literally means "to incline toward" or "to refrain from" (Q) and is here understood to mean altering the words of the Quran and putting them in an improper order (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭs, Z); making clamor and whistling when the Quran is recited (IJ, Ṭs), as in v. 26 (Q); being obstinate (IJ, IK, Q); denying God's signs (IJ, Q); inclining away from belief in them (IJ, Ṭs); or inclining away from the truth and what points to it (Q). Though many attempt to identify *one who is cast in the Fire* with certain of the Prophet's enemies, especially Abū Jahl, and *one who comes in security* with the Prophet or one of his Companions (IJ, Q, Ṭs), the meaning of the sentence is also considered more general (IJ, Ṭs). In its immediate context, *one who is cast in the Fire* is best understood as referring back to *those who deviate with regard to Our signs* and more broadly to the contrast between the believer and the disbeliever (Ṭs). *Do what you will* is a threat, meaning that since *He sees whatsoever you do* (cf. 2:110, 233, 237, 265; 3:156; 8:72; 11:112; 33:9; 48:24; 49:18; 57:4; 60:3; 64:2), all people will be requited for their evil deeds (IK, Q).

whatsoever you do. (41) Truly those who disbelieve in the Reminder when it comes unto them [ . . .]. And truly it is a mighty Book. (42) Falsehood comes not upon it from before it or from behind it; a revelation from One Wise, Praised. (43) Naught has been said unto thee save that which has been said unto the messengers before thee. Truly thy Lord is Possessed of Forgiveness and Possessed of a Painful Retribution. (44) Had We made it a Quran in a foreign tongue, they would say, "If only its signs were expounded. What! A foreign tongue and an Arab [messenger]?" Say, "It is a guidance and a healing

41–42 *Those who disbelieve in the Reminder* are those who disbelieve in the Quran (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭs, Z). The elided phrase indicated by the ellipsis in this verse is understood to be "are punished" (Q, Ṭs), "are destroyed" (Bḍ, Q), "are obstinate" (Bḍ), or "are recompensed for their disbelief" (IJ). It could also be understood as a form of emphasis, in which case the elided phrase would be "disbelieve" (IJ). Others say that the phrase is completed by the last part of v. 44: *Such are called from a place far off* (IJ, Q, Ṭs).

*Mighty* renders *ʿAzīz*, which is also one of the Names of God, meaning Powerful, Overwhelming, and without peer (R). In relation to the Quran, it is understood to indicate that the Quran is protected by God from corruption by Satan or any other being (IJ, IK), that it is honored by God (IJ), and that no one can produce its like (IJ, IK, Ṭs). V. 42 can then be understood as a confirmation that nothing can corrupt the Quran (IJ, IK, Ṭs), as in 15:9: *Truly it is We Who have sent down the Reminder, and surely We are its Preserver* (R). Alternately, that *falsehood comes not upon it from before it* indicates that none of the scriptures before it contradicts it, while *from behind it*, which can also mean "after it," indicates that no revelation will come after it that would contradict or abrogate it (Q, R, Ṭs).

V. 42 also represents one of several responses to the challenges posed by the Quran's detractors in order to convince them of its Divine Origin, as in 18:1: *Praise be to God, Who sent down the Book unto His servant, and placed no crookedness therein;* and 4:82: *Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein.* Elsewhere the Quran challenges those who disbelieve to produce a single *sūrah* like it (see 2:23; 10:38) or *ten* sūrahs *like it* (11:13), suggesting that they will be unable to do so.

43 In the context of the previous verses, this verse is understood to mean that the message sent to the Prophet is in principle the same as that sent to the prophets before him (IJ, Ṭs), as in 87:18–19, which says of the Quranic teachings, *Truly this is in the scriptures of old, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.* Nonetheless, the particular laws with which each prophet is sent are different, as in 5:48: *For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you;* see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

The most widespread reading of this verse is that the insults and denials that have been hurled at the Prophet are no different from those employed against prophets before him (IJ, IK, Q, R, Ṭs). This reading would fit better with the second half of the verse, meaning that God is then *Possessed of Forgiveness* for those who repent for what they have said to the messengers, but *Possessed of a Painful Retribution* for those who do not.

44 In this context, *Quran* should be understood in accord with its lexical definition, "recitation," meaning, "If We had recited this revelation in a language other than Arabic, people would reject it saying 'What! Not in Arabic and from an Arab!' or 'A foreign book and an Arab prophet!' " (IK, Ṭs), as in 26:198–99: *And had We sent it down upon some non-Arab, and he recited it unto them, they would not have believed in it.* But they have a revelation in their own language

for those who believe; yet those who believe not have a deafness in their ears, and it is a blindness for them. Such are called from a place far off." (45) Indeed, We gave Moses the Book; then difference arose concerning it. And were it not for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord, judgment would have been made between them. Yet truly they are confounded by doubt regarding it. (46) Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul. And whosoever commits evil, it is to the detriment thereof. It is not for thy Lord to wrong His servants. (47) Unto Him is knowledge of the Hour referred. No fruits come forth from their sheaths, nor does any female bear or bring forth, save by His Knowledge. And on the Day when He will call unto them,

from a person of their own kind and thus have no excuse for rejecting it (see also 14:4). Yet it is still not clear to them, for although they hear the Quran, they are spiritually deaf and thus do not understand (cf. 2:171; 5:71; 6:25, 39; 8:22; 10:42; 17:46; 18:57; 21:45; 31:7; 41:5; 47:23). Thus they are not able to benefit from the "healing" that the revelation is said to contain, as in 17:82: *And We send down of the Quran that which is a cure and a mercy for the believers. And it increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss* (see also 10:57). That they are *called from a place far off* means a place far away from their hearts (IK, Ṭ), so that when one addresses them directly, it is as if one is calling them from afar (IK, Ṭs). In this sense they are like cattle (R), as in 25:44: *Or do you suppose that most of them hear or understand? Truly they are but as cattle. Nay, they are further astray from the way* (see also 7:179c).

45 Cf. 11:110. The example of Moses and the manner in which his people became divided is cited by way of consolation for the Prophet (IJ, Ṭs), as if God is saying to the Prophet, *Be patient, as the resolute among the messengers were patient* (46:35; IK); see 11:110–11c. *If not for a Word that had preceded from thy Lord* means that, had God not promised to grant the disbelievers respite until an appointed term, *judgment would have been made* at the moment that *difference arose*, and they would have had no opportunity to repent (see 3:19c; 10:19; 42:14). *Truly they are confounded by doubt* means that their rejection of the Prophet and the Quran does not derive from any form of wisdom or insight; rather, they speak without examining God's Word (IK, Ṭ).

46 *Whosoever works righteousness* in obedience to God during the life of this world will receive the reward for it in the Hereafter, while *whosoever commits evil* and is thus disobedient will receive a painful punishment (Ṭ); cf. 45:15. That *it is not for thy Lord to wrong His servants* (cf. 3:182; 8:51; 22:10; 50:29) reiterates a major theme of the Quran. On the one hand, it means that God will not punish individuals for things they have not done. On the other hand, it means that God will not punish a people unless He has sent them a messenger to remind them (IK). According to the Quran, every human community has been sent a warner (see 16:36), and thus its members will be held accountable for heeding or rejecting the warning; see 67:9c.

47 That *knowledge of the Hour*, or the end of time, lies only with God is mentioned in several verses (see 7:187; 31:34; 33:63; 43:85; 67:25–26; 79:42–46); thus *none save He shall manifest it at its proper time* (7:187). This exclusion applies to the Prophet as well, who said to the Archangel Gabriel when asked of the Hour, "The one questioned about it knows no more than the questioner" (IK). The allusion to the exclusivity of such knowledge in this verse can be seen as an answer to one who asks when the rewards and punishments alluded to in v. 46 will come to pass (R). Just as only God knows the ends of all things, so too God alone

"Where are My partners?" they will say, "We admit unto Thee that none among us bears witness." (48) That which they used to call upon before will forsake them, and they will know for certain that they have no refuge. (49) Man wearies not of supplicating for good, and if evil befalls him, he is despondent, despairing. (50) And if We make him taste some mercy from Us after hardship has befallen him, surely he will say, "This is mine; I think not that the Hour will come. If I am returned unto my Lord, surely with Him shall I have that which is most beautiful." So We shall inform those who disbelieved of that which they have done, and We shall cause them to taste of a grave punishment. (51) And when We bless man, he turns away and withdraws. Yet when

knows the beginnings of all things, and only He has certain knowledge of future events in this world (cf. 6:59; 13:8; 35:11). Those who *admit* are either the idolaters, who now profess that none of them bear witness to the partners they had once ascribed to God (IJ, IK, R, Ṭ; cf. 6:23), or the idols and false deities, who now declare that none of them attests to the partnership that the idolaters had attributed to them (IJ, R; cf. 16:86).

48 The partners the disbelievers ascribe to God in this life will *forsake them* or fail them in the Hereafter (see also 6:22–24, 94; 7:37, 53; 10:30; 11:21; 14:22; 16:86–87; 28:75; 40:73–74c). Upon this realization, the idolaters will say, *They have forsaken us. Nay, but we were not calling upon aught before* (40:74). Thus they *know for certain* that those whom they thought they could turn to for help and protection have no power and realize that they themselves *have no refuge* (cf. 18:53).

49–50 The attitudes of human beings toward God are often conditioned by their relative circumstances rather than by true belief, as in 70:19–21: *Truly man was created anxious; when evil befalls him, fretful; and when good befalls him, begrudging* (cf. 11:9–10; 17:83; 22:11). *Man wearies not* of asking God for wealth, health, and other blessings (IJ, IK, Ṭ), meaning there is no amount that will sate them so that they cease asking for more (R). Conversely, there is no end to the despair they feel when afflicted with trials and privations. Although some view v. 49 as a reference to disbelievers (IJ, Ṭ), it can also be understood as a more general reflection upon the frailty of the human condition, in which people vacillate between hope and despair, from one state to the other (R). When individuals of this disposition receive a blessing or mercy from God, they say, *This is mine,* meaning that it is something they feel they deserve (IJ, IK, R) because God is pleased with them (Ṭ), as when one says, *I was only given it because of knowledge* (39:49); or else they think that there will be no end to what they will be given (R). Such an attitude reveals that they do not ultimately believe in the Hour, the Judgment, and the Reckoning before God. Believing that they deserve what they have received from God, such individuals also believe that if there is in fact a return to God, they will be among those who are rewarded, just as they were rewarded in this life (IJ, R). But when the Hour does come, God will "inform" them of the true nature of their actions in this life; see also 5:14, 105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 29:8; 31:15, 23; 39:7; 58:6–7; 62:8; 64:7; 75:13.

51 Human beings *turn away and withdraw* because they consider themselves self-sufficient, beyond the need for God, as in 96:6–7: *Nay, truly man is rebellious in that he considers himself beyond need.* But when misfortune befalls them, they nonetheless take recourse to God. Some understand *prolonged supplication* to indicate supplication that is long on words but short on meaning (IK), while others understand it to mean that the disbelievers genuinely beseech God (Q, Ṭs), but

evil befalls him, he is full of prolonged supplication. (52) Say, "What think you, if it is from God, yet you disbelieve in it? Who is more astray than one in extreme schism?" (53) We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things? (54) Behold! They are in doubt regarding the meeting with their Lord. Behold! Truly He encompasses all things.

that they only acknowledge God when afflicted by trial and not when blessed with ease (Q).

52 Cf. 46:10. This command to the Prophet to challenge the people of Makkah regarding their refusal to accept the Quran can be seen as a response to their claims in v. 5: *Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and between us and you there is a veil. So do [as you will]; we shall do [as we will]* (R). *Schism* renders *shiqāq* (also in 2:137, 176; 22:53; 38:2), which conveys a sense of fracture or separation together with a sense of defiance and indicates that they are far from God in both conduct and character (R).

53 This verse is among the most famous of the Quran as it provides a succinct summation of the broad Quranic theme of God's displaying His signs in various ways to reveal the truth and to guide human beings. In the immediate context, many understand *Our signs upon the horizons* as a reference to the conquering of the lands surrounding Makkah (R) or the various regions to which Islam eventually spread (IJ, Q, Ṭ), and those *within themselves,* or "among themselves," as a reference to the conquest of Makkah itself (Q, R, Ṭ) or to the Prophet's victory at the Battle of Badr (IJ). Others understand *upon the horizons* as a reference to God's victories over other peoples, and *within themselves* as a reference to the defeat of the Makkans at the Battle of Badr (IJ, Q). Alternately, *upon the horizons* could mean the destruction of other civilizations (Q) or God's withholding rain from the earth (IJ), and *within themselves* could mean the afflictions and illnesses people experience in their own bodies (IJ, Q). Others say that *signs upon the horizons* refers to celestial bodies as well as the night and the day and the signs of the created order referred to throughout the Quran, and those *within themselves* refers to the many phases of human life (Q, R), from conception, through gestation, to birth, maturation, and death, as in 22:5 and 23:13–14, or to the wisdom behind the composition of human beings (Q) and the various natures and inclinations they exhibit (IK). Still others propose that *signs upon the horizons* refers only to the celestial bodies that are signs in the sky, while the signs *within* or among *themselves* refer to the signs upon the earth (IJ, Q).

The antecedent of the pronoun *it* (*hu*) in *it is the truth* is ambiguous and is variously understood as a reference to the Quran (IJ, Q), the religion of Islam (Q), everything to which the Prophet calls the people (IJ), or the true prophethood of Muhammad (Q). Alternately, it could be seen as a reference to an unstated "everything," meaning all of creation, both macrocosmic and microcosmic, or to God, in which case it would be rendered "that He is the Truth." In this regard, Sufis understand this verse as a reference to the Self-Manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) or Self-Disclosure (*tajallī*) of God in all things. As the early Sufi Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932) is reported to have said, "He is manifest in everything through that of it which He makes manifest, and His making things manifest is His Own manifestation through them. So if one scrutinizes them, one does not find [anything] other than God" (Su). This cosmological understanding is developed extensively in the school of Ibn ʿArabī, who often cites this verse. In establishing the correspondence between the microcosm, the macrocosm, and the verses of the Quran, he understands *Our signs upon the horizons* as a reference to everything outside of the human being, thus the entire cosmos, and those *within themselves* as a reference to all that

is within the human being, a microcosm in which are brought together all of the realities of the cosmos. Concerning this reality, Ibn ʿArabī writes, "When we come to understand these two affairs together, we come to know Him and it becomes clear to us that 'He is the Truth'" (*Futūḥāt,* II 298). From this perspective, *does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things* (cf. 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 33:55; 34:47; 58:6; 85:9) refers to God's bearing witness to His own Self-Disclosure and Self-Manifestation within each existent thing (*Futūḥāt,* II 151.5). In this sense, the present verse echoes 51:20–21: *And upon the earth are signs for those possessing certainty, and within your souls. Do you not then behold?*

54 That people doubt the meeting with God refers in general to their denial of Resurrection and Judgment and in other verses is associated with disbelieving or rejecting God's signs; see 10:7; 18:105; 29:23; 30:16. In this vein, the present verse can be seen as a reference to those who are veiled from recognizing the *signs on the horizons and within themselves* due to the fact that they are veiled from the Creator by that which is created (K). Most understand God's encompassing all things as a reference to God's Power and Knowledge (IK, Q, R), but, seen in light of the other verses, it may refer to God's Knowledge and Mercy, the only two Attributes said to encompass all things, as when the angels say, *Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge* (40:7; cf. 6:80; 7:89, 156; 20:98; 65:12). Viewed in relation to the interpretation of v. 53 offered by Ibn ʿArabī, God's encompassing all things would refer to the idea that nothing would exist, were it not for His Reality, by which every existent thing is made manifest and then returns unto Him, as in 28:88: *All things perish, save His Face;* and 55:26–27: *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* (K). As al-Kāshānī writes, "Nothing escapes His Encompassing; otherwise it would not exist, since the true nature of everything is the reality of His Knowledge and His Being through it, and His Knowledge is the reality of His Self (*Ḍhāt*) and His Self is the reality of His Being. So nothing escapes His Encompassing, since nothing has being, or reality, or self other than Him" (K).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 42

# Counsel

## *al-Shūrā*

*Al-Shūrā* is considered to be a Makkan *sūrah* revealed directly after the previous *sūrah, Fuṣṣilat* (JJ), although some maintain that vv. 23–26 are from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ, Ṭs), since they are understood as a reference to the Helpers (*Anṣār*) of Madinah. Some add v. 27 to the list of Madinan verses when v. 27 is understood as a reference to the poorest members of the nascent Muslim community in Madinah, known as the People of the Veranda (Āl; see 2:273c). Others maintain that vv. 23–24 and vv. 39–41 are from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ) or that only vv. 38–40 are Madinan (Ṭs). *Al-Shūrā* takes its name from v. 38, which describes *their affair being counsel among them* as a characteristic of the believers; it is also known by its first two verses, *Ḥā Mīm ʿAyn Sīn Qāf* (Āl, Ṭs).

The *sūrah* is framed by references to the continuity of Divine revelations (v. 3 and vv. 51–52), each of which is followed by an assertion of God's Omnipotence (v. 4 and v. 53). The continuity between the teachings of Islam and previous religions is also addressed in v. 7 and vv. 13–15. This discourse culminates in vv. 51–52, which are understood as a reference to the various modes by which God delivers revelation as well as an affirmation that the Prophet has received revelation in the same manner as did previous prophets. In relation to the discussion of revelation, this *sūrah* emphasizes God's function as the Provider and Sustainer unto Whom *belong the keys of the heavens and the earth* (v. 12) and Who provides as He wills in accord with His Wisdom (vv. 11–12, 19–20, 26–29, 32–34, 49–50), a characteristic that applies to the bestowal of wealth, offspring, and revelation. Nonetheless, most human beings seek sustenance elsewhere, taking *protectors apart from Him* (vv. 6, 9), arguing about God (vv. 16–19), disputing the Hour (v. 18), and disputing His signs (v. 35). In this vein, the *sūrah* outlines the contrast between those who seek *the harvest of this world* and those who seek *the harvest of the Hereafter* (v. 20; cf. vv. 22, 36–39) and emphasizes that no one has any protector beyond or apart from God (vv. 8–9, 29, 44, 46).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ḥā. Mīm.* (2) *ʿAyn. Sīn. Qāf.* (3) Thus does He reveal unto thee and unto those before thee—God, the Mighty, the Wise. (4) Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and He is the Exalted, the Magnificent. (5) The heavens are well-nigh rent asunder from above, while the angels hymn the praise of their Lord and seek forgiveness for those on earth. Yea! Truly God is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (6) As for those who take protectors apart from Him, God is Keeper over them, and thou art not a

1 *Al-Shūrā* is the third in a series of seven *sūrahs* that open with the Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm*. The letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. For some possible meanings of the letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm*, see 40:1c.

2 This is the only one of the *ḥā mīm sūrahs* to have additional separated letters. Some say they were added to make this *sūrah* distinct, since it is the only *ḥā mīm sūrah* that does not begin with a declaration regarding the Quran; it begins instead with an allusion to what has been revealed to all prophets (Ṭs). Others say that the letters here represent an oath that God takes upon His Names; that they are simply a reference to certain of His Attributes (IJ), with the *ʿayn* referring to God's Knowledge (*ʿilm*), the *sīn* to His Resplendence (*sanāʾ*), and the *qāf* to His Power (*qudrah;* IJ); or that they refer, respectively, to the Divine Names the Mighty (*al-ʿAzīz*), the Peace (*al-Salām*), and the Powerful (*al-Qādir;* IJ). Others propose that *ʿAyn Sīn Qāf* is a name for the Quran (IJ, Ṭs).

3 Just as God revealed His Words to Muhammad, so too did He reveal them to the prophets before him (IJ, IK, Ṭs). This verse could also refer to the contents of this *sūrah* as something all prophets have received (IJ, Ṭs) or more generally to God's delivering reports from the realm of the Unseen to all prophets (IJ, Ṭs). The word *thus* could be understood as a reference to the manner in which God reveals, meaning, "In this way do We reveal unto thee" (IJ), an interpretation that harmonizes well with the final verses of the *sūrah* (vv. 51–53) which speak of the ways in which God communicates with human beings. When combined with the Name *the Mighty,* the Divine Name *the Wise* (*al-Ḥakīm*) can also be understood to mean "the Determiner" (*al-Muḥkim;* Ṭs).

4 The first phrase of this verse is repeated throughout the Quran in various iterations (see, e.g., 2:255, 284; 3:109, 129; 4:126, 131–32; 171; 10:68; 22:64; 53:31).

5 That *the heavens are well-nigh rent asunder* may mean that they are separated from the greatness of what is above them (Ṭs), meaning the angels and the higher heavens, or from the Might and Greatness of God Himself (IJ, IK, Ṭ, Z). Viewed in light of a similar passage—*The heavens are well-nigh rent thereby, and the earth split asunder, and the mountains made to come crashing down, that they should claim for the Compassionate a child* (19:90–91)—this verse is also interpreted by some to mean that the heavens are nearly rent asunder because of the claim by the idolaters that God has offspring (IJ, Ṭs, Z). The rending asunder of the skies or heavens is referred to in several verses as one of the signs of the end of time: see 25:25; 55:37; 69:16c; 73:18; 82:1; 84:1. Regarding the angels hymning the praises of God and seeking forgiveness for those on the earth, see 40:7c.

6 Regarding those who *take protectors apart from* God, see also 7:3, 30; 29:41c; 39:3; 45:10. That God is *Keeper over* the idolaters means that He witnesses them, keeps a full account of their

guardian over them. (7) Thus have We revealed unto thee an Arabic Quran, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those around it, and that thou mayest warn of the Day of Gathering in which there is no doubt. A group shall be in the Garden and a group shall be in the Blaze. (8) Had God willed, He would have made them all one community. But He causes whomsoever He will to enter into His Mercy. And the wrongdoers have no protector and no helper. (9) Or have they taken protectors apart from Him? Yet God, He is the Protector; He gives life to the dead; and He is Powerful over all things. (10) As for

deeds, and will requite them in full (IK). That the Prophet is *not a guardian over them* (cf. 6:66, 107; 10:108; 17:54; 39:41) nor *a keeper over them* (cf. 4:80; 6:104; 11:86; 42:48) means that he has not been granted the authority to make them believers and that it is not his place to record their deeds (Ṭs), as he has only been sent as a warner (IK, Ṭs). In this respect, there is an aspect of consolation for the Prophet in this verse (Ṭs). That prophets are only responsible for proclaiming the message is emphasized in many passages (see, e.g., 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 64:12).

7 Similar to v. 3, just as previous prophets were given revelations in the language of their respective peoples, so too was the Prophet Muhammad given revelation in the form of *an Arabic Quran* (cf. 12:2; 16:103; 20:113; 26:195; 39:28; 41:3; 43:3; Q, Ṭs), which should here be understood in its literal sense as an "Arabic recitation"; see 39:28c. Makkah is *the Mother of Cities,* a name understood to mean that it is nobler than all other cities (IK). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have addressed Makkah saying, "By God! Thou art the best land of God, the most beloved land of God. Were it not for the fact that I was driven from thee, I would never have left thee" (IK). Regarding the nobility of Makkah, see commentary on 6:92; 27:91; 90:1–2. *The Day of Gathering* (cf. 64:9) refers to the Day of Resurrection, when all human beings of all generations and all jinn will be gathered, each community behind its prophet (see 17:71c), on a single open, barren plain for judgment (see, e.g., 3:25; 4:87; 6:128; 18:47; 20:106; 79:14); see also 64:9c.

8 Rather than sending these multiple revelations in various languages, God could have made all human beings *one community* following one religion and could *have gathered them all to guidance* (6:35; IJ, Ṭ); see also 2:213c. But God made people into different communities, *that He might try* them *in that which He has given* them (5:48); see 5:48c; 11:118–19c; 16:93c. From one perspective, this verse alludes to God's providing various revelations so that people might *vie with one another in good deeds* (5:48). From another perspective, it could be said that God did not join all people in a single religion and save all from the punishment, since this would have removed the charge of moral and legal responsibility (*taklif*) that can only be confirmed by also giving human beings choice (Ṭs).

9 This question is posed by way of rebuke (R). That God is the only Protector for human beings is a common Quranic theme (cf. 2:107, 120; 4:123, 173; 9:74, 116; 29:22; 33:18, 65; 42:31; 48:22).

10 Although from a Quranic perspective the true and final judgment in all matters lies with God alone (see 6:57, 62; 12:40, 67), the means by which human beings come to know God's Will and act accordingly are believed to be found in all revelations. The Torah (see 5:43; 45:16) and the Quran (see 13:37) are mentioned specifically, but the fact that messages about God's Judgment of human beings on the basis of whether they have followed His Will are found in the revelations given to all prophets is alluded to in 6:84–89 (see also 21:78–79, which refer to David and Solomon in particular). Thus 4:59 enjoins believers, *If you differ among yourselves concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day;* and 5:44 warns, *Whosoever judges not by that which God has sent down—it is they who are disbelievers.* The present

anything wherein you differ, judgment thereof lies with God. That is God, my Lord. In Him do I trust and unto Him do I turn. (11) The Originator of the heavens and the earth, He has appointed for you mates from among yourselves, and has appointed mates also among the cattle. He multiplies you thereby;

verse can also be understood as a reference to the Final Judgment, meaning that all people will be recompensed according to what each merits (Ṭs). Seen in this light, it provides assurance that the division between the two groups mentioned at the end of v. 7 will be just and that one should not be disheartened by the apparent injustices of this world, but rather trust in God and turn to Him, since *unto God are all matters returned* (2:110; 3:109; 8:44; 11:123; 22:76; 35:4; 57:5). *Unto Him do I turn* renders *ilayhi unīb* (cf. 11:88; 13:30), which in this context can also be understood to mean, "Unto Him do I return" (IJ) or "Unto Him do I turn in all my affairs" (IK, Ṭs).

11 *Originator* translates *Fāṭir,* a Divine Name related to the verb *faṭara,* meaning to "split" or "cleave." In the Quran, *Fāṭir* always occurs as part of the phrase *Originator of the heavens and the earth* (cf. 6:14; 12:101; 14:10; 35:1; 39:46). When the end of the previous verse is understood as an allusion to returning to God, and thus to one's final end, this phrase complements it by alluding to one's beginning. That God appointed or created *mates* for all human beings is attested in several verses (see 4:1c; 16:72; 35:11; 78:8). Here, as in 16:72 and 35:11, the connection is made between mates and procreation. Elsewhere the emotional, psychological, and spiritual benefits of having mates are emphasized: *And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and that He established affection and mercy between you* (30:21).

*He multiplies you* is also understood to mean, "He creates you" or "He sustains you" (IJ, Ṭ), which could be interpreted to mean that God creates human beings by means of human procreation, which occurs through the "pairing" of spouses. He then sustains human beings by providing them with cattle, whose numbers are maintained through analogous means of procreation between animal mates (Ṭ). *Thereby* renders *fīhi,* which literally means "in it" or "therein," but is here interpreted to mean *bihi,* or "through it," meaning *He multiplies you* through the mates that He appoints (IJ). If understood to mean "He multiplies you in it," "it" is seen as a reference to the wombs in which creatures are generated (IJ), or the pairs from which human beings are generated and sustained (IJ), or the earth, meaning, "He multiplies you in that which He creates from the heavens and the earth" (IJ).

*Naught is like unto Him* (cf. 112:4) is among the most famous phrases of the Quran, as it provides a succinct and unequivocal assertion of God's complete and utter transcendence (*tanzīh*). *Like unto Him* renders *ka mithlihi,* which literally reads "like His likeness." But the *ka* is understood by the vast majority of exegetes to be added for emphasis (IJ, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Some Sufis maintain that the phrase alludes to both God's Transcendence and His Immanence, or "likeness" (*tashbīh*). Thus, while they maintain that reading the *ka* as a particle added for emphasis is valid, they also maintain that the more literal reading—"like unto His likeness"—is valid, in which case the phrase alludes to the manner in which God's creation must be subtly linked to God as His own Self-Manifestation or Self-Disclosure in order for creation to exist, lest there be any form of existence independent of God's Being. In this vein, Ibn ʿArabī observes that God says *naught is like unto Him* in many different ways. The highest of these ways is that there is nothing in existence that resembles God or is a likeness of God, since existence is nothing but God's own Self-Disclosure. So there is nothing in existence other than Him that might be His "likeness" or opposite (*Futūḥāt,* II 516.31–32). This reading provides an emphatic statement of God's absolute transcendence in that it affirms not only that there is nothing like unto God, but that there cannot possibly be anything other than Him that is like unto Him or unto His likeness, since there is no existence other than emanations or theophanies of His Being. From this perspective, God's absolute immanence becomes the greatest testimony to His absolute transcendence. Only in this

naught is like unto Him, yet He is the Hearer, the Seer. (12) Unto Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth. He outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will. Truly He is Knower of all things. (13) He has prescribed for you as religion that which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed unto thee, and that which We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, that you uphold religion and not become divided therein. Grievous for the idolaters is that to which thou callest them. God chooses for Himself whomsoever He will and guides unto Himself whosoever turns in repentance. (14) They did not become divided till after knowledge had come unto them, out of envy among themselves. And were it not for a Word that had preceded from thy Lord unto a term appointed, judgment would have been made between them.

way can one fully explain how it is that God is *with you wheresoever you are* (57:4) and *nearer* to human beings than their *jugular vein* (50:16) and at the same time completely transcendent.

12 For the first phrase, see 39:63c; also see 6:50c. God *outspreads provision for whomsoever He will* as a test and *straitens provision for whomsoever He will* as a trial (JJ); cf. 13:6; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:39; 39:52. In the context of this *sūrah* and especially the next verse, this verse can be seen as an allusion to the "keys to the treasuries" of provision, mercy, and knowledge, which belong only to God and which He provides or withholds as He wills; see 6:59c; 39:63c.

13 The first part of this verse is similar to 4:163–64: *Verily We have revealed unto thee, as We revealed unto Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and unto David We gave the Psalms, and messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee; and unto Moses God spoke directly.* Regarding the universality of revelation in the Quran, see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

To *uphold religion* means that to act in accord with it (Ṭ) or to hold fast to it, perform its obligations, remain faithful to it, and call others to it (Ṭs), and to *not become divided* means to not be like earlier religious communities that divided into sects (Ṭ), but rather to remain united in religion as brothers (Ṭs). In this vein, al-Ṭabarī says that division is destruction and being unified is something upon which one can rely; regarding the importance of brotherhood within the Muslim community, see 49:6–12. The Prophet's call to belief in Divine Unity and sincere devotion to God is *grievous for the idolaters* both because it undermines their religion and because it arouses jealousy that Muhammad and not someone else was given the revelation (see commentary on 38:5–8; Ṭs), as when they ask, *Why was this Quran not sent down to a great man from one of the two towns?* (43:31).

The antecedent of the pronoun here rendered *Himself* is not completely clear. The sentence could also be read, "God chooses for it whomsoever He will and guides unto it whomsoever He will," in which case "it" is understood as a reference to religion (Z) or to bearing witness to Divine Unity (*tawḥīd;* Q). That God guides *whosoever turns in repentance* (cf. 13:27) evokes the famous *ḥadīth qudsī,* "If my servant draws nearer to Me by a span, I draw nearer to him by a cubit; and if he draws nearer to Me by a cubit, I draw nearer to him by the span of an outstretched arm; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running" (R).

14 In this context, *they did not become divided till after knowledge had come unto them* is understood as a reference to the disbelievers who had not differed in their opinions regarding the Prophet until after the declaration of his prophethood (Ṭs). They then turned away out of

Yet truly those who were bequeathed the Book after them are indeed confounded by doubt regarding it. (15) Therefore, summon, and stand firm as thou hast been commanded. Follow not their caprices, and say, "I believe in that which God has sent down as a Book, and I have been commanded to establish justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds; there is no argument between us and you. God will gather us

jealousy and greed, as they did not want him to become their leader (Ṭs). In connection with v. 13, al-Ṭabarī understands this verse to be a reference to the people of Noah, who became divided after they became aware of the revelation sent to him (Ṭ). Others understand this verse to be similar to 3:19 and 98:4, which speak of the People of the Book differing among themselves after *knowledge* or *the clear proof* had come to them, out of envy of the revelation that had been given to the Prophet Muhammad (IJ); see also 2:213; 3:19c, 105; 10:93; 23:53; 43:63–65; 45:17; 98:4c. In this later context, dividing religion into factions is an error said to have been committed by previous religious communities, an error that Muslims are enjoined to avoid (cf. 6:65, 159; 3:103–5); regarding the nature of envy, see 113:5c.

*If not for a word that had preceded from thy Lord* means that if God had not promised to grant them respite until an appointed term, *judgment would have been made* at the moment that *difference arose,* and they would have had no opportunity to repent (cf. 10:19; 11:110; 41:45; 42:20). When viewed as a reference to the people of Noah, *those who were bequeathed the Book* is understood to mean those given subsequent revelations who are in doubt regarding the religion that God enjoined upon Noah and revealed to Muhammad and that they have been ordered to uphold (Ṭ). Others understand it to mean those who are in doubt regarding the Quran (Ṭs) and the prophethood of Muhammad (IJ).

15 As rendered, this opening phrase means that, because people are confounded by doubt, the Prophet must call them to the Truth (Ṭs). The phrase can also be read "and unto that, summon," meaning "unto the Quran" (IJ, Ṭ), but it can be understood more broadly as an injunction to summon people to the religion that has been *prescribed for* them (v. 13) and that was enjoined upon the prophets before them (IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Then the Prophet is to *stand firm* by adhering to what God has enjoined and holding fast to it (Ṭs), worshipping as God has commanded (IK), or "holding firm" to the Quran (Q). The antecedent of *their* in *their caprices* could be the idolaters (IK), the People of the Book (IJ), or all who doubt what has been revealed to the Prophet (Ṭ). To follow their caprices would then be the opposite of following what God enjoined upon the messengers (see also 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 6:56, 150; 13:37; 45:18; 2:145c; 45:18c). It is thus the opposite of affirming the underlying unity of revelations, as the Prophet is here commanded to do; see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions." *To establish justice among you* means either "to be equitable among you" in spreading the message, calling everyone to the Truth and not being partial to anyone (IJ, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), or "to judge according to the decrees of revelation" (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭs), as when the Prophet is told, *Verily We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth, that thou mightest judge between men according to what God has shown thee* (4:105).

That each group has its own *deeds* means that each will receive the reward or recompense commensurate with those deeds (IJ, Ṭ, Ṭs) and bears no responsibility for those of others, as in 10:41: *And if they deny thee, say, "Unto me, my deeds, and unto you, your deeds. You are quit of that which I do, and I am quit of that which you do"* (cf. 2:139; 28:55). That there is *no argument* or dispute between the believers and the disbelievers means that, since the truth has appeared, the dispute is settled (Ṭs) or, as implied by the final sentence of the verse, that as God will gather all people together and judge between them, there is no need to dispute the matter, since *unto God are all matters returned* (2:210; 3:109; 8:44; 11:123; 22:76; 35:4; 57:5).

together and unto Him is the journey's end." (16) As for those who argue about God after having responded to Him, their argument is baseless in the eyes of their Lord. Upon them shall be wrath, and theirs shall be a severe punishment. (17) God it is Who sent down the Book in truth, and the Balance. And what will apprise thee? Perhaps the Hour is nigh? (18) Those who believe not in it seek to hasten it, and those who believe are wary of it and know that it is the truth. Are not those who dispute the Hour far astray? (19) God is kind unto His servants; He provides for whomsoever He will, and He is the Strong, the Mighty.

16 *Those who argue about God after having responded to Him* are those who argue about religion after people have responded to the revelation sent to Muhammad. Although this verse most likely refers to the Makkan idolaters and their efforts to prevent those who responded to the Prophet's call from following him, some interpret it as a reference to Jews and Christians who argue that their religion is superior because their prophets and scriptures were sent prior to those of Islam (IJ, IK, Ṭs). It may also be seen as a criticism of those who argue, in contrast to the affirmation of the underlying unity of revelations advocated in v. 15, that there is no unity between the message of the Quran and that of the Torah and the Gospel and refuse to accept the validity of Muhammad's prophethood (R).

17 Regarding the sending down of the Quran *in truth* or "with truth" (cf. 2:176, 213; 3:3; 4:105; 5:48; 6:114; 39:2, 41), see 39:2c. God establishes justice in the world at large by setting *the Balance* (*mīzān*) within creation itself (15:19; 55:7; 57:25); He does so among human beings by commanding justice through revelation (4:135; 6:152; 7:29, 85; 11:85; 16:90; 42:17; 57:25) and by weighing deeds on *scales* (*mawāzīn*) on the Day of Judgment (see 7:8–9; 21:47; 23:102–3; 101:6–9); see commentary on 57:25, where *the Book* is also coupled with *the Balance*. That the Hour may be nigh (cf. 33:63) is understood as an injunction to prepare for it and the judgment that will ensue, as when a man asked the Prophet, "When will the Hour come?" The Prophet responded, "Woe unto you! What have you done to prepare for it?" To which the man replied, "Love for God and His Messenger." The Prophet then said, "You will be with those whom you love" (IK).

18 The disbelievers seek to hasten the Hour and hence the punishment when they mock it, saying, *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25), and, *O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment* (8:32); see also 6:57; 10:50–51; 22:47; 26:204–7; 29:53–54c; 37:176–77. In contrast, those who believe seek to prepare for it out of fear of what may befall them.

19 Some scholars consider this verse to be among the most hopeful verses of the Quran (others are 24:22; 33:47; 39:53, 42:22; 93:5). *Kind* translates *laṭīf*, which when used in relation to God means that He is Kind, receiving His servants with honor (Ṭs), as well as Righteous and Merciful (R), and that He is Subtle in that He is aware of the most intimate and minute details (Ṭs); hence the repeated reference to God as *the Subtle, the Aware* (6:103; 22:63; 31:16; 33:34; 67:14). *Laṭīf* thus conveys both gentleness in action and acuteness in perception. In relation to other Divine Attributes, al-Ghazzālī writes, "He is Wise insofar as He directs things, Generous insofar as He brings them into existence, Fashioner insofar as He gives them order, Just insofar as He puts each thing in its proper place, and Subtle insofar as He does not overlook the intricacies of gentleness regarding them" (*Asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, 111). Thus it is through the Attribute of kindness and subtlety that God *provides for whomsoever He will*, since it is by virtue of this Attribute that God knows the precise needs of every created thing and provides for them, as in 11:6: *There is no creature that crawls upon the earth, but that its provision lies with God. And He knows its dwelling place and its repository.*

(20) Whosoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We shall increase for him his harvest. And whosoever desires the harvest of this world, We shall give him some thereof, but he will have no share in the Hereafter. (21) Or have they partners who have prescribed for them as religion that which God did not permit? Were it not for the Word of Division, judgment would have been made between them. And truly the wrongdoers shall have a painful punishment. (22) Thou seest the wrongdoers wary of that which they have earned; for it will fall upon them. And those who believe and perform righteous deeds shall be in flowering meadows of the Gardens. With their Lord they shall have whatsoever they will.

20 This verse is similar to several passages contrasting those who desire the fruits of the Hereafter with those who desire the fruits of this world; see 3:145, 152; 4:134; 17:18–19; 18:28; 28:79–80. In 2:86 there is also a warning for those *who have purchased the world at the price of the Hereafter.* To desire *the harvest of the Hereafter* means to work for its sake (IK, Ṭs). God will increase their reward tenfold or even seven hundred fold (IK), as in 2:261: *The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain that grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains.* In contrast, whoever strives only for worldly gains may or may not receive benefits in this world, but will receive none in the Hereafter; see 102:1c. In this vein, the Prophet said of the Muslim community, "Whosoever among them performs the deeds of the Hereafter for the sake of this world will have no portion in the Hereafter" (IK).

Several Sufi commentaries add that for those who work for God out of love for him, not desiring recompense, all things other than God will be diminished in their eyes and they will not seek the harvest of this world or of the Hereafter; rather, they will seek God alone (Aj, Bq, Su).

21 This question asks, "Do they have gods who have created another religion for them that God did not prescribe for them?" (IJ); see also 10:34–35, and "Do they follow what the satans among human beings and jinn have prescribed, such as the contrived rulings and superstitious customs practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia?" In this regard, see 5:103–4, which criticizes the custom of making certain kinds of camels sacred; see also 6:136–39, 143–45; 10:59. *Division* translates *faṣl,* which denotes making one of two things clear from the other (Iṣ). *The Word of Division* refers to the Divine Judgment, which divides the believers and the disbelievers and makes truth distinct from falsehood. In this same vein, the Day of Judgment is referred to as *the Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:13, 38; 78:17). In this context *Word of Division* indicates that, had God not already decreed that the division between the believers and disbelievers would take place on the Day of the Resurrection, those who make the innovations alluded to in the first part of the verse would already have been judged (cf. 10:19; 11:110; 41:45; 42:14). *Faṣl* can also be understood to mean "decisive," as in 86:13, where the decree of the Day of Judgment is referred to as *a decisive Word* (*qawl faṣl*).

22 When everyone is gathered on the plain of Resurrection (see 17:71c; 18:47; 79:14c), the wrongdoers will be wary of the recompense they will receive for the deeds they committed in this world (IK, Ṭ). In contrast, the believers were wary in this world (see v. 18) and therefore performed righteous deeds for which they will be rewarded with *meadows* in the Hereafter. *Meadows* renders *rawḍāt,* the plural of *rawḍah,* a word meaning a place in which vegetation is plentiful (Ṭ), and is used to designate the most pleasing part of a garden (R). Some read this verse to mean that even the iniquitous among those who performed their prayers will be in the Garden, while those who performed righteous deeds will be in a specially designated part of Paradise (R). Some also understand being in *meadows of the*

That is the great bounty. (23) This is that whereof God gives glad tidings to His servants, those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Say, "I ask not of you any reward for it, save affection among kinsfolk." And whosoever accomplishes a good deed, We shall increase him in goodness thereby. Truly God is Forgiving, Thankful. (24) Or do they say, "He has fabricated a lie against God?" If God willed, He would put a seal upon thy heart. God wipes out falsehood and

*Gardens* as a figurative reference to the happiness and blessings they enjoy (Ṭ). That they *shall have whatsoever they will* (cf. 16:31; 25:16; 39:34; 50:35) refers to the many bounties of Paradise being already prepared for them (R); see also 52:22; 56:21; 77:41–44.

23 *This* refers to what was said regarding *the Gardens* in the previous verse (IJ) or to *the great bounty* (Ṭs). No prophet seeks personal gain from the transmission of revelation. Thus the Prophet is enjoined, *Say, "I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds"* (6:90; cf. 25:57; 38:86) and the prophets Noah (26:109), Hūd (11:51; 26:127), Ṣāliḥ (26:145), Lot (26:164), and Shuʿayb (26:180) all say to their respective communities, *I ask not of you any reward for it.* Elsewhere the Prophet states that he only delivers the message so *that whosoever will may take a way unto his Lord* (25:57), but here he enjoins *affection among kinsfolk;* that is, he is asking the Makkans to honor and uphold the ties of kinship that he had with them (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭū), as nearly all of the Makkans were related by virtue of being members of the same tribe, the Quraysh. In this vein, Ibn ʿAbbās said, "There was not a single house [i.e., subtribe] of the Quraysh, but that it had kinship with the Prophet, and so [42:23] was revealed in this regard, and its interpretation is, 'O Quraysh! You should keep good relations between me and you'" (IK, Ṭ). Others say that the call to *affection among kinsfolk* is an appeal to follow the Prophet's kin (Aj, IJ, Qm, Ṭ, Ṭs), specifically his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his daughter Fāṭimah and their descendants (Aj, IJ, Q), though al-Ṭabarī argues that it would need to be phrased "affection for kinsfolk" (*mawaddat al-qurbā*) for this meaning to obtain. Ibn ʿAjībah, however, maintains that the manner in which it is phrased provides a more emphatic injunction to love the Prophet's kinsfolk. Still others understand the phrase to mean that one should love the Prophet as one loves one's own kinsfolk (IJ) or that one should love one's kinsfolk and maintain relations with them (IJ, Ṭ). *Kinsfolk* renders *qurbā,* which derives from a root (*q-r-b*) that indicates nearness and approach. Thus some suggest this verse means "love through nearness" and that it enjoins love for God and drawing near to Him through pious deeds (Aj, IJ, Q, Ṭ, Ṭū).

For *increase in goodness,* cf. 10:26: *Unto those who are virtuous shall be that which is most beautiful and more besides* (see also 2:245, 261; 4:40; 6:160; 64:17; 10:26–27c; 55:60c). That God is *Forgiving, Thankful* (cf. 35:30, 34) indicates that He forgives bad deeds and accepts good ones.

24 Regarding the charge that the Prophet fabricated the revelation, see 10:38: *Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "Then bring a sūrah like it, and call upon whomsoever you can apart from God, if you are truthful"* (cf. 11:13, 35; 32:3; 46:8; 52:33). That God would *put a seal upon thy heart* indicates either that God would fortify the Prophet's heart with patience to endure the insults hurled against him (JJ) or that He would not allow the Prophet's heart to continue to understand the revelation, had the Prophet added anything to it, since God would then cause him to forget what He had already revealed (IJ, IK, Ṭ). This latter interpretation is more in line with the use of "sealing," "veiling," and "covering" hearts that is employed throughout the Quran to indicate the condition in which people are closed to spiritual comprehension (see 2:7c; 6:25, 46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57, 101; 30:59; 41:5; 45:23; 47:16; 63:3; 83:14–15). In this sense, this verse is similar to 69:44–47: *Had he ascribed any statements to Us, We would have taken him by the right hand. And then We would*

verifies the truth through His Words. Truly He knows what lies within breasts. (25) He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons evil deeds. And He knows whatsoever you do. (26) He responds to those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and will increase them from His Bounty. Yet as for the disbelievers, theirs shall be a severe punishment. (27) Had God outspread His provision for His servants, they would have behaved tyrannically upon the

*have severed his life vein. And none among you could have shielded him from it.*

God *wipes out falsehood* by means of the truth, as in 17:81: *Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing*; and 21:18: *Nay, but We cast truth against falsehood, and it crushes it, and, behold, it vanishes.* Then God *verifies the truth* (cf. 10:82) through revelation. The idea that God *knows what lies within breasts* (3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13) is usually a general statement regarding all human beings, but in this context it also implies that, were the Prophet's own soul to suggest that he *fabricate a lie against God,* God would seal his heart, since He eradicates falsehood and verifies the truth (Ṭ). In this sense, this verse provides an unequivocal rejection of the charge that the Prophet could have fabricated the Quran or any part of it.

25 Although repentance is enjoined throughout the Quran, this is one of two verses to state that God accepts repentance (see also 9:104; cf. 20:82). In 40:3 God is referred to as *Accepter of Repentance.* In this vein, the Prophet said, "God rejoices more emphatically over the repentance of His servant than one of you who finds his stray camel in a place where he had feared that thirst would slay him" (IK). The extent of God's Forgiveness toward those who repent was expressed by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, who recited this verse when asked about a man who fornicates with a woman and then marries her (IK). God then pardons past sins for those who repent (Ṭ). Nonetheless, such repentance must be sincere, for *truly those who disbelieve after having believed, then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and they are the ones astray* (3:90); *And repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly, now I repent," nor from those who die as disbelievers* (4:18).

26 God answers the supplications of those who *believe and perform righteous deeds* (Bg, IK, Ṭ) and rewards them (Bg), and He will *increase them* by granting them even more than what they requested (Ṭ). Some understand this verse to mean that God allows them to intercede for their companions; the *increase* then means that they can intercede for the companions of their companions (Bg, IK, Q, Ṭ). Alternately, *those who* could be understood as the subject of this sentence, meaning that those who believe and perform righteous deeds respond to their Lord when He calls them to faith and obedience (Ṭ), and in return He grants them *increase.*

27 In relation to v. 26, this verse emphasizes that one's focus should be upon *increase* in the Hereafter rather than in this world. It can thus be seen as clarifying what is meant by *We shall increase him in goodness* in v. 23. This verse is reported to have been revealed regarding some of the poor and destitute among the early believers who desired the wealth and ease of this world (Ṭ). Some say that it pertained specifically to the homeless emigrants known as the "People of the Veranda" (Ṭ), who may have looked with desire upon the wealth of other tribes in Madinah (Bg, Q). The verse suggests that, were God to have increased the provision He had destined for some people, they would transgress the limits set by God (Ṭ) by being tyrannical and acting disobediently toward Him (Q). They would seek one abode, then another, one mount and then another, one outfit and then another (Q), meaning that, were God to give them much wealth, they would only seek more, as stated in a famous *ḥadīth,* "If the son of Adam had a valley of gold, he would wish that he had two valleys" (Q). Rather, God gives provision

earth. But He sends down whatsoever He will according to a measure. Verily of His servants He is Aware, Seeing. (28) He it is Who sends down the rain after they have despaired and spreads forth His Mercy. And He is the Protector, the Praised. (29) And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and all moving creatures that He has scattered therein, and He is able to gather them together whensoever He will. (30) Whatsoever misfortune befalls you is because of that which your hands have earned; and He pardons much. (31) You thwart not on earth, and you have no protector or helper apart from God. (32) Among His signs are the ships upon the sea like mountains; (33) if He so wills, He stills the wind, and they lie motionless upon its surface. Truly in that are signs for all who are patient, thankful. (34) Or He causes them to perish for

according to what He knows to be in the best interest of His servants (IK) and what suffices them (Q). In this regard, Islamic scholars note that God knows best the state of His servants and when increasing their provision will lead to corruption. Thus reduction of provision is not abasement and increase in provision is not necessarily a sign of Divine Favor (Q), as in a *ḥadīth qudsī,* "Among My believing servants are those for whom nothing but wealth will make them righteous; were I to make them poor, poverty would corrupt them. And among My believing servants are those for whom nothing but poverty will make them righteous; were I to make them wealthy, wealth would corrupt them. Verily, I arrange for My servants according to My Knowledge of their hearts; for truly I am Knowing, Aware" (Q).

28 When people have given up hope that rain will fall, God sends it upon them at their time of need (cf. 30:49; 41:39) and bestows it upon all who are in that region (IK). From a spiritual perspective, "God sends the rain of Divine inspirations down upon dead hearts such that they are revived through remembrance [of God] and knowledge, after they have despaired" (Aj).

29 This is one of many verses to cite, as a sign of Divine Omnipotence, God's creation of all that exists (IK) and His ability to resurrect the dead (Ṭ); see 2:165; 3:190–91; 30:20–26; 56:57–73. *Moving creatures* refers to human beings and angels (Q, Ṭ); or to human beings, angels, jinn, and all the various kinds of animals that God has distributed throughout the earth (IK); or just to all animals (Ṭs). Just as He created them the first time, He is able to gather them all together on the Day of Resurrection (IK, Ṭ).

30–31 Here *misfortune* is understood as a general reference to all afflictions that may befall human beings (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs), similar to 4:79: *Whatever good befalls thee, it is from God, and whatever evil befalls thee, it is from thyself.* It may also be a specific reference to the punishments for violations of Islamic Law (Q, Ṭs). In this sense, the small afflictions one bears are seen as alleviating the burden of sins for which one would have to pay a greater price in the Hereafter, as stated in a *ḥadīth,* "No believer is afflicted with fatigue, exhaustion, anxiety, or sorrow but that God absolves him of some of his sins thereby—even the prick of a thorn" (IK, Ṭ). But should God desire to punish someone, there is nothing anyone can do to thwart it (IJ); this is a recurring Quranic theme: see 8:59; 9:2–3; 11:20; 24:57; 29:22; 35:44; 46:32; 72:12. That no one has any *protector or helper apart from God* and that God is the only Protector for human beings is also reiterated in several verses throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 2:107, 120; 4:123, 173; 9:74, 116; 11:20, 113; 29:22; 33:17–18, 65; 42:8–9; 48:22).

32–34 That God subjugates the sea and allows ships to travel upon it without hindering their travel by withholding the wind or causing

that which they have earned—and He pardons much—(35) and so that those who dispute concerning Our signs will know that they have no refuge. (36) Whatsoever you have been given, it is the enjoyment of the life of this world, and that which lies with God is better and more lasting for those who believe and trust in their Lord, (37) who shun grave sins and indecencies and who, when they are angry, they forgive, (38) who respond to their Lord and perform the

travelers to perish by sending too much wind is here invoked as a sign of His Mercy toward human beings (see also 2:164c; 14:32; 17:66; 23:21–22; 30:46; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 43:12; 45:12; 55:24). In these verses, the ships also indicate the frailty of the human condition, and the metaphor relates to the manner in which God bestows and withholds provision in accord with what He knows is best for each individual (IK), as in vv. 27–28. Those who are patient when affliction befalls them, which could be seen as the times of too much or too little wind, and who are thankful when able to travel with ease, benefit from reflecting upon these signs. As in v. 30, people only perish and are punished because of their own iniquities, since *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44; see also 27:90; 36:54; 37:39; 52:16; 66:7). For more on the symbolism of seafaring as it pertains to the spiritual life, see 30:46c.

35 The disbelievers know that they have no refuge when the water overcomes them and they drown (IJ), or after the Resurrection they know that there is no escape from the punishment (Aj, IJ, Ṭ).

36 Cf. 28:60. *Enjoyment of the life of this world* indicates the ephemeral delights of this world, which are *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20). They stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the next life (see 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 40:39; 43:35), which are *more lasting;* see 29:64c.

37 *Grave sins* refers to transgressions such as idolatry, murder, and usury, though there is no agreement on a single definition; see 4:31c, where they are compared with minor evil deeds (*sayyi'āt*). *Indecencies* translates *fawāḥish* (sing. *fāḥishah*), which may refer specifically to sexual transgressions (IJ, Ṭ; see 4:15c; 4:22c) or more broadly to transgressing the limits set by God (IJ). Other verses specify that one must avoid sin or indecency, both *outward and inward* (see 6:120c; 6:151–52c); for more on the various categories of sins, see 4:31c; 7:33c. To forgive when angry implies also controlling one's rage, as in 3:134, which extols those who *curb their rage, and pardon others.* Regarding the virtue of restraining one's anger, the Prophet said, "A strong person is not one who throws his adversaries to the ground. A strong person is one who contains himself when he is angry." He also advised, "Anger comes from the Devil; the Devil was created of fire, and fire is extinguished only with water; so when one of you becomes angry, he should perform ablution." In this regard, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "Anger is a ball of fire, but when you swallow it, it is sweeter than honey."

38 Those *who respond to their Lord* are those who testify to God's Oneness (Ṭ), fulfill the dictates of religion (Ṭs), and establish the prayer in the manner prescribed at the designated times (Ṭ, Ṭs) or those in whose hearts there is no dispute with any of God's Commands (R). In this sense, they stand in direct contrast to *those who dispute concerning Our signs* (v. 35). The reference to *counsel* is understood as an allusion to the Helpers (Anṣār) of Madinah who responded with faith to the call from the Prophet and sought counsel with one another before embracing Islam (Q, Ṭs). It also invokes a general principle, as it is said that if people seek counsel with one another, they will be guided to sound judgment (Q, R, Ṭs). From another perspective, those whose affair is *counsel among them* refers to those who refer all matters back to the religion, as in 4:83: *And whenever tidings come unto them, whether of security or fear, they spread it about, whereas had they referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those of them whose task it is to investigate would have known it* (Qm).

prayer, their affair being counsel among them, who spend from that which We have provided them, (39) and who, when tyranny befalls them, they defend themselves. (40) The recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it. Yet whosoever pardons and sets matters aright, his reward is with God. Truly He loves not the wrongdoers. (41) And whosoever defends himself after having been wronged, for such there is no way against them. (42) There is only a way against those who wrong people and behave tyrannically upon the earth without right. For them,

In 3:159, the Prophet is also instructed to *consult them in affairs,* that is, to seek the opinion of his Companions, especially in governance and military questions, but not in questions pertaining to Divine Decrees, since the Prophet has direct guidance from God for such matters (Q). But after the death of the Prophet, the Companions would seek counsel from one another in seeking to understand the Divine Decrees and finding the means of extracting them from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (Q). Regarding the importance of counsel in governing the affairs of the community, the Prophet is reported to have said, "If your leaders are the best of you and your wealthy are the magnanimous among you and your affair is counsel among you, the outside of the earth will be better for you than its inside" (Q).

Regarding those *who spend from that which We have provided them,* see 2:3c; 8:3; 13:22; 28:54; 32:16.

39 *When tyranny befalls them* (Q, Ṭ) refers to the idolaters' expulsion of the Muslims from Makkah (Q), after which they were granted permission to defend themselves, as in 22:39–40: *Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged—and truly God is able to help them—who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God"* (Q). The present verse establishes a general principle that no one should submit to the tyranny of an oppressor and thus reaffirms the Quranic injunction to enjoin right and forbid wrong (see 3:104c; Q).

40 If understood as a general statement, this verse alludes to the Quranic dictum that people are only punished for their bad deeds in a measure that is equal to the sins they have committed, but that they are rewarded tenfold or greater for good deeds; see 6:160c; 28:84; 40:40c. In the present context, it refers to the bounds within which justice can be pursued when defending against those who are tyrannical or when seeking retribution after an offense; see the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran." According to some, *evil* here refers to physical harm, cursing another, or insulting another (Bg). With regard to seeking retribution for the sins or misdeeds of individuals, if the offender is an inveterate wrongdoer who engages in immoral acts publicly and shamelessly while bringing harm to society, then seeking retribution is preferable, as in v. 39. If, however, the insult or crime is a minor slip and the wrongdoer acknowledges the error and seeks forgiveness, then pardoning is preferable, as in 24:22: *And let them pardon and forbear. Do you not desire that God forgive you?* (IA, Q). In this sense, this passage gives permission for self-defense or seeking retribution when wronged, but does not enjoin them, as alluded to by the praise given to those who are patient and forgive in v. 43 after permission to seek retribution is granted in v. 41 (Q). From another perspective, v. 39 is general, enjoining Muslims to defend one another in the face of oppression, while v. 40 applies to particular instances when a person is allowed to seek retribution for an offense, which is then limited in scope and degree to the like of the offense (see 2:190–94c; 5:45c; 16:126), or when a person chooses to pardon and forgive (Ṭs).

41–42 In this context, a *way against* means "blame upon" (IK) or a means of recourse against someone. Although pardoning and forgiveness may be preferred, there is still no blame upon one who seeks retribution (IK); see 5:45c. There is only blame upon one who transgresses the rights of an-

there shall be a painful punishment. (43) And whosoever is patient and forgives, that is indeed a course worthy of resolve. (44) And whomsoever God leads astray has no protector beyond Him. Thou shalt see the wrongdoers, when they see the punishment, saying, "Is there any way of return?" (45) And thou shalt see them exposed to it, diminished through abasement, looking furtively. And those who believe will say, "Truly the losers are those who have lost themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection." Behold! Truly, the wrongdoers are in lasting punishment. (46) They have no protectors to help them apart from God. And whomsoever God leads astray, no way has he. (47) Respond to your Lord before there comes a day from God that none can repel. You will have no

other or seeks retribution greater than the initial offense, as stated in a *ḥadīth*: "When two people insult one another, the one who began it is at fault, so long as the one who is wronged does not transgress" (IK). One is also prevented from seeking retribution after having already made amends; see 2:178c.

43 Whoever bears an injury or insult with patience and conceals the evil deeds of others (IK) has chosen *a course worthy of resolve* (cf. 3:186; 31:17), a course for which there is much reward and great praise (IK). Regarding the virtue of patience, see 11:11c.

44 For those whom *God leads astray* the Quran says, there is *no way* (4:88, 143; 42:46), *no guide* (7:186; 13:33; 39:23, 36; 40:33), and *no protector* (18:17). Hence on the Day of Judgment, their fate is sealed, and there is no one upon whom they can call in seeking to return to this world and make amends (Bg). They are denied such requests because *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden* (6:28); see 32:12c; 35:37c.

45 What the wrongdoers will be *exposed to* is the Fire; they will lower their eyes because of their *abasement* and steal glances at the Fire because of their fear of it (Bg, IK). *Looking furtively* could also be understood to mean "looking with veiled eyes," implying that they look with their hearts since they have been resurrected blind (Ṭ, Z), as in 17:72: *And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way.* Such people have *lost themselves* by virtue of coming to dwell in the Fire and lost *their families* because, if they themselves are in the Fire, they can be of no benefit to their family members; yet if their family members are in the Garden, they are given others in the place of those family members who are in the Fire (Q). That *the wrongdoers are in lasting punishment* is understood to mean that the punishment is perpetual and there is no possibility of escaping it (IK). But interpreting this verse in light of 2:254, *The disbelievers, they are the wrongdoers,* al-Rāzī argues that this reference applies only to those who are "absolute wrongdoers," that is, the disbelievers. This interpretation, he maintains, is supported by v. 46 when it is understood to mean that the idols they had worshipped will not be able to intercede for them.

46 Regarding *protectors . . . apart from God,* see 29:41c. That those who are led astray by God have *no way* means that they have no path to the truth or path toward God (Ṭ). It also indicates that God is the only guide (R) and that guiding and leading astray lie in His Hands alone (Ṭ). For those whom *God leads astray,* see 42:44c.

47 *Respond to your Lord* is understood to mean, "Respond to the one who calls you to your Lord, believe in him, and follow him" (Bg, Ṭ), that is, the Prophet Muhammad (Bg), or "Respond to that which calls you to Him, such as faith and obedience" (Q). Responding to God is also understood to mean maintaining the covenant with God (see 7:172c) and observing His due (Qu). The Day of Judgment is referred to as a day *that none can repel* (cf. 13:11; 30:43) or avert, because once

refuge that Day; nor shall you have any denial. (48) And if they turn away, We sent thee not as a keeper over them. Naught is incumbent upon thee, save the proclamation. Truly when We cause man to taste mercy from Us, he rejoices in it. Yet if an evil befalls them because of that which their hands have sent forth, truly man is ungrateful. (49) Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth; He creates whatsoever He will, bestowing females upon whomsoever He will, and bestowing males upon whomsoever He will, (50) or He couples males and females and causes whomsoever He will to be barren. Truly He is Knowing, Powerful. (51) It is not for any human being that God should speak unto him, save by revelation, or from behind a veil, or that He should send a

the Divine Command has been decreed, God will no longer grant reprieve (Q). Therefore, after the Decree has been made, there is no opportunity for repentance and atonement, as expressed in 75:10–12: *That Day man will say, "Where is the escape?" Nay! But there shall be no refuge. Unto your Lord that Day is the dwelling place.* Unable to deny the reality of their condition, those who had been profligate or who had disbelieved will no longer be able to deny their iniquity and will admit their sins, as in 67:10–11: *They say, "Had we listened or had we understood, we would not be among the inhabitants of the Blaze." Thus do they admit their sin; so away with the inhabitants of the Blaze!* (cf. 40:11; 41:47). *A day from God that none can repel* can also be understood as a reference to the moment of death, in which case this verse also implies that the door of response and thus repentance is open until that time.

48 The Prophet is not the *keeper over* those to whom he delivers the message (cf. 4:80; 11:86); nor is he their *guardian* (6:66, 107; 10:108; 17:54; 39:41; 42:6; also see 25:43), since prophets are only responsible for proclaiming the message with which they have been sent; see also 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 64:12. Regarding the last two sentences of this verse, see 30:36c. The judgment wrongdoers receive in the next life is the result of *that which their hands have sent forth* (2:95; 4:62; 28:47–48; 62:7; see also 5:80; 18:57; 36:12; 78:40), meaning the deeds they have committed. Likewise, much of the evil that befalls them in this life results from their own actions. In this context, *ungrateful* renders *kafūr,* which derives from the root *k-f-r,* indicating "covering over," a root from which the Quranic words for "disbelief" (*kufr*) and "disbeliever" (*kāfir*) also derive.

49–50 In the context of the various kinds of offspring mentioned here, that *unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (2:107; 3:189; 5:17, 18, 40, 120; 9:116; 24:42; 45:27; 48:14) and that *He creates whatsoever He will* (cf. 5:17; 24:45; 30:54) indicate that offspring come as a blessing willed by God and are not due to the particular merits of the parents to whom children are born (R). The mention of the different ways in which God grants offspring to people—only daughters, only sons, a mixture of the two, or no children at all—is in part a response to the pre-Islamic belief that daughters were a burden or trial, as expressed in 16:58–59: *And when one of them receives tidings of a female [child], his face darkens, and he is choked with anguish. He hides from the people on account of the evil of the tidings he has been given. Shall he keep it in humiliation, or bury it in the dust? Behold! Evil indeed is the judgment they make!*

51 This verse is understood to refer to the various modes in which God delivers revelation to prophets (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Z). *Save by revelation* is interpreted as a reference to a revelation that is cast into the breast or heart of a prophet, a means by which some say the Psalms were revealed to

messenger in order to reveal what He will by His Leave. Truly He is Exalted, Wise. (52) Thus have We revealed unto thee a Spirit from Our Command. Thou knewest not what scripture was, nor faith. But We made it a light whereby We guide whomsoever We will among Our servants. Truly thou dost guide unto a straight path, (53) the path of God, unto Whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Behold! All affairs are journeying unto God.

David (R, Z), or to revelation that comes in a dream, as when Abraham saw that he was to sacrifice his son (see 37:102c; Q, R, Z). *From behind a veil* is then interpreted as a reference to the moments when prophets hear the Speech of God directly with no intermediary, but do not see God, as when God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai but did not grant him the vision of Himself (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Z), and when God spoke to the Prophet Muhammad during the Night Journey, as in 53:10: *Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed* (see also 17:1c). That God *should send a messenger in order to reveal* then refers to the moments when prophets receive revelation through the intermediary of an angel (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Z), as when the Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation through the agency of the Archangel Gabriel; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 96. That God *should send a messenger* can also be understood as a general reference to God sending various prophets to human beings (Z).

Mullā Ṣadrā sees these three modes of Divine Speech as allusions to the manner in which God pours knowledge upon the human heart through revelation or inspiration or by means of messengers and teachers (*al-Mabdaʾ waʾl-maʿād,* 609). A message that comes by means of revelation and inspiration is whole, without fragmentation, whereas one that comes through other means can be disjointed. The only receptacle for sheer unfragmented knowledge is the pure human heart. In this vein, Mullā Ṣadrā writes, "When God becomes the master of the heart, Mercy pours forth and light shines upon it, the breast is expanded, the secrets of Divine Sovereignty (*malakūt*) are unveiled to it, and the greatest veil is removed from the face of the heart through the benevolence of Mercy, and the realities of Divine Affairs illumine it" (*al-Mabdaʾ waʾl-maʿād,* 609).

52–53 *Thus have We revealed unto thee* indicates that the Prophet Muhammad received revelation as did the prophets before him (Q, Ṭū) or that he received revelation in all three modes mentioned in the previous verse (Ṭb). In the context of the previous verse, *a Spirit from Our Command* can here be understood as a reference to the Quran (IK, Q, R, Ṭb, Ṭū), which is referred to as *a Spirit* because it brings life forth from the death of ignorance and disbelief (Q, R) and revives hearts with guidance (Ṭb). Others see *a Spirit* as a reference to prophethood (Q); the Archangel Gabriel (Q, Ṭb), who is also known as the Holy Spirit, by which revelation is said to have been brought down (see 16:102c); or the capacity for understanding that God grants to those to whom He grants knowledge (Ka). *Scripture* renders *kitāb,* which is usually translated "book," but is rendered here as *scripture,* since in this context it could refer to revelation in general or to the Quran in particular (R).

*A light* refers to the Quran (IK, Ṭb) or to the Quran and faith (R). *Light* is frequently associated with the guidance that comes through the prophets and revelation (see 6:91; 7:157; 21:48; 57:9, 28; 64:8), and in 9:32–33 and 61:8–9 the Quran mentions those who would try to *extinguish the Light of God,* which, in its context, could be read to mean those who attempt to conceal Divine Revelation. That God guides whomsoever He will with it is similar to 41:44, which enjoins the Prophet to say of the Quran, *It is a guidance and a healing for those who believe.* In the present verse, the antecedent of *it* in *We made it a light* is understood by some commentators to be *a Spirit*

*from Our Command* (Ṭb). From a Shiite perspective, it is seen as a reference to the Holy Spirit, which is said to have been with the Prophet and the Imams, supporting them and protecting them from sin and error (Qm). *A light* is then interpreted as a reference to the first Imam, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Ka, Qm). In this sense, some commentators connect this verse to 21:73: *And We made them leaders, guiding according to Our Command. And We revealed unto them the doing of good deeds, the performance of prayer, and the giving of alms. And they were worshippers of Us.*

Regarding *a straight path,* see 1:6c. Although God is said to be the only guide, the Prophet is a guide insofar as he is the messenger appointed to call a particular people to God and therefore to function as a means of Divine Guidance, as in 13:7: *For every people there is a guide* (Ṭ). In this sense, he guides people insofar as he assists them in following the message that God has revealed through him; see 28:56: *Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will. And He knows best those who are rightly guided.* According to some Shiite commentators, this phrase means that the Prophet guides people to believe in the *walāyah/wilāyah,* or sanctified authority, that God has bestowed upon the Prophet and upon ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the subsequent Imams (Ka, Qm).

That *all affairs are journeying unto God* (cf. 2:210; 3:109; 8:44; 22:76; 35:4; 57:5) alludes to the Resurrection, when all human affairs will be brought before God in the Hereafter and He will judge between the people with justice (Ṭ), and to the fact that there is no judge other than God (R).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 43

# Gold Ornaments

## *al-Zukhruf*

*Al-Zukhruf* is a Makkan *sūrah,* believed to have been revealed directly after *Sūrah* 42, *al-Shūrā,* although some maintain that v. 45 is from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ). It takes its name from the mention of *gold ornaments* in v. 35. Some propose that in discussing the nature of the Quran and the *Mother of the Book* in the first verses, this *sūrah* follows directly upon a statement from the end of the previous *sūrah: Thou knewest not what scripture was, nor faith. But We made it a light whereby We guide whomsoever We will among Our servants* (42:52; Aj).

After opening with a brief discussion of revelation (vv. 2–5), the *sūrah* cites the fate of previous communities who rejected the prophets sent to them (vv. 6–8) and challenges the worldview of the Makkan idolaters (vv. 9–35). The first half of the *sūrah* responds to different objections that the Makkan idolaters are reported to have posed to the message of the Quran and in doing so addresses several forms of disbelief, such as assigning partners to God (vv. 15), claiming that the angels are God's female offspring (v. 19), saying that God willed for them to worship the angels (v. 20), claiming that the Quran should have been revealed to someone who was already of high social standing (v. 31), and likening the place of deities in their religion to the place of Jesus in Christianity (vv. 57–58).

A major theme of *al-Zukhruf* is the incorrect ways in which human beings seek to measure truth, such as claiming to follow the tradition of one's forefathers (vv. 22–25) and seeing the wealth of this world as an indicator of one's true station (vv. 31–36). Regarding the former claim, Abraham is cited as an example of someone who opposed his people's attachment to their forefathers (vv. 26–28); for the latter claim, the opposition of the idolaters to the Prophet is likened to the opposition of Pharaoh and his "notables" toward Moses (vv. 46–56). The idolaters' attempt to liken their worship of idols to the Christian worship of Jesus is also firmly rebuked (vv. 57–65). After these examples are provided, there is an extended contrast of the fate of believers and disbelievers

in the Hereafter (vv. 66–78), followed by another challenge to the belief system of the idolaters (vv. 79–87). Having cited and rebuked many different modes of disbelief, the *sūrah* ends with an injunction to the Prophet to remain calm in the face of the disbelievers' opposition to his message (vv. 88–89).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ḥā. Mīm.* (2) By the clear Book, (3) truly We have made it an Arabic Quran, that haply you may understand, (4) and truly it is with Us in the Mother of the Book, sublime indeed, wise. (5) Shall We withdraw the reminder from you altogether for your having been a prodigal people? (6) How many a prophet did We send among those of old? (7) Yet never did a prophet come unto them, but

1 This *sūrah* is the fourth in a series of seven *sūrah*s that open with the Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm;* see 40:1c.

2 Cf. 44:2. The Quran is described as a *clear Book* (cf. 5:15; 12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 44:2), *clear* in both wording and meaning (IK). This appellation is understood to allude to its being sent down by God rather than composed by human beings (Ṭ). It is also said that all things in Heaven and on earth are recorded *in a clear Book* (10:61; 27:75; 34:3). *Clear* renders *mubīn,* which is in the form of an active participle and could thus be understood to mean that it makes clear or clarifies, implying that the Quran makes the path of guidance clear from the path of misguidance (R, Z) and truth from error and that it clarifies what is needed in order to follow religion properly (JJ, Z).

3 That God has revealed *an Arabic Quran* (cf. 12:2; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7) *in a clear, Arabic tongue* (26:195; cf. 16:103; 46:12) indicates that it should be clear to the Arabs (Ṭ), who then have no excuse for rejecting it; see 39:28c.

4 *Mother of the Book* (cf. 3:7; 13:39) is interpreted by most as a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; IK, JJ, R, Z), which is said to be the source of all revealed scripture, and interpreted by some as a reference to the Quran itself (see 3:7c). *Sublime indeed, wise* refers to the Quran or to *the Mother of the Book* (R). *Sublime* renders *ʿalī,* which indicates that it is transcendent and thus beyond the possibility of any corruption or falsification (R). Some say that when read as modifying *Quran, ʿalī* means that the Quran transcends all other revealed books, because it is a miracle that will remain for all time (R). Regarding the inviolability and permanence of the Quran, see commentary on 15:9; 56:77–80. The Quran is also described as *wise* in 10:1; 31:2; and 36:2. Wise (*ḥakīm*) can also be taken to mean "determined" or "made firm" (*muḥkam,* from the same root), as in 3:7, where the Quran is described as having *signs determined* (R; cf. 11:1). *Ḥakīm* could also mean something that makes firm (*muḥkim*), indicating that the Quran or *the Mother of the Book* teaches the truth.

5 The first part of this verse may mean, "Shall We withhold *the reminder* of the punishment from you?" (Ṭ), or, "Shall we withhold the Quran from you?" (JJ), as "the Reminder" is often used as a name for the Quran itself. According to the second interpretation, the verse refers to God's continuing to reveal the Quran out of His Mercy, even though it had initially been rejected by many (IK). For the meaning of *a prodigal people,* see 10:12c; 25:67c.

6–7 These verses are understood as consolation for the Prophet (IK, JJ), informing him

that they mocked him. (8) So We destroyed those of greater prowess than they, and the example of those of old has passed. (9) Wert thou to ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they would surely say, "The Mighty, the Knowing created them." (10) He it is Who made the earth a cradle for you and made paths for you therein, that haply you may be guided; (11) Who sent down water from the sky in due measure, whereby We revived a dead land—thus shall you be brought forth; (12) and Who created the pairs, all of them, and appointed for you ships and cattle that you ride, (13) that you may mount their backs and

that the derision he faces is no greater than that confronted by previous prophets (Ṭ). For v. 7, cf. 15:11; 36:30.

8 The disbelievers whom God destroyed before this generation of disbelievers *were more numerous than they, greater than they in strength, and left firmer traces upon the earth* (40:82; cf. 50:36). Nonetheless, their achievements could not avail them against God. This implies that the opponents of the Prophet, who are weaker than previous generations, are misguided in thinking that they can successfully oppose the message he brings; see 40:82c. *The example of those of old* refers to their way of life (IK) or to the fact that the punishment they received serves as an example for future disbelievers, as in v. 56: *And We made them a bygone people and an example for those of later times* (IK); see also 14:45; 40:84–85c.

9 When questioned about the source of creation, *they*—that is, the idolaters among the Quraysh—*would surely say, "The Mighty, the Knowing created them"* (cf. 10:31; 23:84–85; 29:61, 63; 31:25; 39:38; 43:87), because they acknowledged that one God was responsible for creation, but they nonetheless worshipped other deities alongside Him (IK) and denied His ability to resurrect (R). Alternately, *them* and *they* can be understood as references to the prophets (R), meaning that all prophets affirm this statement. With this latter reading, vv. 10–13 could be read as a continuation of the quotation with which this verse ends.

10 Cf. 20:53. That God *made the earth a cradle* means He made the earth smooth, easy to travel upon (IK), tractable for agriculture (R), and a home for human life. *Paths* (cf. 21:31; 67:15; 71:19–20) refers to navigable routes He has made upon it (IK, JJ). In the context of this passage (vv. 10–14), *that haply you may be guided* (cf. 2:53, 150; 7:158; 16:15; 21:31; 23:49; 32:3) is thought to refer to the manner in which God both facilitates travel upon the earth in this life and provides signs and revelation to guide human beings to truth and to Paradise in the Hereafter.

11 That water is sent *in due measure* (cf. 23:18) indicates that God sends water sufficient to sustain people, livestock, and crops (IK) and does not usually send down a deluge (JJ) as He did in the case of Noah (R). Elsewhere it is said that God *created everything, then measured it out with due measure* (25:2). Regarding the theological significance of "measure," see 54:49c. The last line of the present verse is one of several places where the Quran employs the revivification of dead land as a metaphor for the resurrection of human beings (R); see 7:57; 16:65; 29:63; 30:19, 24, 50; 35:9; 36:33; 41:39; 45:5; 50:9–11; 57:17. Such imagery is also understood as a spiritual allegory and symbol for the death and life of the soul, as discussed in 7:58c; 22:63c; 30:50c.

12–13 *The pairs, all of them* (cf. 36:36) refers to all species of animals (IK, Q), to all opposites (R), or to the fact that all animals have both males and females (Q). According to al-Rāzī, that they are *pairs* indicates that they are all relative and multiple, whereas their Creator is an Absolute Being Who transcends all duality.

This is one of several passages that mention seafaring as a blessing bestowed by God (cf. 14:32; 17:66; 22:65; 30:46) and invoke the benefits of cattle—their usefulness for riding and transporting goods, for providing warmth and clothing, for providing food and drink, and even their

then remember the blessing of your Lord when you are mounted thereon and say, "Glory be to God, Who made this subservient unto us, though we were not equal to it. (14) Truly unto our Lord do we turn." (15) Yet they assign to Him a portion from some of His servants. Truly man is a manifest ingrate. (16) Or has He taken daughters from that which He creates and favored you with sons? (17) And when one of them receives glad tidings of that which he has set forth as a description of the Compassionate, his face blackens and he chokes with anguish. (18) "What! One who is reared amid ornaments and is incoherent in

beauty—as signs of God's Beneficence toward human beings; see also 6:142c; 16:5, 66, 79; 23:21–22; 36:72; 40:79. The supplication given at the end of this verse is often employed by Muslims when traveling by land; see also 28:85c. When traveling by sea, one is advised to use the supplication in 11:41: *In the Name of God be its coursing and its mooring. Truly my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful* (Q, R). Recognizing that God has made certain aspects of creation *subservient unto* human beings, *though* they are *not equal to it,* is to acknowledge that human beings do not have the capacity to make use of these resources without Divine Aid (IK, Q, R, Z); see also 31:20c.

14 *Unto our Lord do we turn* (cf. 7:125), that is, in prayer. Alternately, the phrase could be rendered, "Unto our Lord do we return" in the Hereafter (Aj, IK, R, Ṭ). In the latter interpretation, mention of earthly journeys in the previous verse draws one's attention to the journey toward the Hereafter, just as elsewhere mention of preparing provisions for an earthly journey is employed to remind human beings to prepare provisions for the Hereafter: *And make provision, for indeed the best provision is reverence* (2:197; IK). The mention of the return to God after the mention of the means by which human beings journey is understood as a recognition of the dangers inherent in setting out upon a journey, especially without the necessary preparation, and that the successful return from a journey lies entirely in God's Hands (R). That the Arabic is phrased as an active participle (*munqalibūn,* lit. "are we returners") speaks to the definitive nature of this verse, since from a Quranic perspective human beings cannot but turn to God and all are traveling toward Him at every moment whether they want to or not.

15 The idolaters maintain that some of God's servants are His offspring (JJ, Q, R), who share in His Divinity and in His creative power. Some see this verse as a reference to the practice among the Makkan idolaters of devoting *a portion* of their cattle to their idols, as in 6:136: *And they dedicate to God a share of the crops and cattle He created, saying, "This belongs to God"—or so they claim—"And this belongs to our partners"* (IK). The present verse could also be understood to mean that the idolaters maintain that God has partners and that they only assign "a portion" of His servants to Him and then assign another portion of His servants to the partners they attribute to Him (R).

16–17 Cf. 16:57–58. These verses are similar to 37:149–53; 52:39; and 53:21–22. The Quran criticizes frequently the idea that God has offspring (2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 39:4; 43:81–82; 52:39; 72:3). In this instance, the Quranic argument is not meant to suggest that males are better than females. Rather, it shows that the idolaters' attributing female offspring to God, which they themselves despise (see commentary on 16:57–59), while favoring male offspring for themselves, is illogical and demonstrates the utter inconsistency and vacuity of their position as well as the degree to which they belittle God's rights and dues.

18 The idolaters regard women as lacking something for which they must compensate with jewelry and ornaments and do not allow women to be heard in a dispute; so how could they attribute being female to those beings they call divine?

dispute?" (19) And they have made the angels, who are servants of the Compassionate, females. Did they witness their creation? Their witnessing shall be recorded, and they will be questioned. (20) They say, "Had the Compassionate willed, we would not have worshipped them." They have no knowledge thereof. They do naught but guess. (21) Or did We give them a book beforehand to which they hold fast? (22) Nay! They say, "We found our fathers upon a creed, and surely we are rightly guided in their footsteps." (23) Likewise, We sent no warner unto a town before thee, but that those living in luxury therein said, "We found

(IK). Alternately, this verse could be read as a description of the idols that they decorate with gold and silver and then worship, though the idols cannot speak (Ṭ).

19 Cf. 37:150. The disbelievers make claims regarding aspects of the Unseen of which they have no knowledge. On the one hand, they could not have witnessed the creation of the angels; nor do they have intellectual proofs for their position. On the other hand, they deny revelation, by means of which one could receive such information. Thus they have no means by which to substantiate what they claim (R); see 17:40c; 37:150c. *Servants* renders *ʿibād,* a reading supported by 21:26. According to another canonical reading *ʿibād* would be read *ʿinda,* meaning "with," in which case *who are servants of the Compassionate* would be read "who are with the Compassionate" (Q, R). This reading is supported by 7:206, which speaks of the angels as *those who are with thy Lord,* and by 21:19: *Those who are with Him are not too arrogant to worship Him; nor do they weary* (Q, R). This alternate reading would mean that, as the angels are with God and not with the disbelievers, the disbelievers have no basis for their assertion that the angels are female (R).

20 This verse describes the idolaters' response to the question posed in v. 19. They maintain that since their worshipping of idols happens only by God's Will, He must approve of it (IK, JJ); see 6:148c; 16:35c. In other words, they consider the absence of Divine Punishment to indicate tacit approval. Just as the idolaters are here accused of conjecture when maintaining that God will be pleased with their worship, so too are they accused of conjecture when giving names to their idols (*Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter name the angels with female names. Yet they have no knowledge thereof. They follow naught but conjecture; and surely conjecture avails naught against the Truth;* 53:27–28) and when maintaining that God has a child (see 18:4–5).

21 In context this question asks, "Did God give them a revealed scripture that they are able to study and use as a source for their claims to knowledge of the angels?" This challenge is similar to that posed in 37:156–57, where the disbelievers are challenged regarding their belief in deities as the offspring of God: *Or have you a manifest authority? Bring your Book, then, if you are truthful* (see also 34:44; 35:40c; 46:4; 68:37–38).

22 This verse begins one of several passages in which disbelievers state their unwillingness to abandon the false gods and deities worshipped by their fathers (cf. 2:170; 5:104; 7:28, 70; 10:78; 11:62, 87; 14:10; 31:21; 34:43). In the context of the previous verses, this verse argues for the vacuity of following the beliefs of one's forefathers in the absence of intellectual or revealed truths to support one's position (R). *Creed* renders *ummah,* a word employed in many different ways in the Quran, but usually meaning "community," as in 23:52: *And truly this community of yours is one community.* In the present context, the term indicates both a set of beliefs and a corresponding way of life, thus a religion (Q).

23 Cf. 34:34; 51:52–53. This is one of several verses indicating that it is the leaders or notables of a community who are usually most adamant in opposing God's messengers, implying that they benefit from a corrupt social order and therefore stand the most to lose from the advent of a just

our fathers upon a creed, and we are surely following in their footsteps." (24) He replied, "What! Though I bring you better guidance than that which you found your fathers following?" They said, "Truly we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent." (25) So We took vengeance upon them. And behold how the deniers fared in the end. (26) And [remember] when Abraham said to his father and his people, "Truly I am quit of that which you worship, (27) save Him who originated me, for surely He will guide me." (28) And He made it a word endur-

social order. In other verses, they are thus referred to as *the guilty* (6:123). It is the leaders and notables who are said to have opposed Moses (see 7:103–27; 10:75–88; 11:97–98; 23:46–47; 28:20; 43:46–47), Noah (see 7:60; 11:27, 38; 23:24–25) and other prophets (see 7:66, 75, 88–90; 23:33–36), among them Muhammad (see 38:6). The disbelievers' statement *we are surely following in their footsteps* implies that they see following the ways of their forefathers as sufficient justification for their beliefs and actions.

24–25 *He replied* renders *qāl,* but several canonical readings allow this to be read *qul,* or "say," in which case it is an injunction to the Prophet. This reading is preferred by several commentators (IK, Q, Ṭs). The depth of the idolaters' devotion to their "forefathers' creed" is such that they will not listen to arguments from reason or revelation. Al-Rāzī observes that the root of their devotion to this ancestral creed is love of the world and its delights, since the creed functions to secure their wealth and position. As they were presented with both rational arguments and revelation, they no longer had any excuse for rejecting the truth; yet they continued to do so; thus God *took vengeance upon them* (R). This is in keeping with the Quranic principle that God will not punish or destroy any people until they have been sent a warner (see 15:4; 26:208–9).

26–27 In contrast to the notables, whose love of the world and its accoutrements led them to adhere to the creed of their forefathers and reject both rational arguments and revelation, Abraham's love for God led him to risk his own life in rejecting the creed of his father and his people. Citing Abraham in this context provides a poignant argument for the Arabs, as their claims to honor and nobility were closely connected to their claim of descent from Abraham. On the one hand, these verses cite his example as one to be followed. But on the other hand, they present an argument against the claim made by the Makkans that they are following the creed of their forefathers (v. 22–23). Since Abraham was regarded as their greatest forefather, following his example would in fact be nobler than following the example of the generations immediately preceding them (R). These verses thus seek to undermine the argument of the Makkan idolaters by claiming that, even if they are following their forefathers, they are not doing so as perfectly as Muhammad and his followers, who are following the noblest of their forefathers.

Abraham makes a declaration similar to the one stated in v. 26 in 6:78, saying: *O my people! Truly I am quit of the partners you ascribe.* Likewise, the Arabian prophet Hūd says to his people, *I call God as witness—and you be witness—that I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners apart from Him* (11:54–55), and the Prophet Muhammad is instructed to say to his detractors, *Truly I am quit of that which you ascribe as partners unto Him* (6:19; cf. 10:41; 26:216).

28 *It* refers to the statement of the affirmation of God's Oneness (JJ, R), which is understood to be what Abraham stated in vv. 26–27 (R, Ṭ), or to the Islamic testimony of faith, "There is no god but God" (IK, Ṭ). Others say that *it* refers to Abraham's statement in 37:99, *Truly, I am going unto my Lord. He will guide me* (JJ), or to 2:131, *And when his Lord said unto him, "Submit!" he said, "I submit to the Lord of the worlds."* In this context, *that haply they may return* is understood to mean that later generations might return to this "word" or declaration (IK), return to obedience to God (Ṭ), repent or remember (Ṭ), or re-

ing among his posterity, that haply they may return. (29) Nay, I provided for these and their fathers until the Truth came unto them and a clear messenger. (30) And when the Truth came unto them, they said, "This is sorcery, and we do not believe in it." (31) And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a great man from one of the two towns?" (32) Is it they who apportion the Mercy of thy Lord? We have apportioned for them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take others into service. And the Mercy of thy Lord is better than that

cant what they follow and return to the religion of Abraham (JJ).

29 *Nay* renders the particle *bal,* which when employed in this manner indicates a stark contrast. Here it can be understood to mean that, although God *made it a word enduring among his posterity,* they nonetheless became deluded and were distracted from the message by their preoccupation with their passions and enjoyments (R). Nonetheless, God provided for the people of Makkah and their ancestors and did not destroy them or punish them (JJ, Ṭ). But now that *the Truth,* meaning the Quran (JJ, R, Ṭ) has come to them, they will be held accountable for not adhering to the teachings found in it and in the *word enduring* that Abraham had bequeathed to them. As in v. 2, *clear* renders *mubīn,* which is in the form of an active participle and could thus be understood to mean that the Prophet clarifies by bringing clear proofs (Ṭ) or that he brings with clarity the stipulations of the revealed Law (JJ); see 43:2c.

30 As in v. 20, the idolaters are said to have no argument against what the Prophet brings. In v. 22 they cite the beliefs of their forefathers to justify their position, while here they reject the Prophet and the Quran out of hand by deriding them as connected to sorcery. This is one of many verses in which the Prophet is accused of being a sorcerer (cf. 10:2; 11:7; 34:43; 37:15; 38:4; 46:7; 51:52; 54:2; 74:24), as were Moses (7:109; 10:76; 20:57, 63; 26:34; 27:13; 28:36; 40:24; 51:39) and Jesus (5:110; 61:6).

31 *The two towns* are Makkah and Ṭā'if. Most maintain that the *great man* of Makkah is thought to be al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah and the *great man* of Ṭā'if, ʿUrwah ibn Masʿūd al-Thaqafī (IK, JJ, Ṭ). Others say ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah of Makkah and Ibn ʿAbd Yālīl al-Thaqafī of Ṭā'if (Ṭ). The idolaters were incredulous that God would choose as a prophet one who did not possess high social standing among them and used this fact as another excuse for not following the Prophet, as in 38:7–8, where the *notables among them* say, *We did not hear of this in the creed of latter days. This is naught but an invention. Has the Reminder been sent down upon him among all of us?* In general, the leaders of the Quraysh could not bear the thought that the new revelation would alter their position in society, as in 46:11: *And those who disbelieve say of those who believe, "Had it been good, they would not have outstripped us in [attaining] it."* In response to this attitude, 6:124 states, *God knows best where to place His message.* In other passages, they express amazement at God's choice of a human being as His Messenger, as in 25:7: *What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?* (see also 6:8–9; 11:12; 14:10; 17:94; 23:33; 36:15; 41:14; 54:24; 64:6c). For other verses that speak of their marveling at this phenomenon, see 7:69; 10:2; 38:4; 50:2.

32 *Is it they who apportion the Mercy of thy Lord?* That is, "Do they apportion prophethood?" (JJ), or "Do they apportion the sustenance that God provides such that they can give it to those they love and withhold it from others?" (Ṭ), or "Should God's choice of a prophet be in accord with their caprice?" (Qu). For similar rhetorical questions, see 35:40; 46:4; 52:36–37, 41; 68:37–39, 47; see also 35:40c; 46:4c. When the question is seen as a reference to prophethood, the

which they amass. (33) And were it not that mankind would be one community, We would have made for those who disbelieve in the Compassionate silver roofs for their houses, stairways whereon to ascend, (34) doors to their houses, couches whereon to recline, (35) and gold ornaments. Yet all of that would be but enjoyment of the life of this world. And the Hereafter, in the presence of thy Lord, is for the reverent. (36) Whosoever turns blindly away from the remembrance of the Compassionate, We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him. (37) And they turn them from the way; yet they suppose that they

implication is that God knows best who is fit for this station (IK). That God apportions *livelihood* can then be understood as an allusion to God's choice of whomever He wills as a messenger (Ṭ). Wealth and social station are incorrectly interconnected with prophethood in the minds of the "leaders," so here it is as if God is asking how being favored with wealth could be connected to being favored with prophethood (R). Regarding the manner in which God raises some above others *in rank*, see 6:165c; 17:21. The last sentence is understood to mean that Paradise is better than all the material goods and pleasures the disbelievers may amass and experience in this world (JJ, Ṭ). More generally, it can be understood to mean that the Mercy granted by God in religion is greater than any wealth that could be amassed, because God's Mercy lasts forever, while the things of this world fade away (R).

33–34 These verses are understood to mean that, were it not for the fact that people would have all disbelieved due to their inclination toward the world and neglect of the Hereafter, God would have provided great wealth for them (Q), or that ignorant people would think that God's giving wealth was a sign of His Love and would thus be joined together in disbelief for the sake of wealth (IK). For other verses that allude to God's not wanting to make human beings a single community in disbelief, see 16:93c; 42:8c.

35 *Enjoyment of the life of this world* indicates the ephemeral delights of this world, which are *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20) and stand in stark contrast to the rewards of the next life; see 3:14; 4:77; 9:38; 13:26; 20:131; 28:60; 29:64c; 40:39; 42:36.

36–37 *Remembrance of the Compassionate* refers to either remembering and following God (IK) or the Quran (JJ); in the latter case it could be translated "the Reminder of the Compassionate." In either interpretation, this verse can be understood as a response to all of the excuses for not following the Prophet posed by the disbelievers in the preceding verses. When the disbelievers choose to ignore the proofs of God, both rational and revealed, by turning away from them, save with a weak glance, their glance is like that of one whose vision has dimmed (Ṭ). Yet they have willed this for themselves. Therefore, God punishes them by "assigning satans" to them who will lead them further into the blindness they have chosen. Ibn Kathīr likens this verse to 61:5, which says of those among the Israelites who mistreated Moses, *When they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve; and God guides not iniquitous people;* and 4:115: *But whosoever opposes the Messenger, after guidance has been made clear to him, and follows a way other than that of the believers, We shall leave him on [the path] he has taken, and We shall cause him to burn in Hell—what an evil journey's end!*

That those who turn away from God and His Messenger fall victim to Satan and his minions is asserted in several verses of the Quran, such as 4:38: *Whosoever has Satan for a companion has an evil companion indeed!* And 4:119: *Whosoever takes Satan as a protector apart from God has surely suffered a manifest loss.* For such people *Satan has overwhelmed them, and thus made them forget the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. Lo! The party of Satan are losers* (58:19). Their companion satans keep them from the things that are

are rightly guided, (38) till, when he comes unto Us, he will say, "Would that there were between me and thee the distance of the two easts! What an evil companion!" (39) Yet on that Day it will not benefit you, since you did wrong, to share in the punishment. (40) Dost thou, then, make the deaf to hear or guide the blind and those in manifest error? (41) Either We shall take thee away, and then take vengeance upon them, (42) or We shall show thee that which We have

permissible and make them incline toward what is forbidden, prevent them from being obedient, and encourage them to disobey (Q). They thus make going astray seem like going aright, as in 41:25: *We assigned to them companions, and they made that which is before them and that which is behind them seem fair to them.* Regarding the influence that satans have upon human beings, the Prophet said, "There is none among you but that he has been assigned a jinn as his companion." The Prophet was then asked, "And you, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "And I, except that God helped me against him and he submitted; so he only commands me to good."

38 *He comes unto Us* renders *jāʾanā,* which in other canonical readings is considered to be in the dual form *jāʾānā,* meaning "when the two of them come," that is, the one who turned away and his companion satan (IK, Q). On the Day of Judgment, those who had turned away blindly from the remembrance of God will seek to distance themselves from the satan they had taken as a companion in this world. Some understand *the distance of the two easts* to mean the distance between the east and the west (JJ, Q). *The two easts,* translating *mashriqayn,* could also be rendered "the two places from which the sun rises," as the rising of the sun, *shurūq,* derives from the same root, *sh-r-q,* as the word for "east," *mashriq. The distance between the two easts* could thus be understood as a reference to the distance between the point from which the sun rises at the winter solstice and the point from which it rises at the summer solstice (Q).

39 This verse can be read as an address to one who has turned away blindly and to his companion satan; it means that their being together in the Fire will not be of any help to them and that they will both partake of the punishment (IK). It can also be read as an address to human beings who were spiritually blind, meaning that their expression of remorse in disowning their companion satans will be of no benefit (JJ, Q). That they express regrets and *admit their sin* (67:11; cf. 40:11) is of no avail to them, since they had been offered ample opportunity to repent and make amends during the life of this world; see 6:25c; 32:12c; 35:37c. *It* could also be understood as a reference to the *remembrance of the Compassionate* (v. 36), meaning that because they choose to turn away from it in this world, they will not have the opportunity to turn toward it in the Hereafter.

40 This verse is an address to the Prophet. From a Quranic perspective, the Prophet cannot cause those who are spiritually deaf and blind to hear or be guided by the revelation, because his only duty is to convey the revelation (see 3:20; 13:40), and *whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he* (7:186; 13:33; 39:23, 36; 40:33); see 10:42–44; 27:80–81; 30:52–53c.

41–42 The second part of v. 41 is understood by some to mean, "for We were vengeful with them," meaning that God took vengeance upon past communities who rejected the prophets sent to them (Ṭ). In either rendering, these verses indicate that God will either take vengeance upon the disbelievers after the Prophet has passed away or bring the promised punishment upon them while the Prophet is still among them. These verses can also be read to mean that God will punish those who oppose the Prophet in the Hereafter or that He will punish them in this life by bringing the promised punishment upon them (JJ) and making the Prophet victorious over them (Ṭ). The two possibilities express the inevitability of Divine Punishment for rejecting the Prophet and the Quran. God spared them before (see 43:29c), but now that a messenger has come to them, they will have no reprieve.

promised them. For surely We have power over them. (43) So hold fast to that which We have revealed unto thee. Truly thou art upon a straight path. (44) Truly it is a reminder unto thee and thy people, and you will be questioned. (45) Ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before thee, "Have We appointed gods to be worshipped apart from the Compassionate?" (46) We did indeed send Moses with Our signs unto Pharaoh and his notables. And he said, "I am a messenger of the Lord of the worlds." (47) But when he brought them Our signs, behold, they laughed at them. (48) Not a sign did We show them, but that it was greater than its sister. And We seized them with the punishment, that haply they may return. (49) They said, "O sorcerer, call upon your Lord for us in accord

43 The injunction is to *hold fast* to the Quran (IK, JJ, Ṭ), which ensures that one remains *upon a straight path* (see 1:6c), in contrast to the idolaters, who were not given *a book beforehand to which they hold fast* (v. 21).

44 The Reminder (*al-dhikr*) is one of the names of the Quran (see 15:9c; 36:10–11c) and is also employed as a reference to scripture in general or to the Torah, as when the People of the Book are referred to as the *people of the Reminder* (16:43; 21:8); also see 41:41–42c. That it is *a reminder unto thee and thy people* is understood to mean that the Quran is an honor bestowed upon the Prophet and his people (IK, JJ, Ṭ), especially since it was a revelation sent down in their own language (IK, JJ). It also implies that since they are foremost in their ability to understand its language, they should be the most steadfast in adhering to it (IK), and that they will be questioned in the Hereafter regarding the degree to which they have fulfilled their duty toward it (JJ). The Quran mentions that people will be questioned at the Final Judgment in several verses (see, e.g., 7:6; 16:56, 93; 17:36; 29:13).

45 This verse is understood to mean that when the Prophet met all of the other prophets on the Night Journey (see 17:1c; introduction to *Sūrah* 53), he was to ask them this question (JJ), or that he was to ask it of the People of the Book (JJ, Ṭ), in which case some say there is an implied "unto whom" (*ilayhim*) in the verse so that it could be rendered, "Ask those before you [unto whom] We sent from among Our messengers" (Ṭ). The verse can also be understood as a purely rhetorical question, reaffirming that all of the messengers called their people to the same truths to which the Prophet Muhammad calls his people, as in 16:36: *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community, "Worship God, and shun false deities!"* (IK).

46–56 Here the account of Moses provides a spiritual example, reflecting aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's own challenges. For more detailed accounts of Moses' mission, see 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 28:3–46. Shorter accounts pertaining to particular aspects of Moses' mission can be found in 2:49–61; 5:20–26; 17:101–4; 27:7–14; 40:23–30; 44:17–31; 51:38–40; 79:15–25.

46–47 When Moses brought God's *signs* to Pharaoh and his notables, they *laughed* at them in the same way that the Makkan idolaters mocked the signs with which the Prophet was sent (Ṭ), as when Pharaoh, Hāmān, and Korah said that Moses was *a lying sorcerer* (40:24; cf. 51:39).

48 Each of the signs that Moses brought was *greater* than the sign immediately before it (JJ, Ṭ); see 7:133–35, where these signs are mentioned. For their rejection of the signs, God punished them in the hope that they would repent (Ṭ) and recant their disbelief (JJ).

49 A similar verse is 7:134, in which Pharaoh and the notables continue the address to Moses, saying, *If you lift this torment from us, we shall surely believe in you, and we shall surely send forth the Children of Israel with you;* see 7:134–35c. Their addressing Moses as *sorcerer* is not a slight, since they did not regard sorcery as

with that which He has covenanted with you; surely we shall then be guided." (50) Yet when We removed the punishment from them, behold, they reneged. (51) And Pharaoh called out among his people, saying, "O my people! Is not the sovereignty of Egypt mine, and do these streams not flow beneath me? Do you not, then, see? (52) Am I not better than this one who is vile and can scarcely speak plain? (53) Why, then, have armlets of gold not been cast upon him, and

reprehensible (cf. 7:109; 26:34–35). According to their worldview, this might in fact have been a way of honoring him (IK). In this way they recognized the "evidentiary miracles" with which Moses was sent, but the miracles themselves had no ultimate effect on them, because they were hardened disbelievers (see 7:132c; 27:13–14c). The primary function of prophetic miracles seems to be to elicit and encourage belief among those who are already somehow disposed to it, like the sorcerers who professed belief in the religion of Moses once they witnessed the power of his miracles (see 7:119–20c; 20:70; 26:47–48). In this way, evidentiary miracles, like the prophetic messages themselves, serve to distinguish the inherently good, but merely misguided, members of a disbelieving community from those, like Pharaoh, whose hearts were so thoroughly hardened that they rejected every sign or message the prophet brought. Regarding the inability of signs to convince those unwilling to believe in a prophet's message, see 2:145; 6:25c; 7:146; 10:96–97. See also 10:81–82, where Moses responds to the sorcerers' feats by indicating that it is God's Words (rather than apparent supernatural feats) that ultimately separate truth from falsehood and illusion.

50 Cf. 7:135. Despite the miracles and God's suspension of the punishment in response to Moses' supplications, Pharaoh and his notables return to their inveterate disbelief as soon as they feel safe. Their doing so reflects the Quranic theme that human beings will often invoke God when they are in need and then neglect God when they are safe or at ease, as in 39:8: *And when harm befalls man, he calls upon his Lord, turning unto Him. Then when He bestows a blessing from Himself upon him, he forgets the One upon whom he called before and sets up equals unto God to lead astray from His path* (see, e.g., 6:40–41c; 10:12; 17:67; 30:33).

51 Pharaoh's invocation of the streams running beneath his feet as a sign of his sovereignty demonstrates both his haughtiness, since from a Quranic perspective God alone makes water flow, and his ignorance, since the Quran warns that God grants respite for a while, but can remove such blessings at any moment, as in 6:6: *We sent the sky upon them with abundant rains, and made streams flow beneath them. Then We destroyed them for their sins, and brought into being after them another generation* (see also 2:266; 15:3–4; 16:54–55; 22:48; 23:54–56; 44:25–28; 68:17–20).

52 The charge that Moses can *scarcely speak plain* refers, according to some commentators, to a lisp said to have resulted from a hot coal that was accidentally placed in his mouth when he was a child (IK, JJ); see 20:25–28c; 26:12–13c. According to some accounts, Pharaoh is lying, since this impediment had been removed when Moses asked of God, *And untie a knot from my tongue, that they may understand my speech* (20:27–28). To which God responded, *Thou hast been granted thy request, O Moses!* (20:36; IK). Alternately, it could be understood as Pharaoh's assessment of the message that Moses brought.

53 Here Pharaoh exhibits the same misunderstandings expressed by the Makkan idolaters in the first half of the *sūrah*. Just as the Makkan idolaters asked why God did not send the Quran *down to a great man from one of the two towns* (v. 31) rather than Muhammad, Pharaoh asks why Moses is not endowed with wealth similar to his own. And just as the idolaters asked of Muhammad, *What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?* (25:7), so too

why do angels not accompany him?" (54) Then he incited his people to make light, and they obeyed him. Truly they were an iniquitous people. (55) So when they roused Our Anger, We took vengeance upon them and drowned them all together. (56) We made them a bygone people and an example for those of later times. (57) And when the son of Mary is set forth as an example, behold, thy people turn away from it. (58) They say, "Are our gods better, or is he?" They do not cite him to thee, save to dispute. Nay, they are a contentious people. (59) He was naught but a servant whom We blessed and whom We

Pharaoh wonders why *do angels not accompany* Moses. The answer to these queries is given in 6:8: *Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite;* and 17:95: *Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, then We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.* For the disbelievers' various expressions of this objection to the prophets, see 6:8–9, 50; 11:12; 14:10–11; 17:94–95; 23:24, 33–34, 38, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 41:14; 54:24; 64:6c; 74:25.

54 *Then he incited his people to make light* could also mean that he moved them to submit or to be foolish.

55 This is one of several references in the Quran to the drowning of Pharaoh and his army; see also 2:50; 7:136c; 8:54; 10:90; 17:102–3; 28:40; 44:23–24; 51:40. The Prophet is reported to have recited this verse after saying, "When you see that God gives a person what he wants even though he persists in sin, that means that God is enticing him into destruction" (IK).

56 *A bygone people* renders *salaf,* which in this context could also be understood as "a precedent," meaning that the manner in which God dealt with them served as a precedent and an example for other people who chose to follow their corrupt leaders rather than messengers from God (IK, Q), as did the Makkan leaders in rejecting the prophethood of Muhammad.

57–58 *Turn away from it* renders *minhu yaṣiddūn,* which can also be understood to mean, "cry aloud at it." *Are our gods better, or is he?* expresses the idolaters' objection that the Christian worship of Jesus is no different from their own worship of idols (Ṭ) or even their claim that their deities are better than Jesus (R). These verses are understood as a response to the objection posed by the idolaters when the Prophet recited 21:98: *Surely you and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell. Unto it you shall come.* The idolaters sought to liken the Christian worship of Jesus to their worship of their own idols and then conclude from 21:98 that Jesus would suffer the same fate as their idols (IK, R). But since they know that 21:98 is addressed to them specifically, they should know that Jesus would not be included among the objects of worship referred to in this verse; thus *they do not cite him . . . save to dispute* (IK). Rather, they only bring up Christian worship for the sake of argument; not because it pertains to their beliefs (IK) or because they are concerned that the Prophet would say that Jesus was destined for Hell. In this sense, they are like the people of Noah, who *disputed by means of falsehood in order to refute the truth* (40:5).

59 That Jesus is *naught but a servant* (cf. 19:30; 61:6) is understood as a response to the Christian view of Jesus as fully Divine and fully human, but may also be understood as a response to Christian sects that understood Jesus to be entirely Divine. Regarding the question of the divinization of Jesus, see commentary on 4:171–73. The Quran speaks of Jesus as *a servant* of God who was blessed with prophethood (IK, JJ) and was *an example for the Children of Israel* in being born miraculously of a virgin (see 3:42–47; also see commentary on 19:16–17), speaking as a baby in the cradle (see 3:46; 19:29–33), and performing evidentiary miracles (see commentary on 5:110–15). Alternately, this verse could be rendered, "He was naught but a servant. We

made an example for the Children of Israel. (60) Had We willed, We would have appointed angels among you, succeeding one another upon the earth. (61) And he is indeed a portent of the Hour; so doubt not concerning it and follow Me. This is a straight path. (62) And let not Satan turn you away; truly he is a manifest enemy unto you. (63) When Jesus brought clear proofs, he said, "I have come unto you with wisdom and to make clear to you some of that wherein you differ. So reverence God and obey me. (64) Truly God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path." (65) But, then, the parties differed among themselves. Woe unto those who do wrong for the punishment of a painful day. (66) Do they await aught but that the Hour should come upon them suddenly,

blessed him and made him an example for the Children of Israel."

60 God could destroy human beings and cause there to be generations of *angels* succeeding one another on earth instead of human beings (IK, JJ, Ṭ). This verse serves as a response to the idolaters' understanding that the angels share in God's Power by asserting that they are completely subject to God's Will (R).

61 According to traditional Islamic belief, Jesus did not die a natural death; rather, *God raised him up unto Himself* (4:158; cf. 3:55). In traditional Islamic eschatology, Jesus' return to earth is among the signs of the end of time. The Prophet is reported to have said, "One of the signs of the Hour will be the appearance of Jesus the son of Mary before the Day of Resurrection" (IK, Q, Ṭ), at which point it is said that he will fight the Antichrist (al-Dajjāl), eventually die, and be resurrected like other mortals.

62 This verse cautions believers not to let Satan *turn* them *away* or block them from following the way of God's religion (JJ) or the truth (IK). For references to Satan as a *manifest enemy*, see also 2:168, 208; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 28:15; 36:60.

63 For the story of Jesus and the message he brings, see 3:45–59; 4:153–72; 5:110–18; 19:16–40. All messengers are said to bring *clear proofs*, which are understood by some to be evidentiary miracles and the prescriptions of the Divine Law (JJ, R). In the case of Jesus, some also understand *clear proofs* to mean the Gospel (Ṭ) and its injunctions (Z). For the evidentiary miracles with which Jesus came, such as speaking in the cradle, healing lepers, raising the dead, and breathing life into a bird, see commentary on 3:49; 5:110; 19:29–34; also see 2:87c; 2:253. *Wisdom* is understood as a reference to prophethood (IK, JJ, Ṭ) or to the Gospel and its revealed laws (Z). It can also be understood to mean the knowledge of God's Essence, Attributes, and actions (R). *To make clear to you some of that wherein you differ* refers to Jesus' clarification of the rulings of the Torah regarding which the Jews disputed with one another (JJ, Q, Ṭ). Some understand this verse to be a reference to the accusation that the Jews had altered parts of the Torah (cf. 2:75; Q, Ṭ). *So reverence God and obey me* is also said by Jesus in 3:50 and by the prophets Noah (26:108, 110), Hūd (26:126, 131), Ṣāliḥ (26:144, 150), Lot (26:163), and Shuʿayb (26:179).

64 Cf. 3:51; 19:36.

65 The followers of Jesus differed regarding whether he was God or the *third of three* (5:73; JJ), in which case this verse would refer to the views regarding the Trinity of various Christian sects, such as the Melkites, the Jacobites, the Nestorians (Q, R), and others not known to the classical commentary tradition. It could also be read as a reference to the Jews' and Christians' dispute regarding the understanding of Jesus (Q, R).

66 Cf. 47:18. That the Hour of Judgment or the punishment will come upon the disbelievers *while they are unaware* (cf. 12:107; 26:202; 29:53; 39:55) indicates that one must be prepared for it at all times and alludes to the Quranic position

while they are unaware. (67) Friends on that Day will be enemies to one another, save for the reverent. (68) O My servants! No fear shall be upon you this Day; nor shall it be you who grieve, (69) you who believed in Our signs and who were submitters; (70) enter the Garden, you and your spouses, made joyous. (71) For them are brought round trays and goblets of gold. Therein is whatsoever souls desire and eyes find pleasing. And you shall abide therein. (72) This is the Garden

that *knowledge of the Hour* lies only with God; see 43:85c.

67 On the Day of Judgment, those who were friends in disobedience to God will become *enemies to one another* (JJ), since the folly of everything upon which they had relied will be exposed and *all recourse will be cut off from them* (2:166); *so today* they have *no loyal friend here* (69:35). Thus *no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend* (70:10), and on that Day *a man will flee from his brother, and his mother and his father, and his spouse and his children* (80:34–36), since *for every man that Day his affair shall suffice him* (80:37; see also 40:18; 44:41). The rancor they feel toward one another (see 2:166–67; 7:38–39c; 29:25; 34:31–33) is among the reasons the Day of Judgment is also known as *the Day of Mutual Dispossession* (*yawm al-taghābun*; 64:9); also see commentary on 70:10–14 and Abraham's words to his people in 29:25: *You have taken idols apart from God on account of affection between you in the life of this world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another, and you will curse one another; your refuge will be the Fire, and you will have no helpers.* The fate of the disbelievers stands in sharp contrast to the experience of the reverent, whose conversation in Paradise is marked by mutual greetings of "Peace" (see 10:10; 14:23; 19:62; 56:25–26), since God has removed all *rancor* from them (see 7:43c; 15:47).

68–69 The promise that they shall not fear or grieve indicates that they are spared any punishment in the Hereafter. This same promise is made with slight variation to those who follow God's Guidance (2:38), *whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness* (2:62; 5:69; cf. 6:48), *whosoever submits his face to God, while being virtuous* (2:112), *those who spend their wealth in the way of God* (2:262; cf. 2:274), *those who believe and perform righteous deeds, maintain the prayer and give the alms* (2:277), *whosoever is reverent and makes amends* (7:35), and *the friends of God* (10:62), all of which are attributes of those who can truly be called God's servants.

*Submitted* renders *muslimīn* and is thus understood by many as a confessional designation (Q). But given the Quran's more comprehensive use of the words *muslim* and *islām* as well as their verbal forms, it can also be understood as a reference to all human beings who submit themselves to God; see 31:22c.

70 Cf. 36:56–57. Believers are said to be rewarded with *spouses made pure* (2:25; 3:15; 4:57), which can be understood as an allusion to spiritual beings particular to Paradise or to the spouses of this world who have also attained Paradise; see also 56:16. *Made joyous* (cf. 30:15) translates *yuḥbarūn*, which also indicates being blessed and honored (IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ).

71 *Trays and goblets of gold* allude to the food and drinks that such implements are used to serve (IK). For other delights *brought round*, see 37:45–47 and 76:15–17; see also 56:18–19. The inhabitants of Paradise will receive *whatsoever souls desire* (cf. 41:31; 52:22; 56:20–24; 77:41–44), *whatsoever they will* (16:31; 25:16; 39:34; 42:22; 50:35), and *whatsoever they call for* (36:57; cf. 41:31; 44:55), whereas for the disbelievers *a barrier is set between them and that which they desire* (34:54). Some commentators see *trays and goblets of gold* as a reference to the rewards received by those who are attached to reward, and *whatsoever souls desire and eyes find pleasing* as an allusion to those whose hearts burn with love for God and yearn for the vision of Him (My).

72 Regarding inheriting the Garden, see 7:43c. In this context, some maintain that no one will enter Paradise by virtue of deeds alone, but that the degrees of Paradise to which its inhabitants may attain will be according to righteous deeds (IK).

that you have inherited for that which you used to do. (73) Abundant fruit from which you will eat shall be yours therein. (74) Truly the guilty shall abide in the punishment of Hell. (75) It will not be lightened for them, and therein will they despair. (76) We did not wrong them; rather, it is they who were the wrongdoers. (77) And they will call, "O Mālik, let thy Lord put an end to us." He will reply, "You will surely remain. (78) We did indeed bring you the truth, but most of you were averse to the truth." (79) Or have they devised anything? Truly it is We Who devise. (80) Or do they suppose that We hear not their secret and their

73 This is one of several verses to promise *fruit* or fruits in Paradise; see 36:57c; 37:41–42; 38:51; 44:55; 47:15c; 55:22, 52–54, 68; 56:20, 32; 77:41–42.

74–75 *The punishment . . . will not be lightened* (cf. 2:86, 162; 3:88; 16:85; cf. 35:36) for a single moment (IK), since it is inescapable (25:65), and *there is no security from the punishment* (70:28). *Will despair* renders *mublisūn* (cf. 6:44; 30:49), which also connotes regret and the experience of being dumbstruck, unable to speak in defense of oneself (Is); see 6:42–44c.

76 This is one of many verses indicating that God does not cause injustice, as in 4:40: *Truly God commits not so much as a mote's weight of wrong.* From a Quranic perspective, although evil befalls people, it results from their own actions, since *themselves do they wrong* (3:117, 135; see also, e.g., 10:44; 16:118; 35:32; 37:113).

77 The denizens of Hell will call to the angel Mālik, who is said to be the keeper of Hell, to destroy them, so that they will receive some respite from the torments of the Fire (IK). Similarly, on the Day of Judgment, *the disbeliever says, "Oh, would that I were dust!"* (78:40), *and when they are cast bound together into a narrow place thereof, they will, there and then, call to be destroyed* (25:13). Regarding their request to die or be destroyed, 35:36 states, *They will not be done away with so as to die; nor will aught of its punishment be lightened for them. Thus do We requite every disbeliever* (IK). Mālik's response, which is said to take a thousand years (JJ, Q), will be that they are to remain there everlastingly.[1]

78 Cf. 10:82. This verse can be read as a continuation of Mālik's address to the denizens of Hell or as a Quranic address to the disbelievers (Q). The latter reading makes more sense in the present context, but the former reading corresponds more closely to a similar passage in 40:49–50: *And those who are in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, "Call upon your Lord to relieve us from a day of the punishment." They will reply, "Did not your messengers bring you clear proofs?" They will say, "Yea, indeed." They will say, "Then make supplications!" But the supplication of the disbelievers is naught but astray.* When understood as an address to the disbelievers, *the truth* can also be read as a proper name for the Quran, in which case it would be *the Truth.*

79 Whatever the disbelievers plot or devise is of no avail to them, since ultimately it is God Who devises all plots, as in 27:50–51: *And they devised a plot, and We devised a plot, while they were not aware. So behold how their plot fared in the end; truly We destroyed them and their people all together* (cf. 14:46; 52:42).

80 *Their secret* refers to the sins that people attempt to hide or to their intentions, while *secret converse* refers to what the disbelievers say when plotting against the Prophet or when deriding him. God is present in and knows the details of every gathering, as in 58:7: *There is no secret converse among three, but that He is their fourth, nor among five, but that He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but that He is with them wheresoever they are. Then on the Day of Resurrection He will inform them of that which they did.* The plots people devise during their secret converse are, like all deeds, recorded by attendant angels who are elsewhere described as *guardians, noble, writing, knowing what you do* (82:10–12); see 50:17–18c.

secret converse? Yea, and Our envoys are present with them, recording. (81) Say, "If the Compassionate had a child, then I would be the first of the worshippers." (82) Glory be to the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of the Throne, above that which they ascribe. (83) And leave them to indulge in idle talk and play until they meet the Day that they are promised. (84) He it is Who is God in Heaven and God on earth. And He is the Wise, the Knowing. (85) Blessed is He unto Whom belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, and with Whom lies knowledge of the Hour, and unto Whom you will be returned. (86) Those upon whom they call apart from Him have no power of intercession, save such as have borne witness to the truth

On the Day of Judgment, each person is then presented with a record of his or her deeds, which is unfolded *as a book he will meet wide open* (17:13), and to each person it is said, *Read your book! On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you* (17:14; Ṭ), *and they find present [therein] whatsoever they did* (18:49); see 17:13–14c; 18:49c.

81 This verse returns to the discussion at the beginning of the *sūrah* regarding the idolaters' assertion that God has offspring, an idea frequently criticized in the Quran (see 2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149–53c; 39:4; 43:16; 52:39; 72:3). Most understand this verse to mean that the Prophet would be the first to worship God's offspring if He did indeed have any (IK, JJ, R, Ṭ). Others understand the verse to mean, "If by your account God has a child, I am the first to worship God alone and to deny you" (R, Ṭ). In this sense it could be understood as a categorical rejection of the central tenet upon which the religion of the idolaters is founded. *If* renders the Arabic particle *in*, which can function as a conditional particle, as rendered here, or as a particle of negation, such that the verse could be read, "The Compassionate does not have a child; and I am the first of the worshippers" (R, Ṭ), meaning, "I am the first among you to worship Him with faith and sincerity" (Ṭ).

82 *Glory be* also indicates God's complete transcendence and is thus a way of negating the assertion of the idolaters addressed in the previous verse by saying that God is too great to be associated with anything they ascribe to Him; see 37:180c. God is *Lord of the Throne* (see also 9:129; 21:22; 23:86, 116; 27:26), which is borne by angels (40:7; 69:17), and is also described as *Possessor of the Throne* (17:42; 81:20; 85:15).

83 This verse is similar to 70:42, and both are reflected in the injunction of 6:91: *Say,* "Allāh," *then leave them to play at their vain discourse.* This is not to say that one cannot have any contact with the idolaters, but that *when you hear the signs of God being rejected and mocked, do not sit with them till they engage in some other discourse, or else you will surely be like them* (4:140; cf. 6:68, 112–13). Elsewhere, those who indulge in idle talk are said to be in the Fire (52:11–15; 74:45–46).

84–85 God is not confined to the heavens, and His relationship with earth is the same as His relationship with Heaven (R). In this sense, God has no need for offspring or other deities to govern the affairs of any realm, since He is the God not only *of* all realms but also *in* all realms, with complete sovereignty over all realms. Knowledge of their end lies with Him alone (see 7:187; 31:34; 33:63; 41:47; 67:25–26; 79:42–46; cf. Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32), and at that time all souls will return to Him.

86 The idols upon whom the idolaters call can do nothing for them, but this does not mean a categorical rejection of intercession. Although *Unto God belongs intercession altogether* (39:44), others can be granted powers of intercession *by His Leave*, as in 20:109: *On that Day intercession will be of no benefit, save [that of] those whom the Compassionate has granted leave and with whose*

knowingly. (87) Wert thou to ask them, "Who created you?" they would surely say, "God." How, then, are they perverted? (88) And as for his saying, "O my Lord, truly these are a people who believe not," (89) bear with them and say, "Peace." For soon they will know.

*word He is content* (cf. 19:87; 34:23; 53:26). Regarding the question of intercession, see also 2:48c; 2:255c; 10:3; 39:44; 74:48. *Save such as have borne witness to the truth knowingly* means that only those who bear witness to the truth will receive intercession (Q, R, Ṭ), in which case, that they must do so *knowingly* indicates that testimony with the tongue is not efficacious unless it is combined with faith, knowledge, and certainty (Q, R). Alternately, this last phrase is understood as a reference to the angels, Jesus, and Ezra, all of whom are said to have been worshipped mistakenly (that is, people called upon them apart from God), though they themselves never ceased to bear witness to the Truth (Ṭ).

87 Cf. 29:61. Although some of the idolaters recognize a supreme Creator over all of the other deities they associate with Him (cf. 10:31; 23:84–85; 29:61, 63; 31:25; 39:38; 43:9; see 43:9c), they still maintain a polytheistic view in which other deities partake of His Power. The Quran thus asks rhetorically how it is that they can be perverted, or turned away from worshipping God alone (IK, JJ, Ṭ); see 29:61c.

88 This verse records the words of the Prophet lamenting the state of his people, similar to 25:30: *And the Messenger will say, "O my Lord! Truly my people have taken this Quran for foolishness"* (IK). Here it is read as a new thought, but it can also be understood as following upon v. 85, meaning *with Whom lies the knowledge of the Hour* and of *his saying, "O my Lord, truly these are a people who believe not"* (Ṭ). Others read this verse in the nominative and understand it to follow upon v. 80, meaning *"Or do they suppose that We hear not . . . his saying, "O my Lord, truly these are a people who believe not"* (Ṭ).

89 In response to his lament, the Prophet is enjoined to avoid responding to the disbelievers in the same manner in which they address him and to seek, rather, to soften their hearts and forgive them (IK). That *soon they will know* the truth of that which they rejected (cf. 15:3, 96; 29:66; 37:170; 40:70) may refer to their realizing the truth in the Hereafter, but it can also be understood as an allusion to the Prophet's eventual defeat of the Makkan idolaters (IK, JJ). In accord with this latter interpretation, some say that this verse was abrogated after the command to fight was given (Q, Ṭ), implying that it no longer applies (IK, JJ). But such an interpretation is not in keeping with the general Quranic principle found in 25:63–64: *The servants of the Compassionate are those who walk humbly upon the earth, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace," and who pass the night before their Lord, prostrating and standing [in prayer];* see 25:63c; 7:199c. Others maintain that the present verse is "definitive" (*muḥkam*) and therefore cannot be abrogated (Q).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 44

# Smoke

## *al-Dukhān*

*Al-Dukhān* is from the Makkan period, although v. 15 is considered by some to be from the Madinan period (Āl, JJ). It takes its name from the mention of the *manifest smoke,* which is said to cover people (vv. 10–11). Some see this *sūrah* as following upon the final verse of the previous *sūrah,* so that what *soon they will know* (43:89) is the reality of *the clear Book* (v. 2; Aj). The lament attributed to the Prophet Muhammad at the end of the previous *sūrah, O my Lord, truly these are a people who believe not* (43:88), is echoed in Moses' condemnation of Pharaoh and his followers in v. 22: *These are a guilty people.*

*Al-Dukhān* opens with an oath upon the Quran and an allusion to the manner in which it was revealed and the nature of revelation (vv. 2–6). After a brief affirmation of God's Omnipotence (vv. 7–8), the *sūrah* rebukes those who doubt and tells of the punishment that they will receive for having denied God's messengers (vv. 9–16). This section is followed by an account of Moses, the manner in which Pharaoh and his followers rejected him, and a description of how the Israelites were delivered from oppression (vv. 17–33). After rebuking the disbelievers for denying the Resurrection and, like Pharaoh, exalting themselves (vv. 34–39), the *sūrah* tells of the Day of Resurrection (vv. 40–42) and contrasts the punishments of the denizens of Hell (vv. 43–50) with the rewards bestowed upon the reverent in Paradise (vv. 51–57). This is a well-known and oft-recited *sūrah* regarding which the Prophet is reported to have said, "Whosoever recites *al-Dukhān* during the night will greet the morning with seventy thousand angels asking forgiveness for him" (Aj, Āl, Ṭs, Z).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ḥā. Mīm.* (2) By the clear Book, (3) truly We sent it down on a blessed night—truly We are ever warning. (4) Therein every wise command is made distinct, (5) as a command from Us—truly We are ever sending, (6) as a mercy from thy Lord. Truly He is the Hearing, the Knowing, (7) Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them; would that you were certain. (8) There is no god but He; He gives life and causes death, your Lord and the Lord

1 This *sūrah* is the fifth in a series of seven *sūrahs* that open with the Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm*. The Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* (see 2:1c) and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God. For some possible meanings of these particular letters, see 40:1c.

2 See 43:2c.

3–5 *A blessed night* refers to *the Night of Power* (see commentary on 97:1–3), which is understood to occur during the latter part of the month of Ramadan, or it refers to the middlemost night of the month of Shaʿbān, that is, the eve of the fifteenth of the month that precedes Ramadan (Aj, JJ). According to many commentators, the Quran was sent down from *the Mother of the Book* (see 3:7c; 13:39), thus from the seventh Heaven to the lowest Heaven, on the eve of the fifteenth of Shaʿbān (JJ) and was then sent from the lowest Heaven into this world on *the Night of Power*. *Therein* would thus refer to either of the two nights (JJ). *Every wise command* renders *kullu amrin ḥakīm*, which can also mean, "every definitive command" or "every definitive matter." That each is *made distinct* refers to God's sending the provision of the year and organizing the affairs for each entire year on the eve of the fifteenth of Shaʿbān, during which *God effaces what He will and establishes* (13:39; Aj). Regarding the connection between the eve of the fifteenth of Shaʿbān and *the Night of Power*, Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have said, "God makes all of the decrees on the eve of the middle of Shaʿbān; then He delivers them to their masters [the angels who carry each Command or Decree down to this earth; see 97:4c] on *the Night of Power*" (Aj). Thus the process by which *every wise command is made distinct* begins on the eve of the fifteenth of Shaʿbān and is completed on *the Night of Power* (Aj), when they are transferred from the *Preserved Tablet* (see 85:22c) by the angels (IK), and all that occurs does so *as a command* that originates directly from God's Presence, as does all revelation (IK). That God is *ever sending* could be seen as a reference to the Quran being sent as a mercy to everyone who believes in it (IJ) or to God sending messengers to humanity throughout history (IJ, IK, JJ).

6 As translated, *as a mercy* explains the reason for which God sends revelation and messengers, that is, "for the purpose of mercy," similar to 21:107, which says of God sending the Prophet Muhammad, *And We sent thee not, save as a mercy unto the worlds*. In the present verse, *a mercy* could also be read as a continuation of the previous verse, meaning, "We are sending a mercy from thy Lord," in which case *a mercy* is also understood to be a reference to the Prophet Muhammad (Q).

7 The idolaters among the Makkans acknowledged that there was a Lord and Creator of the heavens and the earth, but then attributed partners to Him. If, however, their acknowledgment were based upon knowledge and certainty, they would know that He is also the One who sends revelation and messengers *as a mercy* from Him (Aj).

8 That *He gives life and causes death* (cf. 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 40:68; 53:44; 57:2) indicates God's Power over all phases of existence and nonexistence at all times; see 7:158c.

of your fathers of old. (9) Nay, but they are playing in doubt. (10) So keep watch for a day when the sky brings forth manifest smoke, (11) covering the people. This is a painful punishment. (12) "Our Lord! Remove from us the punishment; truly we are believers." (13) How can there be a reminder for them, when a clear messenger had come to them? (14) Then they turned away from him and said, "He is taught, possessed." (15) We shall indeed remove the punishment a little.

9 The disbelievers are *in doubt* even when they acknowledge that God is their Creator, as they are only doing so in blind imitation of their forefathers and not on the basis of their own discernment (Q). This verse could also be read as a reference to the manner in which they reject the truth when it comes to them (IK), or to what they attribute to the Prophet, mocking him and saying that he fabricated the revelation (Q); see 10:38; 11:13; 16:101; 21:5; 32:3; 46:8.

10–11 *Manifest smoke* is understood as one of the signs that the Hour—that is, the end of the world—is at hand (Q). The smoke is said to afflict believers like a harsh cold wind (*zukkām*), but to penetrate into disbelievers and cause great affliction (Mw, Q). Others understand this verse as a reference to a time when the Prophet prayed for a famine to come upon the disbelievers, and the famine besieged them to such a degree that their eyes were clouded over from the severity of hunger and they saw what appeared to be smoke rising between heaven and earth (IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ), in which case *covering the people* would refer to the manner in which the smoke overwhelmed them (IK); see also 16:112–13c. A few commentators propose that the *day when the sky brings forth manifest smoke* refers to the conquest of Makkah (Q), in which case it would refer to the dust stirred up by the Muslim armies as they entered Makkah. *This is a painful punishment* describes the affliction to which the disbelievers will be subject or reports their own words upon receiving the punishment (Q) or what is said to them by way of rebuke (IK), similar to 52:14.

12 In this verse the disbelievers are saying, "Were you, Our Lord, to remove the punishment, we would be believers" (Q); cf. 6:27; 14:44; 23:99–100; 32:12; 35:37. When vv. 10–11 are understood as a reference to the famine that afflicted the disbelievers, this verse is understood as their plea to the Prophet (Q), similar to the passages in which Pharaoh and his followers ask Moses to remove the punishment of the plagues from them (see commentary on 7:134–35; 43:49–50). *The punishment* thus refers specifically to the *manifest smoke* or to the hunger that afflicts them (Mw, Q), which would be one and the same, since the *manifest smoke* arises as a result of the severe hunger resulting from famine (Q).

13–14 These are among several verses indicating that once the punishment has come upon the disbelievers there will be no opportunity for them to repent or hear another *reminder,* since they had already denied the messenger or messengers that God had sent to them in this world (JJ); see also 34:52–53c; 35:37; 89:23. Some denied the Prophet by saying that he was *taught,* he was merely uttering words that he learned from someone else, as in 16:103: *Indeed, We know that they say, "He has merely been taught by a human being."* Others said that he was *possessed* by a jinn; see 15:6; 26:27; 37:36; 51:39; 52:29; 54:9; 68:2, 51; 81:22. Similarly, when the disbelievers are called to prostrate in the Hereafter, they will not be able to do so, since they had not heeded the call to prostrate *while they were yet sound* (68:43).

15 When vv. 10–11 are understood as a reference to the drought and famine that afflicted the Makkan idolaters, this verse can be understood as a reference to the manner in which God dealt with disbelieving communities in the past, relieving them of the punishment for a brief period, after which they reverted to disbelief. *Revert* renders *ʿāʾidūn,* which could also be understood to mean "return," in which case this verse would refer to the punishment of the Hereafter, meaning that the disbelievers will return to the Fire over and again (Mw, Q), as in 22:22: *Whensoever*

Surely you will revert. (16) On the Day when We strike with a terrible striking, surely We are vengeful. (17) And indeed We tried the people of Pharaoh before them, and a noble messenger came unto them: (18) "Deliver God's servants unto me! Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you. (19) And rise not against God; surely I have come to you with a manifest authority. (20) Truly I seek refuge in my Lord and your Lord, lest you stone me. (21) But if you believe me not, then keep away from me." (22) Then he called unto his Lord, "These are a guilty

*they desire, in their grief, to leave it, they shall be returned unto it, while [being told], "Taste the punishment of the burning!"* (cf. 32:20). This verse could also be read as a more general reminder that they will return to God (Q) or to mean that if the disbelievers are granted respite, they will return to their immoral behavior.

16 This verse is understood as referring to either an event in the future or an event that has passed. If the latter, the last sentence would be rendered, "surely We were vengeful." Given the tense of the sentence and the overall Quranic context, this verse would appear to refer to the Day of Resurrection (IK, Mw, Q) or to the Hour (Mw, Q). Nonetheless, as with other Makkan verses that refer to an impending punishment, many commentators understand this verse as an allusion to the Battle of Badr, in which the Muslims defeated the Makkan army (IK, Mw, Q, Ṭ).

17–31 As with other *sūrahs* that feature the story of Moses (see also 40:23–45; 43:46–56; 51:38–40; 79:15–25), the account given here provides a spiritual example reflecting aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's challenge rather than an in-depth historical account. The more detailed accounts of Moses' mission are found in 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 17:101–4; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46.

17 That the people were *tried* alludes to the manner in which all people are tested by the nature of their reaction to the prophets God sends them (R).

18 Here Moses' words echo those spoken by Moses in 7:105, *So send forth with me the Children of Israel,* and those spoken by Moses and Aaron in 20:47, *So send forth with us the Children of Israel and punish them not.* The declaration *I am a trustworthy messenger unto you* indicates that he does not conjecture and has been entrusted by God with revelation (Aj). Such a declaration is also made by the prophets Noah (26:107), Hūd (26:125), Ṣāliḥ (26:143), Lot (26:162), and Shuʿayb (26:178) to their respective communities. "The Trustworthy One" (*al-Amīn*) is also a name by which the Prophet Muhammad was known.

19 *Rise not against God* could also be rendered, "Exalt not yourselves against God," meaning, "Do not be too arrogant to follow Him, accept His proofs, and believe in His signs" (IK). *A manifest authority* (cf. 4:153; 11:96; 23:45; 40:23) refers to the clear signs and definitive proof with which Moses was sent (IK).

20 Some understand *lest you stone me* as a reference to a verbal assault (IK, R, Ṭ); others understand it more literally (IK, Ṭ) to mean, "lest you kill me" (R); see 26:116c.

21 This verse says, "Refrain from harming me, even if you do not believe me," though the Egyptians did in fact seek to harm Moses (JJ). It can also be understood to mean, "I have nothing to do with you, and you have nothing to do with me (R, Z), so let us each live in peace until God judges between us" (IK), similar to many verses that allude to the Prophet Muhammad's relationship with the idolaters among the Quraysh; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 109.

22 After Pharaoh and his followers would not permit Moses and the Israelites to practice their religion, Moses implored God to take vengeance upon them, as also described in 10:88: *Moses said, "Our Lord! Truly Thou hast given Pharaoh and his notables ornament and wealth in the life of this world, our Lord, so that they may lead astray from Thy way. Our Lord! Blot out their wealth and*

people." (23) "Set forth with My servants by night; you will indeed be pursued. (24) And leave the sea at rest; truly they will be a drowned host." (25) How many gardens and springs did they leave behind, (26) sown fields and a noble dwelling, (27) and prosperity in which they rejoiced? (28) Thus it was. And We bequeathed it unto another people. (29) Neither Heaven nor earth wept for them, nor were they granted respite. (30) And We delivered the Children of Israel from a humiliating punishment— (31) from Pharaoh. Truly he was foremost among the prodigal. (32) We knowingly chose them over the worlds. (33) And

*harden their hearts, so that they will not believe till they see the painful punishment."*

23–24 Cf. 20:77. Moses is commanded to *leave the sea* as it is (IK), with *a dry path through* it (20:77) and to not command it to go back, as he may have been inclined to do (Z), until the last of Pharaoh's host had entered it (IK, Ṭ). This is one of several references to the drowning of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea; see also 2:50; 7:136c; 8:54; 10:90; 17:102–3; 28:40; 43:55; 51:40.

25–28 Cf. 26:57–59. The abundance that Pharaoh and his people enjoyed in this world was taken from them in a single morning and left *behind* for others to enjoy. *Prosperity* translates *naʿmah,* which refers generally to pleasures and luxuries. But it could also be read *niʿmah,* meaning "blessing," and thus refer to all that God had provided for Pharaoh and his people (R, Z).

This passage serves as an admonition to the idolaters among the Quraysh that their wealth and property could be taken from them at any moment for their opposition to the Prophet. In this sense it is similar to those passages that speak of the wealth and power of past generations who were nonetheless destroyed for their iniquities; see 6:6c; 7:4; 17:17; 19:74, 98; 21:11; 22:45; 28:58; 38:3; 44:37; 47:13; 50:36. The property of the Egyptians, or something similar to what they had been granted, was then bequeathed to those whom they had oppressed, as in 26:59: *So it was, and We made the Children of Israel to inherit them;* see also 7:137c; 28:5c.

29 This verse can be understood as an allusion to the inhabitants of Heaven and earth (Mw, Q, R, Ṭ) or a direct reference to Heaven and earth. According to Islamic tradition, every individual has a gate to Heaven through which provision descends and good deeds ascend. When a believer dies, the gate closes and weeps because it misses the believer, as does the place on earth where the person would pray and remember God. But as the people of Pharaoh left no trace of righteousness on earth and had no good deeds that would ascend to Heaven, *neither Heaven nor earth wept for them* (IK, Mw, Q, Ṭ). That they were not *granted respite* means that the punishment came upon them suddenly and without warning.

30–31 Regarding the delivery of the Children of Israel from Egypt, see 2:49–50; 7:141; 10:90; 20:80; 26:65.

32 The Children of Israel were chosen above the other people of their own time (IK, Q, Ṭ) in receiving revelation and religion (Mw); see 45:16c. Maybudī maintains that this verse can also be understood as an allusion to God's having chosen human beings above all other animals, as in 17:70: *We have indeed honored the Children of Adam;* and to human beings being the most beautiful of God's creations, as in 95:4: *Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature.*

33 The *signs* in this verse can be understood as a reference to the deliverance of the Children of Israel from their enemies, the splitting of the sea for them, and the manna and quails they received (see 2:57c; 7:160–62c; 20:80; Mw, Q, Ṭ) or as a reference to the miracles that Moses performed for Pharaoh, such as when his hand turned white and his staff became a snake (Mw, Q). The *manifest trial* refers to a clear test that would demonstrate who was rightly guided and who was not (IK, Mw); a clear blessing (Mw, Q, Ṭ), which would then become a trial to those who were not thankful; or a severe punishment (Mw, Q, Ṭ), which would then be a punishment for

We gave them signs wherein was a manifest trial. (34) Truly these say, (35) "There is naught but our first death, and we shall not be resurrected. (36) Bring us our fathers, if you are truthful." (37) Are they better, or the people of Tubba$^{c}$ and those before them? We destroyed them. Truly they were guilty. (38) And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in play. (39) We did not create them, save in truth. But most of them know not. (40) Truly the Day of Division is their tryst, all together. (41) The Day when no friend will avail a friend in any way, nor will they be helped, (42) save him unto

those afflicted with it. When viewed in light of 21:35—*We try you with evil and with good, as a test, and unto Us shall you be returned*—the *manifest trial* can be understood as a general reference to the manner in which human beings react to both good and evil with either faith or disbelief (Ṭ). Alternately, it can be understood as a reference to the oppression that the Israelites endured at the hands of Pharaoh, as in 7:141: *And when We saved you from the House of Pharaoh, who inflicted terrible punishment upon you, slaying your sons and sparing your women. And in this was a great trial from your Lord.*

34–36 These verses present a way of denying the Resurrection also employed by the Makkan idolaters in 45:25 and 56:47–48.

37 Tubba$^{c}$ was the title given to a succession of Himyarite kings who ruled for centuries over southern Arabia and were defeated by the Abyssinians in the fourth century AD. Some understand Tubba$^{c}$ to be the title that the people of Sheba, who were in Yemen (see 34:15–19), gave their kings (IK). In 50:14 *the people of Tubba$^{c}$* are mentioned as among those who denied God's messengers and the Resurrection. According to some, Tubba$^{c}$ refers to a righteous king who had called his people to God, but they denied him (JJ on 50:14). Some debate whether this Tubba$^{c}$ to whom reference is made in the Quran was a prophet, since the Prophet is reported to have said, "I know not whether Tubba$^{c}$ was a prophet" (Aj, Bd, IK, Q). Although the people of Tubba$^{c}$ were stronger than the Quraysh, they were destroyed for their disbelief (JJ). In this sense, the reference to them is similar to verses that speak of previous generations or "towns" that were destroyed for their wrongdoing, despite being stronger in their earthly provision and material situation than were the Quraysh of Makkah; see 6:6; 7:4; 17:17; 19:74, 98; 21:11; 22:45; 28:58; 38:3; 47:13; 50:36.

38–39 Cf. 21:16; 38:27. Similar to v. 38, in 23:115, the denizens of Hell are asked, *Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously, and that you would not be returned unto Us?* Similar to v. 39, other verses say, *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth* (15:85; 46:3). All such verses indicate that, contrary to the pre-Islamic understanding of creation in Arabia, creation has a definite purpose. With regard to human beings, this means that they are created for faith and obedience (Aj), as in 51:56, *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me,* and to be resurrected and requited in accord with the degree to which they fulfilled their purpose.

40 That creation is not made frivolously or *in play* (v. 38) alludes to the consequences of its being created for a purpose and thus to Resurrection and the Day of Judgment (R), which is here called *the Day of Division* (37:21; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17; see also 10:28; 30:14, 43), indicating the manner in which people will be divided from relatives and loved ones (Aj) and the manner in which the Judgment will divide believers and disbelievers from one another for eternity.

41–42 Concerning the Day of Judgment, the Quran states, *There shall be no kinship between them that Day, nor will they question one another* (23:101) and that none can avail another against God's Punishment (2:48, 123; 3:10, 116; 26:88; 31:33; 86:10); see 40:18c; 43:67c. They will in fact be so consumed by terror regarding their own fate that *no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend,*

whom God has been merciful. Truly He is the Mighty, the Merciful. (43) Truly the tree of Zaqqūm (44) is the food of the sinner, (45) like molten lead boiling in their bellies, (46) like the boiling of boiling liquid. (47) "Seize him and thrust him into the midst of Hellfire! (48) Then pour the punishment of boiling liquid upon his head." (49) "Taste! Surely you are the mighty, the noble. (50) This is that which you used to doubt." (51) Truly the reverent are in a station secure, (52) amid gardens and springs, (53) wearing fine silk and rich brocade, facing one another. (54) Thus it is. And We shall wed them to wide-eyed maidens. (55) Therein they call for every fruit, secure. (56) They taste not death therein, save the first death. And He will shield them from the punishment of Hellfire— (57) a bounty from thy Lord; that is the great triumph. (58) We have only made this easy upon thy tongue, that haply they may remember. (59) So be on the watch, for they, too, are on the watch.

*[though] they will be made to see them. The guilty would wish to ransom himself from the punishment of that Day at the price of his children, his spouse, and his brother, his kin who had sheltered him, and all who are on the earth, that it might save him* (70:10–14). Nothing will be of any avail on that Day except God's Mercy (IK).

43–44 Just as the people of Paradise receive fruits that befit their station, so too the people of Hell receive fruits that befit theirs; *Zaqqūm* (cf. 37:62; 56:52) is foremost among these. *Zaqqūm* is one of the vilest and most bitter trees of the Tihāmah region of Arabia (JJ). Some understand its use in the Quran to be a metaphor for and an allusion to the ignorance, doubts, and demonic suggestions that people allow to fill their hearts (Aj on 56:52). The Prophet is reported to have said of the *Zaqqūm* referred to in the Quran, "If but one drop of *Zaqqūm* were to fall into the oceans of this world, it would pollute them for all its inhabitants. How shall it be, then, for the one whose nourishment it has become?" (IK, Z).

45–46 Some read *boiling* as *taghlī* rather than *yaghlī,* in which case it applies to the *tree of Zaqqūm* rather than the *food of the sinner* or the *molten lead* (IJ, Z). According to this reading, v. 45 could also be rendered, "Like molten lead it boils in their bellies." Regarding *molten lead,* which is also said to *scald faces* (18:29), see 18:29c; 70:8c. *Boiling liquid* (cf. 6:70; 10:4; 37:67; 38:57; 40:72; 47:15; 56:42, 54; 78:24–25) renders *ḥamīm,* which indicates something that has reached its maximum temperature, but can also indicate severe, painful cold.

47 *Seize him*—that is, the sinner—is God's command to the angels who serve as the guardians of Hell (*al-zabāniyah;* see 96:17–18c; IJ, JJ). Elsewhere the Day of Judgment is referred to as a day when the disbelievers *are thrust into the Fire of Hell with [violent] thrusting* (52:13).

48 V. 46 and other verses say that those in Hell will drink a *boiling liquid,* but this is one of two verses (cf. 22:19) that say that it will be poured upon their heads. That this is *the punishment of boiling liquid* implies that it is only one of many other punishments (Aj).

49–50 These verses represent either God's direct address to the disbelievers or the words of the guardians of Hell to the inhabitants of Hell while the guardians are carrying out God's Command (IK, Q). These words are spoken by way of ridicule and rebuke for the exalted image that the disbelievers had of themselves while in this world (IJ, Ṭ, Z). Some say that these verses refer specifically to Abū Jahl, one of the leaders of the Quraysh, who is reported to have held himself

in high esteem, claiming to be *mighty* and *noble* among his people (Aj, IJ, Q, Ṭ). *Taste* implies, "Taste the punishment that you have brought upon yourselves through your disbelief and your actions" (JJ; see 3:106, 181; 4:56; 6:30; 7:39; 8:35, 50; 10:52; 22:22; 32:14, 20; 34:42; 46:34). *Surely you* renders *innaka,* which is read by some as *annaka,* meaning, "because you are" (IJ, Q, Ṭ, Z); that is, they used to doubt because of their attitude of haughtiness. *This* refers specifically to the punishment that they receive (Q, R, Z) or more generally to the whole affair of judgment, reckoning, and punishment (Z), regarding all of which they were *playing in doubt* (v. 9). While here the disbelievers are mocked for doubting, elsewhere they are chastised for denying the punishment of the Hereafter; see also 32:20; 34:42; 52:13–16; 83:17.

51–52 In contrast to those described in vv. 41–50, *the reverent* (see 2:2c) are in *a station* where they are *secure* from death and from Satan (as well as from the fear of leaving that station) and from all worry, grief, terror, and exhaustion (IK). *Station secure* translates *maqām amīn,* which can also be read *muqām amīn* (Q, R, Ṭ, Z), in which case it would be rendered, "Abiding in security." Whereas in vv. 25–26 Pharaoh and his followers had to leave behind the fleeting *gardens and springs* of this world, *the reverent* are *secure* among gardens and springs that are everlasting.

53 For *fine silk and rich brocade,* see 18:31c; 76:21. That the inhabitants of Paradise are *facing one another* (cf. 15:47; 37:44; 56:16) implies that none shall need to sit behind another (JJ), since all will be equally exalted. In other instances, this description is joined with a reference to reclining *upon couches* (e.g., 15:47; 37:44).

54 *Thus it is* renders *kadhālika,* which can mean, "This is how it is" (Q, Ṭ), and which is understood by some as an expression of wonder and incomparability, as if to say that the like of this is beyond description (Aj). *Kadhālika* can also be understood to mean "similarly" or "likewise" (Q, R, Ṭ, Z). In this context it would then mean, "Just as we made them enter the Garden and did to them what was mentioned previously, likewise We have honored them by wedding them to wide-eyed maidens" (Q).

*Wide-eyed maidens* translates *ḥūr ʿīn* (see also 52:20; 56:22), which literally means someone with eyes whose whites are extremely white and whose pupils are extremely black (Āl, Q, R). Others say that it indicates "the appearance of little white in the eye around the black," which was considered the height of beauty for the eye (Iṣ). It also conveys the notion of purity; thus Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is reported to have said that *ḥūr ʿīn* means the righteous women among human beings (Ṭ). In the commentary on 52:20, al-Rāzī observes that inasmuch as the eye reflects the soul more clearly than any other part of the body, the use of *wide-eyed* (*ʿīn*) in this phrase may be understood to mean "rich of soul." A minority say that *wide-eyed maidens* refers to the state of the women of this world in Paradise (Āl, R). But most commentators agree that the *wide-eyed maidens* are not the women of this world (Āl, R). According to various *aḥādīth* they are maidens made from musk, camphor, and saffron (Āl). Another *ḥadīth* says, "The creation of the *wide-eyed maidens* is from glorifications made by angels" (Āl). Nonetheless, the pious women of this world are thought to be of a higher station (Aj). For additional references to the maidens who await the righteous in Paradise, see 38:52; 55:56; 78:33.

55 The inhabitants of Paradise will receive *whatsoever souls desire* (43:71; cf. 41:31; 52:22; 56:20–24; 77:41–44), *whatsoever they will* (16:31; 25:16; 39:34; 42:22; 50:35), and *whatsoever they call for* (36:57; cf. 41:31), and they are *secure* from it ever being cut off (IJ, Q). In contrast, for the disbelievers *a barrier is set between them and that which they desire* (34:54).

56 The reverent experience only the physical death of this world and experience no death in Paradise (Q, R, Z). They will be spared the punishment of the Hereafter, but the disbelievers will experience it continually, as if they were forced to die again and again (see 14:18c). In this sense, that the reverent *taste not death* stands in contrast to the claim posed by the disbelievers in v. 35 that they will taste but one death. That God *will shield them from the punishment of Hellfire* (cf. 52:18) is integral to the Mercy of the Divine Nature, which precedes God's Wrath. Upon seeing a woman clutch her child to her breast, the Prophet asked his Companions, "Do you think this woman would allow her child to be thrown into the fire?" They replied, "By God, insofar as she is able, she would never allow the child to be thrown into a fire." The Prophet then said, "And God is more tender toward His servants than is this woman toward her child."

57 Everything the reverent attain in the preceding verses comes from God's Bounty (R). Many understand this verse to mean that none of the rewards mentioned here are deserved by the reverent as such; rather, they are bestowed out of God's Bounty, because the good deeds that people do and the faith they have attained have themselves arisen from God's Bounty (R).

58 This verse harkens back to the reference to the Quran in vv. 2–3. That it is *easy upon thy tongue* explains in part how it is a *clear Book* (R). It is similar to the refrain of *Sūrah* 54: *And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember* (54:17, 22, 32, 40). The ease with which the Quran can be recited and remembered is said to be not only for oneself, but also for the purpose of conveying it to others, that they might be admonished and then become believers (JJ), as in 19:97: *We have only made this easy upon thy tongue that thou mayest give glad tidings unto the reverent thereby, and that thereby thou mayest warn a contentious people.*

59 This verse instructs the Prophet, "Be on the watch for the disbelievers' destruction, just as they are on the watch for yours" (JJ), "Await the aid against them that I have promised you. They await your death" (Q), or "Await the victory from your Lord. They await the destruction they claim will befall you" (Q); see also 6:158; 7:71; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 32:30; 52:31.



# 45

# Upon Their Knees

## *al-Jāthiyah*

A late Makkan *sūrah, al-Jāthiyah* is believed to have been revealed immediately after *Sūrah* 44, *al-Dukhān* (JJ). Although some maintain that the entire *sūrah* is from the Makkan period, others maintain that v. 14 is from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ, JJ, Q). The *sūrah* takes its name from v. 28, which states that on the Day of Judgment *every community* will be *upon its knees* (cf. 19:68). It is also known to some as *al-Sharīᶜah,* because it is the only *sūrah* to employ the term *sharīᶜah,* which later came to denote Islamic Law. Another name is *al-Dahr* ("Time"), a reference to *al-dahr* in v. 24, which can mean "time," "fate," or "the passage of time." The initial reference to the *revelation of the Book* can be seen as being connected to the second to last verse of the previous *sūrah*: *We have only made this easy upon thy tongue, that haply they may remember* (44:58; Aj).

*Al-Jāthiyah* contains one of the most explicit and extended Quranic discussions of "the signs of God," enjoining people to reflect upon them and describing the fate that will befall those who deny them. It begins with a discussion of the signs of God in revelation and in the created order and the fate of those who fail to believe in them and understand them (vv. 2–15). A brief mention of the Children of Israel (vv. 16–17) segues into an address to the Prophet Muhammad (vv. 18–19), which is followed by a reiteration of the fate that befalls those who deny God's *insights,* or signs (vv. 20–21). The remainder of the *sūrah* continues the focus upon those who deny God's signs and the Final Judgment (vv. 22–26) and upon the great peril that awaits them on the Day of Judgment (vv. 27–37).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ḥā. Mīm.* (2) The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Wise. (3) Truly in the heavens and the earth are signs for believers. (4) And in your creation and in what He has scattered of animals are signs for a people who are certain. (5) And in the variation of the night and the day, and in that which God sends down from the sky as provision whereby He revives the earth after its death, and in the shifting of the winds are signs for a people who understand.

1 This *sūrah* is the sixth in a series of seven *sūrah*s that open with the Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm*. The Arabic letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s (see 2:1c) and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God. For some possible meanings of the letters *ḥāʾ* and *mīm*, see 40:1c.

2 Cf. 39:1; 40:2; 46:2. For the meaning of this verse, see 39:1c; for other possible readings, see 40:2c. That the Quran has come from *the Mighty* alludes to its being inimitable (*muʿjiz*), overcoming all and not able to be overcome, while its coming from *the Wise* alludes to its comprising *conclusive wisdom* (*ḥikmah bāligḥāh;* 54:5) as well as to its being definitive (*muḥkam;* Aj).

3 This is one of many verses that call human beings to reflect upon God's signs in the created order, since they are seen as indications of His Oneness (Aj). *Signs* translates *āyāt,* which refers to the verses of the Quran, the natural phenomena in the heavens and on the earth, and the signs within the human soul. The heavens and the earth are filled with *signs for believers* (cf. 6:99; 15:77; 16:79; 27:86; 29:24, 44; 30:37; 39:52), *for a people who reflect* (13:3; 30:21; 39:42; 45:13; cf. 10:24), *for a people who hear* (10:67; 16:65; 30:23), *for those who know* (30:22), *for a people who understand* (2:164; 13:4; 16:12, 67; 30:24; 45:5), *for a people who are reverent* (10:6), *for those possessed of intelligence* (20:54, 128), *for the possessors of intellect* (3:190), *for those who possess insight* (3:13) and *for a people who are certain* (45:4; cf. 51:20).

*Signs* (*āyāt*) occurs twelve times in this short *sūrah,* especially in the first section (vv. 3–8), where it is used interchangeably as a reference to the wonders of the created order (vv. 3–5) and the verses of the Quran (vv. 6–8), suggesting a subtle connection between revelation and the created order. This connection has led many Islamic philosophers and mystics to view the created order as "the cosmic Quran" (*al-Qurʾān al-takwīnī*) as distinguished from "the written Quran" (*al-Qurʾān al-tadwīnī*). When understood by those with certainty in their hearts, the signs of the created order are said to guide, by their very being (*kawn*), to the One who brought them into being (*al-Mukawwin;* ST). In this vein, al-Ghazzali writes that for those who are masters of their hearts, God makes "every atom in the heavens and the earth speak to them . . . until they hear their celebration and glorification of God . . . speaking without letters and without voices" (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn, K. al-Tawḥīd wa 'l-tawakkul).*

4 Signs *in your creation* refers to all phases of human life, from gestation to growth to the waning of life (IK); for the Quranic discussion of the phases of life, see 16:70c; 22:5–6c; 23:13–14; 30:54; 40:67. *In your creation* can also be understood as an allusion to the manner in which God has honored human beings by endowing them with knowledge and understanding, subordinating the rest of creation to them (Aj) and making them vicegerents upon the earth (see 6:165; 35:39; cf. 2:30). For other references to the signs within human beings, see 41:53c; 51:20–21c.

5 The *variation of the night and the day* (cf. 2:164; 3:190; 10:6; 23:80; 24:44) points to the

(6) These are the signs of God that We recite unto thee in truth. So in what discourse after God and His signs do they believe? (7) Woe unto every sinful liar! (8) He hears the signs of God recited unto him, then persists arrogantly as if he heard it not. So give him glad tidings of a painful punishment. (9) And when he comes to know aught of Our signs, he takes them in mockery. For

regularity and rhythm in human life and the impermanent nature of life in this world, which is characterized by finitude. In other verses, the alternation of night and day is presented as a direct reflection of God's Omnipotence, since God makes *the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night* (22:61; 31:29; 35:13; 57:6; cf. 3:27; 39:5); see 31:29c. Night and day are also invoked as Divine blessings and mercies for human beings, as in 27:86: *Have they not considered that We made the night that they might rest therein, and the day by which to see? Truly in that are signs for a people who believe* (cf. 6:96–97c; 10:67; 25:47; 40:61).

*The shifting of the winds* alludes to the role of the winds in carrying ships across the sea and in pollinating vegetation (Aj). In the Quran, *winds* (pl.) is employed to convey Divine Mercy, as in 7:57 and 25:48: *He it is Who sends the winds as glad tidings ahead of His Mercy* (see also 25:48; 27:63; 30:46; 35:9). In contrast, *wind* (sing.) is used in the Quran to express God's Wrath and Punishment (see 3:117; 10:22; 17:69; 22:31; 30:51; 33:9; 41:16; 46:24).

6 In the context of this *sūrah, the signs* that God "recites" refers to the verses of the revealed Book and to the signs of God in the created order (Aj), both of which are said to come *in truth,* or "through truth"; see 45:22c. In this sense, this verse can be understood to mean, "*In what discourse* other than the *most beautiful discourse* [see 39:23c] and the most evident signs will they believe?" (Aj). Or it can be understood to mean, "How could they believe in any other discourse after hearing this discourse?" According to another canonical reading, *do they believe* (*yu'minūn*) could be read "do you believe" (*tu'minūn;* Q, Z). Both readings imply that if people cannot believe in these signs, they will not believe in anything of a religious nature.

7 Regarding *woe unto,* see 2:79c. *Liar* translates *affāk,* which indicates those who turn away from the truth and lie to themselves because they are perverted in intellect and judgment; see 29:61c. *Sinner* translates *athīm,* which is an intensive form indicating an inveterate sinner.

8 This verse is reported to have been revealed regarding al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, who would transmit foreign stories, or "discourses," and use them to distract the people from listening to the Quran (Aj, Q, R). Nonetheless, it is understood as a general reference to all who turn away from God's signs when they hear them (Aj). Although such people hear the Quran, it is as if they do not hear, because they are spiritually deaf and thus do not understand, as in 6:25: *Among them are those who listen to thee, but We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they do not understand, and a deafness in their ears* (cf. 2:171; 5:71; 6:25, 39; 8:22; 10:42; 17:46; 18:57; 21:46; 31:7; 41:5, 44; 47:23); see 6:25c. Although *glad tidings* usually indicates the good news of the means to salvation that prophets bring, here as elsewhere (see 3:21; 4:138; 9:3, 34; 31:7; 84:24), it is used with a sense of irony indicating that the hypocrites and disbelievers will receive the *painful punishment* that they seem to "desire."

9 Given the use of *signs* in connection with both the created order and the verses of revelation, this verse can be understood as a reference to those who mock the signs in creation by failing to acknowledge their Divine Origin and their disclosure of God's Reality, failing to be grateful for them, and those who mock the revealed signs by denying revelation. That they *come to know* some of the signs of God refers to memorizing something of the Quran (IK) or to obtaining a surface knowledge of the Quran or the created world without being able to connect the signs in either of them to their Source. Arrogance toward God's signs implies a personal refusal to believe in them, but mocking them can be seen as a more severe manifestation of disbelief, since it implies actively repudiating God's signs in the presence of other people.

them there shall be a humiliating punishment. (10) Beyond them lies Hell. That which they have earned will avail them naught, nor that which they have taken apart from God as protectors; and theirs shall be a great punishment. (11) This is guidance; and those who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord, theirs shall be a painful punishment of torment. (12) God it is Who made the sea subservient unto you, that ships may sail upon it by His Command, and that you may seek His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks. (13) He made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth—all together. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. (14) Tell those who believe to

10 *Beyond them* translates *min warā'ihim,* which can refer to something that lies in front of or behind them (Aj, Q, R, Z). In this sense it can mean that *Hell* lies before the disbelievers because they are headed toward it, or that it lies behind them because they have turned away from it and ignore its reality (Aj). In either interpretation, *that which they have earned,* meaning wealth and children (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭ), cannot help them avoid God's Punishment, as in 3:10: *As for those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against God. And it is they who shall be fuel for the Fire* (cf. 3:116; 58:17). *Protectors* is understood by most to be a reference to the idols and gods that the idolaters worshipped, but who cannot protect them from the *great punishment,* since, as they are warned in 21:98: *You and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell. Unto it you shall come.* The term *protectors* can also be understood as a broader reference to everything upon which they rely that is other than God; see 18:102c.

11 *This* Quran (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z), or everything with which the Prophet came (Q), represents complete and perfect guidance (Aj, Z). Although most understand *signs of their Lord* as a direct reference to the verses of the Quran (Ṭ, Z), in the context of this *sūrah* it can also be understood as a reference to God's signs in the created order. Regarding *a painful punishment of torment,* see 34:5c.

12 This is one of several verses to refer to seafaring as a blessing from God; see also 2:164; 14:32; 17:66; 22:65; 30:46; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 42:32–34c. *Seek His Bounty* refers to the advantages of travel by sea and to the food and precious jewels that can be obtained from the sea (Z).

13 God has made all things subservient to humanity (cf. 14:33; 22:65; 31:20) insofar as He has made human beings His *vicegerents upon the earth* (6:165; 35:39; cf. 2:30); see also 43:12–13c. From a spiritual perspective, when one's heart finds tranquility in God, its Master, one becomes a true servant and everything is made subservient to Him (ST). Seen in this light, this verse serves as an admonition to human beings not to become preoccupied or engrossed with the things of this world to the extent that they forget God, since they would then serve what was created to serve them rather than serving their true Master. In this vein, a well-known saying sometimes said to be a *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "God says, 'O Son of Adam! I created the things [of this world] for you. And I created you for Me. So let not that which I created for you distract you from that for which I created you," meaning do not let serving creation distract you from serving the Creator (Aj). Regarding the reference to aspects of creation as *signs for a people who reflect,* see 13:3; 30:21; 39:42; elsewhere God is said to *expound the signs for a people who reflect* (10:24).

14 *Those who hope not for the days of God* refers to the disbelievers and hypocrites who neither hope for the reward of the Hereafter nor fear God's Punishment (Q, R). According to some commentators, *those who hope not for the days of God* was revealed on an expedition to the Arab tribe of Banu'l-Muṣṭaliq. The Muslims stopped by

forgive those who hope not for the days of God, that He may requite a people for that which they used to earn. (15) Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul. And whosoever commits evil, it is to the detriment thereof. Then unto your Lord shall you be returned. (16) And indeed We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgment, and prophethood, and We provided them with

a well and ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites, sent his slave to get some water. When he came back, he asked him, "What has delayed you?" His slave replied, "The slave of ᶜUmar stood at the opening of the well and did not let anyone draw water until he filled up the water skins of the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and his own master." ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy exclaimed, "Our example and the example of these people is as the saying goes: fatten your dog, and he will eat you." By this statement, he was implying that the Prophet, who had come to Madinah as a powerless guest, was cared for by the Madinan population, and had now turned against them to bring them harm; see 9:74c. When ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard this, he seized his sword, intending to kill ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, but then God revealed this verse (IJ, Q, R, W). This verse may, however, have already been revealed when this incident occurred, and the Prophet simply recited it to ᶜUmar at this time to calm him and maintain the peace.

According to another account, when the verse *Who is it that will lend unto God a goodly loan?* (57:11; cf. 2:245) was revealed, a Jewish man in Madinah by the name of Finḥās said, "Muhammad's Lord is in need!" When ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard this utterance, he grabbed his sword and went looking for him. So Gabriel went to the Messenger of God and said to him, "Your Lord says to you, *'Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God.'* " The Prophet replied, "No doubt. By Him Who has sent thee with the truth, anger will not show upon my face!" (Q, W). Some maintain that this verse was abrogated, but al-Qurṭubī notes that, if the verse is from the Madinan period, such abrogation is unlikely.

The command to forgive and be gentle with disbelievers and hypocrites can be understood as following from the allusion to the *signs in your creation* (v. 4), since if one reflects upon the signs of God, one will recognize the honor due to all human beings. As al-Rāzī observes, discussions of the nature of the created order in the Quran are often followed by discussions of virtuous conduct. In this sense, the admonition to *forgive those who hope not for the days of God* can be understood to mean that when one acts in accord with the nature of things, one will forgive others, remembering that one's own faith and understanding are blessings from God, as in 7:43, where the believers are reported to say, *Praise be to God, Who guided us unto this. We would not have been rightly guided, had God not guided us.* In the context of the previous verses, to forgive others is also part of recognizing that the subservience of creation to human beings and the position of being God's vicegerent is a blessing from God, as when the believers are enjoined to say, *Glory be to God, Who made this subservient unto us, though we were not equal to it. Truly unto our Lord do we turn* (43:13–14).

15 For the first two sentences, see 41:46c. In relation to v. 14, the reminder that ultimately everyone will bear the consequences of his or her own actions serves to explain why it is best for the believers to forgive the disbelievers.

16 Here *the Book* refers to the Torah, while *judgment* refers to the Israelites' understanding of the Torah (Q), thus to knowledge and wisdom (R). *Good things* refers to the blessings given to the Israelites in this world, such as the wealth of the Egyptians, which they inherited (see 7:137c; 26:59c; 28:5; 44:28), and the manna and quails through which they were sustained in the desert (see 2:57; 7:160; 20:80; R). They are mentioned after *the Book, judgment, and prophethood* to illustrate the superiority of spiritual benefits over those that pertain only to this world (R). That God *favored* the Israelites *above the worlds* (cf. 2:47, 122; 7:140) refers to the blessings mentioned above and is understood as a reference to their

good things, and We favored them above the worlds. (17) And We gave them clear proofs from the Command. And they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them, out of envy among themselves. Thy Lord will surely judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that wherein they used to differ. (18) Then We placed thee upon a clear path from the Command; so follow it, and follow not the caprices of those who know not. (19) Truly they will avail you naught against God. And surely the wrongdoers are the protectors of

being chosen above the other people of their own time (IK, Q, Ṭ); see also 5:20c.

17 *Clear proofs from the Command* refers generally to unequivocal proofs (IK) and more specifically to clear delineations between what is forbidden and what is permissible (Q) or to the miracles that God gave to Moses as proof of his prophethood (R). Viewed in light of the preceding verse, this phrase most likely refers to Moses and the Children of Israel. But when viewed in light of the subsequent verse, some understand *clear proofs* to mean the indications that God gave the Prophet Muhammad that he would migrate to Madinah and that he would receive help from its people (Q, R). According to this interpretation, that *they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them* (cf. 10:93) refers to the Jews of Madinah who rejected Muhammad's prophethood, and *out of envy among themselves* refers to their being jealous of the Prophet (Q). Their differing after being given knowledge is also interpreted as a more general reference to the manner in which religious communities fracture *out of envy among themselves* (Q); see 2:213; 3:19, 105; 10:93; 23:53; 42:14; 43:63–65; 98:4c. In such instances, it is not knowledge itself that leads them to differ, but the manner in which some seek leadership and advancement through such knowledge and thus to the envy that arises from it (R). Regarding the nature of envy, see 113:5c. Regarding the manner in which religious difference leads to envy, see commentary on 23:53, which speaks of different religious factions, *each party exulting in what it had*. For God judging between them *regarding that wherein they used to differ*, see 2:113; 10:93; 16:124c; 32:25; 39:3.

18 After giving the Israelites gifts (v. 16), God placed the Prophet Muhammad *upon a clear path* like those upon which He had placed the messengers before him (Ṭ). In this context, *clear path* translates *sharīʿah*, which later became the technical term for Islamic Law, though it occurs only this one time in the Quran. Linguistically, *sharīʿah* means a straight, smooth path that leads to water, which in the deserts of Arabia would also have meant a path to salvation from death. In this context it thus appears to indicate a clear path by which God leads people to the truth (Q). The manner in which *sharīʿah* is juxtaposed to *caprices* (*ahwāʾ*; sing. *hawā*) indicates the moral and spiritual implications associated with the term. This is one of several verses to enjoin the Prophet not to acquiesce to the caprices of the People of the Book (see 2:120, 145; 5:48–49; 13:37; 42:15), while elsewhere he is told not to follow the caprices of the disbelievers (cf. 6:56, 150). Regarding the nature of *caprice*, see 45:23c. According to some commentators, this verse was revealed after some of the leaders of the Quraysh called upon the Prophet to return to the religion of his forefathers, maintaining that the forefathers were preferable to him (R).

19 Following upon v. 18, this verse enjoins the Muslims to make no pacts that would compromise the integrity of the Quranic message, as in 68:8–9: *Obey not the deniers. They wish that thou wouldst compromise, so that they would compromise.* Abandoning the potential benefits of protection from other tribes constituted a great risk for the small Muslim community. Nonetheless, 5:51 maintains that *whosoever takes them as protectors, surely he is of them.* The Muslims are thus enjoined to take one another as protectors, as in 9:71: *But the believing men and believing women are protectors of one another, enjoining right and forbidding wrong, performing the prayer, giving the alms, and obeying God and His Messenger. They*

one another, while God is the Protector of the reverent. (20) These are insights for mankind, and guidance and mercy for a people who are certain. (21) Or do those who commit evil deeds suppose that We shall treat them like those who believe and perform righteous deeds equally in their life and in their death? Evil indeed is the judgment they make! (22) God created the heavens and the earth in truth, and so that every soul may be recompensed for that which it has earned; and they shall not be wronged. (23) Hast thou considered one who takes his caprice as his god, God having led him astray knowingly, and sealed

*are those upon whom God will have mercy.* See commentary on 8:72–73.

20 The beginning of this verse is literally, "This is insights," meaning that the Quran is a means by which people gain insight into the truth, are able to distinguish truth from falsehood, and know the path to right guidance (Ṭ), because the Quran provides evidence that suffices for the insight of the heart (R); see commentary on 7:203, where the Prophet is told to say, *I only follow that which is revealed unto me from my Lord. These are insights from your Lord, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.* According to some, *these are insights* means "these are signs" (Q, Z). *A people who are certain* refers to those who are certain that the message of the Quran is true (Ṭ) or more broadly to those who have belief and certitude in the Unseen (Aj).

21 This verse presents a rebuke posed as a question to the disbelievers. As with most such rhetorical questions in the Quran, it is answered elsewhere, since the Quran maintains throughout that *the good and the wicked are not equal* (5:100); see 32:18–19c. Here *equally* renders *sawāʾan,* understood as an adverb modifying the verb "treat." In other canonical readings, the term is read *sawāʾun* (Q, R, Ṭ), in which case the last phrase would be rendered, "equal their life and their death" or "their life and their death being equal" (Q, Z), meaning, "Are the life and death of those who commit evil deeds equal with, or on the same footing as, the life and death of those who believe and perform righteous deeds?" (Q). In this sense, the verse alludes to the difference between their states in the Hereafter (Z). It could also be understood to mean that the believer and the disbeliever will not be on equal footing in the Hereafter as they appeared to be in this world, since the true difference between them will become manifest in the Hereafter (R).

22 That *God created the heavens and the earth in truth* (cf. 6:73; 16:3; 29:44; 39:5; 64:3) is reiterated in various ways in the Quran (see 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 30:8; 46:3); see 29:44c; 44:38–39c. In relation to the previous verse, it indicates why the life and death of the believers and those of the disbelievers are not equal. Since all things are balanced in truth, every soul will be recompensed in accord with the good or evil it has done (Q, Ṭs; cf. 3:161; 40:17; 74:38) and *shall not be wronged* (cf. 2:181; 3:25, 161; 16:111; 39:69; 46:19); see 36:54c.

23 The *caprice* that people are said to take as their god is defined as the inclination of the soul to passion and lust (*shahwah*). The verb from which *caprice* derives, *hawā/yahwī,* means both "to blow" and "to fall or tumble," and when combined with the preposition *bi* means "to overthrow." *Caprice* can thus be said to be something that blows the soul one way and another and overthrows the soul through the calamities of this world, making it tumble into *an abyss* (*al-hāwiyah,* from the same root, *h-w-y;* 101:9) in the Hereafter (Iṣ). The word *hawāʾ,* meaning *vacant,* from the same root, is also used to describe the vacuity of the hearts of disbelievers on the Day of Judgment (see 14:43). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The intelligent person is one who takes his soul to account and works for that which follows death. The inept person is one who allows his soul to follow his caprice, yet hopes for God" (Aj). References to God's misleading or causing to go astray (cf. 13:27; 14:4, 27;

his hearing and his heart and placed a cover upon his sight? Who, then, will guide him after God? Will you not, then, remember? (24) They say, "There is naught but our life in this world. We die and we live, and none destroys us save time." But they have no knowledge thereof. They do naught but conjecture. (25) And when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, their argument is naught but to say, "Bring us our fathers, if you are truthful." (26) Say, "God gives you life; then causes you to die; then He gathers you together on the Day

16:93; 22:4; 35:8; 40:34, 74:31) can be understood in light of 2:26, *And He misleads none but the iniquitous,* to mean that going astray is a result of one's own iniquities and not the outcome of arbitrary predestination. Those who are led astray are thus those whose hearts, according to several verses, are "veiled," "covered," or "sealed" so as to prevent spiritual comprehension (see 2:7c; 6:25, 46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57, 101; 30:59; 47:16c; 63:3; 83:14–15).

Regarding the question, *Who, then, will guide him after God?* see commentary on 7:186: *Whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he. And He leaves them to wander confused in their rebellion.* The rhetorical question *Will you not, then, remember?* is one of the Quran's many invitations to reflect upon its parables and proofs or God's signs in order to facilitate spiritual understanding (see, e.g., 11:24, 30; 16:17; 30:8; 37:155; 56:62; 3:191c).

24 Cf. 23:37. *There is naught but our life in this world* refers to the disbelievers' rejection of Resurrection. *We die and we live* refers to the idea that there is only one life and one death with no afterlife; or it means, "Some of us die and some of us live," or "We die and our children live" (Q, R). In pre-Islamic Arabia when hardship befell someone, it was common to say, "Curse the passage of time (*al-dahr*)". (IK). The Prophet enjoined his followers not to do so, saying, "God says, 'The son of Adam vexes Me when he curses time, for I am Time (*Dahr*). In My Hands lies the affair, and it is I Who alternate the day and the night" (IK, Q). This is understood to mean that the alternation of life followed by eventual death, which were attributed to the mere passage of time, are in fact caused by God (Q, R), so when one curses time for one's sufferings, one is in fact cursing God, since He is the Agent behind all that transpires (Q).

The disbelievers' failure to understand the manner in which the passage of time attests to the Omnipotence of God and the meeting with Him is yet another consequence of failing to reflect upon the signs of God. Thus *they have no knowledge thereof* (cf. 43:20). That *they do naught but conjecture* then means that what they do say regarding what follows the life of this world has no foundation, as in 53:28: *Yet they have no knowledge thereof. They follow naught but conjecture; and surely conjecture avails naught against the Truth;* see also 49:12c.

25 *Our signs* here are signs regarding the Resurrection and the recompense that awaits the disbelievers (Q, Ṭ). Since many verses of the Quran attest to the Resurrection and the signs of the created order are often cited as signs of God's ability to resurrect, this verse can be read as a reference to both revelation and creation. That they can only respond by saying, *Bring us our fathers, if you are truthful* (cf. 44:36) illustrates their misunderstanding of Resurrection, since they seek to define it in terms of this world, and supports the contention that *they do naught but conjecture* (v. 24).

26 That God gives life and causes death (cf. 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 40:68; 44:8; 53:44; 57:2; 67:2) serves as an answer to the contention that it is only time that destroys (v. 24; Aj), since such claims serve to deny both God and the Resurrection (R). It also answers the disbelievers' challenge to bring forth their fathers (v. 25) by stating that only God has power over their coming and going (Q). *Most of mankind,* meaning humanity in general or the disbelievers in particular, *know not* (cf. 7:187; 16:75, 101; 21:24; 27:61; 30:30; 31:25; 34:36; 39:29; 40:57) about God's ability to resurrect and the wisdom

of Resurrection in which there is no doubt. But most of mankind know not." (27) Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. And the Day when the Hour is come—on that Day those who make false claims will have lost, (28) and thou wilt see every community upon its knees. Every community is called to its book: "Today you will be recompensed for that which you used to do. (29) This Our Book speaks against you with truth. Truly We were recording all that you used to do." (30) As for those who believed and performed righteous deeds, their Lord causes them to enter into His Mercy. That is the manifest triumph. (31) And as for those who disbelieve, were not My signs recited unto you? But you waxed arrogant and were a guilty people. (32) When it was said, "Surely

in delaying resurrection, due to their opposition to reflection (Aj).

27 *Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (3:189; 5:17, 18; 24:42; 48:14) indicates that He created and rules over all things (Q). *Those who make false claims* (*al-mubṭilūn*) comes from the verb *abṭala/yubṭilu,* "to make a false [or vain] claim," "to try to disprove the truth of something," "to try to reduce something to nothing," or "to prove something to be null and void, unfounded, false, or spurious" (*Tāj al-ʿarūs; Lisān al-ʿarab*). In this sense it describes the disbelievers, who on the Day of Judgment *will have lost* their souls (see 6:12, 20; 7:53; 11:21; 23:103) as well as their families (39:15; 42:45).

28–29 On the Day of Judgment, each religious community will be gathered in ranks (see 18:48c) with its members upon their knees for the Reckoning before God (Ṭ) due to the shame of that day (Q, Ṭ). Some say that this fate is particular to the disbelievers (Q); others say it applies to believers and disbelievers alike when they are awaiting the Reckoning before God (Q). According to another canonical reading, this verse could be rendered, "Thou wilt see every community upon its knees, every community called to its book" (Q). In either reading, *book* is used in the singular to indicate the individual books in which each person's deeds are recorded by the angels upon God's Command (see 86:4; commentary on 43:80; 82:10–12; Aj, Q, R, Z) or the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Q), upon which all of God's Commands and Decrees are said to have been written.

The address is spoken by the angels who were tasked with recording the deeds of human beings (R, Z) or by God (Q). That the book *speaks against* human beings means that it testifies to their deeds (Q, R). When the book speaks or testifies, *thou wilt see the guilty fearful of what is in it. And they will say, "Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof." And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did* (18:49). In relation to a famous saying of the Prophet, "The Quran is a proof, either for you or against you," this verse could also be understood as a reference to the Quran.

30 Here God's *Mercy* is understood as a reference to the Garden (Q, Z), the attainment of which is also referred to as *the manifest triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

31 *Were not My signs recited unto you* is a rebuke that pertains to witnessing the signs both in the created order (see commentary on 45:3–6) and in revelation. With regard to the latter, it recalls 39:71, where the keepers of Hell say to the disbelievers, *Did not messengers from among you come to you, reciting unto you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?* (cf. 40:50).

32 That *God's Promise is true* (cf. 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:21; 28:13; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 46:17) pertains to the end of time, here referred to as *the Hour,* to the return to God, and to the Promise of both Heaven and Hell, all of which the disbelievers

God's Promise is true, and there is no doubt in the Hour," you said, "We do not know what the Hour is. We do naught but conjecture, and we are not certain." (33) The evils of that which they had done will become manifest unto them, and that which they used to mock will beset them. (34) And it will be said, "Today We forget you just as you forgot the meeting with this your Day; your refuge is the Fire and you have no helpers. (35) That is because you took the signs of God in mockery and the life of this world has deluded you." So today they will not be removed from it; nor can they make amends. (36) Unto God be praise, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of the worlds. (37) His is the Grandeur in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

deny. The reply of the disbelievers, *We do not know what the Hour is,* is understood to mean, "We do not know if it is true or not" (Q), or simply, "We do not know if it is coming" (T), implying that they see no need to prepare for it. Regarding the nature of *conjecture,* see 49:12c; 53:28c.

33 *And that which they used to mock will beset them,* or "close in upon them" (cf. 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 46:26) indicates that the punishment the disbelievers receive is a direct result of their own iniquity, since *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44).

34 This is one of several verses that speak of the disbelievers being forgotten (see 7:51; 9:67; 20:126; 32:14; 59:19), which is understood to mean that they have been abandoned by God (Q). That they *forgot the meeting with* God means both that they did not think of it and that they did not prepare for it (Q). For the consequence of forgetting God and the meeting with Him, see commentary on 7:51 and 59:19: *And be not like those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls.*

35 When the signs of revelation and the signs in creation are not understood, *the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20; cf. 6:70, 130; 31:33; 35:5), yet *the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared with the Hereafter, is but a little* (9:38; cf. 4:77; 13:26; 40:39). As the disbelievers had ample opportunity to remember God in this world, once they have been shown the truth of the signs that they used to mock and the reality of their evil deeds in the Hereafter, they will no longer have any opportunity to make amends, since their conduct has demonstrated that *even if they were sent back, they would return to the very thing they had been forbidden* (6:28); see 6:27–28c; 23:100; 32:12c; 35:37.

36–37 According to another canonical reading, v. 36 could be rendered, "Unto God be praise. He is the Lord of the heavens . . ." (Q). In either reading, *unto God be praise* is understood as an injunction to praise God (Aj), while *His is the Grandeur* or "unto Him is the Grandeur" is an injunction to magnify God, since the effects of His Grandeur and Greatness are manifest in all things (Aj). In this sense, the mention of God's Grandeur harkens back to the call to reflect upon God's signs *in the heavens and the earth* in vv. 3–6.

While the reference to God as *the Mighty, the Wise* in v. 2 refers to God's Reality in relation to revelation, here it refers to God's Reality in relation to creation, thus alluding to the manner in which both kinds of signs are said to come from Him *in truth,* or "for the truth" (for verses regarding revelation *in truth,* see 2:176, 213, 252; 3:3, 108; 4:105; 5:48; 6:114; 17:105; for those regarding creation *in truth,* see 6:73; 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 16:3; 29:44c; 30:8; 39:5; 44:38–39c, 45:22; 46:3; 64:3). The bracketing of this *sūrah* with these two references thus highlights the discussion of God's signs in revelation and creation that runs throughout this *sūrah.*

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 46

# The Sand Dunes

## *al-Aḥqāf*

*Al-Aḥqāf* is a late Makkan *sūrah*. Some commentators maintain that the entire *sūrah* is Makkan, although most believe that v. 10 is from the Madinan period, to which some add v. 15 and others v. 35 (Aj, Āl). The majority of the *sūrah* was most likely revealed around the same time as *Sūrah 72, al-Jinn,* two years before the Prophet's migration to Madinah. The last of the seven *sūrahs* that begin with the Arabic letters *ḥā'* and *mīm,* it takes its name from the mention of the *sand dunes* in v. 21 as a place near which the pre-Islamic Arabian prophet Hūd warned his people, the tribe of ʿĀd.

*Al-Aḥqāf* begins with a response to the disbelievers, calling them to account for their rejection of the revelation and confirming the nature of revelation as something that is not a human innovation (vv. 2–9). A brief reference to the Torah and those who believed in it (vv. 10–12), followed by an affirmation of belief in one God (vv. 13–14), then transitions into a discussion of the rights of parents (vv. 15–17), which are often considered second only to the rights of God and His messengers. A discussion of the disbelievers (vv. 18–20) then segues into a story of the Prophet Hūd, the manner in which the people rejected him, and the punishment that was sent upon them (vv. 21–25). The story of their destruction is used as a warning to the Quraysh that they can be destroyed, just as those who were more powerful than they were destroyed before (vv. 26–28). A recounting of the story of the jinn who heard the Quran and then called their community to follow the Prophet (vv. 29–32) concludes with a reminder of God's Omnipotence (vv. 33–34). A final verse counsels the Prophet to follow the example of prophets before him who patiently endured the insults of the disbelievers (v. 35).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Ḥā. Mīm.* (2) The revelation of the Book from God, the Mighty, the Wise. (3) We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, save in truth and for a term appointed. Yet those who disbelieve turn away from that of which they were warned. (4) Say, "Have you considered that which you call upon apart from God? Show me that which they have created of the earth. Or do they have a share in the heavens? Bring me a book before this or some vestige of knowledge, if you are truthful." (5) Who is more astray

1 This *sūrah* is the last in a series of seven *sūrah*s that open with the Arabic letters *ḥā'* and *mīm* and are referred to collectively as the *Ḥawāmīm*. The letters *ḥā'* and *mīm* are among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meanings are considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. For some possible meanings of the letters *ḥā'* and *mīm*, see 40:1c.

2 Cf. 39:1; 40:2; 45:2. For the meaning of this verse, see 39:1c. For other possible readings, see 40:2c. Here al-Maybudī notes that *the Mighty* can also be read as an active participle meaning "the One Who makes mighty" or "the One Who exalts" and writes, "The name means that He exalted the believers by making them the object of His address and worthy of His book and message."

3 *We did not create . . . save in truth* is repeated in 15:85, while in 30:8 the same concept is conveyed in the third-person singular (see also 44:39). *In truth* indicates both that the world is created with precision and perfection and that the nature of the created world is just (R). Regarding the Quranic idea that all of creation came *in truth*, or "through truth," see 6:73c; 15:85; 44:38–39c. *For a term appointed* (2:282; 11:3; 13:2; 14:10; 16:61; 22:5, 33; 30:8; 31:29; 35:13, 45; 39:42; 42:14; 71:4) refers to the duration of the world and thus alludes to both the final end of the heavens and the earth (IJ) and the Final Judgment (see 35:45; 71:14). *Save . . . for a term appointed* (Q, R, Ṭ) thus indicates that creation, as it is other than God, cannot but have a beginning and an end, as in 28:88: *All things perish, save His Face;* see 10:24c. As translated, the last sentence of the present verse reiterates that many people *turn away* from the messengers God sends. It could also be read, "Those who deny that of which they were warned turn away," meaning that they turned away from understanding the true nature of creation, thus implying that they do not reflect upon the signs of God and the ephemeral nature of the world (R).

4 This is one of several verses that challenge the disbelievers to bring something to verify their claims (see also 2:23c; 10:38c; 21:24; 37:156–57; 54:43c; 68:37). *That which you call upon apart from God* means idols or beings such as jinn whom the idolaters treat as partners with God. *Bring me a book* is a request that they bring a revealed scripture (Q, R, Ṭ), and *some vestige of knowledge* means some remnant from the teachings of those of old (Q, R, Ṭ). Others interpret *vestige of knowledge* to mean something that was written by those before (Q, Ṭ), though it is also understood to mean any authentic report that has been transmitted (R). In all interpretations, it means something that indicates the veracity of the idolaters' claim that these idols and jinn whom they worship are indeed partners with God (Ṭ). Elsewhere the Quran asks rhetorically, *or did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?* (35:40; cf. 34:44; 43:21; 68:37–38).

5 *Who are heedless of their calling* can refer to those upon whom they call or to those who call, the latter meaning that the idolaters are oblivious to the fact that their supplications are in vain.

than one who calls, apart from God, upon such as do not answer him, [even] unto the Day of Resurrection, and who are heedless of their calling? (6) When mankind is gathered, such will be enemies unto them and deniers of their worship. (7) Yet when Our signs are recited unto them as clear proofs, those who disbelieve say to the truth when it comes to them, "This is manifest sorcery." (8) Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "Had I fabricated it, you would not be able to avail me aught against God. He knows best that about which you carry on. He suffices as a Witness between me and you, and He is the Forgiving, the Merciful." (9) Say, "I am no innovation among the messengers, and I know not what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which has

6 *When mankind is gathered* refers to the Day of Judgment (see 42:7c). *Such will be enemies unto them* alludes to the fact that the false objects of worship upon whom the idolaters called in this life will testify against them on the Day of Judgment (Q, Ṭ), saying, *Our Lord! These are those whom we perverted. We perverted them as we ourselves were perverse. We disavow [them] before Thee; it was not us whom they worshipped* (28:63). It can also be understood to mean that those upon whom they called are their enemies, because calling upon them, and thus attributing partners to God, was the cause of their destruction (Q).

7 This verse speaks of one of the various ways in which the disbelievers react to the recitation of God's signs, that is, verses of the Quran; cf. 8:31; 19:73; 22:72; 31:7; 34:43; 42:25; 68:15; 83:13. The charge of *manifest sorcery* is said to have been brought by the disbelievers against the Quran and several messengers of God, most notably the prophets Moses and Muhammad (see 5:110c; 6:7; 10:2; 11:7; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 61:6; 74:24).

8 Such charges of fabrication are repeated throughout the Quran; see 10:38c. To attribute anything falsely to God is considered to be among the greatest of sins, thus the Quran frequently asks, *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God?* (6:21, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 29:68; 61:7), meaning, "Who does greater wrong than one who holds to false beliefs or engages in erroneous religious practices?" Here the Prophet is commanded to explain that, were he to make such claims, as others have, God would punish him and that no one could avert His Punishment, as in 5:41: *For whomsoever God desires that he be tried, thou hast no power to avail him aught against God* (R). For *He suffices as a Witness between me and you,* see 29:52c.

9 *I am no innovation among the messengers* reaffirms the Quranic position that all revelations contain the same essential message. As the Prophet has said, "The prophets are half brothers; their mothers differ and their religion (*dīn*) is one." In this vein al-Tustarī writes of this verse, "That is, 'There were messengers before me who commanded what I command and forbade what I forbid. I am not a marvel (*ʿajab*) among the messengers. I do not call you to anything except testifying to God's Oneness (*tawḥīd*), and I do not guide you to anything other than the most noble character traits. It was with this [message] that the prophets before me were sent' " (ST; cf. 2:62; 5:69; 26:192–96; 41:43; 78:18–19). For more on the Quranic understanding of the unity of prophethood, see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

*I know not what will be done with me or with you* most likely indicates that the Prophet was not a fortune-teller, an ability that many of the Arabs expected of a prophet. Some maintain that this phrase was abrogated by 48:2, in which the Prophet is told that God has forgiven him his *sins that went before and that which is to come* (Q). But the two verses can be seen as references to very different issues: the present verse refers to the events of this world, and 48:2 to forgiveness and reward

been revealed unto me, and I am naught but a clear warner." (10) Say, "Have you considered if it is from God and you disbelieve in it, though a witness from the Children of Israel bore witness to the like thereof, then believed in it, while you waxed arrogant? Surely God guides not wrongdoing people." (11) And those who disbelieve say of those who believe, "Had it been good, they would not have outstripped us in [attaining] it." Since they will not be guided by it, they will say, "This is an ancient perversion." (12) Yet before it there was the Book of Moses, a guide and a mercy. This is a Book that confirms in an Arabic tongue

in the Hereafter, in which case there is no need for abrogation (Q). Regarding *I am naught but a clear warner* (cf. 11:12; 13:7; 27:92; 34:46; 35:23; 79:45), see 38:65–66c.

10 *If it is from God and you disbelieve in it* likely refers to the Quran itself, although the second clause may be rendered "and you disbelieve in him," meaning that the people disbelieve in the Prophet. Most exegetes interpret *a witness from the Children of Israel* as a reference to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, one of the leading Jews of Madinah who followed the Prophet and was rejected by his community for doing so. *Bore witness to the like thereof* would then imply his bearing witness to the truth of both the Torah and the Quran. In this vein, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ is reported to have said, "I have never heard the Prophet say of anybody walking on the earth that he is from the people of the Garden except ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām. The following verse was revealed concerning him: *Though a witness from the Children of Israel bore witness to the like thereof* (T). But if, as many commentators maintain, the whole of this *sūrah* is from the Makkan period, this verse most likely refers to Moses (Q). In this case, *bore witness to the like thereof* would again refer to the Torah, in which case the verse is most likely a challenge to the disbelievers, comparing their arrogance in the face of revelation to the Israelites' acceptance of the Torah.

*Bore witness to the like thereof* could also be read "bore witness to one like him," implying that Moses foretold the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. In light of the latter interpretation, this verse would be read as an affirmation of 7:157, which refers to the Prophet being *inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel.* In this vein, many Muslims read Deuteronomy 17:15 and 18:18, among other Biblical verses, as allusions to the Prophet Muhammad.

11 The objection of the disbelievers among the Quraysh was that those who were of low social standing in Makkah could not have discerned the value of the new religion to which the Prophet called them when the leaders of Quraysh did not, as in 6:53, where they are also reported to say of those who followed the Prophet, *Are these the ones whom God has graced among us?* Such objections are similar to those voiced by the leaders among Noah's people, who said, *We see none who follow you, save the lowliest among us* (11:27), and asked, *Shall we believe you, when the lowliest follow you?* (26:111). This verse thus relates back to v. 3, because the disbelievers' arrogance caused them to continue going further astray after they first turned away. They say, *This is an ancient perversion,* because *they deny that whose knowledge they cannot comprehend and whose interpretation has not yet come to them* (10:39; Q).

12 From a Quranic perspective, every revelation fulfills the function of guiding and is a mercy for human beings, as is said of the Torah here. *This is a Book that confirms* refers to the Quran confirming the Torah and the Gospel, among other revelations, as in 5:48: *And We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth, confirming the Book that came before it, and as a protector over it.* Just as the Quran is God's Word in Arabic, so too the Torah is considered to have been God's Word in Hebrew. As al-Dārimī writes, "God knows all languages and speaks in whichever language He wishes: if He wishes, He speaks in Arabic; and if He wishes, He speaks in Hebrew; and if He wishes, in Syriac. So He has made the Quran His Word in Arabic" (al-Dārimī, *al-Radd,* 123); see

to warn wrongdoers, and a glad tiding for the virtuous. (13) Truly those who say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm, no fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve. (14) They are the inhabitants of the Garden, abiding therein, as a recompense for that which they used to do. (15) And We have enjoined man to be virtuous unto his parents. His mother carried him in travail and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning is thirty months, such that when he reaches maturity and reaches forty years he says, "My Lord inspire me to give thanks for Thy blessing with which Thou hast blessed me and hast blessed my parents, and that I may work righteousness such that it pleases Thee; and make

commentary on 14:4: *And We have sent no messenger, save in the language of his people.*

13–14 *Then stand firm* means that these believers do not *confound the truth with falsehood* (3:71; cf. 2:42) and do not oppose God's Commands and Prohibitions (Ṭ). According to some, *no fear shall come upon them* means that they will have no fear of retribution and will be spared many of the trials that occur on the Day of Resurrection (R). The first part of v. 13 is repeated in 41:30, but there it is the angels who promise that in the Hereafter there shall be no fear or sorrow for the believers; see commentary on 41:30–33. That such rewards will be afforded *those who say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm* could be understood as an allusion to the salvific nature of all revealed religions, as in 2:62: *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve* (cf. 5:59).

15 Goodness, gratitude, and virtue toward one's parents are enjoined in several verses (4:36; 17:23; 29:8; 31:14–15) and are presented as second in importance only to the duty to worship God in other verses (see 2:83; 4:36; 6:151); see 29:8c. *To be virtuous* translates *iḥsān,* which means "to make beautiful" or "to do what is beautiful" and comes from a root (*ḥ-s-n*) meaning "beautiful," other derivations of which mean "virtue" or "virtuous" in the sense of having a beautiful character and intrinsic morality; see 29:69c. The mention of the mother alone after the mention of both parents indicates that her right to be honored is greater than that of the father (R). In this regard, a well-known *ḥadīth* reports that a man asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, who among the people is most deserving of my good companionship?" He said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Then who?" The Prophet replied, "Your mother." He asked again, "Then who?" The Prophet again replied, "Your mother." After he asked a fourth time, the Prophet replied, "Your father."

The first instance of *travail* refers to the difficulties of pregnancy, and the second refers to those of childbirth. For the discussion of the combined period of gestation and breast-feeding, which is here said to be thirty lunar months, see 2:233c; 31:13–14c. *When he reaches maturity* is understood by the majority of commentators to mean thirty-three lunar years, the age at which the body is traditionally thought to reach its peak. *Forty years* is then the age at which one reaches intellectual (IK) and spiritual maturity, whereupon one can focus more upon worship and obedience to God (R). Forty is also said to be the age of prophethood (R), and according to Islamic teachings all prophets received the call to prophethood at the age of forty, except Jesus, who was aware of his prophetic mission from the moment of his birth (see commentary on 19:30–33). *Inspire me to give thanks* literally means, "Inspire me to be [in a state of] thankfulness" (R, Ṭū). The prayer for both parents and children may indicate greater awareness of responsibility toward both the older and younger generations that comes with being in the prime of life. Regarding the importance of respecting both the young and the old, a *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever is unkind to our young and

righteous for me my progeny. Truly I turn in repentance unto Thee, and truly I am among those who submit." (16) They are those from whom We accept the best of that which they have done and over whose evil deeds We pass. [They] will be among the inhabitants of the Garden—the true promise that they were promised. (17) As for one who says to his parents, "Fie upon you both! Do you promise me that I shall be brought forth when generations have passed away before me?" while they call upon God for succor, "Woe unto you! Believe! Surely God's Promise is true." Whereat he says, "This is naught but fables of those of old." (18) They are those for whom the Word among the communities of jinn and men that had passed before them came due. Truly they are lost. (19) For each there are degrees according to that which they have done. He will pay them for their deeds in full, and they will not be wronged. (20) And the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire: "You squandered your good

disrespectful to our old is not one of us." *Make righteous for me my progeny* is a request to guide them in faith and in doing what pleases God (Ṭ), which are considered among the greatest blessings for a parent (R). While many Sunni commentators say that this verse was revealed regarding Abū Bakr's prayer for his parents when they embraced Islam (IJ, JJ, Q, Ṭ), Ḥasan al-Baṣrī says that the verse is general, applying to all Muslims.

16 *They* refers to the people who have the attributes described in v.15 (IK, Ṭ). That God accepts *the best of that which they have done* (cf. 9:121; 16:96–97; 24:38; 29:7; 39:35) indicates that they are only recompensed for their good deeds, while *over whose evil deeds We pass* means that they have been absolved of such deeds; see 29:7c. Here *the true promise* can also be read "the promise of truth." In either reading it refers to the first part of the verse (Q).

17 Saying *Fie upon you both* is seen by most as referring to every form of disobedience toward parents. Others understood it as specifying those who reject their parents' call to religion (R). *Brought forth* refers to the Resurrection. Here the example given would be considered the most egregious, as it also entails disobedience toward God. *God's Promise* refers to the promise of the Resurrection, the Gathering, the Reward, and the Punishment (Ṭs, Ṭū). Referring to the revelations as *fables of those of old* was a common way for the disbelievers to dismiss the Prophet and the revelation (see 6:25; 8:31; 16:2; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 68:15; 83:13).

18 That *the Word . . . came due* (cf. 10:96; 28:63; 36:7, 70; 40:6) indicates God's Punishment, as in 39:71: *But the Word of punishment has come due for the disbelievers.*

19 *For each there are degrees* pertains to all believers and disbelievers (JJ) and to the hierarchy among them. That God will reward or punish in degrees in accord with people's actions is also stated in 6:132, while 3:163 speaks of people being *ranked in degrees* and 6:165 states that God has *raised some . . . by degrees above others* (see also 6:83; 58:11); see 3:163c; 4:96c. *They will not be wronged* (cf. 2:281; 6:160; 10:47, 54; 16:111; 36:54; 39:69; 45:22), because *every soul will be paid in full for that which it has done* (16:111; 39:70; cf. 2:281; 3:25).

20 *Exposed to the Fire* (*yuʿraḍu ʿala'l-nār*) indicates that the disbelievers are thrown into it or shown its terrors before being thrown into it (R). It can also mean "killed or destroyed by the Fire," as in the Arabic phrase *ʿuriḍa ʿala'l-sayf*, meaning, "He was killed by the sword" (Aj). *Squandered your good things in your life in the world* means they enjoyed the things of this world and followed their lusts (Q), so that during this

things in your life in the world and sought enjoyment therein; so today you are recompensed with the punishment of disgrace for having waxed arrogant upon the earth without right and for having been iniquitous." (21) And mention the brother of ᶜĀd, when he warned his people by the sand dunes; warners had passed away before him and after him, [saying], "Worship none but God. Truly I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day." (22) They said, "Have you come to us to pervert us from our gods? Then bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are among the truthful." (23) He said, "Knowledge lies with God alone, and I only convey to you that wherewith I have been sent. But I see that you are an ignorant people." (24) And when they beheld it as a cloud bound for their valleys, they said, "This is a cloud bringing us rain." Nay! It is what you sought to hasten—a wind carrying a painful punishment, (25) destroying everything by the Command of its Lord. They became such that

life they already spent the share of good that was destined for them and will have no share of good in the Hereafter. Regarding the contrast between enjoying goods in this life and in the next, ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have implored the Prophet to pray to God for prosperity like that of the people of Persia and Byzantium, whereupon the Prophet said, "Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, do you doubt that they are a nation for whom good things have been advanced to them in the life of this world?" (Q), implying that they would not have these goods in the Hereafter. This verse does not reprimand the disbelievers simply for enjoying the things of this world, as such enjoyment is expressly permitted in the Quran (see, e.g., 7:32); rather, it reprimands them for failing to be thankful for the goods God has permitted them and for indulging in those that were not permitted (Q, R). People could thus avail themselves of good things in this world and continue to receive good things in the Hereafter, so long as it is done with a sense of gratitude and proportion. If, however, they *waxed arrogant,* failing to acknowledge the rights of God and other human beings and thus being *iniquitous,* they would be subject to *the punishment of disgrace.*

21 *The brother of ᶜĀd* is the prophet Hūd, who was sent to the tribe of ᶜĀd in the Ḥaḍramawt region of southern Yemen. For the account of the tribe of ᶜĀd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16; 54:18–21. *Sand dunes* translates *aḥqāf,* which is taken by some as a proper name for a valley in Yemen (JJ). *Worship none but God* is the same message with which all prophets are said to have been sent. *I fear for you* implies, "If you disobey me" (Aj).

22 *To pervert us from our gods* means to turn the tribe of ᶜĀd away from worshipping their gods (Aj). Their challenge, *Bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us,* which refers to the punishment, is similar to the one posed to Noah by his people (7:70; 11:32) and to the prophet Ṣāliḥ by the Arab tribe of Thamūd (7:77). In each case it refers to a manner of mocking the prophets that is similar to the way in which the disbelievers are said to have mocked the Prophet Muhammad, saying, *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25).

23 Hūd's response, *Knowledge lies with God alone,* is what the Prophet Muhammad is also enjoined to say in the face of mocking (see 67:25–26). In both cases it refers to knowledge of when the Day of Judgment will come (Aj).

24–25 The people of ᶜĀd reportedly suffered from a drought for three years. They then

naught was seen but their dwellings. Thus do We recompense the guilty people. (26) Indeed We established them in a manner in which We did not establish you, and We endowed them with hearing, sight, and hearts. But their hearing, sight, and hearts availed them naught, since they rejected God's signs, and that which they used to mock beset them. (27) And indeed We destroyed the towns around you, and We vary the signs that haply they might return. (28) Why, then, did they—whom they had taken as gods apart from God and as a means of

prayed for rain, and when they saw the cloud, they thought it was an answer to their supplications, because they believed they were in fact good and thus deserving of God's Mercy; see 7:72c. According to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, "Whenever the wind was stormy, the Messenger of God would say, 'O God! I ask Thee for what is good in it, and the good that it contains, and the good of that for which it was sent. I seek refuge with Thee from what is evil in it, what evil it contains, and the evil of that for which it was sent.' And when there was thunder and lightning in the sky, his color would change; he would go out and in, backward and forward; then when the rain came, he would be relieved, and I noticed that on his face. I asked him about it, and he said, 'It may be as the people of ʿĀd said, when they saw a cloud formation coming to their valley, *This is a cloud bringing us rain*' " (IK). That the people of ʿĀd *sought to hasten* the wind that brought their punishment refers to the manner in which disbelievers, by way of mocking the warnings of the prophets in v. 22, hasten the Punishment of God. This attitude of derision is attributed to all disbelievers in one way or another and is elsewhere contrasted with that of the believers: *Those who believe not in it seek to hasten it, and those who believe are wary of it and know that it is the truth* (42:18; for other passages where the disbelievers seek to *hasten* their punishment, see 10:50–51; 13:6; 22:47; 26:204; 27:46, 72; 29:53; 37:176–77; 38:16; 51:14). The people of ʿĀd *were destroyed by a howling, raging wind* that was inflicted *upon them for seven nights and eight days consecutively* (69:6–7; cf. 41:16; 54:19). Then they were *felled as if they were hollowed palm trunks* (69:7; cf. 54:20).

26 The Quraysh are called upon to contemplate the greater power of those who had passed before them, as the tribe of ʿĀd was among the most powerful in the memory of the people of Arabia, *the like of which was never created in all the land* (89:8). This principle is expressed more broadly in 6:6: *Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them? We had established them on the earth more firmly than We have established you.* Despite their strength, *their hearing, sight, and hearts availed them naught* because they did not listen to the revelation, see the signs in creation pointing to the Oneness of God, or reflect upon either (Aj). *And that which they used to mock beset them* (cf. 6:10; 11:8; 16:34; 21:41; 39:48; 40:83; 45:33) indicates that the punishment they received is a direct result of their own iniquity, since *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44). Thus 11:58 clarifies that, although God destroyed the tribe of ʿĀd, He *saved Hūd and those who believed with him.*

27 *The towns around you* refers to the ʿĀd and other Arabian tribes, such as the Thamūd, who dwelt between Makkah and Syria; Saba', who were in Yemen; the Midianites, who were on the route to Palestine; and the people of Lot, who are believed to have lived by the Dead Sea (IK), all of whose stories are given as examples in other *sūrah*s. Regarding *We vary the signs* (cf. 6:46, 65, 105; 7:58; 17:41), see 6:46c.

28 Just as the Quraysh worshipped idols, so too did the ʿĀd, the Thamūd, and other tribes. The disbelievers are thus asked how the gods they worship will help them, if the gods worshipped by the ʿĀd and the Thamūd did not help them, though those tribes were wealthier and more powerful than the Quraysh (cf. 11:100–101; 21:43; 36:74–75). That they took other gods *as a means of drawing nigh [unto God]* implies that some dis-

drawing nigh [unto God]—not help them? Nay, they forsook them. That was their perversion and that which they used to fabricate. (29) And [remember] when We made a group of jinn incline unto thee, listening to the Quran, when in its presence they said, "Hearken!" Then when it came to an end, they went back to their people as warners. (30) They said, "O our people! Truly we have heard a Book sent down after Moses, confirming that which came before it, guiding to the truth and to a straight road. (31) O our people! Answer God's caller and believe in him, then He will forgive you some of your sins and protect you from a painful punishment. (32) And whosoever does not answer God's caller thwarts not on earth and has no protectors apart from Him—they are

believers tried to reconcile their polytheism by envisioning a hierarchy with a single God reigning supreme; see commentary on 39:3, where the disbelievers say of their deities, *We do not worship them, save to bring us nigh in nearness unto God.*

29 This verse is a reference to a group of jinn (seven or nine, according to most) who came upon the Prophet while he was performing the morning prayer in the valley of Nakhlah during his return to Makkah from the city of Ṭā'if. After hearing the Quran, the jinn accepted it and then returned to their fellow jinn, enjoining them to accept the Quran and the Prophet. For a full account of this event, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72. Here *its presence* could also be read "his presence," meaning that of the Prophet (Aj, R, Ṭ).

30 Some interpret the reference the jinn make to Moses to mean that the jinn had been Jews (IK, R, Ṭ), but given the full context of the story (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72), it may simply mean that they are comparing the Quran to another revelation. The Quran is also described as *confirming* earlier scriptures in 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31. *Guiding to the truth* can also be understood to mean "guiding to God" (Aj), as "the Truth" (*al-Ḥaqq*) is one of the Names of God. The way of Islam is referred to throughout the Quran as *a straight path,* and *the straight path* (*al-ṣirāṭ al mustaqīm*) is often taken as a synonym for Islam, but this is the only verse that refers to *a straight road* (*ṭarīq mustaqīm*). Combining the two terms, al-Tustarī writes of this verse, "It indicates that the road of truth is to leave worldly transactions (*muʿāmalāt*) and formalities (*rusūmāt*), and to realize the truth, which is the straight path" (ST).

31 *God's caller* means the Prophet, while *in him* can refer to the Prophet or to God (Ṭs) or to all that the Prophet commands (R). Al-Tustarī sees the phrase *answer God's caller and believe in him* as an allusion to the mystery of faith in the depths of one's heart: "In the heart of every believer there is a caller calling him to his sound judgment (*rushd*). Happy is the one who listens to the call of the caller, and follows it" (ST). Some commentators understand *some of your sins* to mean that only some sins will be removed by belief (Aj, R), implying that for complete forgiveness one must also act in accord with the revelation. Together, these verses are understood to demonstrate that the jinn are subject to command and prohibition, reward and punishment the same way human beings are, while others maintain that the believers among the jinn are only rewarded with being saved from the Fire (Q).

32 The reference to "thwarting" God alludes to vv. 4–5, as the jinn were among those upon whom the disbelievers would call to save them. That no one can thwart God or His signs is repeated in over a dozen verses (6:134; 8:59; 9:2–3; 10:53; 11:19–20, 33; 16:46; 22:51; 24:57; 29:22; 34:5, 38; 35:44; 39:51; 42:31;), since from a Quranic perspective *naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God* (35:44; see also 52:8).

in manifest error." (33) Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth and did not weary in their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Yea! He is Powerful over all things. (34) On the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire: "Is this not true?" They will say, "Yea, by our Lord!" He will reply, "Taste the punishment for having disbelieved." (35) So be patient, as the resolute among the messengers were patient. And seek not to hasten for them. It shall be for them, on the day when they see that which they are promised, as though they had tarried naught but an hour of a day. A proclamation! Will any but the iniquitous people be destroyed?

33 This verse presents one of the Quranic arguments for God's ability to resurrect human beings (IK, Q), as if to say, "If God can create *the heavens and the earth,* then surely He can *give life to the dead*" (cf. 40:57c). Regarding the absence of fatigue or weariness from the Divine Nature, see the discussion of *Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep* in 2:255c (also see 50:15).

34 For *exposed to the Fire,* see 46:20c. *Is this not true?* is a rhetorical question posed elsewhere to the disbelievers (see 7:44); *this* refers to the Fire and the punishment whose reality they had denied. It could also be understood as a reference to God, in which case *Is this not true?* would be rendered, "Is He not the Truth?" Even though they now realize the truth and admit to it, the gates of repentance have been closed, and they are cast into the Fire and thus made to *taste the punishment* (cf. 3:106, 181; 4:56; 6:30; 8:35, 50; 22:22; 32:14, 20; 34:12; 34:42).

35 The injunction *Be patient* is addressed to the Prophet or to all Muslims. *The resolute among the messengers* is most often understood to mean the messengers who brought a new Book and a new revealed law from God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, who are listed together in 33:7 and 42:13, and Muhammad (IK, Kā). There are, however, other proposals for the referent, ranging from three prophets—Noah, Hūd, and Abraham—to all the prophets (Q). Relating this term directly to the specific trials many prophets endured, al-Tustarī writes, "*The resolute among the messengers are* Abraham, God's friend; he was tried with fire, and with the sacrifice of a son, but was content and submitted. Job was tried by trials, and Ishmael [was tried] with the sacrifice, and was content. Noah [was tried] with denial but was patient, while Jonah was in the belly of the fish, but called [upon God] and sought refuge [in Him]. Joseph [was tried] with prison and the well, but he did not change, and Jacob was tested by the loss of his sight and the loss of a son, but he complained of his grief only to God and did not complain to anyone other than Him. There are twelve prophets who were patient with what befell them, and they are *the resolute among the messengers*" (ST).

The Prophet is enjoined not to pray for punishment to be hastened against the disbelievers, as some prophets had done in the past, since their punishment would come in due course (JJ, Q). This postponement can be understood as a mercy from God or to mean that God has a greater punishment for them in the Hereafter (see 41:16). Either way, the reality and duration of the Hereafter will make the life of this world seem for them *as though they had tarried naught but an hour of a day* (cf. 10:45; 17:52; 23:112–14; 30:55; 79:46). The iniquitous are destroyed by being punished in the Hereafter, but moreover by being led astray (see 2:26) and made to forget God, resulting in distance from Him and from their true selves, as in 59:19: *And be not like those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls. It is they who are the iniquitous.*

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 47

# Muhammad

## *Muḥammad*

All scholars agree that *Muḥammad* is a Madinan *sūrah*. Some maintain that it is early Madinan, with the exception of v. 13 (Āl, IJ, JJ), which is reported to have been revealed during the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah and thus before the beginning of the Madinan period (Āl). It takes its name from the mention of *Muhammad* in v. 2, one of only four verses to mention him by name; the others are 3:144; 33:40; and 48:29. It is also known to some as *al-Qitāl* ("Fighting"; al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*), due to the criticism of those who shrink from the call to fight in the way of God in v. 20. The disease of hearts (vv. 20, 29) and the reasons for which God seals (v. 16) and locks (v. 24) them is an important theme of this *sūrah,* as is the true nature of human action. It therefore provides a subtle reflection upon the intrinsic connection between actions and belief or between deeds and the state of one's heart.

The *sūrah* begins by distinguishing between the believers and the disbelievers with regard to the true nature of their deeds (vv. 1–3). An exhortation to fight the disbelievers (vv. 4–7) then segues into an examination of the state of disbelievers (vv. 8–10), followed by a comparison of the final ends of the believers and the disbelievers (vv. 11–15) that culminates in a stark contrast between what each group is given to drink in their final abode (v. 15). This contrast is followed by a more specific discussion of the manner in which the disbelievers react to the Prophet and the Quran (vv. 16–30). The discussion then focuses again upon the contrast between the believers and disbelievers, exhorting the believers to continue striving against the disbelievers (vv. 31–35). A final passage cautions against miserliness and enjoins the believers *to spend in the way of God* (vv. 36–38).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God—He has made their deeds go astray. (2) And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and believe in what has been sent down unto Muhammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He has absolved them of their evil deeds and set their state aright. (3) That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood and because those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus does God set forth for mankind their likenesses. (4) When you meet those who disbelieve, strike at their necks; then, when you have overwhelmed them, tighten the bonds. Then free them graciously or hold them for ransom, till war lays down its burdens. Thus [shall it be]. And if God willed, He would take vengeance upon them, but that

1 *Turn from* translates *ṣaddū ʿan,* which can mean both "to turn away from" and "to prevent from" (Iṣ, Z). Taking the two meanings together, the verse indicates that the disbelievers turn away from *the way of God* and also seek to prevent others from following it. As this behavior reflects their disposition toward religion, God *has made their deeds go astray,* meaning that their evil deeds will not have the intended effect, that any good deeds they have performed will bring no benefit for them in the Hereafter (JJ), and that they mistake evil deeds for good deeds because *the evil of their deeds is made to seem fair unto them* (9:37). In this way, God brings their scheming and plotting to naught (Q). This verse stands in stark contrast to the last sentence of v. 4: *And as for those who are slain in the way of God, He will not make their deeds go astray.* But the use of the past tense here in v. 1 leaves open the possibility that *those who disbelieve* may repent in the future and thus be forgiven for their evil deeds.

2 Whereas even the good deeds of disbelievers *go astray,* the evil deeds of believers are absolved and forgiven. *Has absolved them of their evil deeds* is understood by some to mean all of the evil deeds that they performed before they believed (Q), as it is a fundamental tenet of Islamic theology that embracing Islam "wipes out all previous sins."

Absolution (*takfīr*) is said to cover over evil deeds, rendering them as if they had never been committed (Iṣ). It is thus a greater reward than forgiveness wherein although one will not be punished for one's evil deeds one will still witness them on the Day of Judgment.

*Set their state aright* then means that God helps them in following the teachings of Islam after embracing religion (Z), as in 25:70, which says of those who repent, *God will replace their evil deeds with good deeds* (R). *State* translates *bāl,* which can also mean the heart or the mind (Ṭū).

3 *That is because* refers to God's rendering the deeds of the disbelievers void and absolving the believers of their evil deeds (JJ, Q), as the disbelievers follow falsehood and the believers follow truth (Q). In this context, *Thus does God set forth for mankind their likenesses* indicates that God has made clear the difference between good and evil deeds (Q), or it refers directly to the distinction made in the beginning of the verse between the disbelievers following falsehood and the believers following truth (R).

4 *Strike at their necks* conveys the gravity and severity of the fighting (Q). Rendered literally, it would be "striking the necks" in the accusative, which is understood to mean "strike the necks with a strike" (IK, Q, Ṭ), indicating the brevity of the act, as it is confined to battle and

He may test some of you by means of others, [ . . . ]. And as for those who are slain in the way of God, He will not make their deeds go astray. (5) He will guide them and set their state aright, (6) and cause them to enter the Garden, having made it known to them. (7) O you who believe! If you help God, He will help you and make firm your steps. (8) As for those who disbelieve, wretched

is not a continuous command. *When you have overwhelmed them* can mean, "When you have overcome those whose necks you did not strike and made them captives" (Ṭ), or "When you have slaughtered them" (IK). *Tighten the bonds* means that prisoners should only be taken after the victory has definitely been achieved, as in 8:67: *It is not for a prophet to take captives until he overwhelms [his enemy] in the land* (Q). The bonds are to be tightened so that the enemy can neither cause further harm nor escape (Ṭ). According to the present verse, prisoners of war can be set free as a gracious act, ransomed for money, or freed to the other side in an exchange of prisoners (JJ, Q). It does not, however, command that prisoners be released. They may thus continue to be held captive as well or in certain cases even executed, alternatives practiced by the Prophet at various times during different battles according to different circumstances (Q). Although there are debates as to whether verses such as 8:57; 9:5; and 9:36 may abrogate this verse, al-Qurṭubī notes that abrogation only need arise in cases where two verses are considered irreconcilable in their legal intent, but that when it is possible to implement both verses under different circumstances, as in this case, there is no abrogation. Whether to slay prisoners of war because they are implacable adversaries, continue to hold them captive, or set them free must thus be decided on a case-by-case basis. For a more complete discussion of the treatment of captives, see commentary on 8:67–71; 9:5; and the essay "Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran."

*Till war lays down its burdens* means either until war ceases or so that war will cease. Some interpret *its burdens* literally to mean weapons, while others allow that it means all the hardships that war entails (Q). Many understand *till war lays down its burdens* as a reference to the time when only God is worshipped (Q, Ṭ, Ṭū). *If God willed, He would take vengeance upon them* without any fighting (JJ), *but* instead He tests some human beings *by means of others* (cf. 6:53), as in 5:48: *And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds.*

5 See 47:2c. In this context, the future tense indicates a promise that God will *set their state aright.*

6 After being guided and having their state set aright, God will bring the believers into *the Garden* (R). Then each person will know his or her place in Paradise, as in a *ḥadīth:* "When the believers have been saved from Hell, they will be stopped at a bridge between the Fire and the Garden, where they will retaliate against each other for the injustices done among them in the world. Then when they are purified and cleansed, they will be permitted to enter the Garden. And by Him in Whose Hands lies the soul of Muhammad, everybody will recognize his dwelling in the Garden better than he recognizes his dwelling in this world" (Q).

7 *If you help God* is understood to mean if believers help God's religion and the Prophet (JJ, Q) or if they help *the party of God* (58:22). The manner in which believers *help God* is made more explicit in 22:40: *Were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God's Name is mentioned much, would have been destroyed. And God will surely help those who help Him.* The phrase *make firm your steps* (cf. 2:250; 3:147) refers to walking on *the straight path* (Q), or it means making one stand firm while fighting (JJ). It is also understood as an allegory for making hearts firm in faith (Q), as in 8:12, where God says to the angels before the Battle of Badr, *Truly I am with you; so make firm those who believe.*

8 *Wretched are they* translates *taʿsan lahum,* an emphatic phrase that conveys ruin, sorrow, misery, revilement, destruction, defeat, failure,

are they, and He has made their deeds go astray. (9) That is because they were averse to that which God sent down, so He made their deeds come to naught. (10) Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? God destroyed them; and the disbelievers shall have the like thereof. (11) That is because God is Master of those who believe, and because the disbelievers have no master. (12) Truly God causes those who believe and perform righteous deeds to enter Gardens with rivers running below, while those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire shall be an abode for them. (13) And how many a town greater in strength than thy town which cast thee out have We destroyed, having none then to help them?

ignominy, evil, and misfortune (Q). With regard to God's making *their deeds go astray,* see 47:1c.

9 *That is because* refers to their being wretched and to their deeds going astray (Q). That *they were averse to what God sent down* implies aversion to all revealed books and religions (Q). God makes their deeds *come to naught in this world and the Hereafter* (2:217; see also 3:22), since in the absence of proper belief, good deeds provide no reward in the next life (cf. 2:217; 3:21–22; 5:5; 6:88; 7:147; 9:17; 11:16; 18:105; 39:65; 5:53c).

10 *Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end?* is repeated several times in the Quran (see 12:109; 30:9c; 30:42; 35:44; 40:21, 82). The Quran frequently mentions the fate of the guilty, the corrupt, the wrongdoers, and those who denied God's messengers as an admonition for the disbelievers (see 3:137; 6:11; 7:84, 86, 103; 10:39, 73; 16:36; 27:14, 69; 37:73; 43:25). *Those before them* is thus understood as a reference to the ruins left by previous tribes who were destroyed despite being of greater might than those who opposed the Prophet (see 35:44; 40:21, 82). For more on the Quranic discussion of journeying upon the earth and the spiritual and moral edification that derives from it, see 30:9c. That *the disbelievers shall have the like thereof* is understood to mean that they will suffer a fate like that of those before them (Q, Ṭ).

11 Here *that* refers to the destruction and degradation suffered by disbelievers of past generations (R). *Master* translates *mawlā,* which also means "protector" and "helper." The implication is that anyone who does not recognize God as master, protector, and helper will have no master or protector, since *they will find no protector or helper for themselves apart from God* (33:17; cf., e.g., 29:22; 33:65; 42:31, 46; 46:32). Some maintain that this verse was revealed on the Day of the Battle of Uḥud, when, after gaining the upper hand over the Muslims, the idolaters shouted from afar, "A day for a day. We have [the goddess] ʿUzzā and you have no ʿUzzā." The Prophet then told his Companions to shout back, "God is our Master, and you have no master" (Q).

12 Regarding *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c. That the disbelievers *eat as cattle eat* means that they have no concern other than filling their bellies—and by implication satisfying their carnal desires (JJ, Q)—and are heedless of the Hereafter (JJ). In this vein, it is said, "In the world the believer makes provision [for the Hereafter], the hypocrite preens, and the disbeliever revels" (Q).

13 According to some accounts, this verse was revealed at the beginning of the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah. After the Prophet left Makkah, he turned to the city and said, "By God, thou art the most beloved land to God and the most beloved land to me. Were it not that thy people had expelled me from thee, I would not have left thee" (Āl, IK, Q). This is one of several verses to mention previous peoples destroyed for their iniquity and for their refusal to accept the teachings of the messengers God had sent them, referring to towns (7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48) and to whole generations (17:17; 19:74; 20:128;

(14) Is one who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord like one whose evil deeds are made to seem fair unto him and like those who follow their caprices? (15) The parable of the Garden that has been promised to the reverent: therein lie rivers of water incorruptible, rivers of milk whose flavor does not change, rivers of wine delicious for those who imbibe, and rivers of purified honey. Therein they partake of every fruit and of forgiveness from their Lord. [Are they] like

32:26; 36:31; 38:3; 50:36), all of which serve as a reminder that God can undo the power of any people.

14 *A clear proof* refers to the revelation, or to affirmation and certainty (Q), or simply to a definitive argument *from his Lord* (JJ). Elsewhere it is said of those who reject God's messengers that *Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them* (16:63; 27:24; 29:38). That they *follow their caprices* is then a greater degree of disbelief, since *one whose evil deeds are made to seem fair unto him* may still have doubt and thus reflect upon and question his evil deeds and in doing so be closer to one who *stands upon a clear proof* (R). In this vein, 28:50 asks, *And who is more astray than one who follows his caprice without guidance from God?* Regarding the Quranic understanding of *caprice,* see 45:23c. Similarly, 32:18 asks rhetorically, *Is one who believes like one who is iniquitous? They are not equal.* And in 39:9 the Prophet is told, *Say, "Are those who know and those who do not know equal?"*

15 *Water incorruptible* means either water whose nature, in contrast to the water of this world, does not change (JJ) or water whose smell and taste do not change (Q). *Milk whose flavor does not change* means milk that does not sour, as does the milk of this world (Q). The *rivers of wine* provide a drink *wherefrom they suffer neither headache nor stupefaction* (56:19), unlike the wine of this world. And *purified honey* means that it is not earthly honey, which is made by bees and must then be harvested and filtered because of impurities, but is created directly by God (Q). Some equate these four rivers with the rivers seen by the Prophet during his Night Journey and Ascension through the seven heavens (see 17:1c; introduction to *Sūrah* 53). Regarding this part of the journey, the Prophet is reported to have said, "I was raised to the *lote tree of the boundary* (53:14) and saw four rivers, two of which were flowing out and two of which were flowing in. Those that were flowing out were the Nile and the Euphrates, and those that were flowing in were two rivers in Paradise. Then I was given three bowls: one containing milk, another containing honey, and a third containing wine. I took the bowl containing milk and drank it. It was said to me, 'You and your followers will be on the right path.' "

Many Sufis see these rivers as four different kinds of Divinely granted knowledge by which the human heart is enlivened. According to al-Kāshānī's detailed interpretation, *water incorruptible* is the knowledge that "does not change with the defects of delusions (*wahmiyyāt*), doubts (*tashkīkāt*), and differences in corrupt tenets (*iʿtiqādāt*) and customary beliefs. And it is for the reverent . . . who have reached the station of the heart" (K). *Milk whose flavor does not change* then represents a lower degree of knowledge that does not change by being mixed with caprice or innovation, the differences between schools of law, and the tribalism of those attached to creeds. This is the knowledge pertaining to proper actions that prevents one from acts of disobedience and depravity. The *rivers of wine* are then different kinds of love for the Divine Attributes and the Divine Essence. They are delicious "for those who are complete (*kāmil*), who have reached the station of witnessing the beauty of the manifestations of the [Divine] Attributes, and directly witnessing the beauty of the [Divine] Essence, the ardent lovers who desire Absolute Beauty, in the station of the spirit." And the *rivers of purified honey* are "holy delights that descend [upon the heart], luminous gleams, and the raptures of realization in states and stations for [spiritual] wayfarers . . . and seekers." Those who drink from *the rivers of purified honey* are thus less numerous than those who drink from *the rivers of wine;* and "not everyone who

one who abides in the Fire and those who are made to drink a boiling liquid which then tears apart their bowels? (16) Among them are those who listen unto thee. Then when they depart from thee they say to those who have been given knowledge, "What did he say?" It is they whose hearts God has sealed and who follow their caprices. (17) But those who are guided, He increases them in guidance and grants them their reverence. (18) Do they await aught but that the Hour should come upon them suddenly? Yet its portents have already come. Then when it has come upon them, what will their remembrance do for them? (19) Know, then, that there is no god but God, and ask forgiveness for thy sin

tastes the delight of honey tastes the sweetness of wine." From this perspective, *they partake of every fruit* means that they partake of every delight from the manifestations of the Divine Acts, Attributes, and Essence (K).

Although other verses speak of those who are *made to drink a boiling liquid* (see 6:70; 10:4; 18:29; 37:67; 38:57; 44:46; 78:24–25; 88:5), none provides as stark a contrast. In the context of this *sūrah* and according to the Sufi interpretation, it could be said that they are made to drink the boiling liquid of their own caprice (K), as in 4:10: *Truly those who consume the property of orphans unjustly only consume fire in their bellies,* a reality that the Prophet is said to have directly witnessed in his glimpse of Hell during the Night Journey and Ascension. In this way, it is the disbelief and evil deeds of those in Hell that tear *apart their bowels,* since *God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* (10:44).

16 *Among them* refers to the hypocrites of Madinah, while *those who have been given knowledge* refers to the Prophet's Companions (Q, Ṭ, Z). In this context, that God seals their hearts (see 2:7c) means that, although they hear the words and profess belief outwardly, they are blinded by their desire to *follow their caprices.* Thus they cannot understand and do not act in accord with what they hear. This verse can also be understood as a message to believers that they must be attentive when reciting the Quran, lest they hear the words but do not understand them or heed their meaning. In his *Revival of the Religious Sciences,* al-Ghazzālī lists four obstacles that prevent those who listen to the Quran from understanding it: confining their focus to the correct pronunciation of the letters of the Quran; dogmatic adherence to a particular school of thought (*madhhab*); persistence in sin or being characterized by pride and worldly passions; and reading the outward commentary on the Quran and thinking that the Quran contains only those meanings that have been transmitted from early commentators such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, and the like (*Iḥyāʾ*: Qirāʾāt al-qurʾān).

17 *Increases them in guidance* indicates that God increases those who are guided in faith (Q, Ṭ), knowledge, and insight (Q), which does not occur for those whose hearts are sealed. That God *grants them their reverence* indicates either that God helps them attain reverence or that He gives them rewards for their reverence (Z).

18 This verse asks whether those disbelievers and hypocrites (mentioned in the previous verses) are waiting for the Final Hour, and whether they know that it will come upon them suddenly and that they will not have time to repent and remember God (Ṭ). Although there are many discussions regarding the signs or portents of the Hour, the sign to which this verse refers is most likely the coming of the Prophet, who is reported to have said, "I was sent like this in relation to the Hour," while pointing to his index finger and his middle finger (Mw, Q).

19 Some understand this verse to mean that what one has learned by way of reason and deduction, one must know for certain (Mw). Others see it as a command to say, "There is no god but God," as the form of remembrance mentioned in

and for the believing men and the believing women. God knows your coming and going, and your abode. (20) Those who believe say, "Would that a *sūrah* were sent down." Then when a definitive *sūrah* wherein fighting is mentioned is sent down, thou seest those in whose hearts is a disease looking at thee as if death had overcome them. More fitting for them (21) would be obedience to God and honorable speech. Then, when the matter is resolved, were they true to God, it would be better for them. (22) Were you to turn away, would you perchance

the previous verse. *God knows your coming and going, and your abode* is interpreted as a reference to waking activity and sleep (Mw, Q, Ṭ) or to activity in this life and the state in the grave and the Hereafter (Aj, Q). In each interpretation, it refers to God knowing all of one's states because nothing is hidden from Him (Aj).

20–21 For the meaning of *definitive* or "determined" *sūrah*s or verses, see 3:7c. It is said that the context for this verse is a time when some believers were hoping for a *sūrah* that would allow them to fight their enemies. While in Makkah, a group of the Muslims had reportedly asked the Prophet why they could not fight the disbelievers even though they were oppressed by them. The Prophet responded that he had not been commanded to fight. When verses came enjoining fighting, many feared fighting *even as they should have feared God* (4:77; see 61:2–3c). Though they went into battle, some of the believers were at first reluctant to fight, and some even retreated at the Battle of Uḥud (see 3:121c; 3:155c). This verse, however, most likely refers only to the hypocrites (Q, R, Ṭ), since *those in whose hearts is a disease* (cf. 2:10; 5:52; 8:49; 9:125; 22:53; 33:12, 60; 47:29; 74:31) describes those of impure intentions (see 33:32) or those who secretly harbor in their souls a deep religious hypocrisy or doubt (see 2:8–11; 5:52; 24:47–50; 33:12, 60). As translated, a single thought continues through these two verses, though some prefer to place a full stop at the end of v. 20, so that the last clause means "[death] would be more fitting for them" (R). In this context, *honorable speech* means words that are kind to the Prophet (JJ), rather than scoffing, and *when the matter is resolved* means when fighting has been decreed.

22 What the hypocrites *turn away* from is the religion and the Prophet. Although here working *corruption* is linked specifically to breaking *family relations,* it is more generally linked to all manner of iniquity, such as arrogance (7:74) and oppression (26:183; 28:4). For the Quranic understanding of working *corruption,* see 30:41c. Regarding the prohibition against working *corruption upon the earth,* see 7:56c. Maintaining *family relations,* literally, "womb relations," is considered to be among the most important virtues; see 4:1c, where *reverence* is linked to maintaining family relations in the same way that *obedience* is linked to it in these verses. According to a *ḥadīth qudsī,* "God created creatures, and when He finished His creations, the womb said, '[O God,] at this place I seek refuge in Thee from all those who sever me [i.e., sever the ties of kinship].' God said, 'Yes. Will you not be pleased that I will keep good relations with the one who will keep good relations with you, and I will sever relations with the one who will sever relations with you.' It said, 'Yes, O my Lord.' God said, 'Then that is for you.'" To this the Prophet added, "Read if you wish, the statement of God: *Were you to turn away, would you perchance work corruption upon the earth and break your family relations?"* In this context, breaking *family relations* is understood to mean returning to the ways of paganism and idolatry before Islam (JJ, Ṭ). But as maintaining *family relations* was also an esteemed virtue among the Arabs before the advent of Islam, for such an interpretation to hold true, *family relations* would need to be used as a metaphor for the bonds of brotherhood between Muslims, as mentioned in 49:10: *The believers are but brothers; so make peace between your brethren, and reverence God, that haply you may receive mercy.*

work corruption upon the earth and break your family relations? (23) They are those whom God has cursed, making them deaf and blinding their sight. (24) Do they not contemplate the Quran? Or do hearts have their locks upon them? (25) Truly those who turn their backs after guidance has been made clear to them—Satan has seduced them, yet He grants them respite. (26) That is because they say to those who are averse to what God has sent down, "We shall obey you in some matters." And God knows their keeping of secrets. (27) Then how will

23 *They* are those who turn away, work corruption, and do not honor family ties. *Making them deaf and blinding their sight* indicates that their hearts are unreceptive to truth, as in 22:46: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* (cf. 18:57; 41:44). They continue to hear and to see, but because the heart, the seat of the intellect, is hardened and therefore, spiritually speaking, dead, they are like the cattle mentioned in v. 12 in that they have no intellect (Q).

24 The question *Do they not contemplate the Quran?* is repeated in 4:82; see also 23:68: *Have they not contemplated the Word, or has there come unto them that which came not unto their forefathers?* Although recitation of the Quran is enjoined in several passages, it is also noted that one must contemplate, understand, and implement the Quran's teachings to the best of one's ability. In this vein, Ibn Masʿūd is reported to have said of the Companions, "The Prophet used to recite for them ten verses, and they would not move on to the next ten until they had learned everything about [the first ten]. Thus he taught them the Quran and the deeds based upon it together." Regarding the knowledge to be obtained by meditating upon the Quran, the fourth Shiite Imam, ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, is reported to have said, "The verses of the Quran are stores of treasure. So whenever you open one of them, you must see what lies inside." Another famous *ḥadīth* says, "The best of you is one who learns the Quran and teaches it." In this same vein, Ibn Masʿūd is reported to have said, "When you intend to acquire knowledge, study the Quran in depth, for in it lies the knowledge of those of old and those of later times." *Or do hearts have their locks upon them* is understood to mean, "But hearts have their locks upon them" (IJ). Some understand the locked heart to refer to the heart of the most severely afflicted, whom no guidance reaches, while hearts with rust upon them (see 83:14) and hearts that are sealed (see v. 16) are less diseased (IJ).

25 Here *those who turn their backs* refers to those who turn their backs on the Prophet, which could mean the hypocrites who turned away when fighting was enjoined upon them (IJ, Q) or the Jews of Madinah who rejected the Prophet and turned away from part of what was revealed to them (IJ), as in 2:85, when they are asked, *Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part?* Some say that it refers to the disbelievers who knew the Prophet's trustworthy character well before the coming of Islam, but nonetheless rejected him after the coming of Islam (Q). As translated, the last phrase means that God grants them respite in this world, so that they may turn in repentance before they die, or to allow them to further prove their sinful nature (see 3:178). *He grants them respite* could also be rendered "he gives them false hope," deriving from the verb *amala,* meaning "to hope" (Ṭ), in which case the subject of the verb would be Satan.

26 *That* refers to the seduction by Satan and the granting of respite (or false hope). Here commentators mention that it is either the hypocrites or the Jews who turn to the disbelievers *who are averse to what God has sent down* and offer to follow them. An alternate reading of *And God knows their keeping of secrets* (*isrārahum*) is, "And God knows their secrets (*asrārahum*)" (IJ, Q). Both readings refer to their secret consultations with the disbelievers.

27 This verse asks what the state of the disbelievers will be when the angels take their souls, given that God granted them respite but they still

it be when the angels seize them, striking their faces and their backs? (28) That is because they followed that which angers God and were averse to His Good Pleasure; so He made their deeds come to naught. (29) Or do those in whose hearts is a disease suppose that God will not expose their rancor? (30) And if We willed, We would show them to you so that you would know them by their mark. And you will certainly know them by their tone of speech. And God knows your deeds. (31) And We shall test you until We know those among you who strive and those who are patient, and We shall test your proclamations. (32) Truly those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, and oppose the Messenger of God after guidance has been made clear to them will not harm God in the least. And He will make their deeds come to naught. (33) O you who

died in a state of disobedience (Q). Regarding the angels' *striking their faces and their backs,* see 8:50, which adds that the angels say to them, *Taste the punishment of the burning,* and 8:50c.

28 *That* refers to the punishment mentioned in the previous verse. For *made their deeds come to naught,* see 47:9c.

29 This verse asks if the hypocrites fear that God will expose their hypocrisy by exposing their enmity for the Prophet (IJ)

30 Regarding the marks upon the disbelievers and the hypocrites, 55:41 states, *The guilty shall be known by their marks; and they shall be seized by the forelocks and by the feet.* For other verses that mention marks that reveal belief or disbelief, see 2:273; 7:46–48. For a discussion of the ability to *know them by their mark,* see 2:273c. *Their tone of speech* can refer to the tenor with which they said things or to their actual words, as when ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites in Madinah, is reported to have said with regard to the Prophet and his Companions, *If we return to Madinah, the mightier will surely expel the weaker therefrom* (63:8).

31 God will *test* people to see if their testimony of faith and willingness to fight are indeed true, as was reportedly done in the Battle of Uḥud (see 3:121c; 3:155c). In the context of this *sūrah,* this verse means both that one must act in accord with revelation in order for one's *proclamations* of belief to be accepted and that many of the hypocrites declared their willingness to fight until they were commanded to do so (v. 20). *Those among you who strive* (cf. 3:142; 9:16) refers not only to those who fight, but also to those *who strive in the way of God with their property and themselves* (49:15; cf. 2:218; 4:95; 5:54; 8:74; 9:20, 41, 44, 81). *Until We know* could also mean "in order to know" (cf. 2:143c). In either translation, it is understood to mean, "in order to make manifest" in existence, as God already knows their true nature (IJ); see 10:14c; 29:3c. In a more general sense, the present verse indicates that all hypocrisy will be exposed.

32 Regarding *turn from,* see 47:1c. *After guidance has been made clear* means after the revelation has been made clear. Whereas vv. 9 and 28 state that God *made their deeds come to naught,* which can be understood as a reference to deeds for which one would receive reward if they were combined with faith and thus right intention, here the deeds that *come to naught* is understood as a reference to acts done in defiance of the Prophet (R), and the use of the future tense thus conveys a promise that they will not prevail against him.

33 The Command to *obey God and obey the Messenger* (3:32; 4:59; 5:92; 24:54; 64:12; see also 3:132; 4:80; 7:156–57; 8:1, 20, 46; 33:33; 49:14; 58:13) is an underlying theme of the Quran; see 3:32c; 4:59c. Although most commentators relate the Command *let not your deeds be in vain* to undoing good deeds through disobedience, it

believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and let not your deeds be in vain. (34) Truly those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, then die while they are disbelievers, God will not forgive them. (35) So do not falter and call for peace while you have the upper hand. God is with you and will not deprive you of your deeds. (36) The life of this world is but play and diversion. If you believe and are reverent, He will give you your rewards and not ask you for your wealth. (37) Were He to ask you for it, then implore you, you would be miserly, and He would expose your rancor. (38) Behold! You are those who are called upon to spend in the way of God; yet among you some are miserly. And whosoever is miserly is only miserly toward himself. God is the Rich, and you are the poor. And if you turn away, He will cause a people other than you to take your place, and they will not be the likes of you.

can also be understood as an injunction to purify one's intentions. In this vein, al-Tustarī writes, "*Let not your deeds be in vain,* that is, by seeing them as coming from yourselves and by seeking recompense from your Lord, for sincere action is that which seeks no recompense" (ST).

34 Those who die in a state of disbelief will not be forgiven, because *God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will* (4:48, 116). In contrast those disbelievers, such as Khālid ibn al-Walīd (d. 642), who initially sought to turn others away from Islam before repenting and embracing Islam are believed to have been absolved of their evil deeds (see 47:2c). Khālid ibn al-Walīd, for example, later became a legendary Muslim military leader and is held in high regard by Sunni Muslims.

35 *Do not falter,* that is, show weakness (IJ). Many understand this verse as a command not to make treaties with the disbelievers (IJ, Q). If this is the case, it would be a command to the nascent Muslim community during its first years in Madinah, when this *sūrah* is believed to have been revealed, as the Prophet later made significant treaties with many of the tribes who remained disbelievers, the most important of which was the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, made with the Quraysh in 6/628 (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48). The command to not make treaties with the disbelievers would also stand in stark contrast to the command to make peace given in 8:61: *And if they incline toward peace, incline thou toward it, and trust in God.* Some thus say that 8:61 abrogates this verse (Q), but, as discussed in 47:4c, in questions such as these many commentators prefer to see such differences as a description of different options or conditions or different rulings under different circumstances rather than abrogation.

36 This world is described as mere *play and diversion* (see also 6:32; 29:64) or as *naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185) and more fully as *play, diversion, ornament, mutual boasting among you, and vying for increase in property and children—the likeness of a rain whose vegetation impresses the farmers; then it withers such that you see it turn yellow; then it becomes chaff* (57:20). That *He will . . . not ask for your wealth* means that God will allow people to keep most of their wealth, requiring only that they pay the mandatory alms (*zakāh*); it can also be understood to imply that God is not asking for people's wealth but for His wealth, since all things ultimately belong to Him (cf. 25:57; Q).

37 *Were He to ask you for it* is understood to mean, "Were He to ask you for all that you own," while *expose your rancor* means, "make manifest your enmity toward God and His Messenger"

(IJ). In other words, God is Merciful in that He only asks that a small amount of the wealth He has given be spent *in the way of God*.

38 *Whosoever is miserly is only miserly toward himself* indicates a moral and spiritual reflexivity of actions in which one's actions ultimately affect oneself more than anyone else (see also 4:131; 5:54; 6:133; 14:19). In this context, it is understood to mean that refusal to pay the mandatory alms is in fact to deprive oneself of the benefits that accrue from it (IJ), since God has no need of one's money (Q). Conversely, *whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves, when you spend only seeking the Face of God* (2:272). This "reflexive" nature of good and evil deeds is emphasized throughout the Quran (see 2:9, 272; 3:69; 4:111; 6:123; 8:60; 9:34–35; 10:23; 29:6; 35:18; 36:19).

*God is the Rich, and you are the poor* (cf. 35:15c) means that God is completely sufficient unto Himself, and human beings are utterly dependent upon Him. In the present context, it also refers to the fact that all of one's wealth is from God; so to refuse to pay the mandatory alms *in the way of God* is to refuse to give back to God what is rightfully His. It can, moreover, be understood as a reference to the fact that one's very existence is from God and that one must thus submit fully and completely to Him. In this vein, al-Tustarī writes of this phrase, "Knowledge of poverty before God is the knowledge that wealth is in God" (ST).

*He will cause a people other than you to take your place* (cf. 4:133; 5:54; 6:133; 9:39; 11:57; 14:19; 35:16) means that God will replace some with others more worthy of His religion, meaning either another people who already exist or a whole new people whom He will create (IJ). *They will not be the likes of you* then means that they will be better people (IJ), not miserly and refusing to *spend in the way of God* (Ṭ).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 48

# Victory

## *al-Fatḥ*

A Madinan *sūrah, al-Fatḥ* was revealed while the Prophet was returning to Madinah from the area of Ḥudaybiyah, just outside of Makkah, during the month of Dhu'l-Qa'dah in the year 6/628. The Prophet had set out on a pilgrimage to Makkah with many pilgrims, fourteen hundred according to most accounts. They donned the pilgrim garb and were unarmed, save for sheathed swords used mostly for hunting. They stopped at Ḥudaybiyah, and the Quraysh refused them entry into the sacred precinct. There, the Muslims and the Quraysh agreed upon a treaty, known as the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, which stipulated the following: both parties would cease hostilities for ten years; neither would interfere with the free movement of the other; the Prophet and his followers would abandon the pilgrimage that year, but then be allowed to perform the pilgrimage every year for the following ten years; any man who left the Quraysh to join the Muslims would be returned to the Quraysh, but any man who left the Muslims for the Quraysh would not be returned to the Muslims; and any tribes that wished to enter into an alliance with the Muslims were free to do so, as were any that wished to enter into an alliance with the Quraysh.

Some of the Prophet's Companions, however, considered the terms unfavorable for the Muslims and even tantamount to defeat. Nonetheless, the Prophet accepted the terms, and the treaty worked quickly and decisively to the advantage of the Muslim side. The freedom of any tribe to ally with either the Muslims or the Quraysh absolved the tribes of their former alliances, and some that had been allied with the Quraysh quickly switched to the Muslims. The concluding of a treaty with the Quraysh clearly demonstrated that the Muslims had acquired at least equal footing with the Quraysh, which was a feat in and of itself.

After the Prophet slaughtered his sacrificial animals in the area of Ḥudaybiyah, where the Muslim pilgrims had stopped, and they had begun the return trip to Madinah, this *sūrah* was revealed, declaring the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah *a manifest victory*. Regarding this event, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have said, "We were with the Messenger of God on a trip, and I asked him about

a matter three times, but he did not answer me. So I said to myself, 'May your mother be bereft of you, O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb! You were stubborn in repeating your question three times to the Messenger of God; each time he did not respond to you.' So I mounted my camel and went ahead for fear that a part of the Quran might be revealed regarding my case. Suddenly I heard someone calling, 'O ᶜUmar!' So I went to the Messenger while fearing that part of the Quran had been revealed about me. The Prophet said, 'Last night, a *sūrah* was revealed to me that is dearer to me than all over which the sun rises.' Then he recited [the *sūrah* beginning with] *Truly We have granted thee a manifest victory*" (IK, Q). The Prophet is also reported to have recited this *sūrah* while riding his camel on the day of the conquest of Makkah (IK).

*Al-Fatḥ* begins with a description of the *manifest victory* that God granted to the Prophet and his followers, which is described in spiritual terms (vv. 1–7). It then transitions into a discussion of the function of the Prophet and a reference to the pledge of allegiance made by those who traveled with him to Ḥudaybiyah (vv. 8–10), followed by a criticism of *those who stayed behind* making excuses for having rejected the Prophet's invitation to join him on pilgrimage (vv. 11–17). Those who traveled with the Prophet and *pledged allegiance* are praised and promised extensive spoils in this life and reward in the next (vv. 18–21). The *sūrah* then discusses God's reasons for having prevented fighting in this instance (vv. 22–25) and concludes with a contrast between the disbelievers, who remain consumed by the *zealotry of the Age of Ignorance* (v. 26), and the believers, who have been granted God's *Tranquility* (v. 26) and who are likened to a plant that continues to grow firm (v. 29).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Truly We have granted thee a manifest victory, (2) that God may forgive thee thy sins that went before and that which is to come, and complete His Blessing upon thee, and guide thee upon a straight path; (3) and that God may help thee with a mighty help. (4) He it is Who sends down Tranquility into the hearts of the believers, that they might increase in faith along with their faith—to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and God is

1 In historical context, this verse is understood by many as a reference to the conquest of Makkah (JJ, Q, R) and, by extension, other future Muslim victories (JJ). But many of the Prophet's Companions, such as Ibn Masᶜūd and Anas ibn Mālik, saw it as a specific reference to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (IK, Q), as this treaty allowed Muslims and non-Muslims to mix more freely and thus resulted in an increase in the number of adherents to Islam (IK, Q). In this regard, Ibn Masᶜūd is reported to have said, "You consider the conquering of Makkah to be the *victory,* while to us the *victory* is the treaty conducted at Ḥudaybiyah" (IK). The verse can also be understood as a reference to the *victory* of Islam by means of proofs and revelation (R). *Victory* translates *fatḥ,* which also means "opening." Read in this way, some understand *fatḥ* as a reference to the opening of the heart and thus to the unveiling of the secrets of the Divine Essence, the lights of the Divine Attributes, and the beauty of Divine Acts (Aj).

2–3 Many commentators understand v. 2 to mean that God has forgiven the Prophet all of his sins, past and future; thus some take it as a prooftext for the spiritual inerrancy (ᶜiṣmah) of the Prophet (JJ, R). According to some commentators, *thy sins that went before* refers to sins committed before the *manifest victory,* while *that which is to come* refers to sins committed after it (JJ, Q, R, Ṭ). Others say this verse refers to the period before and the period after the revelation began (Q, R, Ṭ), while still others say it means what preceded the revelation of this verse and what followed it (Q). Even after this promise of forgiveness, the Prophet continued to stand in prayer at night until his feet swelled, asking forgiveness of God. When asked why he did so, the Prophet replied, "Should I not be a thankful servant?" (IK, Ṭ). *Complete His Blessing* refers to attaining Paradise, the blessing of prophethood and wisdom, or the conquests of Khaybar, Makkah, and Ṭāᵓif (Q).

4 *Tranquility* (*sakīnah;* cf. 2:248; 9:26, 40; 48:18, 26) is understood by some as a reference to God's Mercy (Ṭ) or to patience in carrying out what God has ordered (Aj). Others say, "It is an angel that dwells in the hearts of believers, providing them support" (Iṣ). It is also said that the *sakīnah* is the intellect (ᶜ*aql*), or that one has *sakīnah* when one alleviates (*sakkana* ᶜ*an*) the inclination toward desires (*shahawāt;* Iṣ). Some see the repetition of the term *faith* in *increase in faith along with their faith* as a reference to an increase in certainty along with faith (Aj, Q). Others say the *increase in faith* reflects the gradual increase in religious obligations that are added to the initial *faith,* the testimony of faith, *There is no god but God,* that is, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the *ḥajj* (in that order). Each time the Muslims confirmed one of these obligations, God added another until the religion was complete (Q, Ṭ, Z). Here the *hosts of the heavens and the earth* may refer to those helpers whom God sends upon his enemies as He wills (Ṭ), thus indicating both that God will defeat those who oppose Him and His Messenger and that, if He so willed, He could vanquish them at any moment, but instead grants them respite.

Knowing, Wise— (5) that He may cause the believing men and the believing women to enter Gardens with rivers running below, therein to abide, and that He may absolve them of their evil deeds—that is a great triumph in the sight of God— (6) and that He may punish the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and the idolatrous men and the idolatrous women, who think an evil thought concerning God. Upon them is an evil turn. God is wroth with them, curses them, and prepares Hell for them—what an evil journey's end! (7) And to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and God is Mighty, Wise. (8) Truly We have sent thee as a witness, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner, (9) that you may believe in God and His Messenger, and support Him,

5 After the Prophet informed the believers of the revelation of vv. 1–3, saying of them, "A passage more beloved to me than the world entire has been revealed to me," the Companions said, "Congratulations, O Messenger of God. God has made clear to us what He will do with thee. What will He do with us?" This verse was then revealed (IK, Q, Ṭ, W). The verse can thus be viewed as following upon v. 1, meaning, *Truly We have granted thee a manifest victory . . . that He may cause the believing men and the believing women to enter Gardens* (Ṭ). Or it can be seen as following upon v. 4, meaning that the *Tranquility* was the cause of their entering the Gardens (Q). Attaining "the Garden" is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses, though some see *the great triumph* as a stage of nearness to God that is even beyond the paradisal Garden; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

6–7 *Who think an evil thought concerning God* refers to those who thought that God would not help the Prophet and his followers (Ṭ, Z) or those who thought that the Prophet and those who left with him on pilgrimage would not return to Madinah (Q; see v. 12). *An evil turn* refers to the punishment that will be leveled upon the idolaters and the hypocrites in this life and the next (Ṭ), to their corruption (Q), or to the manner in which what they are waiting to befall the Prophet and his followers will in fact befall them (Z). Although the previous mention of *the hosts* in v. 4 confirms the manner in which such hosts assist the Prophet and the believers, their mention here affirms God's Power over the hypocrites and the disbelievers. Commenting upon the meaning of God's hosts, al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "His hosts are of different kinds. His hosts in Heaven are the prophets, and on earth, the saints. His hosts in Heaven are hearts, and on the earth, souls. Whatever God empowers over you is among His hosts. If He empowers your soul over you, your soul will destroy your soul. If He empowers your bodily members over you, they will destroy you. If your soul overpowers your heart, it will drive you to follow caprice. But if your heart overpowers your soul and your bodily members, it will tether them with propriety (*adab*), compel them to worship, and then adorn them with sincerity in servanthood. All of these are God's hosts" (ST).

8 The Prophet was sent *as a witness* to Divine Oneness (ST) or as one who will bear witness for or against people in the Hereafter; see 33:45c. The Prophet is also referred to as both *a bearer of glad tidings* and *a warner* in 2:119; 5:19; 7:188; 11:2; 17:105; 25:56; 33:45; 34:28; 35:24, while in other verses these functions are attributed to all prophets (see 2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56).

9 Some early authorities are said to have read this verse, "That they may believe in God and His Messenger, that they may support Him" (Ṭ). In either reading, it can be understood as an address

and honor Him, and that you may glorify Him morning and evening. (10) Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands. And whosoever reneges, reneges only to his detriment. And whosoever fulfills what He has pledged unto God, He will grant him a great reward. (11) The Bedouin who stayed behind will say to thee, "We were occupied by our property and our families; so ask forgiveness for us." They say with their tongues that which is not in their hearts. Say, "Who can avail you

to the believers of the Prophet's time or to all of humanity. Believers *support* God either by magnifying Him or by fighting in God's way (Q; Ṭ). The words here translated *support* and *honor* can indicate both honoring and magnifying. The first is thus taken by some as a command to honor God and the second as a command to honor the Prophet (Q). Others see it as a command to both *support* and *honor* the Prophet (Q in commentary on 47:25), since the pronoun can refer to either God or the Prophet. Regarding the injunction to *glorify Him morning and evening* (cf. 6:52; 18:28; 19:11; 24:36; 76:25), see 33:42c; 76:25–26c.

10 In the same way that *whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God* (4:80), to *pledge allegiance* to the Prophet is to *pledge allegiance* to God (Q). The pledge of allegiance is widely known as the Pledge of Good Pleasure (*bayʿat al-riḍwān*); see 48:18c. There is extensive debate over how to understand phrases such as *the Hand of God,* which seem to describe God as having human and bodily characteristics. Some say that the complete meaning of such verses cannot be understood by human beings and should be relegated to God alone. Others claim that the literal meaning has significance, but that it should be interpreted as a reference to one of God's Attributes, such as Power, which is associated with God's Hand, or that a symbolic and metaphorical meaning is what is intended rather than a literal one. Others, however, say that the literal meaning is the true meaning, but that its actuality is unknown, since the manifestation of Divine Attributes such as Living, Knowing, Hearing, and Seeing on the human plane is not commensurate with the Divine Reality of these Attributes. There is thus no correlation between what is meant by God's Hand and the physical, human hand, since *naught is like unto Him* (42:11). This verse is thus understood by some as containing the highest praise for the Prophet in the Qurʾān, since it equates grasping his hand with grasping the *Hand of God* and pledging allegiance to him with the pledging of allegiance to God (Aj).

This verse is often invoked by Sufi masters in the rite of initiation of a disciple into the spiritual path, or *ṭarīqah*. For Sufis it has a spiritual significance related to the transmission of the spiritual power, or *wilāyah/walāyah,* from the Prophet to certain of his Companions and through them to one generation after another of those seeking to follow the spiritual path.

*Whosoever reneges* his pledge of allegiance *reneges only to his detriment* insofar as he has prevented himself from earning reward and made himself liable to punishment (Q). *What He has pledged unto God* refers to the pledge of allegiance, but can also been seen as an allusion to the pretemporal covenant made between God and humanity in 7:172, of which the pledge of allegiance stated in the present verse is a reaffirmation.

11 *The Bedouin who stayed behind* refers to those tribes in the area of Madinah that, due to their fear of the Quraysh, made excuses for refusing the invitation to go on pilgrimage with the Prophet (Q). In this context, *Who can avail you aught from God should He desire harm for you or should He desire benefit for you?* (cf. 3:160; 10:107; 36:23; 39:38) means that no one can avert what God desires or has ordained (IK). It can also be understood to imply that the Prophet's prayer for forgiveness of them can do them no good if God has already made a determination regarding their hypocrisy, as in 63:6: *It is the same for them whether thou askest forgiveness for them or thou askest forgiveness for them not; God will never forgive them. Truly God guides not iniquitous people*

aught from God should He desire harm for you or should He desire benefit for you? Nay, but God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (12) Nay, but you thought the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families, and that was made to seem fair in your hearts. You thought an evil thought and were a people ruined." (13) And whosoever does not believe in God and His Messenger—truly We have prepared a Blaze for the disbelievers. (14) Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. He forgives whomsoever He will and punishes whomsoever He will; and God is Forgiving, Merciful. (15) Those who stayed behind will say when you set out to capture spoils, "Let us follow you." They desire to change the Word of God. Say, "You will not follow us; thus has God said before." Then they will say, "Nay, but you are jealous of us." Nay, but they have not understood, save a little. (16) Say to the Bedouin who stayed behind, "You will be called against a people possessed of great might; you will

(see also 4:107; 9:80). Elsewhere the Quran asks, *And if He forsakes you, who then can help you thereafter?* (3:160).

12–13 To think that the Prophet and his followers would not return to Madinah was *an evil thought,* because it means those tribes thought God would not help them (Ṭ). Here *ruined* translates *būr,* which means something that is thoroughly corrupt and has no good in it whatsoever; it can also indicate something that is vanishing to the point of becoming nothing (Ṭ). That God has prepared *a Blaze* or *a humiliating punishment* (4:37, 102, 151; 33:57) or *a painful punishment* (4:161; 33:8) along with *chains, shackles, and a blazing flame* (76:4) is asserted in various ways throughout the Quran.

14 Regarding *Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (3:189; 5:17, 18; 24:42; 45:27), see 45:27c. That God *forgives whomsoever He will and punishes whomsoever He will* (2:284; 3:129; 5:18) indicates both that God has the ability to forgive all sins and that no one may determine whom God forgives, as in 5:18, where the Prophet is enjoined to utter this same phrase as a response to Jews and Christians who say in a haughty manner, *We are the children of God, and His beloved ones.* The opportunity for the Bedouin who stayed behind (v. 11) to make amends and thus be forgiven is presented in v. 16.

15 The Bedouin in question had refused to make the pilgrimage to Makkah with the Prophet, but wished to go on the immediately subsequent conquest of Khaybar to the north of Madinah, as they knew that it would likely be an easy victory with ample spoils. But a victory at Khaybar was understood to have been promised to those who had been present at Ḥudaybiyah in exchange for being unable to complete the pilgrimage. Their desire *to change the Word of God* thus means that they wished to change God's Promise regarding the spoils of Khaybar (Q, Ṭ). *Save a little* indicates that they only understand the affairs of the world or that they understand little concerning religion (Q). It could also be rendered "save a few," meaning that only a few of them understand.

16 *A people possessed of great might* is understood by some as a reference to the tribe of Banū Ḥanīfah, who were defeated after the death of the Prophet by armies under the direction of the first Caliph, Abū Bakr (Q). Others maintain that this verse foreshadows future battles against the Byzantine and/or Persian armies (Q, Ṭ), while others say it refers to the tribes of Banū Hawāzin and Banū Thaqīf, who were defeated immediately after the conquest of Makkah (Q, Ṭ). *You will fight them or they will submit* refers to the two options given to the idolatrous tribes in Arabia when confronted by the Muslim army (Q). *God will grant you a*

fight them or they will submit. So if you obey, God will grant you a beautiful reward; but if you turn away as you turned away before, He will punish you with a painful punishment." (17) There is no blame upon the blind; nor is there blame upon the lame; nor is there blame upon the sick. Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, He will cause him to enter Gardens with rivers running below. And whosoever turns away, He will punish him with a painful punishment. (18) God was content with the believers when they pledged allegiance unto thee beneath the tree. He knew what was in their hearts and sent down Tranquility upon them and rewarded them with a victory nigh (19) and abundant spoils that they will capture; and God is Mighty, Wise. (20) God has promised you abun-

*beautiful reward* in this life through the spoils of war and assistance and by granting Paradise in the Hereafter. *As you turned away before* refers to refusing to go on pilgrimage with the Prophet.

17 Cf. 4:95c; 9:91. There is no blame upon the blind, the lame, and the sick for staying behind from the pilgrimage; see 9:91c. The stark contrast between obeying God and His Messenger or turning away from them is made throughout the Quran, as in 24:54: *Say, "Obey God and obey the Messenger." But if they turn away, he is only accountable for that wherewith he has been burdened, and you are accountable for that wherewith you have been burdened. But if you obey him, you will be rightly guided.*

18–19 This verse refers to the pledge discussed in v. 10. While the Prophet and the pilgrims waited at Ḥudaybiyah for permission to enter Makkah and perform the pilgrimage, the Prophet sent ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (d. 36/656) to inform the Quraysh that their intentions were peaceful and that they sought only to make pilgrimage to the Kaʿbah. While ʿUthmān was negotiating with the Quraysh, false rumors reached the Prophet that ʿUthmān had been killed, greatly increasing the anxiety of the Muslims. Thereupon he gave instructions that everyone be summoned to take a pledge with him. Everyone present, save one hypocrite, came to him as he sat beneath an acacia tree and took their pledge. Most accounts say that they pledged that they would not flee, though some say the pledge was that they would fight with the Prophet until death (IK, Q, Ṭ). Regarding this event, al-Barāʾ ibn ʿĀzib is reported to have said, "You consider the *victory* to be the conquest of Makkah, which was indeed a victory. However, we consider the *victory* to be the Pledge of Good Pleasure (*bayʿat al-riḍwān*) on the Day of Ḥudaybiyah" (Ṭ). According to one account, the Prophet said of this pledge, "None of the companions of the tree who made the pledge under it will enter the Fire" (IK, Q). That God *knew what was in their hearts* indicates that God knew the sincerity (*ṣidq*) and loyalty with which they took the pledge (Q, Ṭ) or that God knew the dejection they felt at not being able to complete the pilgrimage and thus sent *Tranquility upon them* in order to console them (Q). In its immediate context, *a victory nigh* most likely refers to the conquest of Khaybar, which followed soon after Ḥudaybiyah, though some believe it refers to the conquest of Makkah (Q, Ṭ). *Abundant spoils* refers to the spoils obtained at the Battle of Khaybar, which immediately followed the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, or to those of the conquests of Persia and Byzantium after the death of the Prophet (Q, Ṭ). From a spiritual perspective, *Tranquility* refers to certainty (Aj) and *a victory nigh* refers to the spiritual victory over one's carnal soul that comes as a result of adhering to the pledge with a true spiritual guide.

20 This second mention of *abundant spoils* is either a reiteration of the first for the purpose of emphasis or a reference to greater spoils beyond those mentioned in the previous verse (Ṭ). Some interpret it to mean all spoils obtained by

dant spoils that you will capture—then He hastened this for you and restrained the people's hands from you, that it may be a sign for the believers, and that He may guide you upon a straight path— (21) and others of which you were not capable, God has encompassed them; and God is Powerful over all things. (22) If those who disbelieve had fought you, they would have turned [their] backs, and then would have found neither protector nor helper. (23) [That is] the wont of God that came to pass aforetime; and you will find no alteration in the wont of God. (24) He it is Who restrained their hands from you and your hands from them in the valley of Makkah, after having made you victorious over them.

Muslims until the Day of Resurrection (Q, Ṭ). God *hastened this for you*—that is, by way of the advantages the Muslims gained through the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah—through which God also *restrained the people's hands* (IK, Q, Ṭ). It may also refer to the conquest of Khaybar (Ṭ), although some read this verse to mean that God hastened the attainment of spoils in general (Q). From a spiritual perspective, it refers to the inner riches received by those who follow the spiritual path.

21 *And others* alludes to still more spoils of war (Q), to Khaybar (Ṭ), to the conquest of Makkah (IK, Q, Ṭ), to the future conquests of Islam against the Persians and Byzantines (IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ), to all the conquests that God would open to the Muslims (IK, Q, Ṭ), or to other spiritual rewards. *And others of which you were not capable* refers to spoils or conquests that could not be achieved prior to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah. Before the treaty, the Muslim armies could not campaign to the north, lest they risk an attack from their enemies to the south. But now that they had reached a truce with the Quraysh and their allies, they could fight other enemies to the north more freely. That the Muslims were then able to conquer their enemies to the north left them free to focus all of their energies upon the south when the Quraysh broke the treaty by supporting one of their allied tribes in a raid against a tribe allied with the Muslims. The treaty thus proved to be a crucial turning point in the political fortunes of the Muslim polity.

22 Had the disbelievers of Makkah chosen to attack rather than to make a treaty, they would have been destroyed and would have fled from battle (Q, Ṭ). That they would have found no one to protect or to assist them could refer to their situation in both this life and the next (cf. 4:123, 173; 33:17, 65). With regard to this world, the Quraysh derived their power, wealth, and prestige from being keepers of the Kaʿbah. To attack a large group of pilgrims would thus have irreparably compromised their standing with all of the tribes of Arabia.

23 Here *the wont of God* (cf. 3:137; 33:38, 62; 40:85) is usually taken to mean the way God deals with those who fight His prophets (Ṭ) as in 58:21: *I shall surely prevail, I and my messengers* (Z). Here it is rendered as nominative, an accepted interpretation (Iṭ), but it is always recited in the accusative, in which case it could be the object of an implied verb (Sh). Regarding the more general implications of there being no alteration in *the wont of God*, see commentary on 35:43: *Thou shalt find no alteration in the wont of God, and thou shalt find no change in the wont of God* (cf. 33:62).

24 There is some debate about the referent of this verse (Q, Ṭ). If *in the valley of Makkah* is understood as a reference to Ḥudaybiyah, the verse most likely pertains to a group of thirty young men who attempted a surprise attack on the Muslims at Ḥudaybiyah before the treaty had been ratified. After they were caught by the Muslims, the Prophet asked them, "Have you come under someone's protection?" When they said no, he let them go (Q, Ṭ, W). According to another

And God sees whatsoever you do. (25) It is they who disbelieved and turned you from the Sacred Mosque and the offerings detained from reaching their place of sacrifice. And were it not for believing men and believing women whom you know not, lest you trample them, and thus incur guilt unknowingly—that God may cause whomsoever He will to enter into His Mercy—had they been clearly separated, We would surely have punished the disbelievers among them with a painful punishment. (26) When those who disbelieve had set zealotry in their hearts, the zealotry of the Age of Ignorance, God sent down His Tranquility

account, it was an attack by eighty men who came upon them during the morning prayer (Q, Ṭ, W).

25 To turn or bar others from the Sacred Mosque is criticized in several verses (see 2:114; 5:2; 8:34; 22:55). In this context, it also affirms that the Prophet and pilgrims were not at fault for failing to reach Makkah and perform the pilgrimage. As they had intended to make pilgrimage and their failure to do so was beyond their own control, the pilgrimage was believed to have been accepted by God. Thus this event also came to be known as the Minor Pilgrimage of Ḥudaybiyah. When the treaty was concluded, the Prophet instructed his Companions to slaughter their animals and shave their heads, as was the custom upon completion of the ordinary pilgrimage (see 2:196c). Likely confused because they had not completed the pilgrimage and what the Prophet commanded was uncustomary, none of them got up, and the Prophet repeated his order thrice. As they remained sitting, the Prophet went to his wife Umm Salamah, who counseled him, "O Prophet of God! Dost thou want thine order to be carried out? Go forth and say no word to any man till thou hast performed thy sacrifice." The Prophet followed her advice, and upon seeing him sacrifice his animal and shave his head, the Companions sacrificed their animals in turn and started shaving the heads of one another with such urgency that they almost cut one another (Q).

*And were it not for believing men and believing women* refers to the believers in Makkah whom the Muslims might have killed along with the disbelievers, had God granted the Muslims permission to fight their way into Makkah. *Had they been clearly separated* is interpreted to mean that if the believers in Makkah had been clearly discernible from the disbelievers, the Muslims would have been permitted to fight the disbelievers. The last part of this verse can also be seen as an allusion to the subtle way in which the presence of pious believers can serve as a spiritual protection for others, even when they are not aware of it.

26 *Zealotry in their hearts* refers to the excessive manner in which the disbelievers of Makkah barred the Muslims from performing the pilgrimage. Some see this zealotry as a reference to specific acts connected with this event and the resulting treaty, such as the Makkans' refusal to accept the presence of the words "*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*" and "Muhammad, the Messenger of God" at the beginning of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (Q, Ṭs). But it most likely refers to a general contrast between the condition of the disbelievers and that of the believers. In this regard, *zealotry of the Age of Ignorance* (*jāhiliyyah*), which refers to the zealotry of the period of idolatry before the coming of the revelation, could be understood more literally to mean "the zealotry of impassioned haughtiness," as *jahl* denotes not only "ignorance," as it later came to be understood, but also stubborn pride and being so subject to the dictates of one's passions that one cannot discern right from wrong and truth from falsehood. For the believers to have received *Tranquility* from God then indicates the peace, patience, and dignity that stand in direct opposition to "impassioned haughtiness." This is to say that, although they appeared weak for turning away from the pilgrimage, the believers conducted themselves with dignity and nobility, while their adversaries fell victim to their own passions and

upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and enjoined the word of reverence upon them, they being more worthy of it and deserving of it. And God is Knower of all things. (27) Surely God has fulfilled for His Messenger the vision in truth: you shall enter the Sacred Mosque in security, if God wills, with the hair of your heads shaven or cut, not fearing. For He knows what you know not, and He has given you therewithal a victory nigh. (28) He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion. And God suffices as a Witness. (29) Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Those who are with him are harsh against the disbelievers, merciful to one another. You see them bowing, prostrating, seeking bounty from God and contentment; their mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah. And their likeness in the Gospel is a sapling that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it, such that it grows stout and rises firmly upon its stalk, impressing the sowers, that through them He may enrage the disbelievers. God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those among them who believe and perform righteous deeds.

thus harmed themselves. *The word of reverence* is understood by most as a reference to one of the common formulas of faith, most likely "There is no god but God" (Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). Ibn ʿAjībah says the testimony of faith is referred to as *the word of reverence* because it purifies one's character traits, excising illness and hypocrisy from the heart.

27 This verse refers to the dream that had prompted the Prophet to perform the Minor Pilgrimage that resulted in the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah. The Prophet saw himself entering Makkah and circumambulating the Kaʿbah. He told his Companions about this dream while they were still in Madinah. When they traveled to Makkah in the year of Ḥudaybiyah, none of them doubted that the Prophet's vision would come true that year. When the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah was concluded and they had to return to Madinah without performing the pilgrimage as expected, some of the Companions were saddened and dejected. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked the Prophet, "Didst thou not tell us that we would go to the House and perform the circumambulation around it?" The Prophet responded, "Yes, but did I tell you that you would do so this year?" (IK, Q). *You shall enter the Sacred Mosque* thus indicates that the vision of the Prophet would be fulfilled, but not in the same way that his Companions had expected. The vision was fulfilled the following year, 7/629, when, in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, the Prophet returned with a large group of Muslim pilgrims, and they completed the pilgrimage and stayed in Makkah for three days before returning to Madinah. *A victory nigh* is understood as a reference to either the Battle of Khaybar or the conquest of Makkah (Q, Ṭ), but can also be seen as a reference to the general victory of Islam that was partly facilitated by the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah. That Muslims were now able to mingle freely with the Quraysh and their allies resulted in the members of the Islamic community doubling in the two years following the treaty (Q).

28 The majority of commentators interpret *Religion of Truth,* or "the True Religion" (*din al-ḥaqq*), here and in 9:33 and 61:9 as a reference to Islam itself and thus see all three verses as a reference to the triumph of Islam over all other religions. But as the Quran attests to the veracity and

salvific efficacy of other religions (see, e.g., 2:62; 5:69), *the Religion of Truth* can be more broadly understood to mean all religions revealed by God. See 61:9c and the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

29 *Those who are with him* refers to all who follow the Prophet or those who were with him at Ḥudaybiyah (Q). That they are *harsh against the disbelievers* implies that they never relent in their opposition to them and fight them when necessary (IK). In this context it also reflects an aspect of mercy, for just as the sunlight is most intense on black surfaces and less so on white surfaces, so are the believers harsher or "more intense" with the disbelievers. In this sense, the believers must display the truth to them with a greater intensity of light and insight. Among each other, however, there is less need for such intensity, because the truth is manifest as gentle warmth. The importance of displaying the virtue of mercy among all human beings is emphasized by a *ḥadīth:* "God is not merciful to one who is not merciful." Mercy is understood to be an essential component for binding together any community; thus another *ḥadīth* states, "The merciful are shown mercy by the Merciful. Be merciful to those on earth, and He who is in Heaven will be merciful unto you." The believers are also described as *humble toward the believers, stern toward the disbelievers* (5:54). That one knows the believers by *their mark upon their faces* that *is from the effect of prostration* is similar to the manner in which one is said to be able to distinguish the guilty in 55:41: *The guilty shall be known by their marks; and they shall be seized by the forelocks and by the feet.* For other verses that mention marks that reveal belief or disbelief, see 2:273c; 7:46–48; 47:30. Some understand the *marks upon their faces* as an allusion to the effects of night vigil, as in a well-known *ḥadīth,* "Whose prayer is much at night, his face is beautiful by day" (IK, Q). When asked about the *mark upon their faces* in this verse, Mujāhid is reported to have said, "It is a light upon their faces [resulting] from humility" (Q). While such interpretations allude to the *mark upon their faces* being discernible in this life through the light in their faces and the expression of their countenance, others see it as a reference to the light upon their faces on the Day of Resurrection (Ṭs), though it can be understood as a reference to both. Others say that the *mark upon their faces* refers to the dust upon their foreheads after prostrations (Q, Ṭs).

The parable of the sapling serves as a symbolic and allegorical description of the Companions of the Prophet. At the outset they were weak and few in number; but then their numbers grew and they acquired strength (Q). It provides a fitting end to this *sūrah,* as the events to which it alludes, the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, the conquest of Khaybar, and the conquest of Makkah, marked a decisive turn in the early history of Islam; through these events it was spread over the entire Arabian Peninsula in a few years. Such a spread would no doubt *enrage the disbelievers.* Seen in this light, the *great reward* refers to the victories that were to follow upon the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah and to the promise of Paradise.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 49

# The Private Apartments

## *al-Ḥujurāt*

*Al-Ḥujurāt* is from the late Madinan period, although a minority maintain that v. 13 is from the Makkan period (Āl). It derives its name from the reference to the private apartments of the Prophet's wives in v. 4. The *sūrah* was most likely revealed in the year 9/630 after the Muslims had captured Makkah and most of Arabia had come under the Prophet's rule. As such, it addresses the complexities of ruling over this larger and more diverse community and instructs more recent members in proper conduct toward the Prophet. This is most evident in the first part of the *sūrah* (vv. 1–5), which instructs the Muslim community in the proper etiquette for their encounters with the Prophet.

The second section (vv. 6–12) focuses upon the ties of brotherhood within the Muslim community and the forms of behavior that should be avoided in order to facilitate it. This unifying theme can be seen as following directly upon the description of those who are with the Prophet at the end of the previous *sūrah* (see 48:29). As Ibn ʿAjībah states, "After giving them the good news of forgiveness [in 48:29], God instructed the companions in proper conduct (*adab*) because it is among the greatest means for obtaining forgiveness and proximity [to God]." The last part of this *sūrah* (vv. 13–18) clarifies the true nature of faith and belief, providing one of the most famous lines of the Quran: ***Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you*** (v. 13).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O you who believe! Advance not before God and His Messenger, and reverence God. Truly God is Hearing, Knowing. (2) O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor address him in the manner that you address one another, lest your deeds come to naught, while you are unaware. (3) Truly those who lower their voices before the Messenger of God, they are the ones whose hearts God has tested for reverence. Theirs shall be forgiveness and a great reward. (4) Truly those who call thee from behind

1 *Advance not before God and His Messenger* sets the tone for this *sūrah*. In the immediate context, it enjoins Muslims to avoid coarse manners in the presence of the Prophet, reminding many of those who had recently joined the Muslim polity that he was more than a tribal leader. Some also interpret it to mean that one should not contradict the Quran or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (IK). More broadly, it indicates that people should not follow their own opinions rather than the teachings of the Prophet (Q) or allow personal desires to take precedence over the commands of God and the Prophet, as in a famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "None of you truly believes until he loves me more than his father, his children, and mankind all together."

2 This verse was reportedly revealed in response to an argument between Abū Bakr and ᶜUmar. Each favored a different individual for the honor of receiving a delegation from an outlying tribe. Their quarreling in the presence of the Prophet was so loud that his voice was drowned out, at which God revealed this verse (IK, Q). *Nor address him in the manner that you address one another* speaks primarily to new members of the Muslim polity who had taken an attitude of excessive familiarity with the Prophet; they should not call him by name, "Muhammad," but by his title, "Messenger of God" or "Prophet of God" (Q). See also 24:63: *Do not deem the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling to one another.* That deeds may *come to naught* if one raises one's voice above that of the Prophet or fails to respect his position indicates the gravity of these offenses. Elsewhere the Quran maintains that in the absence of proper belief, good deeds come to naught or provide no reward in the next life (see 2:217; 3:21–22; 5:5; 6:88; 7:147; 9:17; 11:16; 18:105; 33:19; 39:65; 47:9, 28, 32; 5:53c).

3 *Tested* translates *imtaḥana,* which indicates testing something for purity (Aj, R). That God has *tested* their *hearts* for *reverence* thus indicates that God has tested the purity of their hearts, expanded their hearts for reverence (Aj), and purified their intentions (ST). The trials that believers confront in this life are thus considered an important part of their inner purification. This is perhaps most evident in 3:154, which says of the losses the Muslims suffered in their defeat at the Battle of Uḥud: *And [this is] so that God may test what is in your breasts and so that He may assay what is in your hearts.* Regarding the role of trials and tribulations in the spiritual life, see commentary on 29:2–3.

4 A group of Bedouin reportedly came to the Prophet while he was sleeping and shouted for him to come out from his apartment. They did not know in which of his wives' apartments he was sleeping; so they went behind each apartment and called to the Prophet in a crude manner. One Aqraᶜ ibn Ḥābis reported that he had called out, "O Muhammad, verily my praise is sweet and my curse is bitter!" To which the Prophet responded, "Only God is like that." Then this verse was revealed (IK, Q, Ṭ).

the apartments, most of them understand not. (5) Had they been patient until thou camest out unto them, it would have been better for them. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (6) O you who believe! If an iniquitous one comes to you with tidings, then be discerning, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become remorseful over that which you have done. (7) And know that the Messenger of God is among you. Were he to obey you in many matters, you would suffer. But God has caused you to love faith and has made it seem fair in your hearts, and He has caused you to despise disbelief, iniquity, and disobedience—such are the rightly guided— (8) as a bounty from God and a blessing;

5 This verse reprimands the Bedouin for their behavior; it and the following verses indicate the proper protocol to be used with the Prophet and by extension with other Muslims, as in a *ḥadīth,* "If any one of you seeks permission [to enter a house] and no permission is given, he should go away." In this instance the group of Bedouin had reportedly called upon the Prophet to request that he intercede on behalf of some prisoners who had been taken in the recent wars that they had lost to the Muslims. The Prophet agreed to free half of them and allow the rest to be ransomed. According to some, had they been patient, the Prophet would have freed them all (Q, Sh).

6–8 Although these verses convey principles that should be followed in any Muslim polity, they were reportedly revealed regarding a false accusation that could have led to internecine fighting between the Muslims of Madinah and the tribe of the Banū Muṣṭaliq, whom the Muslims had defeated in 5/627 and who had accepted Islam and agreed to pay the alms (*zakāh*). The Prophet sent Walīd ibn ʿUqbah to collect it. There had, however, been enmity between him and the Banū Muṣṭaliq in the pre-Islamic period. When the people heard of his coming, they came out to receive him out of reverence for God and the Prophet. But Walīd was scared of them and took it into his mind that they wanted to kill him. He returned and went to the Prophet saying, "The Banū Muṣṭaliq have refused to pay the alms and wanted to kill me." The Prophet became angry and began arranging for an armed delegation. Meanwhile, when the Banū Muṣṭaliq realized that the emissary had gone back, they went to the Prophet and said, "We heard of your emissary, and we went out to receive him, honor him, and give him the right of God that was due upon us. But your emissary went back, and we feared that what sent him back might be a message he received from you because you are angry with us. We seek refuge in God from His Wrath and from the wrath of His Messenger." Then these verses were revealed clearing the Banū Muṣṭaliq (Q, Ṭ, W). On the basis of v. 6, many Muslim scholars reject the testimony in legal matters of anyone known to be iniquitous (*fāsiq*) unless a corroborating witness or corroborating evidence can be found. There is some debate as to whether the testimony of the iniquitous can be accepted for other matters, such as marriage, and whether an iniquitous believer can be allowed to lead the prayer (Q). Regarding the penalties for false accusation, see 24:4c.

*The Messenger of God is among you* (v. 7) means that he was among the Muslims at the time of the revelation and that he continues to be with Muslims, for *the Prophet is closer to the believers than are they to themselves* (33:6). As the Prophet does not *speak out of caprice* (53:3), his determination in all religious and legal matters is understood to be guided by God. Therefore, he is to be obeyed; if he were to obey others, it would be an inversion of the proper order and thus lead to adversity. The believers are thus counseled to follow his rulings, as in 59:7: *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo.* The Prophet is also warned, *Were the truth to follow their caprices, the heavens and the earth and those*

and God is Knowing, Wise. (9) If two parties among the believers fall to fighting, make peace between them. If one of them aggresses against the other, fight those who aggress until they return to God's Command. And if they return, make peace between them with justice and act equitably. Truly God loves the just. (10) The believers are but brothers; so make peace between your brethren,

*therein would have been corrupted* (23:71). The presence of the Prophet is also understood to remain with the community after his death. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "My life is a great good for you; you will relate accounts from me, and accounts will be related from you. And my death is a great good for you; your deeds will be presented to me, and if I see goodness I will praise God, and if I see evil I will ask forgiveness from Him for you." Additionally the presence of the Prophet continues in the Hereafter, as in 9:94: *God and His Messenger will see your deeds.*

God *has caused you to love faith* and disposed your hearts to it means that faith and guidance are *a bounty from God* and thus points to the humility that must always accompany faith for it to be sincere, lest one attribute what comes from God to oneself. *Made it seem fair in your hearts* means both that God makes the believers incline to faith and that God beautifies them with their faith.

9 Here the basic principles for dealing with disputes between Muslims are explained. The Prophet enjoined his followers, "Help your brother whether he oppresses or is oppressed." When asked what it means to help the oppressor, he replied, "You help him by preventing him from oppressing" (IK, Q). This verse was reportedly revealed regarding an incident in which the Prophet went to call upon ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites in Madinah. When the Prophet reached him, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy said, "Keep away from me. The stench of your donkey is offending me." A man from the Helpers said to him, "By God, the donkey of the Messenger of God smells better than you." One of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy's tribesmen became angry. The parties exchanged blows; then this verse was revealed (W). Regarding antagonisms between Muslims, a *ḥadīth* states, "Cursing a Muslim is a sin, and fighting him is disbelief." That *God loves the just* (cf. 5:42; 60:8) reinforces the general principle stated in 4:135 that, in order to maintain justice, Muslims must be impartial, swayed by neither self-interest nor ties of kinship. Although Sufis affirm the literal understanding of the present verse, they also see it as an allusion to the process of inner purification. As al-Tustarī writes, "If nature, caprice, and lust tyrannize the heart, intellect, and spirit, the servant must fight them with the swords of vigilance, the arrows of self inspection, and the lights of conformity [to the truth], such that the spirit and the intellect prevail, and desire and lust are vanquished" (ST).

10 This is among the most important verses in the Quran for understanding the structure of the Muslim community (*ummah*), regarding the unity of which the Prophet said, "The believers are like a single structure, each part supporting the other." The centrality of brotherly love in Islam may be best expressed in this famous *ḥadīth:* "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." This *ḥadīth* goes to the heart of this *sūrah,* which emphasizes a bond of faith that transcends those of kinship and suggests that one should no longer make alliances based merely upon tribal bonds (see 9:23; 58:22). As another *ḥadīth* states, "God helps His servant as long as the servant helps his brother." Bonds of faith are esteemed so highly in Islam that among the seven types of people whom the Prophet said will be granted Paradise, he lists "two men who love each other for the sake of God, meeting for that reason, and parting with this love." In another *ḥadīth,* the love of another for God's sake is combined with the love of the Prophet and the fear of disbelief to make up the three qualities needed for entrance into Paradise: "Whosoever possesses these three qualities will have the sweetness of faith: the one to whom God and His Messenger become dearer than anything else; one who loves a person and loves him only for God's sake; and one who hates to revert to disbelief as

and reverence God, that haply you may receive mercy. (11) O you who believe! Let not one people deride another; it may be that they are better than they. Nor let women deride other women; it may be that they are better than they. And do not defame yourselves or insult one another with nicknames; how evil is the iniquitous name after having believed! And whosoever does not repent, they are the wrongdoers. (12) O you who believe! Shun much conjecture. Indeed, some conjecture is a sin. And do not spy upon one another, nor backbite one another.

he would hate to be thrown into the Fire." And a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "God will ask on the Day of Judgment, 'Where are those who loved each other for the sake of My Glory? Today, on a day wherein there is no shade but Mine, I shall shade them with My shade.' "

11 In the context of this *sūrah,* which emphasizes the transition from tribal bonds to those of faith, this verse indicates that boasting on the basis of tribal lineage should cease, as explained in a *ḥadīth,* "Unless people cease boasting about their dead ancestors, who are merely coals for the Fire, they will be more despicable to God than the beetle that rolls dung with its nose. God has removed from you the pride of the Age of Ignorance [see 3:154; 5:50; 33:33c; 48:28] and boasting about ancestors. One is either a pious believer or a miserable sinner. All men are descendants of Adam, and Adam came from dust." *Do not defame yourselves or insult one another with nicknames* is said to have been revealed in order to abolish the pre-Islamic practice of calling people by derogatory nicknames (IK). *How evil is the iniquitous name after having believed* warns those who have become believers not to call other believers by derogatory names; or it points to the manner in which abusing others in word and deed can undo the benefits of good deeds. On occasion the Prophet would even change names whose meanings might be negative, as when a man named Ḥazn, or "rough," was renamed Sahl, meaning "soft" or "easy."

12 This verse continues to address the manner in which community ties can be undone by bad blood. Regarding *conjecture,* a *ḥadīth* warns, "Beware of conjecture, for it is indeed the most misleading form of speech." On another occasion the Prophet warned, "A leader will corrupt his people if he pursues conjecture regarding them."

Spying (*tajassus*) is considered a sin, as it usually indicates suspicion of another's sin and thinking ill of another; inquiring (*taḥassus*), on the other hand, is done for the benefit of the one being inquired about (IK). In this regard, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "Do not be quick to expose another's sin, for he may be forgiven for it, and do not feel yourself safe even from a small sin, since you may be punished for it. Every one of you who comes to know the faults of others should not expose them in view of what he knows about his own faults, and should remain busy in gratitude that he has been saved from that in which others have been indulging" (*Nahj al-balāghah,* Sermon 139). A *ḥadīth* states that those who eavesdrop "will have molten copper poured in their ears on the Day of Judgment." As spying usually implies seeking faults, it is closely tied to backbiting, which is understood to mean saying anything about another that he or she would not like to have said (IK). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "O gathering of those who submit with their tongues, but in whose hearts faith has not yet taken hold! Do not harm Muslims, do not shame them, and do not pursue their faults. For whosoever pursues the faults of his Muslim brother, God will pursue his faults. And he whose faults are pursued by God, God disgraces him, even in his own home." In contrast, another *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever covers [the faults] of a Muslim in this world, God will cover [his faults] in this world and the next. Truly God continues to help the servant, so long as the servant continues to help his brother."

God's "relenting" correlates with human beings' repenting, as both translate the same verb, *tāba/yatūbu.* The majority of scholars have stated that repentance for backbiting entails refraining

Would any of you desire to eat the dead flesh of his brother? You would abhor it. And reverence God. Truly God is Relenting, Merciful. (13) O mankind! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware. (14) The Bedouin say, "We believe." Say, "You believe not. Rather, say, 'We have submitted,' for belief has not yet entered your hearts. Yet if you obey God and

from backbiting and intending not to repeat it. There is a difference of opinion as to whether one must apologize to the harmed party. Some maintain that it is not necessary to ask forgiveness from the victim, because if the person knew what was said, it would cause more hurt than not being told about it. It is better to praise the wronged person among those who had previously heard the negative comments. It is also better to defend the injured party against any further backbiting as recompense for the previous ill-advised words (IK). When backbiting becomes open and extends to slander and false accusations, the punishment can be severe, as in 24:4: *And as for those who accuse chaste women, but then do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty lashes, and never accept any testimony from them.*

13 This is among the most famous verses of the Quran. *From a male and a female* can be understood as a reference to Adam and Eve (Q), but also to the creation of each human being from the fluid of a man and a woman (Ṭ). That people have been divided into diverse *peoples and tribes* that they *may come to know one another* indicates the manner in which differences in tribe, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion can be sources through which human beings gain a deeper appreciation for the reality of the human condition. In this regard, the Prophet has said, "God does not look at your bodies, nor at your forms. He looks at your hearts." In another *ḥadīth,* the heart is presented as the reality that determines all other dimensions of one's being: "There is in man a clump of flesh. If it is pure, the whole body is pure. If it is polluted, the whole body is polluted. It is the heart." The outward diversity that divides human beings is thus one of the greatest tests that human beings confront in the life of this world, as in 5:48: *And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ.*

The combination of nobility and reverence marks a remarkable transition from the attitudes of pre-Islamic Arabia, in which reverence (*taqwā,* which also has the sense of "God-fearing," or just "fearing" in pre-Islamic Arabia) and nobility were considered polar opposites. This late Madinan verse thus signals a revamping of the moral order of Arabia to one in which true worth is no longer determined by lineage and grandiose displays of valor and generosity, but by the depth of faith and piety. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Truly God has ennobled those who were lowly during the Age of Ignorance. Through Islam, God removed the zealotry of the Age of Ignorance and its custom of vainglorious boasting regarding kinsfolk and noble descent. Today, all the people, be they white, black, Qurayshī, Arab or non-Arab, are seen to be descendants of Adam. And, assuredly, God created Adam from clay, and the people most beloved by God on the Day of Resurrection will be the most obedient and the most reverent among them."

14 This verse indicates that belief is of a higher rank than submission (IK), that faith has degrees, and that tribal affiliations are superseded by those of faith. It was reportedly revealed with regard to members of the tribe of Banū Asad who had moved to Madinah after a drought and sought charity, claiming that they were true believers and had a right to the same considerations as those who had followed the Prophet for many years. Some say that they were hypocrites (W), while others say they simply had not yet attained faith (IK), though they had made a formal submission.

His Messenger, He will not diminish for you aught of your deeds. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful." (15) Only they are believers who believe in God and His Messenger, then do not doubt, and who strive with their wealth and theirselves in the way of God; it is they who are the truthful. (16) Say, "Would you teach God about your religion, when God knows whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth?" And God is Knower of all things. (17) They count it as a favor to thee that they have submitted. Say, "Do not count your submission as a favor to me. Nay, rather God confers a favor upon you, in that He has guided you to belief, if you are truthful. (18) Truly God knows the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and God sees whatsoever you do."

In this sense, this verse admonishes all forms of religious pretension, as in 53:32: *Do not deem yourselves purified. He knows best the reverent.* Modesty and humility are thus exalted as among the highest of virtues, as in a *ḥadīth,* "Modesty produces naught but good." The injunction to *obey God and His Messenger* (e.g., 3:32, 132; 4:59; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; see 3:32c; 4:59c) here indicates that, as long as Muslims remain obedient, they will be rewarded for the best of their deeds. It also implies that their bad deeds may be forgiven, as stated in a *ḥadīth,* "If a servant submits and perfects his submission (*islām*), God will record for him every good deed that he performed before [submitting], and every evil deed that he performed before [submitting] will be erased. After that the requiting for the good deed will be tenfold up to seven hundred fold, and for the evil deed one like it, unless God absolves him of it."

15 After v. 14 rebuked those who claim belief without attaining it, this verse emphasizes the steadfast nature of true faith and the depth of commitment it entails. While the previous verse emphasizes obedience, this verse emphasizes belief. Those *who strive with their wealth and theirselves in the way of God* (cf. 8:72; 9:20, 44, 81; see also 2:218; 4:95; 5:35, 54; 8:74; 9:41) are those who are willing to give everything for the sake of seeking God's good pleasure (IK); see 4:95c; 8:72c. They are truthful in their claim to believe, unlike the members of the Banū Asad, who claim belief only outwardly (IK).

16 This verse asks, "Would you propose to tell God what lies within you, when nothing is hidden from Him?" (IK, Ṭ); or more specifically, "Are you going to declare that you have faith when God knows that you do not know?" (Ṭ). More generally, this verse can be understood to mean that one should maintain a sense of humility when speaking of religious matters.

17 The Banū Asad (see 49:14c) count their submission *as a favor,* because, unlike other tribes, they submitted without fighting (JJ), or because, when they entered Islam, they came with goods and families (Q). That they would think this way demonstrates that they had still not grasped the principles of belief and continued to think of their pledge to the Prophet as if it were another tribal allegiance. They should not count their submission as a favor on a practical level, because they came to Madinah with needs resulting from the drought. They should also not do so from a religious perspective, because God and the Prophet have no need of them; rather, it is they who are in need of God and the guidance He provides through His Prophet. More generally, this verse can be understood as a continuation of the discussion in vv. 7–8 and thus as a reminder that all belief and all guidance is a favor from God.

18 Elsewhere God is said to be *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 62:8; 64:18), but this is one of only two verses to assert that *God knows the Unseen of the heavens and the earth* (cf. 35:38). In the context of this *sūrah,* it also indicates that God knows the true depths of one's faith.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 50

# Qāf

## *Qāf*

Although all scholars agree that *Qāf* is a Makkan *sūrah,* some maintain that v. 38 is from the Madinan period (Āl, Q). The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the Arabic letter *qāf* at the beginning and is known to some as *al-Bāsiqāt,* "The Towering," after the reference to *date palms towering with layered spathes* in v. 10 (Sy, *Itqān*). It could also be understood to be the "*Sūrah* of the Threat," since of the six times that *threat* or "warning" (*waᶜīd*) is employed in the Quran, four occur in this *sūrah.* Just as the previous *sūrah* criticized those who claim to believe, but have not yet realized the fullness of faith, this *sūrah* criticizes those who do not believe in the prophethood of Muhammad and the Hereafter (Āl).

Many scholars consider *Qāf* to mark the beginning of the "separated" (*mufaṣṣal*) *sūrah*s, the shorter *sūrah*s whose length leads to the more frequent appearance of the *basmalah—In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*—which marks the beginning of each new *sūrah.* It is reported that in later years, the Prophet would recite *Qāf* from the pulpit during the sermon of the Friday congregational prayer (Q). He is also reported to have read *Qāf* and *Sūrah* 54, *al-Qamar,* during the two *ᶜīd*s (the Feast of Sacrifice and the Feast of Breaking Fast; Āl, Q) and to have often recited *Qāf* during the morning prayer (Āl, Q). The Prophet's frequent recitation of this *sūrah* has led some to consider it as among the greatest of *sūrah*s (Āl).

After beginning with a reference to the Quran and addressing those who reject the Prophet and deny Resurrection (vv. 1–5), the *sūrah* calls one to reflect upon the wonders of creation as evidence of God's Omnipotence (vv. 6–11). A brief reference to previous communities that rejected the prophets sent to them (vv. 12–15) leads into the main subject of the *sūrah,* death and the disparate ends of the believers and the disbelievers in the Hereafter (vv. 16–35). Another brief allusion to past generations (vv. 36–37) paves the way for an injunction to be mindful of death (vv. 38–44) and a final injunction to the Prophet to remind *those who fear* God's *Threat* (v. 45).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Qāf.* By the glorious Quran; (2) nay, but they marvel that a warner has come unto them from among their own; so the disbelievers say, "This is an astounding thing! (3) What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is a far-fetched return!" (4) Well do We know what the earth diminishes from them, and with Us there is a preserving Book. (5) Nay, they denied the truth when it came unto them; so they are now in a confounded state. (6) Have they not

1 The letter *qāf* is among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaᶜāt*) that are found at the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrah*s and whose meaning is considered by most commentators to be known only to God; see 2:1c. *Qāf* is understood by many as a proper name for an emerald mountain whose reality encompasses the earth (IJ, IK, Q, Ṭ). This is not a literal physical mountain, but a cosmic mountain that represents the created order as such. Others say that *Qāf* is one of the Names of God (IJ, Q, Ṭ) or that it represents the Divine Names that begin with the letter *qāf* (IJ, Q), such as "the Powerful" (*al-Qadīr*), "the Paramount" (*al-Qahhār*), and "the Holy" (*al-Quddūs*). Still others say that *Qāf* is one of the names of the Quran (IJ, Q, Ṭ). A few commentators say that *Qāf* is the name of a mountain in Hell (IJ). This is one of two verses in which the revelation is referred to as a *glorious Quran* (cf. 85:21), which means the utmost in nobility, magnanimity, grace, and glory.

2 Here and in the almost identical 38:4, the disbelievers' incredulity may result from the idea of God's choosing as a prophet one who previously did not have a position of influence among them, as when they ask, *Why was this Quran not sent down to a great man from one of the two towns?* (43:31). It may also result from God's choice of a human being as His Messenger, as in 25:7: *What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?* (see also 6:8–9; 6:50; 11:12; 14:10; 17:94; 23:33; 36:15; 41:14; 54:24; 64:6c). For other verses that speak of the disbelievers marveling at this phenomenon, see 7:63c; 10:2; 25:20; 38:4c. Alternately, this verse could indicate that they are amazed that they could be deemed to be in need of a message and especially of a warning or admonition (JJ).

3 These are the words of the disbelievers when they disparage the Quranic teaching regarding bodily resurrection; see also 17:49; 36:78; 37:16–17, 53; 56:47; 79:11.

4 This verse implies that God is able to take into account all parts of their bodies that have decomposed. *A preserving Book* may be a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22), which contains all that has been decreed by God (JJ), or to the book in which all of one's deeds are recorded; see 18:49c.

5 In this context many understand *the truth* as a reference to the Quran (JJ, Q, Ṭ), but it may also refer to Islam or to the Prophet (Q). *Confounded* translates *marīj,* which derives from the verb *maraja,* indicating something that has been completely mixed up so that its true nature cannot be discerned. Here it is understood to mean that they are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood (Ṭ), that they are misguided or even iniquitous (Q, Ṭ), or that they are of many different opinions (Q, Ṭ) and thus in an ambiguous and precarious situation (Ṭ) because they believe one thing and then another.

6–11 This is one of several passages to call human beings to reflect upon the beauty, proportionality, and bounty of the natural world as evidence of God's Mercy and wisdom and of the Resurrection; see 16:79–81; 24:43–50; 26:7–8; 33:27; 35:27–28; 36:71–73; 45:1–5.

6 Here *the sky* can also mean the heavens or be read as an allusion to all of creation; see 67:3–4c. That creation has *no rifts* means that there is no

looked upon the sky above them, how We built it and adorned it, and [how it] has no rifts? (7) The earth We spread out, and cast therein firm mountains, and caused every delightful kind to grow therein, (8) as a source of insight and a reminder for every penitent servant. (9) And We sent down blessed water from the sky whereby We grew gardens and the harvested grain, (10) and the date palms towering with layered spathes, (11) as provision for His servants. And We revive a dead land therewith—likewise shall be the coming forth. (12) Before them the people of Noah, the inhabitants of al-Rass, and Thamūd denied, (13) as did ᶜĀd, Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lot, (14) the inhabitants of the thicket, and the people of Tubbaᶜ—each denied the messengers; so My Threat came

disproportionality and that each thing is in its proper place, since *He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in truth* (6:73; 16:3; 29:44; 39:5; 45:22; 64:3).

7 See 15:19c. *Every delightful kind* can be taken as a reference to all that is created. In the present verse, *every . . . kind* translates *kulli zawj,* which can also mean "every pair," in which case it is similar to 51:49: *And of all things We created pairs.*

8 Everything that exists serves as *a reminder* of God's Might and Power and an indication of His Oneness (Ṭ), because "in each thing there is a sign, indicating that He is the One." *Every penitent servant* means all those whose hearts turn to God (Ṭ). For the Quranic understanding of repentance and turning to God, see 4:17–18c; 42:25c.

9 God's sending down water relates to the giving of all life. Although many verses refer to God's sending down water (e.g., 23:18; 27:60; 31:10; 35:27; 39:21; 41:39; 43:11), the present verse provides the only reference to *blessed water.* Water is understood in the Quran as the source of all life, as in 21:30: *And We made every living thing from water.* Other verses allude to God's ability to remove water, thus life and blessings, at any time (e.g., 18:41; 67:30).

10 The *date palm* was for the Arabs the best of plants. It can thus be understood as a reference to the highest of God's Blessings in the physical realm and as an allusion to all forms of fruit and nourishment.

11 *As provision for His servants* refers to the waters, gardens, grain, and date palms in the previous verses. God revives *a dead land* with the water that is sent down, as in 16:65: *And God sends down water from the sky, and thereby revives the earth after its death. Surely in this is a sign for a people who hear* (see also 2:164; 41:39; 45:5; 57:17). The *coming forth* refers to the Resurrection, meaning that just as God has created all that is mentioned in vv. 9–10, so too will He bring forth all human beings and jinn. This argument is made more explicit in 30:19: *He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after its death. Even so shall you be brought forth* (cf. 16:65; 25:48–49; 30:50; 35:9; 36:33; 43:11; 45:5). In all such verses, the revival of the earth can also be taken as a reference to the manner in which God revives the hearts of those who are spiritually dead.

12–14 *Before them* means before the idolaters who oppose the Prophet (Ṭ). For the Quranic account of Noah and the flood, see 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; *Sūrah* 71. *The inhabitants of al-Rass* (cf. 25:38) is an enigmatic reference that some understand to mean one of the towns of the tribe of Thamūd (Ṭ). Others understand *al-Rass* to mean "the well" and interpret it as a reference to the well in which the people spoken of in 36:13–27 threw the prophet whom God had sent to them (Ṭ). The ᶜĀd and the Thamūd were pre-Islamic Arabian tribes who rejected the prophets sent to them. For the account of the ᶜĀd see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16; 54:18–21. For that of the Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:24–31. The story of Lot and his people is discussed most extensively in 11:77–83; see also 7:80–84; 15:57–77; 21:74–75; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38. *The*

due. (15) Did We then weary in the first creation? Nay, but they are in doubt regarding a new creation. (16) We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (17) When the two receivers receive, seated on the right and on the left, (18) no word does he utter without a ready watcher beside him. (19) And the agony of death comes

*thicket* translates *al-aykah,* which according to some is a proper name. *The inhabitants of the thicket* are either the people of Midian, who are said to have rejected the prophet Shuʿayb (see 7:85–93; 11:84–95; 26:176–89; 29:36–37), or a second community to which Shuʿayb was sent (Mw). For Tubbaʿ, most likely a reference to a line of kings in southern Arabia, see 44:37c.

15 This verse is a rebuke to what the idolaters say in v. 3. They are questioned as to how it is that they could doubt God's ability to resurrect when they have the evidence of God's ability to create everything that is around them (Ṭ). The rhetorical question is answered in 46:33: *Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth and did not weary in their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Yea! He is Powerful over all things.* In the present verse, *the first creation* means the creation of this world. When confronted with the Quranic teaching regarding bodily resurrection, the reaction of the disbelievers is that they say, *What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?* (17:49, 98). In this interpretation *new creation* refers to the Resurrection; see also 13:5; 14:19; 34:7; 35:16–17c. *New creation* can also be understood as a reference to the perpetual creation of the world, in which God's creative act is renewed at every instant (K). That most human beings *are in doubt regarding a new creation* indicates that they are unable to see because their sight is not yet *piercing* (see v. 22).

16 *Man* translates *al-insān,* which also means the human being as such. In this context, some understand it as a reference to Adam and God's knowledge of his inclination to eat of what had been forbidden to him (Q). Most, however, see it as a reference to God's Knowledge of all that *lies within breasts* (3:119; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13), in which case it means that God knows the true intentions behind all words and actions, even when the speaker or agent is unaware of them. The second phrase could also be read, "and We know that of which his soul whispers" (Aj).

*We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* is problematic for many commentators. Some seek to avoid the literal meaning, saying that "we" refers to two angels (IK). Others understand this verse as connected to the following verse so that they read, "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein when the two receivers receive," indicating that God continues to have power over the *two receivers* and that, although He has appointed two angels to each person, He is not in need of them in order to know what the person is doing (Z). Although this second reading is part of what is implied, this is one of several verses that indicate the Immanence of God in all of creation (see, e.g., 2:115), that the Divine Reality is the substrate of every reality, and that God is the nearest and closest Reality to the human being. God is with human beings wherever they may be (see 57:4) and is always close to them, but human beings, nonetheless, often fail to be with or close to God and thus remain far from Him.

17–18 *The two receivers* refers to the two attendant angels charged with recording all of an individual's deeds (JJ, Ṭ); see also 43:80; 82:10–12. Each angel could be said to be *a ready watcher,* but the angel who sits on the right recording good deeds is believed to be superior to the angel who sits on the left recording evil deeds, often telling him to wait to see if an evil deed is erased through repentance or asking forgiveness (Ṭ, Z). *Seated* is understood to mean "observing" or "keeping watch" (Ṭ). When one stands for judgment on the Day of Resurrection, the scroll in which one's deeds are recorded is unfolded *as a book* one *will meet wide open* (17:13), and it is said, *Read your book! On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you* (17:14, Ṭ); see 17:13–14c.

19 *Agony* translates *sakrah,* which is related to a word used to refer to "intoxicants" (*sakar*) and "intoxicated" (*sakrān*). *Sakrat al-mawt,* or *agony*

with the truth. That is what you were avoiding. (20) And the trumpet is blown. That is the Day of the Threat. (21) Then every soul comes, with it a driver and a witness: (22) "You were indeed heedless of this. Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing." (23) And his companion says, "This

*of death,* is thus understood to mean the state of confusion brought on by the severity of death (Ṭ), which for some may be a state of fear and for others a state of ease (Aj). But given that *sakrah* is said to come *with the truth,* or "through the truth," others see it as a reference to the wisdom that comes with death (Z), meaning the vision of the Unseen Realm. In this sense it could be understood as an allusion to the transition from one state of being to another that accompanies death. Just as intoxication separates one from the true self, *the agony of death* describes the manner in which death comes between a person and the self, indicating the transition from one state of being to another.

Here *the truth* most likely indicates the reality of death, since *every soul shall taste death* (3:185; 21:35; 29:57; Z), or the reality of "the affair," meaning that one will now know the joy of death or its sorrow (Aj). *The truth* can also be understood to mean God (Ṭ), as "the Truth" is one of the Names of God. *That* in the second sentence refers to death (Aj, Z) or the truth (Ṭ). From a Quranic perspective, the disbelievers seek to avoid both, whereas the believers embrace them. *That is what you were avoiding* can be understood as addressed directly to readers or as recounting the address of God or the angels to the disbelievers at the moment of death.

20 The blowing of the *trumpet* on the Day of Judgment is mentioned in several verses (see 6:73; 18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68c; 69:13; 74:8; 78:18c).

21 *A driver and a witness* refers to two angels, one who drives a person to the place where all souls are gathered and another who bears witness to the deeds one has performed (Ṭ, Z), or to a single angel who performs both functions (Z). Others understand the *driver* to be an angel and the witness to be one's own soul (Ṭ), as in 17:14: *On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you.* This verse could also be understood as a reference to every soul or as a reference only to the souls of the disbelievers (Ṭ).

22 *Today your sight is piercing,* so that now souls are able to see what they could not see before (JJ). At the moment of death, the veils that cover one's vision in this life are lifted and one sees the reality of creation and of one's own condition (see 67:10–11c). Some Muslims maintain that such *piercing sight* can be attained before the moment of physical death by those who have purified their souls, since the *cover* is attachment to the sensory experiences of this world. In commenting upon this verse, Ibn ʿArabī thus writes, "The believer who is granted the unveiling of things 'as they are' is granted [the return from the many to the One]. . . . And this is before he leaves this world" (*Futūḥāt,* III 388.33–34). In his philosophical commentary on *Sūrah* 36, Mullā Ṣadrā writes, "The soul's inner faculties will become powerful and piercing because of its perception of matters related to the next world, as in [God's] saying, *Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing.* The unseen forms, which store the results of the soul's actions, its ambitions, the intentions of its disposition, and the aims and shortcomings of its aspirations, will be witnessed."

23 *His companion* means the angel charged with overseeing the person (JJ), which could also be understood as the *driver* from v. 21 (Ṭ). *Companion* might also refer to the jinn or satan who is assigned to an individual, as in 43:36: *And whosoever turns blindly away from the remembrance of the Compassionate, We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him* (Z). In this latter interpretation, the verse would refer only to disbelievers, though many take it as a reference to all human beings (Ṭ). *This is what I have ready* are the words of *his companion* upon presenting the record of deeds for the reckoning (Ṭ).

is what I have ready." (24) "Cast you both into Hell every stubborn disbeliever, (25) every hinderer of good, every transgressor, every doubter (26) who has set up another god along with God. Cast him into the severe punishment." (27) His companion will say, "Our Lord, I did not make him rebel; rather, he was far astray." (28) He will say, "Dispute not before Me, since I have already presented unto you the Threat. (29) With Me the Word is not changed, and I do not wrong My servants." (30) That Day We shall say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" And it will say, "Is there more?" (31) And the Garden will be brought nigh unto the reverent, not distant: (32) "This is what is promised for every oft turning keeper, (33) who fears the Compassionate unseen and comes with a penitent heart.

24–26 *Hinderer of good* means one who does not render unto God and to others that to which they have a right (Ṭ). With regard to God's Commands, this means one who does not pay the obligatory alms (*zakāh*). With regard to other human beings, it means honoring contracts and dealing justly. *Transgressor* indicates one who violates others by reviling or oppressing them (Ṭ).

27 For the meaning of *his companion,* see 50:23c. *I did not make him rebel* declares the companion's innocence of what the person does (Ṭ), as when Satan says to human beings after they have followed his injunction to disbelieve, *Surely I am quit of you. Truly I fear God, Lord of the worlds* (59:16), and when Satan declares, *I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves* (14:22). Such verses indicate that all human beings bear responsibility for the state of their soul and would not incline to suggestions from Satan, were they not already *far astray.*

28 Human beings received ample warning during the life of this world, since *there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them* (35:24; cf. 16:36). Thus some read *Threat* here as a reference to the Quran (Ṭ), since to warn people of the impending punishment is considered a function of all revelations and is a central theme of the Quran. To dispute before God on the Day of Judgment is therefore futile, since such people did not avail themselves of the warning when it came, and all of their iniquities are now on display.

29–30 *The Word is not changed* refers to God's Decree (Ṭ) or to the Quran itself, as in 6:115 and 18:27: *None alters His Words.* It can also be understood as a reference to both, for in 32:13 God says, *I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together.* The question posed by Hell, *Is there more?* is interpreted by some to mean, "I am full" (Ṭ), while others say it means, "Give me more" (Ṭ). Both interpretations are possible depending upon how one understands *aḥādīth* such as the following: "As for the Fire, it will not be filled until God puts His Foot upon it, saying to it, 'Enough, Enough.' Then it will be full, and it folds in upon itself. And God will not wrong anyone among His creation" (Q, Ṭ). Were Hell to say, *Is there more?* before the Foot of God, which is often understood as a symbol of Divine Mercy, is placed upon it, it could be read as a request for more. Were it to be said afterwards, it could be read as an acceptance of God's Decree or as a query as to whether it had fulfilled its task by accepting all whom God had decreed for it.

31 See 26:90–91c.

32 *Oft turning* translates *awwāb,* which indicates someone who is penitent and could also mean one who is constantly turned to God and thus remembers Him in all things; see 38:17c. *Keeper* indicates a person who keeps the Commands of God and avoids falling into sin (Ṭ). Translated according to the interpretation of these terms, this verse would mean, "everyone who is penitent and steadfast."

33 *Fears the Compassionate unseen* (cf. 36:11) can be interpreted as a reference to worshipping

(34) Enter it in peace. This is the day of abiding." (35) Therein they shall have whatsoever they will; and with Us there is more. (36) How many a generation before them have We destroyed who were of greater prowess than they? Then they searched about in the lands: "Is there any refuge?" (37) Truly in that is a reminder for whosoever has a heart, or gives ear as witness. (38) And indeed We created the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in six days, and no fatigue touched Us. (39) So bear patiently that which they say, and hymn

God while God remains unseen or worshipping God in seclusion (see also 67:12c). To come *with a penitent heart* means to come with a heart that has turned away from what displeases God to what makes God content (Ṭ).

34 *Peace* translates *salām,* which also denotes "greeting" and "safety." *Enter it in peace* is thus interpreted to mean, "Enter secure from every fear," or "Enter with the greeting of peace" (JJ), as in 56:25–26: *They hear no idle talk therein, nor incitement to sin, save that "Peace! Peace!" is uttered* (cf. 7:46; 10:10; 13:23–24; 14:23; 16:32; 19:62; 25:75; 33:44; 36:58). Thus the Garden is also known as *the Abode of Peace* (6:127; 10:25). That this is *the day of abiding* indicates that it is the day on which everlasting life in the Garden will begin (JJ, Ṭ).

35 That they shall have *whatsoever they will* (cf. 39:34; 42:22) is reaffirmed in 56:20–21, which speaks of their having *fruits as they choose, and the meat of birds as they desire* (cf. 52:22). *And with Us there is more* indicates the vision of God (Ṭ), which is considered the greatest blessing, beyond all else, that one can desire in Paradise. When viewed in contrast to the query of Hell at the end of v. 30, *Is there more?,* it could also be understood to mean that, whereas the punishment of Hell is set and delimited, the rewards of the Garden are infinite.

36 This verse refers to those tribes and peoples mentioned in vv. 12–14. The same rhetorical question is asked of previous generations in several Quranic verses with slight variations (see 6:6; 17:17; 19:74, 98; 20:128; 32:26; 36:31; 38:3). Other verses refer to similar destruction of towns (see 7:4; 21:11; 22:45, 48; 47:13). In all such verses, it is stated or implied that such people were destroyed for their iniquity and their refusal to accept the teachings of the messengers whom God had sent to them; see 6:6c; 47:13c. That they wandered in the land asking, *Is there any refuge?* implies that the disbelievers and the iniquitous had no place in which to find security in this life or the Hereafter.

37 In Arabic, to say that one "has a heart" is to say that one's heart is alive and awake, which also implies the ability to understand (Ṭ). *Whosoever has a heart* can thus mean, "Whoever has a heart that is aware, because if one's heart is not aware, it is as if he has no heart" (Z); see 2:7c. *Gives ear as witness* can mean "present with his intelligence, because whosoever is not present in mind, it is as if he is absent" (Z). *As witness* could also be rendered "and is a witness," in which case this verse would, from a Quranic perspective, refer to the three main faculties through which understanding is achieved: the heart, the ears, and the eyes. When interpreted to mean "and is a witness," this verse is also understood as a reference to the People of the Book, whose books Muslims believe bear witness to the prophethood of Muhammad (Ṭ, Z; see 7:157c), or to the believer who hears the Quran and bears witness to it (Ṭ, Z). It can also be seen as a reference to the hypocrite who hears the Quran, but does not benefit from it (Ṭ).

38 Regarding the creation of the earth *in six days* (cf. 10:3; 11:7; 25:29; 32:4; 57:4), see 7:54c. *No fatigue touched Us* is understood as a response to the assertion that God rested on the seventh day after creating the earth and all that is in it (JJ, Z). Regarding the preclusion of fatigue or weariness from the Divine Nature, see 2:255c.

39 Cf. 20:130. *Bear patiently that which they say* (cf. 20:130; 38:17; 73:10) enjoins the Prophet and, by extension, all Muslims to bear patiently the chiding of disbelievers and naysayers. The command to *hymn the praise of thy Lord* (cf. 15:98; 20:130; 40:56; 52:48; 110:3) indicates that one

the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting. (40) And at night glorify Him, and after prostrations. (41) And listen on the Day when the caller calls from near at hand, (42) on the Day when they hear the Cry of Truth; that is the Day of coming forth. (43) Truly We give life and We cause death, and unto Us is the journey's end. (44) That Day the earth is split asunder from about them—as they hasten forth. That is a gathering easy for Us. (45) We know best that which they say. Thine is not to compel them. So remind, by means of the Quran, those who fear My Threat.

should not dwell upon the words of disbelievers, but instead turn to God. According to some commentators, *before the rising of the sun* refers to the morning prayer and *before the setting* refers to the late afternoon prayer (Ṭ), though others say that *before the setting* refers to both afternoon prayers (JJ, Z). On a night of the full moon, the Prophet is reported to have said to a group of his Companions, "You will see your Lord as you see this moon, and you will have no trouble looking at Him. So whosoever can should not miss the offering of prayers before sunrise [*fajr* prayer] and before sunset [*ʿaṣr* prayer]." Then the Prophet recited, *And hymn the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting.*

40 *And at night glorify Him* (cf. 52:49) refers to the obligatory night prayer (Q), or both the sunset prayer and the night prayer (JJ, Ṭ, Z), or the two supererogatory prayer cycles before the morning prayer (Q). It can also be taken as a general command to glorify God throughout the night (JJ, Q) and thus to practice the night vigil (Z); regarding the night vigil, see 11:114; 17:79; 21:20; 20:130; 25:63–64; 73:6, 20; 76:26; 73:1–2c. *After prostrations* is taken by some as a command to glorify God after each prayer. According to Ibn ʿAbbās, "*The receding of the stars* [52:49] is the two prayer cycles before the morning prayer, *and after prostrations* is the two prostrations after the sunset prayer" (Q). According to some, v. 39 refers to performing all of the obligatory prayers, though only two are mentioned specifically, while v. 40 refers to supererogatory prayers at night and after the prescribed prayers.

41–42 *And listen* to My Words (JJ) either *on the Day when the caller calls,* referring to the Archangel Seraphiel's blowing his trumpet and heralding the end of the world (see 39:68c; 78:18c), or "regarding the Day when the caller calls," meaning the description of that day provided in the Quran (Z). Some say that Seraphiel blows the trumpet, while Gabriel calls (Z). *From near at hand* refers to a place close to Heaven or a place close to those who are called (Z). In the case of a place close to Heaven, it is interpreted to mean Jerusalem (Ṭ, Z). In the case of a place close to those who are called, it is interpreted to mean "from beneath their feet" (Z). *The Cry of Truth* most likely refers to the second blast of Seraphiel's trumpet, when all souls are brought forth from their graves and gathered before God.

43 Although the plain sense of *We give life and We cause death* (cf. 15:23) indicates that God alone controls every phase of existence, it is also understood as an allusion to spiritual life and death. As Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī writes, "We give life to hearts that are dead and cause carnal souls that are alive to die. And *unto Us is the journey's end* for one whose carnal soul has died and whose heart is alive." Echoing the famous verse *Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return* (2:156), that the *journey's end* is unto God is reaffirmed in several verses (see 2:285; 3:28; 5:18; 22:48; 24:42; 31:14; 35:18; 40:3; 42:15; 60:4; 64:3), though this is the only verse where it is phrased in the first-person plural, *unto Us.*

44 The earth being *split asunder* is among the many signs of the Last Day (see also 19:90), along with the heavens being rent, the mountains falling, and the seas swelling over. In this case only the earth is mentioned, since it pertains to the bodies being brought forth from their graves for

the Resurrection. *That is a gathering easy for Us* reasserts one of the central themes of this *sūrah,* that just as God brought forth the first creation, so too can He bring about the Resurrection, as in 29:19: *Have they not considered how God originates creation, then brings it back? Truly that is easy for God* (see also 64:7c).

45 That God *knows best that which they say* (cf. 20:104) provides the rationale for enduring insults with patience (see v. 39). As true speech is that of the heart, and just as some hypocrites profess faith though they disbelieve (see 63:1c), some who have faith in their hearts may appear outwardly to reject the truth. This verse is thus related to the understanding that *God knows best what they conceal* (3:167; 84:23) and *what is in their souls* (11:31; see also 17:25), implying that God knows both the inveterate disbelievers and those who simply decry the Prophet due to social norms, but may eventually be among those who are reminded by the Quran of the truth and of their true nature, as happened with several of the Prophet's early detractors, most notably ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who later became one of his closest Companions and the second Caliph after his death. Given the general principle in Islam that *there is no coercion in religion* (2:256), the Prophet is not to *compel* disbelievers. His function is only to remind human beings through revelation (see 88:21–22), as prophets are only responsible for proclaiming the message (see, e.g., 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48). *Those who fear My Threat* (see also 87:9–10) is understood by some to mean the believers (JJ), but can be taken more generally to mean all but the most obstinate disbelievers, since every human being is believed to bear the primordial covenant, and thus the remembrance of God, within the depths of his or her soul (see 7:172c; 30:30c).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 51

# The Scatterers

## *al-Dhāriyāt*

*Al-Dhāriyāt* is a Makkan *sūrah,* most likely from the later Makkan period. The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the winds that *scatter* in the first verse. It can be seen as following upon the previous *sūrah* in that vv. 5–6 guarantee the advent of the Day of Judgment, which will follow upon the Resurrection and Gathering, mentioned at the conclusion of the previous *sūrah* (Āl).

After attesting to the Judgment in the opening lines (vv. 1–6), the *sūrah* discusses the intellectual fallacies that lie at the heart of disbelief (vv. 7–14) and contrasts the final end of *those who conjecture* with the final end of *the reverent* (vv. 15–19). It then calls upon the signs within creation and the human soul as evidence of the Day of Judgment (vv. 20–23). This is followed by references to the stories of Abraham, Lot, and Moses (vv. 24–40), transitioning into a discussion of the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes of ʿĀd and Thamūd (vv. 41–45), and concluding with a reference to Noah (v. 46), who preceded all of the aforementioned tribes and peoples. The next passage (vv. 47–55) begins with another allusion to the evidence of Divine Omnipotence provided by the natural order (vv. 47–49) and provides counsel to the Prophet Muhammad. The *sūrah* concludes with a discussion of the relationship between the Divine and the human (vv. 56–58) and a final warning to the disbelievers (vv. 59–60).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the scatterers as they scatter, (2) and by those that bear a burden, (3) by those that course with ease, (4) and by those that apportion the Command, (5) verily what you are promised is true, (6) and truly the judgment shall come to pass. (7) By Heaven possessed of paths, (8) truly you are of differing claims. (9) Whosoever has been turned away shall from it be turned away. (10) Perish

1 A reference to the winds that scatter dust (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭ) or an allusion to the cycles by which women bring forth subsequent generations (Bḍ).

2 A reference to the clouds that carry moisture (Bḍ, JJ, Q, Ṭ) or to women who are pregnant (Bḍ, Q).

3 Ships that course upon the surface of the ocean (Bḍ, JJ, Q, Ṭ) or the planets that run through their stations (Bḍ).

4 The angels who apportion all that God has ordained for creation (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭ) or the winds that apportion the rains by dispersing the clouds (Bḍ).

5 The promise of the Resurrection and what follows it will come to pass (JJ), indicating that the final accounting, reward, and punishment are inevitable (Ṭ). Vv. 5–6 constitute the response to the oaths taken in vv. 1–4, which can be understood to mean that the subtle ways in which life is supported in this world, through winds and rain and other means, bear witness to the existence of a Creator behind them to Whom they all return, as in 2:164: *And the water God sends down from the sky whereby He revives the earth after its death, scattering all manner of beast therein; and the shifting of the winds; and the clouds subdued between the sky and the earth are surely signs for a people who understand* (see also 7:57; 30:48).

6 Cf. 52:7. *Shall come to pass* can also be translated *shall befall* (*wāqiᶜ*), for which see 56:1–2c.

7 *Paths* translates *ḥubuk,* which indicates ripples made upon sand or water by the wind (Ṭ) or the streaks upon mountains. In this context, *ḥubuk* refers to the subtle paths through which the heavenly bodies move. *Heaven* could also be interpreted to mean "sky," in which case *ḥubuk* would refer to streaks of clouds. As all of these various meanings of *ḥubuk* indicate subtle wonders of the natural world, this verse is understood in relation to the verb *ḥabaka,* meaning, "to make well and firm," as an allusion to the beauty and sound structure of the created order (Ṭ).

8 *Differing claims* refers to the different opinions among people regarding the Quran, as some believe in it and some deny it (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭ); or to the different opinions the disbelievers have regarding the Prophet, some maintaining that he is a poet, others that he is a sorcerer, and others that he is possessed (Bḍ, JJ); or to the disbelievers' opinions regarding the Resurrection and Judgment (Bḍ).

9 *Away* here means away from the Quran (Ṭ), or the Prophet and the Quran (JJ), or from the truth. *Turned away* translates *ufika/yuʾfaku,* which also means "to lie" or "to pervert." The verse is therefore understood to mean that those whose intellects and souls have already strayed or been perverted will continue to stray (IK). Mujāhid thus interprets it to mean that whoever is weak in intellect and judgment will thereby be turned away from religion (IK). Some also read *has been turned away* (*ufika*) as an active verb rather than a passive one and interpret it to mean "to lie," thus indicating, "Whosoever lies shall be turned away from it" (Bḍ, R).

10 *Perish* (*qutila*) could also mean "cursed be." Most interpret this verse as a reference to those who say that human beings will not be resurrected and that they cannot have certainty (IK, Ṭ). *Those who conjecture* translates *kharrāṣūn,* which indicates those who guess and opine, but do not seek to ascertain and confirm. It also indicates those who speak as if they have ascertained

those who conjecture! (11) Those who blunder along in a stupor, (12) asking, "When is the Day of Judgment?" (13) A day when they are tried upon the Fire. (14) Taste your trial! This is what you sought to hasten! (15) Truly the reverent shall be amidst gardens and springs, (16) partaking of that which their Lord has given them. Truly they were virtuous aforetime. (17) Little of the night did they slumber, (18) and ere dawn would seek forgiveness. (19) And in their wealth was a due for the beggar and the deprived. (20) Upon the earth are signs for those possessing certainty, (21) and within your souls. Do you not then behold?

and thus lie, or those who make false accusations (*yatakharraṣūn*) against the Prophet (Ṭ).

11 The conjecturers roam about in stupefying ignorance (JJ), heedless of what is to befall them and of what God has commanded them to do (Ṭ).

12 This question and variations upon it are repeated throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 10:48; 34:29–30; 67:25; 75:6). In general, the disbelievers do not pose it in a spirit of inquiry, but one of derision, mockery, and denial (IK).

13 *Tried upon the Fire* means punished and burned in the Fire (IK, Ṭ). *Tried* translates *yuftanūn,* which relates to the means by which gold is tested and purified with fire (IK, Ṭ).

14 *Taste your trial;* that is, *taste the punishment for having disbelieved* (3:106; 6:30; 8:35; 46:34) or *taste the punishment of the burning* (3:181; 8:50; 22:22). The disbelievers seem to wish to hasten the Punishment of God when they ask mockingly, *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25), and point to the Prophet's inability to bring about the Judgment of which he warns them as evidence of his assumed folly. Thus the Prophet is told to say, *That which you seek to hasten is not within my power. Judgment belongs to God alone, He relates the Truth, and He is the best of deciders* (6:57; see also 8:32; 22:47). This attitude of the disbelievers is elsewhere contrasted with that of the believers, as in 42:18: *Those who believe not in it seek to hasten it, and those who believe are wary of it and know that it is the truth.*

15 See 15:45–46c; see also 44:51–52.

16 The reverent will be *partaking* of all the delights of the Garden in the Hereafter, because they had been *virtuous* in the life of this world.

17 *Little of the night did they slumber* implies, "Much of the night did they pray" (Ṭ). Many interpret this verse to mean that they would sleep little and pray during the period between the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) and the night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*) or during another period of the night (Ṭ).

18 *Ere dawn* translates *asḥār* (see also 3:17), which refers to the last part of the night before the morning twilight. Regarding seeking forgiveness at this hour, a famous *ḥadīth* states, "Every night during the last third of the night, our Lord descends to the Heaven of this earth and says, 'Who calls upon Me that I might answer him? Who asks of Me that I might give to him? Who seeks My Forgiveness that I might forgive him?' " (IK). The Prophet was known to sleep little. He would usually rise for supererogatory prayers before dawn and strongly encouraged others to do so. Regarding the practice of night vigil (*tahajjud*), see 17:79c; 73:1–2c.

19 Cf. 70:24–25. *Due* is interpreted as a reference to the required alms (*zakāh*) rather than supererogatory charity (*ṣadaqah;* Q, Ṭ), but may refer to both. For a list of those who have a *due* or right to a share of one's wealth, see 2:177. *The beggar* indicates those who ask to be given charity, while *the deprived* indicates those who have need but do not beg (JJ, Ṭ). *The deprived* can be understood as a reference to human beings or to all living creatures who are unable to voice their needs (R). In either case, there is an implied obligation upon those with wealth to be aware of the needs of others, even when others may be reticent or unable to bring those needs to their attention.

20–21 These verses relate to the opening lines of the *sūrah,* which call upon some of the

(22) And in Heaven is your provision and that which you were promised. (23) So by the Lord of Heaven and earth, it is indeed true—as it is that you are endowed with speech. (24) Hast thou heard tell of Abraham's honored guests, (25) when they entered upon him and said, "Peace!" he said, "Peace—an unfamiliar folk." (26) Then he went quietly to his family and came with a fattened calf. (27) He placed it close to them, saying, "Will you not eat?" (28) Then he conceived a fear of them. They said, "Fear not!" and gave him glad tidings of a knowing son.

subtleties of nature as evidence of God's Wisdom and Omnipotence. The theme that the created order presents signs for those who have eyes to see recurs throughout the Quran; see commentary on 41:53 and 45:3–4. For the relationship between the signs in the external world and those within the human soul, see 41:53c. In relation to v. 21, the famous commentator and *Ḥadīth* scholar Qatādah is reported to have said, "Whoever meditates upon his own creation recognizes that he was only created for worship and that his joints were only made flexible for worship" (IK). *Souls* could also be rendered "selves," in which case it is taken to indicate the variations in human languages, forms, colors, and natures (Āl) or the lowliness of the physical body, given the manner in which food and drink leave the body (Āl). "In your selves" could thus refer to the waste matter the body contains (Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ: K. dhamm al-kibr waʾl-ʿujb*).

22 As translated, *your provision* refers to all the things that God has destined for every person (R) and that are brought down by the angels (Qu). It could also be rendered "in the sky is your provision," implying primarily precipitation (R, Ṭ), but also light and wind. *That which you were promised* is understood as a reference to all that God has apportioned for every person (Ṭ), thus indicating the manner in which God determines all things (JJ).

23 *It is indeed true* refers to *that which you were promised* in v. 22 (JJ, R), to the Quran as a whole (R), or to the Judgment, as in v. 6 (R). The ending phrase means that just as you have no doubt that you speak, you should have no doubt in its reality (Bḍ).

24–36 The account of Abraham provided here is very close to that in 11:69–76 and 15:51–60; for more details, see commentary on these passages. For other aspects of the Abraham story in the Quran, see 14:35–41; 37:83–109. For the Biblical account, see Genesis 18.

24–25 V. 24 could also be rendered as a definitive statement, "Thou hast heard tell of Abraham's honored guests" (Q). *Honored guests* refers to a group of three, ten, or twelve angels, one of whom was Gabriel (JJ); see also 11:69. The angels' salutation to Abraham is in the accusative, indicating, "We wish you peace," whereas Abraham's response is in the nominative, indicating, "Peace be upon you," the greeting of the people of Paradise (56:26) and the one enjoined among the believers (6:54). "Peace be upon you" is a firmer and more complete salutation, indicating that Abraham greeted the angels in conformity with the injunction in 4:86: *And when you are offered a greeting, respond with a greeting that is better, or return it* (R, Z).

26 Elsewhere it is said *and he hastened to bring them a roasted calf* (11:69). The Quranic account of this encounter is similar to that found in Genesis 18 in that Abraham is at first unsure as to the identity of his guests. It differs, however, in that in the Genesis account the angels eat the meal that Abraham offers them.

27–28 See 11:70c. Abraham *conceived a fear of them* (cf. 11:70) because in the ancient world, including the Arab world, refusing to partake of offered food was considered a sign of hostility or ill will. It is also proposed that Abraham thought they were angels sent to punish him (Āl). While here it is the angels who *gave him glad tidings*, 37:112 states, *We gave him glad tidings*. Together the two verses indicate that God gave glad tidings through the angels as intermediaries. The majority of commentators maintain that *a knowing son* (cf. 15:53) refers to Isaac, but others see it as a reference to Ishmael (Āl, Ṭ); see also 11:71.

(29) Then his wife came forward with a loud cry; she struck her face and said, "A barren old woman!" (30) They said, "Thus has thy Lord decreed. Truly He is the Wise, the Knowing." (31) He said, "What is your errand, O messengers?" (32) They said, "We have been sent unto a guilty people, (33) to send upon them stones of clay (34) marked by thy Lord for the prodigal." (35) So We brought forth those among them who were believers; (36) yet We did not find therein but one house of submitters. (37) And We left therein a sign for those who fear the painful punishment. (38) And in Moses [We left a sign], when We sent him to Pharaoh with a manifest authority. (39) But he turned away with his court and

29 In 11:72 Sarah exclaims, *Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing.* Abraham was said to be 120 years old at this time, while Sarah was 99 (JJ).

30 This declaration is similar to the declaration that Gabriel makes to Mary when announcing the conception of Jesus: *Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, "It is easy for Me." And [it is thus] that We might make him a sign unto mankind, and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter decreed* (19:21).

31–32 See 15:57–58c. *A guilty people* refers to the people of Lot.

33 In other passages, before the stones are sent, the town has already been afflicted: *So when Our Command came, We made its uppermost to be its lowermost, and We rained down upon them stones of baked clay* (11:82; see also 15:74).

34 *Marked . . . for the prodigal* is understood to mean that each stone bore the name of the person at whom it was to be hurled (Āl, JJ). *Marked by the Lord* can be understood to mean that each stone fell with a Divine purpose; see also 11:83.

35–36 God removed the believers in order to spare them from the punishment intended for the disbelievers. *One house* refers to Lot and his two daughters; they were saved from this punishment, but his wife was not (see 7:83; 11:81; 15:59–60; 26:170–71; 27:57; 29:32; 54:34; cf. Genesis 19:26). The mention first of *believers* and then of *submitters* can be seen as a reference to those who combine faith and action (Āl).

37 *We left therein a sign* indicates that the ruins of the town were left as a sign or that the story of the punishment was preserved as a warning for later generations, or both.

38–40 The account of Moses, whose name appears 136 times in the Quran, is featured more prominently than that of any other prophet. As with most Makkan *sūrahs* that feature the story of Moses (40:23–45; 43:46–56; 44:17–31; 79:15–25), here the account is given more as a spiritual example reflecting aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's challenge than as history. The more detailed accounts of Moses' mission are found in 2:49–61; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 17:101–4; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46.

38 *A manifest authority* is understood as a reference to the miracles associated with Moses (Āl, Bq), because they provided a clear indication of the truth of the message (Bq). It can also be seen as a reference to the belief that *God grants His messengers authority over whomsoever He will* (59:6).

39 *His court* translates *ruknihi,* which literally means "his support" and in this context is understood by some to imply might and strength (Sh) or something in which Pharaoh trusts or on which he relies. Some interpret it to mean "his people" (Āl, Ṭ), "his companions" (Ṭ), or the hosts around him (Sh), because he "relies upon them" (*yarkanu ilayhim*) and derives strength from them (Āl). That Pharaoh must turn to them implies that he has no response to Moses but to deride him, since he cannot argue against the proofs that Moses has brought. *A sorcerer* (see

said, "A sorcerer or one possessed." (40) So We seized him and his hosts and cast them into the sea, for he was blameworthy. (41) And in ᶜĀd [We left a sign], when We sent upon them the barren wind. (42) Naught did it leave that it came upon, but that it made it as bones decayed. (43) And in Thamūd [We left a sign], when it was said unto them, "Enjoy yourselves for a time." (44) Then they insolently defied the Command of their Lord, and the thunderbolt seized them as they looked on. (45) So they were not able to rise; nor could they help one another. (46) As for the people of Noah before, truly they were an iniquitous people. (47) And the sky We established with might; truly We make vast!

also 7:109; 26:34; 40:24) *or one possessed* is the same accusation often leveled against the Prophet Muhammad by the Quraysh; see 51:52c.

40 The casting of Pharaoh and his hosts into the sea refers to the parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites and its closing over Pharaoh and his hosts, who were in pursuit, as in 2:50: *And when We parted the sea for you and so delivered you, and drowned the House of Pharaoh as you looked on.* The drowning of Pharaoh and his army is mentioned in several Quranic passages; see 7:136; 8:54; 17:102–3; 43:55–56; 44:22–24.

41–45 The ᶜĀd and the Thamūd were pre-Islamic Arabian tribes who rejected the prophets sent to them. For the account of the tribe of ᶜĀd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16; 54:18–21. For that of the tribe of Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31.

41–42 *Barren wind* indicates a wind with no benefit, because it does not carry rain or pollinate any trees (Āl, JJ), unlike those winds mentioned in the opening of the *sūrah*. Elsewhere the wind that comes upon the tribe of ᶜĀd is described as *a howling wind* (41:16; 54:19) or, more emphatically, *a howling, raging wind* (69:6). The wind laid waste to all of the people and all of the land upon which it came (JJ). For the broader use of *wind* and *winds* in the Quran, see 30:48–49c.

43 The people of Thamūd were allowed to enjoy themselves in this world for three days after hamstringing the camel that God had sent them as a sign; see 11:65. While in other verses *enjoy* indicates partaking of the blessings God has provided (e.g., 16:80; 36:44; 37:148), this use of *enjoy* has a sense of irony, since *the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20). It thus indicates that God will grant them a brief respite in this life, but that they will then suffer greater punishment in the Hereafter. For more on the ironic use of *enjoy* in the Quran, see commentary on 77:46: *Eat and enjoy yourselves a little; truly you are guilty.*

44 The tribe of Thamūd is also said to have been destroyed by *a thunderbolt* in 41:13, by *the Cry* (or *a cry*) in 11:67 and 54:31, and by an *earthquake* in 7:78. These are not necessarily contradictory, but instead are different aspects of *the overwhelming* (*al-ṭāghiyah*) that is said to befall them in 69:5.

45 The people of Thamūd were unable to flee due to the force with which it seized them, as in 7:78, which says: *So the earthquake seized them, and morning found them lying lifeless in their abode* (cf. 11:67; Āl, Sh).

46 For the Quranic account of Noah and the destruction of his people, see 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; *Sūrah* 71.

47–48 These verses return to the motif of the first verses of the *sūrah*, which point to the composition of the natural order as bearing signs of God. *We make vast* indicates God's ability to create as He wills and His Generosity in providing for all things (Āl, Sh). *What excellent spreaders* refers to God Himself with a plural noun because the sentence is in the first-person plural and indicates both the wisdom behind the manner in which God created the earth and God's Generosity in doing so. *Spreaders* translates *māhidūn*, which derives from the same root, *m-h-d*, as *cradle*

(48) And the earth We laid out—what excellent spreaders! (49) And of all things We created pairs, that haply you may remember. (50) So flee unto God. Truly I am a clear warner unto you from Him. (51) And do not set up another god along with God. Truly I am a clear warner unto you from Him. (52) Likewise, there came no messenger unto those before them, but that they said, "A sorcerer or one possessed." (53) Do they exhort one another to it? Nay, they are a rebellious people.

(*mahd*), to which the earth is likened elsewhere: *He it is Who made the earth a cradle for you and made paths for you therein, that haply you may be guided* (43:10; see also 20:53).

49 *Pairs* can be seen as a reference to the fact that all animals are created both male and female (Āl) or to the manner in which creation is made up of opposites, such as night and day, Heaven and earth, distress and happiness, and so forth (Āl). Here *that haply you may remember* is understood to mean that creation is for people to reflect upon and to realize that God is the Creator (Āl, R, Sh).

50 *So flee unto God* may mean, "Flee from the Punishment of God to His Mercy through faith in Him, follow His Command, and work in obedience to Him" (Ṭ); or "Flee from obeying Satan to obeying God"; or "Flee from ignorance to knowledge" (Sh). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, this verse means, "Flee from sins and take shelter with God through repentance." Others understand it to mean, "Be cautious of everything other than God, because whoever flees to what is other than Him does not benefit from it" (Sh). Similarly, the Prophet is reported to have often prayed, "O God! I seek refuge in Thy Contentment from Thine Anger, and in Thy Pardon from Thy Punishment, I seek refuge in Thee from Thee." Regarding the reasons one must *flee unto God,* al-Qushayrī writes, "The human being is in one of two states: either the state of coveting something or the state of dreading something, either the state of hope or the state of fear, either the state of attracting benefit or the state of repelling harm. So his fleeing must be to God, for the one who benefits and the one who harms is God." Al-Qushayrī goes on to say, "It is incumbent upon the servant to flee from ignorance to knowledge, from caprice to reverence, from doubt to certainty, and from Satan to God. It is incumbent upon the servant to flee from his actions that are a trial to his actions that are sufficient; and from characterizing Him in terms of God's Wrath to characterizing Him in terms of His Mercy; and from His Self, as when He says, *God warns you of Himself* [3:28] to His Self, as when He says, *So flee unto God*" (Aj, Qu). From this perspective, the command to *flee unto God* is placed after the creation of all things in pairs to emphasize that one cannot flee to anything other than God, since *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88).

51 That one should not *set up equals unto God* (2:22) or *ascribe partners unto God* (4:36; 7:33) is among the most predominant themes of the Quran; see 4:48c; 6:151–52c. Regarding the present verse, al-Ghazzālī writes, "One who does not see God in everything sees something other than Him. And if there is something other than God to which one gives attention, this attention involves an element of hidden idolatry (*al-shirk al-khafī*). Rather, pure monotheism (*al-tawḥīd al-khāliṣ*) consists in seeing only God in everything" (*Iḥyāʾ, K. Qirāʾat al-Qurʾān*).

52 This verse parallels the manner in which Pharaoh and his people sought to discredit Moses in v. 39. It can be read as providing solace to the Prophet by showing him that his plight is the same as that of previous messengers or as a warning to the Quraysh that the fate of Pharaoh and his followers will be their fate as well if they do not follow the Prophet. The accusation that the Prophet was *a sorcerer* (10:2) or *one possessed* (52:29) is among the many accusations the Makkans brought against him (cf. 15:6–7; 23:70; 34:8; 68:51). For other verses that liken the plight of the Prophet Muhammad to that of previous prophets, see 15:11; 34:34; 36:30; 43:7, 23.

53 *Exhort one another to it;* that is, exhort one another to saying that the Prophet is *a sorcerer or*

(54) So turn away from them, for thou shalt not be blamed. (55) And remind, for truly the Reminder benefits the believers. (56) I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me. (57) I desire no provision from them; nor do I desire that they should feed Me. (58) Truly God is the Provider, the Possessor of Strength, the Firm. (59) And surely for those who do wrong is a share like unto the share of their companions; so let them not seek to hasten. (60) Woe unto those who disbelieve on account of the Day that they are promised.

*one possessed* (R), hence to denying the Prophet (Ālī, Bg). Most commentators interpret this verse as an expression of wonder that they would in fact exhort one another to denial of God and of revelation (Ālī, R). But it could also be understood as a negation meaning, "They do not exhort one another to it" (Ālī), in which case "it" would refer to belief.

54 This verse says to the Prophet, "Once you have delivered the message, you are not responsible for whether the disbelievers follow it or for the punishment that will afflict them if they do not; you are only responsible to continue reminding the believers who do benefit from the message"; see 2:272c.

55 *Remind* is aimed at either the believers to the exclusion of the disbelievers or both the believers and the disbelievers. Here *the Reminder* is understood as a reference to the Quran. The verse is thus taken as an injunction to preach the Quran, because it benefits believers by increasing their spiritual insight (*baṣīrah*) and giving them strength in certainty and knowledge (Aj, Ālī).

56 Together, this and the preceding verse indicate that God did not create human beings merely to seek their own sustenance, but rather to worship and submit to Him (Aj, IK), or in other words to remember God. Al-Zamakhsharī argues that this points to the purpose for which human beings were created, even if most of them do not fulfill this function. From this perspective, God only created human beings to worship Him by choosing to worship freely and not being constrained to do it, because He created them as contingent beings. Had God wanted their worship by way of coercion (*qasr*) and compulsion (*iljāʾ*), it would be found among all human beings (Z). Regarding God's desire that human beings worship, a *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "O Son of Adam! Dedicate yourself (*tafarrugh*) to worshipping Me, and I will fill your chest with riches and make your poverty dissipate. Otherwise, I will fill your chest with distractions and will not make your poverty dissipate" (IK). In this vein, the verse expands upon the command to *flee unto God* (v. 50), as everything else in which one seeks refuge distracts human beings from their true purpose. This passage could thus be interpreted as another expression of the central Quranic theme that human beings are not created for this world alone, but for the next. Ibn Kathīr links this to his understanding of what is reported to have been written in a previous scripture: "It has been transmitted in one of the Divine books [that] God says, 'Son of Adam, I created you to worship Me, so play not! I have taken on the burden of your provision, so tire yourself not! If you seek Me, you will find Me. If you find Me, you have found everything. If I pass you by, everything has passed you by. And I am more beloved to you than everything.'"

According to a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, *save to worship Me* means "save to know Me" (Bg). Viewed in this light, v. 56 follows upon the declaration in v. 49 that all things were created so that people could remember or recollect, "since God created the cosmos only for knowledge of Him" (*Futūḥāt*, IV 221.20). In this vein, al-Ālūsī cites the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* whose authenticity through transmission cannot be substantiated, but which is widely repeated among Muslims: "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known; so I created creation in order to be known."

57–58 God has no need of human beings, for they are *needful of God; and He is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised* (35:15).

59 *A share like unto the share of their companions* indicates fellow wrongdoers from generations past, thus implying that current wrongdoers will be forced to endure a punishment similar to those endured by the people who rejected the prophets mentioned in previous verses (e.g., vv. 41–46). It can also be seen as a reference to those who follow the people or customs of their own time blindly, as this will not suffice as an excuse on the Day of Judgment. *Let them not seek to hasten* relates to the trial that they sought to hasten in v. 14.

60 *The Day* is the Day of Judgment, as promised in vv. 5–6.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 52

# The Mount

## *al-Ṭūr*

All commentators agree that *al-Ṭūr* is from the Makkan period, most likely from the latter half. According to some it was revealed immediately after *Sūrah* 32, *al-Sajdah*. It takes its name from the mention of *the Mount* (*al-Ṭūr*) in the first verse. *Al-Ṭūr* is understood by most as a reference to Mt. Sinai here and wherever else it is found in the Quran (2:63, 93; 19:52; 20:80; 28:29, 46), although the full name "Mount Sinai" is given twice (*Ṭūr Saynāʾ* in 23:20 and *Ṭūr Sīnīn* in 95:2). It follows upon the previous *sūrah* in that the first half (vv. 1–28) focuses upon the subject of the concluding verse of that *sūrah, the Day that they are promised* (51:60; Aj, Āl), and in that it promises punishment for the wrongdoers and disbelievers mentioned in 51:59–60 (R). This *sūrah* can thus be understood as an affirmation of the promise made in *Sūrah* 51 (see 51:5, 22) and as a further warning thereof (Bq).

*Al-Ṭūr* begins with a series of oaths and a promise of God's impending punishment and the Day of Judgment (vv. 1–10), followed by a description of what will befall *the deniers* (vv. 11–16), whose fate is then contrasted to the rewards bestowed upon *the reverent* (vv. 17–28). This is followed by a reply to accusations made regarding the Prophet (vv. 29–31) and a series of challenges to those who deny him and the revelation (vv. 32–43). The *sūrah* then concludes with counsel to turn away from disputing with the disbelievers, to be patient, and to praise God (vv. 44–49).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the Mount, (2) and by a Book inscribed (3) on parchment outspread; (4) by the house inhabited, (5) by the canopy raised, (6) and by the sea swelling over, (7) truly thy Lord's Punishment shall come to pass. (8) None can avert it. (9) On a day when the sky churns with [great] churning, (10) and the mountains move with [great] motion; (11) woe that Day to the deniers (12) who play in idle talk, (13) a day when they are thrust violently into the Fire of Hell:

1 *The Mount* is a reference to Mt. Sinai and by extension to what was revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Bq). It can also be seen as a general reference to all mountains (Bq, R).

2–3 These verses may refer to the Torah, the Quran (Bḍ, JJ, R), or the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Bḍ, IK, R), the last of which most interpret to mean the source of all revelations. It could also be seen as a reference to the books in which the deeds of all human beings are recorded (R) or to the knowledge and wisdom written within the hearts of God's friends (Bḍ).

4 The Prophet is reported to have said regarding his Night Journey and Ascension (for which see 17:1; 53:1–14), "I was taken to *the house inhabited*. It is visited every day by seventy thousand angels who will not come back to visit it again" (IK). According to many classical scholars, every heaven has its own house of worship, which is the direction of prayer for its residents. *The house inhabited* is said to be in the third, sixth, or seventh Heaven (JJ); Ibn Kathīr reports that the house located in the lowest heaven is called "the Glorious House" (*bayt al-ʿizzah*). Others say *the house inhabited* can also be understood as a reference to the Kaʿbah or to the heart of the believer and its being "inhabited" by knowledge (Bḍ).

5 The *canopy raised* is the sky (Bḍ, JJ), as in 21:32: *And We made the sky a canopy preserved* (IK).

6 This verse can be understood as a reference to the sea being full (Bḍ, JJ) or to the seas "boiling over" on the Day of Judgment, as in 81:6: *And when the seas are made to swell over* (cf. 82:3; Bḍ, IK).

7–8 Cf. 51:6. *Shall come to pass* can also be translated *shall befall* (*wāqiʿ*), for which see 56:1–2c. Here the phrase indicates that the punishment shall come upon all who deserve it (JJ). These verses constitute the response to the oaths taken in vv. 1–7, all of which point to the completeness of God's Power and Wisdom, which, like His Punishment, *none can avert* (Bḍ).

9 Elsewhere it is said that the sky *shall be rent asunder* (42:5; 55:37; 73:18; 84:1; also see 25:25; 82:1), and that the sky shall be *opened as if it were gates* (78:19).

10 *The mountains move,* becoming *heaps of shifting sand* (73:14), as in 27:88: *And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away like clouds—the work of God, Who perfects all things.* See also 18:47; 69:14; 70:8–9; 78:20; 81:3; 89:21; 101:5.

11 This phrase is repeated ten times in *Sūrah* 77. Here, as there, it refers to those who deny the Day of Judgment (as the same phrase does in 83:10) or those who deny the prophethood of Muhammad.

12 To *play in idle talk* is often associated with *vain discussion* (6:68; see 6:68–69c), but it means more generally to become engrossed with the vanities of this world (R). Regarding the meaning of this verse, which has become an idiomatic Arabic expression, see 70:42c; 74:45c. Several Quranic passages indicate a direct connection between denying God and idle talk. This is made more explicit in a *ḥadīth:* "Whosoever can guarantee me that he will control what is between his two lips and his two thighs, I will guarantee him the Garden." The Prophet is also reported to have said, "The fornication of the tongue is the enticing word." And it is reported that when the Prophet

(14) "This is the Fire that you used to deny. (15) Is this sorcery, or do you not see? (16) Burn therein! Be patient, or be not patient; it will be the same for you. You are only requited for that which you used to do." (17) Truly the reverent shall be in Gardens and bliss, (18) rejoicing in what their Lord has given them. And their Lord has shielded them from the punishment of Hellfire: (19) "Eat and drink in enjoyment for that which you used to do," (20) reclining upon couches arrayed, and We shall wed them to wide-eyed maidens. (21) And those who believe and

instructed the prominent Companion Muʿādh ibn Jabal in the principles of Islam, he took hold of his own tongue and said, "Restrain this." Muʿādh said, "O Prophet of God, are we to be held accountable for what we say?" He said, "May your mother be bereaved of you Muʿādh! Is there anything that drags people on their faces"—or he said "on their noses"—"into the Fire other than the harvests of their tongues?"

13 The violent way the deniers are cast into the Fire is described graphically in many verses: they are *dragged upon their faces* (54:48), they are bound in *shackles and chains* (40:71; see 36:8c; 40:70–72c), and they drink *a boiling liquid and a cold, murky fluid* (38:57), among other forms of punishment. This verse could also be read, "a day when they are called unto the Fire of Hell with a [great] calling" (Bḍ).

14 Cf. 83:17. This verse is similar to 77:29: *Away to that which you used to deny!* Vv. 14–16 are understood to be uttered by the angels to the inhabitants of the Fire.

15 This verse asks, "*Is this sorcery,* as you used to claim?" as in 54:2: *And if they see a sign, they turn away and say, "Incessant sorcery!"* And as in 15:15, where it is said that among the responses to the miracles and revelations brought by prophets, people say, *Our eyes are merely spellbound. Nay, we are a people bewitched!* The disbelievers are said to have made this charge against several messengers of God, most notably the prophets Moses and Muhammad (see 5:110; 6:7; 10:2; 11:7; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 46:7; 61:6; 74:24).

16 Whereas patience with the trials or punishments in this life can ease the trial, lessen the punishment, and even provide spiritual benefit, in the Hereafter one no longer benefits from exercising this virtue, which should have been exercised before, and the punishment will not be lessened, regardless of one's disposition toward it (R). *You are only requited for that which you used to do* (cf. 27:90; 37:39; 66:7) indicates that everyone receives the punishment that they have brought upon themselves, as in 10:44: *Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves.*

17 This is the only verse that presents *Gardens* and *bliss* as parallels. Other verses speak of *Gardens of bliss* (see 5:65; 10:9; 22:56; 31:8; 37:43; 56:12; 68:34).

18 Regarding God's shielding the believers from Hellfire, see 44:56c.

19 Cf. 69:24; 77:43. *In enjoyment* conveys the idea of a gracious host who provides hospitality with no reservations. Here it is understood to mean "while you are enjoying [them]," referring to the eating and drinking, or to mean "as congratulations" *for that which you used to do* (Bḍ).

20 Elsewhere couches are described as *embroidered couches* (56:15) upon which the reverent recline *facing one another* (37:44; 44:53; 56:16), *in the shade* with *their spouses* (36:56). The word for "couches," *surur* (sing. *sarīr*), is semantically related to both "joy" (*surūr*) and "secret" (*sirr*, pl. *asrār*). Joy (*surūr*) is thus described as "rejoicing that remains concealed," and the *couches* upon which believers sit can be seen as couches of joy (Iṣ). Thus al-Qushayrī glosses *reclining upon couches* as "they remain in joy and felicity." For *wide-eyed maidens* (cf. 44:54; 55:72; 56:22), see 44:54c.

21 According to a saying attributed by some to the Prophet (Bḍ, Q) and by others to Ibn ʿAbbās (IK, Ṭ), "God elevates the ranks of the believers' progeny to the rank of their parents, even when the former have not performed as well as

whose progeny followed them in faith, We shall cause their progeny to join them and will not stint them aught of their deeds. Each man shall be held in pledge for that which he has earned. (22) And We shall bestow upon them fruits and meat as they desire. (23) Therein they shall pass to one another a cup wherein is no idle talk, nor incitement to sin, (24) and there wait upon them youths, for them, as if they were hidden pearls. (25) And they will turn to one another, questioning each other, (26) saying, "Truly aforetime, when among our families, we were anxious, (27) but God was gracious unto us and shielded us from the punishment of the scorching wind. (28) Truly we did call upon Him aforetime.

the latter, to comfort the parents thereby." Then he recited this verse. *Join them* can mean both that they will be together and that the children will receive a reward equal to that of their parents (Ṭ). Ibn ʿAbbās is also reported to have said, "No part of the reward their parents receive for their good deeds will be reduced for them" (IK), though all such interpretations assume the children are believers as well. *Each man shall be held in pledge for that which he has earned* (cf. 74:38) indicates that the good and evil deeds that a soul has committed bind it to a particular end, since God *attends to every soul in accordance with what it has earned* (13:33). The first part of this verse can also be read with *progeny* as a direct object and with "follow" in the first-person plural (*atbaʿnāhum*), meaning, "Those who believed and whose progeny We caused to follow in belief," a reading preferred by several commentators (JJ, Ṭ).

22 Cf. 56:20–21; 77:42. Several other verses also refer to the fruits of the Garden that will be at the disposal of the believers (e.g., 36:57; 37:42; 38:51; 43:73); see 36:57c.

23 *Nor incitement to sin* (see also 56:25) translates *lā taʾthīm,* which can also indicate that there is no lying or any form of sinful speech. Both readings indicate that this wine does not bring about the negative effects that might result from the wine of this world (JJ); see also 37:47; 56:19.

24 For the *youths* who wait upon the believers, see 56:17c; 76:19c. *For them* translates *lahum,* which could be taken to mean that these are their own children (R).

25 Cf. 37:27, 50. This verse refers to the believers speaking with one another about their lives in this world while they are in the Hereafter, in contrast to the disbelievers, of whom the Quran says, *There shall be no kinship between them that Day, nor will they question one another* (23:101; see also 28:66). Their questioning one another can also refer to the questions they pose about their former companions who did not enter the Garden (see 37:50–55).

26–27 That they *were anxious* can be understood to indicate that their questioning one another arises from their humility, as they do not think that they have merited entry into Paradise and are aware that it is only through the Grace of God that they could have achieved such a station. *Scorching wind* translates *samūm,* which indicates a wind that penetrates the pores (*masāmm*) of one's body (Aj, Q, Z). It is among the punishments said to afflict the *companions of the left* in 56:42.

28 *Truly He is* translates *innahu,* which could also be read *annahu* (Bḍ), meaning "for He is" ("for He is the Righteous, the Merciful"). This is the only appearance of the Divine Name *al-Barr* or *the Righteous* in the Quran. *Barr* usually appears in the Quran in relation to certain virtuous human beings who are referred to in several passages as *al-abrār,* or *the pious* (3:198; 76:5; 82:13; 83:18, 22). In relation to both God and humans, *birr* connotes beneficence and all the attributes associated with it. It is thus similar to nobility or magnanimity (*karāmah;* see 49:13c; 96:3c) and to "doing what is beautiful" (*iḥsān;* see 29:69c), qualities that encompass many other virtues and can be used to describe both God, Who is seen as the source of all virtues, and human beings.

Truly He is the Righteous, the Merciful." (29) So remind, for thou art not, by the Blessing of thy Lord, a soothsayer or one possessed. (30) Or do they say, "A poet—let us await the vagaries of fate for him." (31) Say, "Wait! For truly I am waiting along with you." (32) Do their minds command them to this, or are they a rebellious people? (33) Or do they say, "He has invented it"? Nay, but they believe not. (34) Then let them bring an account like unto it, if they are truthful. (35) Were they created from naught? Or are they the creators? (36) Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Nay, but they have no certainty.

29 The placement of the command to *remind* between the mention of those who feared God in this world (vv. 25–28) and a series of verses (vv. 30–33) in which the disbelievers cast aspersions upon the Prophet is in keeping with the broader Quranic theme that the Prophet's function is to deliver the message to those who fear God and to leave the disbelievers for God to deal with, as in 50:45: *We know best that which they say. Thine is not to compel them. So remind, by means of the Quran, those who fear My Threat* (see also 87:9–10; 88:21–26). That the Prophet was a *soothsayer* (cf. 69:42) or *possessed* (cf. 68:2) are among the many accusations the Makkans made against him, as in 15:6–7; 23:70; 34:8; 68:51.

30 *A poet* refers to the Makkans' accusation that Muhammad had authored the Quran himself; regarding this accusation, see 26:224–27; 29:48; 36:69. *The vagaries of fate* can also indicate the vagaries of death or the calamities of time (Z). Here the phrase indicates that the disbelievers expected the passage of time to prove the Prophet wrong.

31 This verse is understood to mean, "I shall await your destruction just as you await my destruction" (Bḍ, Z); for other instances of this ironic statement with slight variations, see 6:158c; 7:71; 9:52; 10:20, 102; 11:122; 20:135; 32:30. Some view this statement as fulfilled by the defeat of the Makkans at the Battle of Badr in 2/624 (JJ).

32 The question is rhetorical, meaning that the disbelievers' mental faculties could not possibly lead them to say that the Prophet is a soothsayer, a possessed man, or a poet (JJ, Z). Therefore, they must be *a rebellious people.*

33 An accusation similar to the charge the disbelievers make in 38:7: *We did not hear of this in the creed of latter days. This is naught but an invention.* According to many commentators, the beginning verses of the next *sūrah* (53:1–11) follow upon this verse by asserting that the Prophet neither invents or speaks out of his own desire; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 53.

34 This is one of the famous "challenge verses" of the Quran that implore those who claim the Quran to be a human creation to create its like if they can. See also 2:23–24; 10:38; 11:13. Regarding this challenge, 17:88 enjoins, *Say, "Surely if mankind and jinn banded together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not bring the like thereof, even if they supported one another."*

35 Both this verse and a similar verse, 56:59, question why the disbelievers do not acknowledge their Creator by worshipping Him. This verse could also mean, "Is it they who have created themselves?" Or it could be read as a reminder that human beings have been created *from a draught of base fluid* (32:8). It can also be understood as a reminder that human beings will be resurrected, as in 23:115: *Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously, and that you would not be returned unto Us?* (see also 74:36–40).

36 The disbelievers do not think they have created the universe, but in failing to worship God they fail to acknowledge that He is the Creator and fail to worship Him accordingly. Several verses indicate that the pagan Arabs acknowledged that God was the Creator, but did not conclude from this affirmation that they must worship God, as in 31:25: *And wert thou to ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they would surely say, "God." Say, "Praise be to God." Nay, but most of them know not* (see also 29:61; 39:38; 43:9, 87). From a Quranic perspective, that God is the Creator also indicates

(37) Do they possess the treasuries of your Lord? Or are they in control? (38) Or do they have a ladder whereby they listen? Then let their listener bring a clear warrant. (39) Does He have daughters while you have sons? (40) Or dost thou ask a reward of them, such that they are burdened with debt? (41) Or do they possess the Unseen, such that they write it down? (42) Or do they desire to devise [a scheme]? Then those who disbelieve shall be the ones against whom a scheme is devised! (43) Or do they have a god other than God? Glory be to God above the partners they ascribe. (44) Were they to see a fragment falling from the sky, they would say, "A heap of

His Omnipotence and Omniscience, as in 67:14: *Does He Who created not know? He is the Subtle, the Aware;* and that He is able to resurrect, as in 36:81: *Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? Yea, indeed, He is the knowing Creator.*

37 Cf. 38:9. *The treasuries* can refer to the stores of God's Mercy (38:9), the stores from which God sends prophecy to whom He wills (Z), God's Knowledge (Z), or the Divine secrets hidden from human perception (R). See comment on 15:21: *Naught is there, but that its treasuries lie with Us, and We do not send it down, save in a known measure.* No human being could have such access to the Divine treasuries; hence the Prophet is instructed, *Say, "I do not say to you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me"* (6:50; see also 11:31). In this context, *control* most likely indicates the ability to measure out from God's treasuries, thus to determine and to decree as does God.

38 By *ladder* is meant a ladder to Heaven. This is one of several passages that speak of the audacity of those who deny revelation, asking whether they have better access to the truth, which from a Quranic perspective, can only be from God. In this vein, 37:156–57 states: *Or have you a manifest authority? Bring your Book, then, if you are truthful.* Elsewhere the Quran asks rhetorically, *Or did We give them a book, such that they stand upon a clear proof from it?* (35:40; see also 6:148; 34:44; 43:21; 68:37–38, 47). The notion of ascending to Heaven to listen to heavenly discourse is a concept related to the jinn, as in 72:8–10, where it is implied that the jinn once had the privilege of overhearing the Heavenly discourse, but are now barred from it (see also 15:16–18; 67:5). In 38:65–70, the Prophet is instructed to declare that he himself has no knowledge beyond what is revealed to him and is not privy to what is said among the angels.

39 This verse is similar to 37:149 and 43:16. The Quran frequently criticizes the idea that God has sons or daughters (see 2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 39:4; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39; 72:3). Here the disbelievers blaspheme by ascribing offspring to God and further blaspheme by ascribing to themselves offspring that according to their particular worldview would be superior to those they ascribe to God, namely, sons instead of daughters.

40–41 These verses are repeated in 68:46–47. See also 23:72: *Dost thou ask any recompense of them? For thy Lord's recompense is better, and He is the best of providers.* This rhetorical question is answered by the Quran itself in 12:104: *And thou askest of them no reward for it; it is naught but a reminder for the worlds.*

42 This is one of several verses to illustrate the folly of those who would attempt to outwit God, for only His *scheme is firm* (68:45; cf. 7:184); see also 8:18; 22:15; 40:26; 77:39; 86:16–17.

44 This verse can be seen as a response to the disbelievers' words to the Prophet in 26:187: *Then make fragments from the sky fall upon us, if you are among the truthful* (Bd). The implication is that even when the disbelievers receive a proof that they have requested, they will still disbelieve, as in 15:14–15: *Were We to open for them a gate unto Heaven, that they might continue to ascend through it, they would say, "Our eyes are merely spellbound. Nay, we are a people bewitched!"*

clouds." (45) So leave them until they meet the Day when they will be thunderstruck, (46) a day when their scheming will avail them naught and they will not be helped. (47) And truly for those who do wrong there is punishment besides that. But most of them know not. (48) Be patient with the judgment of thy Lord, for thou art before Our eyes; hymn the praise of thy Lord when thou dost rise; (49) and at night glorify Him, and at the receding of the stars.

45 The command to *leave them* or elsewhere to *turn away from them* (4:63; 32:30; 51:54) recurs throughout the Quran, especially in the Makkan verses, implying that the Prophet should leave the disbelievers to their own devices, since they will eventually sow the seeds of their own demise in this world and will, in the Hereafter, be punished by God for their disbelief; see 52:29c. Their being *thunderstruck* describes the state that will come upon them the day they die (JJ), or on the Day of Resurrection (IK).

46 Elsewhere it is said that *God makes feeble the scheming of the disbelievers* (8:18), because those who are guilty *only plot against themselves, though they are unaware* (6:123). The *scheme* of Satan is also described as *ever feeble* (4:76; see also 3:120; 8:18), since in the end only God's *scheme is firm* (7:183; 68:45), and *God is swifter in plotting* (10:21). Thus 16:127 counsels the Prophet, *And grieve not on their account, nor be distressed by what they plot.*

47 *Punishment besides that* may refer to the punishment in the grave before the Day of Resurrection (Sh; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran") or to the punishment received in this life in addition to the punishment that will be meted out in the Hereafter (Sh), as in 32:21: *And We make them taste the lesser punishment before the greater punishment, that they might turn back* (IK, R). The last sentence is thus interpreted to mean that most people do not understand that the afflictions and calamities they suffer in this life are so that they might reflect and turn to God (IK).

48 This verse begins an address to the Prophet instructing him to bear patiently either the burden of revelation (Q), or the insults of the disbelievers, as in 50:39: *So bear patiently that which they say.* It can also be taken as general advice to all believers. In contrast to those who do not understand the nature of afflictions and for whom they thus bring angst, believers are said to be patient with all that God sends, the good and the bad. In this vein, a *ḥadīth* says, "No fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt or distress befalls a Muslim—even if he be pricked by a thorn—but that God absolves some of his sins thereby." Regarding the spiritual benefit of trials and afflictions, see commentary on 29:2–3; 67:2. *Thou art before Our eyes* indicates that God preserves and protects the Prophet and the believers against their enemies and their scheming (Bd, JJ). *Hymn the praise of thy Lord when thou dost rise* means to say, as was the custom of the Prophet, "Glory be to Thee, O God, and with Thy praise," when getting up in the morning or standing to leave an assembly (IK, Q, Sh). Some commentators also interpret this phrase to be an injunction to recite the formulas of praise that are said during the course of the ritual prayer (Q).

49 *At night glorify Him* (cf. 50:40) refers to the obligatory night prayer (*ʿishāʾ*; Q), both the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) and the night prayer (Sh, Ṭ), or the two supererogatory prayer cycles before the obligatory morning prayer (*ṣalāt al-fajr*; Q, Sh). It can also be taken as a general command to glorify God throughout the night (Q). Some thus link it to the command to perform night vigil (*tahajjud*) in 17:79: *And keep vigil in prayer for part of the night, as a supererogatory act for thee* (IK). According to a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, "*The receding of the stars* indicates the two prostrations before the morning prayer, *and after prostrations* (50:40) indicates the two prostrations after the sunset prayer" (Q). It is reported that the Prophet did not perform any of the supererogatory prayers as frequently as he did the two cycles before the obligatory morning prayer; of them he said, "The two cycles of the supererogatory morning prayer are better than this world and all that is in it" (IK, Q).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 53

# The Star

## *al-Najm*

*Al-Najm* is usually considered an early Makkan *sūrah,* revealed soon after *Sūrah* 112, *al-Ikhlāṣ.* Vv. 13–18, which refer to the Ascension of the Prophet, may, however, be from a later period, since many commentators maintain that the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (*miʿrāj*) did not occur until the late Makkan period, most likely in the year 619, although a minority maintain that it occurred seven years before the *hijrah* in 614. V. 32 is also considered by some to be from the Madinan period (Āl, JJ, Q), to which some add v. 33 (Āl). *Al-Najm* takes its name from the oath with which it opens, *By the star.* This *sūrah* is reported to be the first that the Prophet recited in public in Makkah (Āl, IJ, Q). It can be seen as following from the previous *sūrah* in two ways: the reference to the star (v. 1) connects back to the injunction in 52:49 to glorify God *at the receding of the stars* (Āl), and the opening verses respond to the contention of the disbelievers in 52:33, *He has invented it* (Aj).

*Al-Najm* is among the most famous *sūrah*s of the Quran, because of its poetic rhetorical power and the debate that arises over the meaning of the first section (vv. 1–18), which is taken as a reference to two different seminal events. Many commentators say the passage refers to the Prophet's two visions of the Archangel Gabriel in his true form rather than the human form in which he would usually appear to the Prophet. Many others interpret it as a reference to the Prophet's vision of God, either with the heart alone or with the eye and the heart together, during his famous Night Journey and Ascension (*al-isrāʾ wa'l-miʿrāj*), when he is said to have traveled through the seven heavens to within two bows' length of God.

The second section (vv. 19–30) reproaches the Quraysh for worshipping idols (vv. 19–23), followed by a brief discussion of the ignorance and conjecture from which such worship originates (vv. 24–26) and concluding with a similar condemnation of those who seek intercession from angels (vv. 27–30). After contrasting the punishment of those who do evil with the rewards of those who are virtuous (v. 31), the third section (vv. 31–54) calls upon people to reflect upon their creation and then transitions into a discussion of the perennial truths

attested in the *scriptures of Moses and Abraham* (vv. 36–49). This is followed by a brief reference to the destruction of former peoples (vv. 50–54) and a final admonition to heed the Quran (vv. 55–62).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the star when it sets, (2) your companion has neither strayed nor erred; (3) nor does he speak out of caprice. (4) It is naught but a revelation revealed, (5) taught him by one of awesome power. (6) Possessed of vigor, he stood upright (7) when he was upon the highest horizon. (8) Then he drew nigh and

1 This verse refers to the setting of Pleiades, or to the destruction of all stars on the Day of Judgment, as in 81:2: *And when the stars fade away* (Aj, Ṭ, Ṭū). According to another interpretation, the word usually translated "star," *najm,* could refer to the gradual revelation of the Quran in continual installments (*nujūm;* Bq, Ṭ, Ṭū); see 56:75c.

2–3 *Your companion* refers to the Prophet Muhammad. Some maintain that "to be astray" or "to stray" (*ḍalla*) is the opposite of having guidance (*hudā*), while "to err" (*ghawā*) is the opposite of having sound judgment (*rushd;* R). "To err" is also understood to indicate ignorance that results from adhering to a corrupt creed (Iṣ, R, Ṭb). In this sense, "to be astray" indicates the absence of guidance, while "to err" indicates that one is mistaken in how one follows religion. *Caprice* (*hawā*) is an important Quranic concept, often placed in direct opposition to guidance and truth, indicating that one follows either God and God's messengers or the inclinations of one's own soul; see 45:23c. That the Prophet does not speak *out of caprice* indicates both that he did not author the revelation himself and that his own speech is guided. Together these three claims amount to saying that the Prophet has a true religion, is following it correctly, and is not subject to his own whims.

4 The alliteration of *revelation revealed* is a form of emphasis interpreted to mean that revelation is not to be understood as inspiration, but as a Divine Reality (Aj). It can also indicate that the revelation is continuously renewed at each moment (Aj), meaning, "It is a revelation being revealed."

5 The *one of awesome power* is understood by most commentators to be a reference to the Archangel Gabriel, who imparted the revelation to the Prophet (JJ, Ṭ), and by others as a reference to God Himself.

6 *Possessed of vigor* is also understood to mean "possessed of a beautiful stature" (Ṭ). This verse is said to indicate one of two times the Archangel Gabriel displayed his full form to the Prophet (Ṭ, Z): the first was when Gabriel appeared to the Prophet on the horizon with six hundred wings and delivered the initial revelation; the second was during the Prophet's Ascension. *Stood upright* translates *istawā,* which indicates the manner in which Gabriel taught the Prophet the revelation (Aj) or the manner in which he appeared upon the horizon when the Prophet asked to see him in his true nature (Aj). When these verses are viewed as a reference to the vision of God, *stood upright* is taken to indicate the manner in which God disclosed His Light to the Prophet (Aj).

7 *When he was upon the highest horizon* refers to when Gabriel appeared to the Prophet on the eastern horizon after the Prophet requested to see him in his true form (JJ), to when Gabriel appeared in the highest Heaven (Ṭ), or to when the Prophet reached the horizon during the Night Journey and Ascension.

8 This verse indicates that Gabriel drew close to the Prophet (Q, Ṭ) or that God drew close to

came close, (9) till he was within two bows' length or nearer. (10) Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed. (11) The heart lied not in what it saw. (12) Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw? (13) And indeed he saw him

the Prophet (Ṭ). When understood in relation to the process of spiritual perfection, this verse is also interpreted to mean, "Then he [the Prophet] drew nigh and He [God] came close." In this vein, some relate this verse to a famous *ḥadīth qudsī:* "God says . . . 'My servant draws nigh unto Me through nothing that I love more than what I have made obligatory upon him. And My servant never ceases to draw nigh unto Me through supererogatory devotions until I love him. And when I love him, I am the hearing through which he hears, the sight through which he sees, the hand with which he strikes, and the foot upon which he walks' " (Q).

9 The Prophet Muhammad drew to within *two bows' length* of God or of the Archangel Gabriel (Q, Ṭ). A bow's length was a standard measure among the Arabs. A minority say that vv. 8–9 indicate that it was Gabriel who drew close to God and was *two bows' length or nearer* to God (Q). *Or* renders the particle *wa,* which in this context could also mean "and" or "nay"; using "nay," it could be rendered "within two bows' length, nay, nearer" (Q). The *two bows* (*qawsayn*) can also mean "two arcs." When viewed as forming the two halves of a single circle, some see them as representing the circle of existence, in which one bow represents the arc of descent whereby God brings forth creation and the other bow represents the arc of ascent whereby creation returns to God.

10 This verse can be understood to indicate one of three relationships in the process of revelation: (1) that Gabriel revealed to the Prophet (*His servant*) what God had revealed to Gabriel (JJ, Q, Ṭb), in which case it would be rendered, "Then he revealed to His servant what He revealed"; (2) that God revealed the revelation directly to the Prophet (Q, Ṭb); or (3) that God revealed to Gabriel (*His servant*) what Gabriel then transmitted to the Prophet. What is revealed is not mentioned by name out of reverence for its exalted status (JJ, Ṭb).

11 *The heart* is the Prophet's heart. Some say this verse refers to the time when the Prophet saw Gabriel (JJ), and others say it refers to the vision of God (Q). When interpreted as a reference to an actual vision with the eyes, *what it saw* can be read "what he saw," meaning that the heart did not deny what the eyes saw (Q). Most of those who maintain that this verse refers to the vision of God understand it to mean the vision with the heart, because other verses are taken to indicate that no one can see God by means of the physical eye, especially 6:103: *Sight comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all sight;* and 42:51: *It is not for any human being that God should speak unto him, save by revelation, or from behind a veil* (Q, Ṭ). In this vein, some also cite a well-known response by the Prophet when asked if he had seen God: "[He is] a light. How could I see Him?" (Aj, IK, Q). However, others argue that the Prophet also said, "The light of my vision was placed in my heart; then my heart gazed upon Him" (Aj, IK, Sy), which is interpreted to mean that the vision of the physical eye saw what the inner vision (*baṣīrah*) saw. Thus many understand this verse to mean that, although the Prophet did see God, he did not see the Divine Essence in and of Itself, but saw the highest Self-Disclosure (*tajallī*) of God with both his heart and his physical eye. In this vein, some also cite the *ḥadīth:* "His veil is light. Were He to remove it, the disclosures of His Face would burn whatsoever His Sight reaches" (Aj), meaning that this highest Self-Disclosure that the Prophet saw is itself a veil of light over the Divine Essence.

12 This verse is addressed to those who denied the Prophet's vision of Gabriel (JJ) or to those who denied the Night Journey and Ascension (Aj). *Dispute* translates *tumārūn,* which also indicates resistance and opposition.

13 This verse refers to either the two times in which the Prophet is said to have seen Gabriel in his true form or two separate visions of God (Aj). The Prophet is said to have seen Gabriel's true form only twice, once at Mount Ḥirāʾ, where he received the first revelation, and a second time during the Ascension. Those who maintain that it refers to the vision of God say that the Prophet saw his Lord twice in a special Self-Disclosure: once at the rending of the highest veil above the

another time, (14) at the lote tree of the boundary, (15) by which lies the Garden of the refuge, (16) when there covered the lote tree that which covered. (17) The gaze swerved not; nor did it transgress. (18) Indeed, he saw the greatest of the signs of his Lord. (19) Have you considered al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā (20) and Manāt,

Divine Throne and once at *the lote tree of the boundary* (v. 14; Aj).

14–15 *The lote tree of the boundary* is an enigmatic term that has led to many interpretations. Most say it is a tree in the seventh Heaven to the right of the Divine Throne; it is *of the boundary* either because it is the end of Paradise or because all that is created ends there, so that none can pass beyond it and none knows what lies beyond it (Aj, JJ). Others say *the lote tree* is at the *boundary* between the sixth and seventh heavens (Ṭū). In this interpretation, the *Garden of the refuge* is taken as a reference to the seventh Heaven (Ṭū). It is said to be the Garden in which the spirits of the prophets, the righteous, and those who bear witness (see 4:69) take refuge (Aj).

16 The enigmatic structure of this sentence indicates something ineffable (Aj, Z). Some say the *lote tree* was covered with "light and brilliance, beauty and purity that please the eyes to an extent that is indescribable" (Ṭū). Others say it was covered with angels and butterflies of gold, which were circumambulating it (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭū).

17 The Prophet's *gaze* did not swerve from the wonders being revealed to him (Aj). More generally, it implies that he did not swerve away from the truth that he sought (Ṭū). *Nor did it transgress* then means that he did not seek anything beyond what was disclosed to him (Ṭū), whether it was the vision of Gabriel or the vision of God.

18 When the preceding verses are seen as an allusion to the Prophet's vision of Gabriel, this verse may be read "some of the signs," meaning that the Prophet saw some of the greatest signs of God when he witnessed Gabriel on the horizon in his true form with six hundred wings (JJ, Ṭ). Others say that this verse refers to the green curtain he saw covering the horizon at this same time (Ṭ). When the preceding verses are viewed as a reference to the Night Journey and Ascension, *the greatest of the signs* indicates the wonders of the Dominion (*malakūt,* the level of being above this world) and the secrets of the archangelic realm (*jabarūt,* what lies beyond the Dominion), which God showed the Prophet (Aj).

19–20 *Al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā,* and *Manāt* are the names of some of the idols worshipped by the pre-Islamic Arabs. Al-Lāt (which some say is a shortened form al-Ilāhah, meaning "the Goddess") is said to have been a white stone with inscriptions in the city of Ṭāʾif, the sister city of Makkah, that was worshipped by the tribe of Thaqīf. Al-ʿUzzā (meaning "the Most Mighty" and referring to Venus or the morning star), worshipped by the tribe of Ghaṭafān, had a shrine consisting of three trees on which the idolaters placed a monument and curtains in the area of Nakhlah, between Makkah and Ṭāʾif; she is said to have been the most venerated idol among the Quraysh. Manāt, worshipped by the tribes of Khuzāʿah, Aws, and Khazraj, was said to be the goddess of destiny; her shrine was in the area of Mushallal near Qudayd, between Makkah and Madinah. The three idols together formed a triad. Sometimes all three were said to be daughters of "Allāh," an idea alluded to in vv. 21–22, and sometimes al-Lāt and Manāt were considered daughters of al-ʿUzzā. Many other idols in the Arabian Peninsula were reportedly worshipped by the pagans, but these three are mentioned because they were more famous (IK) or because of their proximity to Makkah.

In several early histories of Islam, it is reported that when the Prophet came to the end of vv. 19–20 Satan whispered to him another two verses falsely according these pagan deities an exalted status: "Verily, they are high flying cranes! And their intercession is indeed anticipated/hoped for." These verses appeared to accept the idols of the pagan Arabs as legitimate deities and greatly pleased the Quraysh, who according to some accounts then prostrated with the Prophet and his followers when the Prophet reached v. 62: *So prostrate unto God and worship* (Ṭ). As a result, the persecution of Muslims abated for a brief period. The Prophet later realized that he had been deceived when he received the revelation of 22:52: *And no messenger*

the third, the other? (21) Unto you males and unto Him females? (22) This, then, is an unfair division. (23) They are naught but names that you have named—you and your fathers—for which God has sent down no authority. They follow naught but conjecture and that which their souls desire, though guidance has surely come to them from their Lord. (24) Or shall man have whatsoever he longs for? (25) Yet unto God belong the Hereafter and this world. (26) And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession avails naught, save after God grants leave unto whomsoever He will and unto the one with whom He is content? (27) Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter name

*or prophet did We send before thee, but that when he had a longing, Satan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what Satan cast.* The Prophet then recanted the satanic interpolation, whereupon the persecution of the Muslims at the hands of the Quraysh resumed. This is known as the "Story of the Cranes" in the Islamic tradition and as the "Satanic Verses" in modern Western literature; see 22:52c.

21–22 This verse asks, "Do you claim that you have male offspring as it pleases you, but that God has female offspring, whom you do not want for yourselves?" (Ṭ). *Unfair* translates *ḍīzā*, which indicates decreasing something in an unjust manner that deprives others of their rightful due (Ṭ). The attribution of "daughters" to God is presented as unjust in light of the contempt that the pagan Arabs are said to have had for female offspring (see 16:57–59, 62). This is one of several passages that criticize the pagan Arabs for ascribing offspring, especially daughters, to God; see also 2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 39:4; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39; 72:3.

23 That the idols *are naught but names that you have named* indicates that they have no reality other than what has been imagined, as in the Prophet Joseph's words to his fellow prisoners in 12:40: *You worship apart from Him naught but names that you have named* (R). *Conjecture* is what one follows in the absence of knowledge (see 53:28c), while *that which their souls desire* refers to their caprice, which is the tendency to wander one way and then another in the absence of truth (for caprice, see 45:23c). The phrase could also be translated more literally, "that which their souls fancy." To follow *that which their souls desire* or "fancy" is to succumb to the soul that commands to evil (see 12:53c).

24 This verse can be understood as a reference to everything that human beings desire. In this context it speaks more specifically to the desire of the Quraysh to have their idols as intercessors with God and, by extension, to the desire of human beings to fashion religion according to their own desires, rather than conforming themselves to revealed religion.

25 Although the followers of the pagan religions that are criticized in this *sūrah* would appear to believe in "a god" and in a hereafter, by attempting to make this understanding conform to their conjectures and caprices, they in effect deny that God is the Master of this world and the next.

26 This verse asks, "If the angels who are with God can do nothing except through God's permission, then how can the idols that you yourselves have set up avail you in any way?" From one perspective, this rhetorical question is answered by 34:23: *And intercession will benefit none with Him, save whomsoever He gives leave.* Ultimately, *there is no intercessor, save by His Leave* (10:3; see also 19:87; 20:109; 21:28; 39:44; 43:86; 53:26) and God is the only intercessor (6:51, 70; 32:4, 39:44). Regarding the complex question of intercession, see 2:48c; 2:255c.

27 The idolaters' efforts to fashion reality according to their liking—they *name the angels* with any names they choose—demonstrate that they have no understanding of God and thus no appreciation for God's Power over all that is

the angels with female names. (28) Yet they have no knowledge thereof. They follow naught but conjecture; and surely conjecture avails naught against the Truth. (29) So shun whosoever turns away from Our Reminder and desires naught but the life of the world. (30) That is the extent of their knowledge. Surely thy Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided. (31) Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, that He may requite those who commit evil for that which they have done, and that He may requite those who

created. They thus misunderstand the final ends of things, which indicates disbelief in the Hereafter even if they believe in a hereafter, and disbelief in the origins of things, as indicated in 43:19: *And they have made the angels, who are servants of the Compassionate, females. Did they witness their creation?*

28 *They have no knowledge thereof* means they have no knowledge of the matters pertaining to the angels that are discussed in the preceding verses. Alternately, *thereof,* translating *bihi,* could be understood as a reference to God, thus meaning "of Him." From a Quranic perspective, people follow either God and His messengers or conjecture and their own desires (see v. 23). To follow conjecture is thus equated with following something other than revelation, as in 10:35–36: *Say, "Is there any among your partners who guides unto Truth?" Say, "God guides unto Truth. Is one who guides unto Truth worthier to be followed, or one who cannot guide unless he be guided? What ails you? How do you judge?" And most of them follow naught but conjecture. Truly conjecture does not avail against the Truth in the least* (see also 6:116–17c; 10:66). In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Beware of conjecture, for verily conjecture is the most mendacious form of speech" (IK).

29 The command to *shun* or "turn away" indicates that the Prophet should not concern himself with the affairs of those who deny him and the revelation, as his function is only to warn and remind, and after that he is to leave their fate to God (Āl, R), as in 4:80: *Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God, and as for those who turn away, We have not sent thee as their keeper* (see also 5:92; 64:12; 79:45; 88:21–22). Here *Our Reminder* is understood by most as a reference to the Quran, one of whose names is "the Reminder" (*al-Dhikr*). It could also be read, "Our remembrance," in which case it is understood as a reference to belief in general (Bg, Q). In juxtaposition to the next phrase, it also can be seen as a reference to the remembrance of death (Aj). One could, moreover, understand "remembrance" as indicating the practice of remembering God with both tongue and heart (see 13:28c; 29:45c). The disbelievers desire only this life, because they believe that *there is naught but our life in this world: we die and we live, and we will not be resurrected* (23:37).

30 *The extent of their knowledge* can be seen as a reference to the fact that the disbelievers look only to the world and are ignorant of religion (Q) or as an indication that their "knowledge," especially as pertains to the angels and idols mentioned in the preceding verses, derives solely from conjecture, caprice, and their own desires. The second sentence of this verse is repeated in 6:117, and with minor variation in 68:7 (see also 28:85). In general it indicates that God knows the final ends of all things, but in this context it also refers to God knowing the difference between the beliefs of the Muslims and that of the pagans.

31 This verse alludes to the fact that everything in the heavens and on the earth has been created with design and purpose, *in truth* (16:3; 29:44; 30:8; 39:5; 45:22; 46:3), not *in play* (21:16; 44:38), or *in vain* (3:191; 38:27); thus people's actions will be dealt with accordingly. *That which is most beautiful* is interpreted by most commentators as a reference to the Garden (Bḍ, Q). It could also be rendered "for that which is most beautiful," meaning for their good deeds (Bḍ). *Those who are virtuous* (*alladhīna aḥsanū*) and *that which is most beautiful* (*al-ḥusnā*) derive from the

are virtuous with that which is most beautiful, (32) those who shun grave sins and indecencies, save what is slight; truly your Lord is of vast forgiveness. He knows you best, from when He brought you forth from the earth and when you were hidden in your mothers' bellies. So deem not yourselves purified. He knows best the reverent. (33) Have you seen the one who turned away, (34) gave

same root *ḥ-s-n;* literally it means that God rewards those who do what is beautiful with what is most beautiful or with what is more beautiful, thus indicating the manner in which beautiful character begets greater beauty in this life and the Hereafter; see 29:69c; 55:60c.

32 Regarding shunning *grave sins and indecencies,* see 42:37c. Although *grave sins* are often discussed in the Islamic tradition, there is no agreement on a single definition and there are many different lists of "grave sins"; see 4:31c. Some define *grave sins* as "sins for which the retribution is not removed except through repentance" (Z). *Indecencies* translates *fawāḥish,* which is often equated with fornication or, more generally, with grave sins that are considered particularly atrocious (Z); see 4:15c; 4:22c.

*Save what is slight* is understood by most to mean minor sins from which one repents (JJ). To explain this term, many commentators cite the same *ḥadīth:* "Verily, God has decreed for the son of Adam his share of fornication (*zinā*), and he will certainly earn his share. The fornication of the eye is by looking, the fornication of the tongue is by talking; the heart wishes and lusts, and the sexual organ either manifests all of this or not" (IK, Q). In interpreting this *ḥadīth,* Ibn Masᶜūd is reported to have said, "The eyes fornicate by looking, the lips by kissing, the hands by transgressing, the feet by walking, and the sexual organ either manifests all of this or not. When one has [illicit] sexual intercourse, he will be someone who fornicated. Otherwise, it is *what is slight* (*al-lamam*)" (IK). So although small sins may be more easily forgiven, one must still avoid them and be wary of what they may lead to.

*Your Lord is of vast forgiveness* in that He forgives small sins by keeping one away from grave sins, and grave sins through repentance (*tawbah;* Z). The commentator al-Baghawī says that this phrase may be placed after the mention of *those who are virtuous* in the previous verse, so that those who have not been as virtuous or who have even committed grave sins will not despair of receiving God's Mercy, as in 39:53: *Say, "O My servants who have been prodigal to the detriment of their own souls! Despair not of God's Mercy. Truly God forgives all sins. Truly He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.*

*Brought you forth from the earth* is understood as a reference to God's creation of Adam from dust (JJ, Q). That God *knows you best* is thus understood as a reference to the fact that God knows the state of every human being even before they are born, from the time all human beings were in the loins of Adam (Bḍ, IK, Q; see 7:172). As God *knows you best,* you should *deem not yourselves purified,* for only God knows who is truly pure. Thus people should not think well of themselves for performing pious deeds, but should be mindful that the deeds themselves only come through God's support (Z), as in 4:49: *Hast thou not seen those who deem themselves pure? Rather, it is God Who purifies whomsoever He will.* The Prophet even enjoined his followers not to ascribe good deeds to their companions, but only to God, saying several times, "Woe to you! You have cut off the neck of your companion!" Then continuing, "If one of you must praise a friend of his, let him say, 'I think that so-and-so is this and that; God knows best about him, and I would never declare anyone pure before God,' if he knows his friend to be as he is describing him" (IK).

33–34 Cf. 75:31–32. *Withheld* translates *akdā,* which derives from *al-kudyah,* designating earth that is rock hard. If someone is digging a well and comes upon such earth, the Arabs say, "He dug and came upon hard rock (*akdā*)." The verb *akdā* is then used as a metaphor for any endeavor that fails (Bḍ, Iṣ, Z). This verse thus implies that when people are satisfied that past deeds will suffice or consider themselves pure and consequently cease to perform good deeds, even past deeds may come to naught. Similarly, the effort to dig a well is useless if one does not reach water.

little, and then withheld? (35) Does he have knowledge of the Unseen, such that he sees? (36) Or has he not been informed of that which is in the scriptures of Moses (37) and Abraham, who fulfilled: (38) that none shall bear the burden of another; (39) that man shall have naught but that for which he endeavored, (40) and that his endeavoring shall be seen, (41) whereupon he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward; (42) that the ultimate end is unto thy Lord; (43) that

Though they apply to all who ignore the needs of others, these verses were reportedly revealed in relation to al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah when he offered some of his wealth to one of the Prophet's followers on the condition that he return to the religion of the Quraysh. After the man accepted, he gave the man some of the money, but did not fulfill the pledge in full (Bḍ, Ṭ).

35 In this context, this verse implies, "Does the one who stopped giving charity know that his past deeds will suffice or that his wealth will actually be preserved if he does not give it out in charity?" In the broader Quranic context, it indicates the arrogance of those who act as if they know better than God; see 52:41; 68:47.

36 Though Abraham precedes Moses chronologically, the scrolls of Moses are here mentioned before those of Abraham (v. 37), because they are more widely known (Bḍ).

37 Abraham is referred to as he *who fulfilled* for patiently enduring what no one else was made to endure, such as being cast into the fire for smashing the idols of his people (21:67–69) and agreeing to sacrifice his son as commanded by God before the Archangel Gabriel stopped him (37:102; Bḍ). Others say this verse refers to Abraham's fulfillment of the command to deliver God's message (IK, Ṭ) or to Abraham fulfilling the covenant with God (R).

38 This is the first instance of this Quranic axiom in the chronological order of revelation (cf. 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; see 35:18c). No one will be forced to endure the punishments accrued through deeds committed by another. Nonetheless, one will be punished for influencing others to perform bad deeds, as in a famous *ḥadīth:* "Whosoever establishes a sinful custom shall bear its burden and the burden of whosoever acts in accord with it until the Day of Resurrection" (Bḍ). In this vein, those who lead others astray are said to have "a double punishment" (see 7:38–39c; 33:68).

39 Just as none will bear the sins of another, so too will none be rewarded for the good deeds performed by another. Nonetheless, the effects of good deeds can continue to provide benefit. As a famous *ḥadīth* states: "When a person dies, his deeds are cut off, save for three things: a righteous child who makes supplication for him; a charitable deed that continues [to bear fruit] after his death; or knowledge [he has imparted] from which people benefit" (IK).

40 This verse means that everything one does in this life will be witnessed on the Day of Judgment. God will judge all deeds and human beings will be shown their deeds and bear witness to how they had lived. Thus the Prophet is told to say, *Perform your deeds. God will see your deeds, as will the Messenger and the believers, and you will be brought back to the Knower of the Unseen and the seen, and He will inform you of that which you used to do* (9:105).

41 *The fullest reward* that God has promised to people (Ṭ), according to some, is the vision of God (R).

42–50 Each verse in this passage, except v. 46, begins with *wa anna,* translated "that" or "and that," indicating a continuation of the preceding verses (vv. 36–41), which discuss all that is *in the scriptures of Moses and Abraham.* But *wa anna* could also be read *wa inna,* which would make each occurrence mark a new, independent thought and be translated "truly," "surely," or "verily."

42–43 *Unto thy Lord* conveys a sense of the Day of Judgment, when everyone will stand before God. Although the *ultimate end* of all created things is from one perspective "unto thy Lord," there are nonetheless disparate ends for various

it is He Who causes laughter and weeping, (44) that it is He Who causes death and gives life, (45) and that He creates the two—male and female— (46) from a drop when emitted; (47) and that with Him lies the second genesis; (48) that it is He Who enriches and grants possessions; (49) that it is He Who is the Lord of Sirius; (50) and that He destroyed ᶜĀd the Former (51) and Thamūd, sparing none, (52) and the people of Noah aforetime—truly they were most wrongdoing and most rebellious, (53) and He razed the subverted cities, (54) such that there

groups, as in 13:35: *The parable of the Garden that has been promised to the reverent: with rivers running below, its food everlasting, as is its shade. That is the ultimate end of those who were reverent, while the ultimate end of the disbelievers is the Fire!* The reverent will thus be those who laugh, as in 80:38–39: *Faces that Day shall be shining, radiant, laughing, joyous.* And the disbelievers will be those who weep. *The ultimate end* can also be seen as a reference to God as the One Necessary Being, Who is the Source of all beings (R).

43 This verse indicates that God decrees the causes that bring about laughter and weeping and that He is the One who brings joy and sadness in this world (Q), that God causes the believers to laugh in the Garden and the disbelievers to weep in the Fire (Q), or that God causes the believers to laugh in the Hereafter and weep in this world, while He causes the disbelievers to laugh in this world and weep in the Hereafter (Qu). Dhu'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī is reported to have said, "He causes the hearts of the believers and the gnostics to laugh through the sun of knowledge of Him. And He causes the hearts of the disbelievers and the disobedient to weep through the darkness of His Wrath and Punishment" (Q).

44 That *it is He Who causes death and gives life* (cf. 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 40:68; 44:8; 57:2; 67:2) indicates God's Power over all phases of existence and nonexistence. It is also understood to mean that "He causes the hearts of His enemies to die through disbelief and darkness and gives life to the hearts of His friends through faith and the lights of gnosis" (ST).

45–48 *The two (zawjayn)—male and female—* are said to be *mates (azwāj)* created *from a single soul* (4:1; 6:98; 7:189; 39:6). For the meaning of these verses, see 75:37–40c. In both passages, God's ability to create human beings *from a drop* (cf. 16:4; 18:37; 22:5; 35:11; 36:77; 40:67; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19) is cited as evidence of His ability to resurrect—resurrection is what is referred to here as *the second genesis,* according to most commentators. Al-Rāzī, however, understands *the second genesis* as a reference to the breathing of the Spirit into the human being (see 15:29c; 38:72c), because it is the Spirit, not the body, that ennobles human beings and sets them apart from other animals.

49 Pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped *Sirius* (JJ), a star of the first magnitude belonging to Canis Major. This verse thus returns to the theme of vv. 19–30, emphasizing that God is the Lord of everything to which the pagans ascribe some independent power.

50–51 *And that* relates back to v. 36, thus meaning, "Or has he not been informed that." The ᶜĀd and the Thamūd are pre-Islamic Arabian tribes who rejected the prophets sent to them. *ᶜĀd the Former* (v. 50) is understood as a reference to Iram, the tribe of Noah's grandson by the same name (see 89:7–8), while ᶜĀd the latter was simply referred to as ᶜĀd. For the account of the tribe of ᶜĀd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16; 54:18–21. For the account of the tribe of Thamūd, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31.

52 For the Quranic account of Noah and his people, see 11:25–48; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; *Sūrah* 71. According to some commentators, Noah's people were *most wrongdoing* in that they established customs, particularly idol worship, that were then imitated by others and *most rebellious* in that most of them rejected the message to which Noah called them for over nine hundred years (R).

53–54 These verses are understood by most as a reference to the calamities that befell the cities

covered them that which covered? (55) So which of thy Lord's boons do you dispute? (56) This is a warning from the warners of old. (57) The imminent is nigh. (58) It has no unveiler apart from God. (59) Do you then marvel at this discourse? (60) And do you laugh and not weep, (61) while you stand with head held high? (62) So prostrate unto God and worship!

of Sodom and Gomorrah (see 11:82–83c). But it may also indicate all those who have been destroyed by calamities that overturned their cities (R). Whereas the enigmatic phrase *that which covered* conveys the indescribable wonder of the *lote tree of the boundary* in vv. 14–16, here it conveys the indescribable terror that overcame the people of Lot, of which 11:82 says, *We made its uppermost to be its lowermost, and We rained down upon them stones of baked clay.*

55 This verse reflects the refrain *So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?* which occurs thirty-one times in *Sūrah* 55. In the context of the preceding discussion in this *sūrah* it suggests that those who disputed with the Prophet regarding the nature of the angels and the idols will suffer fates similar to those of the communities mentioned in vv. 50–54.

56 As translated, this verse refers to the Quran itself as part of the continuous stream of revelation (Bḍ). It could also be rendered, "This is a warner from the warners of old," referring to the similarity between the Prophet Muhammad and the messengers who had been sent to previous communities (Bg, IK, JJ), such as those mentioned in vv. 50–54.

57 The Resurrection is near, and *the Hour has drawn nigh* (54:1; Bg).

58 That God is the only unveiler of the Hour means both that no one other than God can know when it will come and that only God will bring it to pass, as in 7:187: *None save He shall manifest it at its proper time.*

59 *This discourse* refers to the Quran. That the disbelievers marvel at it indicates that they do not accept that a revelation could be sent from God, as in 10:2: *Is it a marvel for mankind that We have sent revelation unto a man from among themselves?* (see also 7:63, 69; 38:4; 50:2).

60 In this context, *laugh* means mocking the Quran and the believers, as in 23:110: *But you took them in mockery, till it made you forget My remembrance, and you used to laugh at them.* Here *weep* indicates the manner in which all human beings, but especially those who disbelieve, would react, were they to understand the reality of the Day of Judgment and what is to follow. In this vein, the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah reported, "One day, the Messenger of God passed by a group of people who were laughing, and said, 'If you knew what I know, you would laugh little and cry much'" (Q). According to a *ḥadīth,* "The Fire will not reach a man who weeps for fear of God" (Q). In a famous *ḥadīth,* one of seven categories of people said to be "shaded by God on the Day wherein there will be no shade other than His Shade" is "a person who remembers God while alone and his eyes flow with tears."

61 *Stand with head held high* translates *sāmidūn,* which can also mean "diverted and heedless" (Ṭ). In the Yemeni dialect, it can also be understood to mean that they sing when they hear the Quran (Ṭ), meaning that this is their way of mocking it.

62 This is one of fifteen verses after which one must prostrate when reciting the Quran; see 19:58c. Most maintain that there is an obligatory prostration after this verse, but according to Imam Mālik, in this instance it is optional (Āl, Q). It appears that the Prophet would usually prostrate upon completing the recitation of this *sūrah,* but that this may have been a supererogatory custom rather than an obligation (Āl).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 54

# The Moon

## *al-Qamar*

Most commentators maintain that *al-Qamar* is a Makkan *sūrah,* although some say that v. 45 and others that vv. 44–46 are from the Madinan period (Āl, IJ). It takes its name from the mention of the *moon* in the first verse and is also known by its first words, *Iqtarabat al-sāᶜah,* "The Hour Has Drawn Nigh" (Āl, IK). This *sūrah* follows thematically upon the previous *sūrah* in that the first verse reiterates 53:57, *The imminent is nigh,* and the stories of the destruction that befell former communities expand upon the references to the tribes of ᶜĀd and Thamūd, and the people of Noah in 53:50–52 (Āl, Sy). It is reported that the Prophet would recite *Qāf* (*Sūrah* 50) and *al-Qamar* during the prayers of ᶜ*Īd al-aḍḥā* (the Feast of Sacrifice) and ᶜ*Īd al-fiṭr* (the Feast of Breaking Fast) and during other major prayer gatherings (IK).

The first two verses of *al-Qamar* are understood by the vast majority of commentators as a reference to a miracle performed by the Prophet. One evening he was addressing a group of disbelievers and Muslims on the plain of Minā, just outside of Makkah. The disbelievers had been disputing with the Prophet for several days, demanding a miracle as proof of his prophethood, and they began to do so again. The Prophet then raised his hand and pointed to the moon, whereupon it appeared to separate into two halves, one on either side of nearby Mt. Ḥirāʾ. He then said, "Bear witness!" (IK, Ṭ), and the line of separation disappeared. All were left speechless, but his opponents soon discounted it as an illusion produced by sorcery. According to one account, one of the disbelievers said, "Muhammad has merely bewitched us, but he cannot bewitch the entire world. Let us wait for travelers to come from faraway places and hear what reports they bring." Then, when some travelers arrived in Makkah a few days later, they confirmed that they too had witnessed the splitting of the moon (IK).

After warning the opponents of the Prophet of the judgment that will overtake them (vv. 1–8), the *sūrah* cites the people of Noah (vv. 9–15), the tribes of ᶜĀd (vv. 18–21) and Thamūd (vv. 23–31), the people of Lot (vv. 33–38), and the people of Pharaoh (vv. 41–45) as examples of previous peoples who were overthrown for similar offenses. Mention of the punishments that await the guilty

(vv. 46–48) segues into a discussion of the nature of God's Decree and accounting (vv. 49–53), and the *sūrah* concludes with a discussion of rewards that await the reverent (vv. 54–55).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) The Hour has drawn nigh, and the moon has been cleaved; (2) and if they see a sign, they turn away and say, "Incessant sorcery!" (3) They denied and followed their caprices—and every matter shall be made to endure. (4) Indeed reports have come to them wherein is a reproof, (5) conclusive wisdom, but the warnings availed not. (6) So turn away from them on the Day wherein the caller

1 *The Hour* refers to the Final Hour as well as the imminent demise of the world (IK), and to the Resurrection (JJ), as in 21:1: *For mankind, their reckoning draws nigh, while they turn away heedless* (see also 16:1). Many *aḥādīth* state that relative to the earth's life span there is little time left between the Prophet's coming and its final end, as in the Prophet's statement, "I was sent like this in relation to the Hour," while pointing to his index finger and his middle finger (IK). A few commentators note that the second half of this verse could be read, "and the moon will be cleaved," referring to one of the signs of the end of time (Iṣ, Mw, Z). But all who relate this opinion also mention the miracle of the Prophet splitting the moon (see the introduction to this *sūrah*).

2 *Incessant* translates *mustamirr,* which could also be understood to mean "powerful" or "intense" (Ṭ). Regarding their turning away from God's signs, which can also mean the verses of revelation, see commentary on 32:22: *And who does greater wrong than one who has been reminded of the signs of his Lord, then turns away from them?* (cf. 6:157; 18:57).

3 *They denied* the signs of God after they had come to them (Ṭ), and *they denied* the Prophet (JJ). In the Quran, following *caprice* is often contrasted with following God and His Messenger, and people tend to follow either one or the other. Thus 4:135 says, *Follow not your caprice, that you may act justly* (see also 2:120, 145; 5:48–49). That *every matter shall be made to endure* is understood to indicate that good will be established in the Garden for those who do good and evil will be established in the Fire for those who do evil (Ṭ) or, more broadly, that "everything has a reality of its own and is bound to display that reality in the Hereafter" (Bg).

4 The *reports* are of the destruction of previous communities that denied the messengers sent to them (JJ), such as those mentioned later in this *sūrah*. *Reproof* translates *muzdajar,* which could also mean "deterrent," as it is something that rebukes the disbelievers for their own denial and idolatry and should deter them from persisting in it.

5 In the context of the previous verse, this verse means that *the reports* are *conclusive wisdom* or that the *reproof* contains *wisdom* (Ṭ). *Conclusive* can be understood to mean complete or perfect (JJ). *But the warnings availed not* could also be read as a rhetorical question: "What did the warnings avail them?" (Ṭ). In both translations, *warnings* could also be read to mean "warners," referring to the prophets. This is similar to 10:101: *Say, "Observe that which is in the heavens and on the earth." But neither signs nor warnings avail a people who believe not.*

6 The Prophet is enjoined to turn away from the disbelievers to prevent them from persisting

will call unto a terrible thing. (7) With their eyes humbled they emerge from the graves as if they were scattered locusts, (8) scrambling toward the caller. The disbelievers say, "This is a calamitous day." (9) The people of Noah denied before them, for they denied Our servant and said, "Possessed!" And he was reproved. (10) Then he called upon his Lord, "Truly I am overcome. Help!" (11) So We opened the gates of the sky with pouring water, (12) and We caused the earth to burst forth with springs, such that the waters met for a matter determined. (13) Then We carried him upon a thing of planks and nails, (14) coursing under Our Eyes as a recompense for one who was rejected. (15) And indeed We left it

in their blasphemy, as in 6:68: *And when thou seest those who engage in vain discussion about Our signs, turn away from them till they engage in other discourse;* and in order to turn toward God, as in 4:81: *So turn away from them and trust in God. God suffices as a Guardian.* This verse also implies that the Prophet should focus upon guiding those who have accepted the message, as in 51:54–55: *So turn away from them, for thou shalt not be blamed. And remind, for truly the Reminder benefits the believers* (see also 4:63; 6:106; 7:199; 9:95; 15:94; 32:20; 37:174, 178). The *caller* refers to the Archangel Seraphiel (Isrāfīl; JJ), who is said to blow the trumpet that heralds the Hour (see 39:68c). *Terrible* translates *nukur,* which could also mean "not known," indicating that the Day of Judgment is something that human beings cannot comprehend, because they have never seen anything like it (Z).

7 All of humanity will emerge from the grave in a state of fear and confusion (JJ), like *scattered locusts* or *scattered moths* (101:4). According to al-Qurṭubī, their emerging like scattered moths refers to the first phase, when they rise from the graves in a state of confusion, going one way and another, while their being like *scattered locusts* refers to the second phase, when they respond to the trumpet blast (see 39:68c) and head together in one direction (Q). The image of *scattered locusts* could also be seen as a reference to the number of people (Z), since every person who has ever lived will be brought forth on this day.

8 *Scrambling toward* is also understood to mean "looking at" (Ṭ). This event *shall be 'a difficult day* (74:9), for the disbelievers in particular; it shall be a day that is *not of ease* (74:10).

9–14 This is most likely the first account of the story of Noah in the chronological order of revelation. As these verses only allude to aspects of the story, the Makkans may have already known the story of Noah, which is fleshed out in 11:25–48; 23:23–30; and *Sūrah* 71 (see also 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 21:76–77; 26:105–21; 29:14–15; 37:75–82), though 11:49 says of the account of Noah, *These are among the accounts of the Unseen that We reveal unto thee. Thou knewest not of them, neither thou nor thy people, beforehand.* V. 9 reflects the narrative in vv. 2–5, in which the Makkans reject the Prophet and turn away from God's signs. In this respect the story of Noah appears to be mentioned in order to give solace to the Prophet, for just as people had turned away from the prophet Noah for hundreds of years, so too did they turn away from the Prophet Muhammad. And just as God helped Noah and those who were with him prevail, so too would He ensure that Muhammad and his people would prevail. *Such that the waters met* is the punishment of those who rejected Noah. *A thing of planks and nails* refers to the Ark, whose construction is discussed in greater detail in 11:37–44. Coursing *under Our Eyes* indicates God's protection (JJ). *One who was rejected* refers to Noah and could also be read "for one who was disbelieved." For more on the story of Noah, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 71 as well as commentary on 7:59–64; 11:25–48.

15 *We left it* is taken by some to mean that the ark had been preserved for many generations to

as a sign; so is there any who remembers? (16) How, then, were My Punishment and My warnings? (17) And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember; so is there any who remembers? (18) ᶜĀd denied. How, then, were My Punishment and My warnings? (19) Truly We sent upon them a howling wind on a day of incessant misfortune, (20) tearing out people as if they were uprooted palm trunks. (21) How, then, were My Punishment and My warnings? (22) And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember; so is there any who remembers? (23) Thamūd denied the warnings. (24) They said, "Shall we follow a single

witness, even up to the time of the Prophet (IK). But it most likely means, "We preserved" the story of Noah within human memory *as a sign* or warning for future generations. *Who remembers* could also be rendered "who takes heed" or "who will be admonished."

16 This poetic and evocative verse serves as a refrain in this *sūrah,* coming at the end of each of the reports of former communities that were destroyed. It can be taken to mean, "How severe were My Punishment and My warnings?" or to indicate that the punishment they received was justified, because God had already sent them a warning (JJ, comment on v. 18).

17 Juxtaposed to the ominous refrain that first appears in the previous verse, this verse introduces a second, more positive refrain in this *sūrah.* The first refrain emphasizes the wrath that comes upon those who reject God and His signs, while the second emphasizes the mercy by which God makes access to revelation, and hence truth, easy. The Quran is *made easy to remember* as a mercy to human beings in that its recitation is made easy for the tongue and the understanding and memorization of it are made easy for the mind and heart (Aj). Many *aḥādīth* speak of the virtues of memorizing the Quran, among them: "The best among you are those who learn the Quran and teach it to others"; and "If the Quran is enclosed by skin [i.e., memorized by a human being], God will never burn it in Hellfire." Similar to *who remembers* in v. 15, *to remember* could also be understood to mean, "to be admonished" (Aj) and *who remembers* can indicate those "who will be admonished" or "who will take heed." In both readings, it can also be understood as a reference to the covenant made between God and human beings before time (see 7:172c), thus meaning, "Is there anyone who remembers (or takes heed of) the pact or covenant with God?" (Aj).

18 For the story of the people of ᶜĀd, a pre-Islamic Arabian tribe whose prosperity led to its decadence and whose members rejected the Prophet Hūd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16. Regarding the second part of this verse, see 54:16c.

19–20 While the wind that destroys the people of ᶜĀd is called *a howling wind* in 41:16 and *the barren wind* in 51:41, 69:6 is more emphatic: *And as for ᶜĀd, they were destroyed by a howling, raging wind.* Here, as in v. 2, *incessant* translates *mustamirr;* here too it can also indicate "powerful" or "severe" (Ṭ). *Tearing out people* refers to their being wrenched from holes in the ground in which they sought shelter and being flung headfirst so that their necks were crushed and their heads severed from their bodies (JJ). They are likened to palm trees, because they were known for their large physical stature (JJ; see 89:7–8). They are also compared to *hollowed palm trunks* in 69:7.

21 See 54:16c.

22 See 54:17c. Similar to this refrain, 19:97 states, *We have only made this easy upon thy tongue that thou mayest give glad tidings unto the reverent thereby, and that thereby thou mayest warn a contentious people.*

23 *Warnings* could also be rendered "warners"; see 54:5c. For more on the story of the Thamūd people, a pre-Islamic Arabian tribe who the Quran says were destroyed for rejecting the Prophet Ṣāliḥ, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58.

24 The words with which the people of Thamūd rejected Ṣāliḥ reflect those with which the

human being from among us? Then we would surely be astray and mad! (25) Has the reminder been cast upon him from among us? Nay, he is an insolent liar." (26) On the morrow they will know who is the insolent liar. (27) Behold! We are sending the she-camel as a trial for them; so watch them and be patient. (28) And inform them that the water is to be divided among them—each share of drink equitably proportioned. (29) Then they called their companion, and he took in hand and hamstrung [her]. (30) How, then, were My Punishment and My warnings? (31) Truly We sent upon them a single cry, and they were like a fence maker's dry sticks. (32) And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember; so is there any who remembers? (33) The people of Lot denied

Quraysh rejected the prophethood of Muhammad: *What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?* (25:7). The manner in which people are said to reject their prophets, saying, *Shall we follow a single human being from among us?* or, *Shall a human being guide us?* (64:6) recurs throughout the Quran and is thus presented as a constant barrier to belief, as in 17:94: *And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?"* (see also 6:6–9, 50, 91; 11:12, 27; 14:10–11; 21:3; 23: 24, 33, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 41:14; 50:2; 74:25).

25 Here *the reminder* refers to the revelation sent to Ṣāliḥ. The verse can be understood to mean either that they doubt anything had been sent at all (JJ) or that they question how a reminder could have been sent to Ṣāliḥ rather than to another whom they would have considered more worthy. In this latter sense, it is similar to the words of the Quraysh in 43:31: *And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a great man from one of the two towns?"* (see also 50:2).

26 The people of Thamūd will know that they were wrong to deny Ṣāliḥ and will be punished for their denial. Arabic morphology allows that, without diacritical markers, *they will know* could instead be read, "you will know." When read in this manner, it is taken as Ṣāliḥ's address to the disbelievers among his people (Bg).

27 This verse represents God's address to Ṣāliḥ. The she-camel is said to have been a sign from God brought forth from a mountain or a rock (JJ), regarding which Ṣāliḥ said, *This she-camel of God is a sign unto you. Leave her to graze freely on God's earth, and cause her no harm, lest a painful punishment seize you* (7:73; see also 11:64).

28–29 In 26:155 Ṣāliḥ says, *This is a she-camel; she shall have drink and you shall drink on an appointed day.* Both instances are understood to mean that God had ordered that the people could drink of the water one day and the she-camel the next. At first they followed this allotment, but then grew impatient and *called their companion,* whom some say was named Qudār ibn Sālaf, who drew his sword and smote her (Bg, JJ); see 11:64–65c. *Took in hand* is understood to mean that he undertook the task of hamstringing the she-camel (Bḍ, Q, R, Sh, Z), or that he took a sword in hand (Bḍ, JJ, Z), or that he took the she-camel in hand (R, Ṭ, Z).

30 See 54:16c.

31 Here *a single cry* indicates the instantaneous and overwhelming nature of the punishment that came upon the Thamūd people, though elsewhere it refers to the herald of the end of time and the Final Judgment for all humanity (see 36:29; 36:49; 37:19; 38:15; 79:13). The Thamūd people are also said to have been destroyed by *the Cry* in 11:67, *a thunderbolt* in 41:13 and 51:44, and an *earthquake* in 7:78. These are not contradictory accounts, but different aspects of the *overwhelming* (*ṭāghiyah*) that is said to befall them in 69:5.

32 See 54:17c; 54:22c.

33–38 In the Quran Lot has greater status than in the Bible; the story of Lot and his people

the warnings. (34) Truly We sent upon them a torrent of stones, save the family of Lot, whom We delivered at dawn (35) as a blessing from Us. Thus do We requite whosoever gives thanks. (36) And indeed he had warned them of Our assault, but they disputed the warnings. (37) They had sought to lure him from his guests; so We blotted out their eyes. So taste My Punishment and My warnings! (38) And indeed an enduring punishment greeted them early in the morning. (39) So taste My Punishment and My warnings! (40) And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember; so is there any who remembers? (41) And indeed the warnings came unto the House of Pharaoh. (42) They denied Our signs—all of them; so We seized them with the seizing of One Mighty, Omnipotent.

is discussed most extensively in 11:77–83; see also 7:80–84; 15:57–77; 21:74–75; 26:160–73; 27:54–58; 29:28–35; 37:133–38.

34 Elsewhere the torrent is described as a rain of *stones of baked clay* (11:82; 15:74). All members of Lot's family were saved from this punishment except his wife (cf. 7:83; 11:81; 15:59–60; 26:170–71; 27:57; 29:32; Genesis 19:26). *At dawn* can be taken to describe when the stones were sent or when Lot and his family were saved.

36 When warned by Lot in various ways, his people would say, *Bring us God's Punishment if you are among the truthful* (29:29).

37 The people of Lot's town had sought to have sexual relations with his guests, who, unbeknownst to Lot and the people, were angels sent by God; some say they were the Archangels Gabriel, Michael, and Seraphiel (IK). Lot sought to dissuade and warn his people, saying, *Among all creatures do you come unto males, leaving your spouses your Lord created for you? Nay, but you are a transgressing people* (26:165; see also 7:80–81; 27:54–55; 29:29). But as they would not heed his warning, they were destroyed the next day (see 11:82–83c). According to some, *blotted out their eyes* refers to the blinding of the crowd (some say by the tips of Gabriel's wings striking their eyes [IK]), so that they could not violate Lot's guests, as in Genesis 19:11: "And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door." It can also be understood to mean that, due to their sinful natures, God deprived them of understanding and insight, as in 2:7: *Upon their eyes is a covering, and theirs is a great punishment* (see also 47:23c).

38 Their punishment is described most emphatically in 26:173 (cf. 27:58), *And We rained a rain upon them. Evil was the rain of those who were warned!* (see also 7:84c; 29:34), and is said to have been manifest as *stones of baked clay* (11:82; 15:74) or a *torrent of stones* (54:34) that rained down upon them.

39 This verse and v. 37 are two of over a dozen verses where God tells the disbelievers, *Taste My Punishment* or *taste the punishment* (see 3:106, 181; 4:56; 6:30; 7:39; 8:35, 50; 10:52; 22:22; 32:14, 20; 34:42; 46:34). In this context, the first instance of this phrase, in v. 37, can be understood as a reference to their punishment in this world, and the second, in v. 39, as a reference to their punishment in the next world. Alternately, the first can be seen as God's address to the people of Lot at the time of their destruction and the second can be seen as God's warning to the disbelievers among the Quraysh and by extension to disbelievers in general.

40 See 54:17c; 54:22c.

41–42 Although the story of Pharaoh is given only two lines here, the account of Moses and Pharaoh is the most extensive account provided in the entire Quran; for more detailed accounts of Moses' mission to Pharaoh, see 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 28:3–46. Shorter accounts pertaining to particular aspects of Moses' mission can be found in

(43) Are your disbelievers better than those? Or have you some exemption in the scriptures? (44) Or do they say, "We are a host victorious!"? (45) The whole shall be routed and they will turn [their] backs. (46) Nay! The Hour is their tryst, and the Hour is more calamitous and more bitter. (47) Truly the guilty are astray and mad. (48) On the Day they are dragged upon their faces into the Fire, "Taste the touch of Saqar." (49) Truly We have created everything according to a measure.

2:49–61; 5:20–26; 17:101–4; 27:7–14; 40:23–45; 44:17–31; 51:38–40; 79:15–25.

43 This verse asks whether the disbelievers among the Quraysh are somehow exempt from the punishments that afflicted the ʿĀd, the Thamūd, and the peoples of Lot and Pharaoh, mentioned in this *sūrah* (Ṭ, Z). *Better* can be taken to mean better generally or "better in strength" (Z). The second sentence of this verse asks whether there is something in previous revelations that would excuse their rejection of Muhammad (Sh, Ṭ, Z). It is somewhat similar to 68:37–39: *Or do you have a book wherein you learn that you shall have therein whatsoever you choose? Or do you have oaths binding upon Us until the Day of Resurrection that you shall have whatever you ordain?* (see also, e.g., 6:148; 37:156–57; 52:37–38; 68:47).

44 *We are a host victorious!* was the response of the Quraysh to the Prophet's call. It implies that they had great faith in their strength and numbers, thinking nothing could overcome them, a folly attributed to many peoples of the past, such as the tribe of ʿĀd in 41:15: *As for ʿĀd, they waxed arrogant upon the earth without right and said, "Who is greater than us in strength?" Have they not considered that God, Who created them, is greater than them in strength? Yet they rejected Our signs* (see also 9:69; 28:78; 30:9; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:13).

45–46 Interpreted in historical context, *the whole* indicates all the disbelievers among the Quraysh (Sh). It is reported that at the Battle of Badr the Prophet came forth from his tent reciting these verses. Some thus interpret them as prophesying the future victory of the Muslims over the Quraysh (Bg, Ṭ). But they can also be seen more generally to indicate the triumph of truth over falsehood, as in 17:81: *Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing."* While v. 45 refers to defeat in this world, v. 46 is understood as a reference to punishment in the next, which shall be *more calamitous and more bitter* than the destruction and humiliation experienced in this life (Bg, Sh).

47–49 These verses are reported to have been revealed in connection with a dispute between the Prophet and the idolaters among the Quraysh concerning God's "measuring out" (*qadar;* IK, Q, R, Ṭ), which refers to the manner in which God gives or withholds provision for all of creation.

47 *Mad* translates *suʿur,* which is related to *saʿīr,* or *blaze,* a word used throughout the Quran to refer to the punishment of Hell. Some thus interpret this verse to mean that the disbelievers are "burning (*yusʿarūn*) in the Fire" (Bg, Z). They are thus *astray* in this world and "in the blaze" in the next (Z).

48 *Dragged upon their faces* likely indicates punishment for various iniquities. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Are people thrown into Hell and dragged up on their faces [or by their nostrils] for anything other than the harvest of their tongues?" Other verses indicate that the disbelievers will be *gathered upon their faces* (17:97; 25:34) and that their faces will be struck by the angels (8:50; 47:27) and by the Fire (23:104) and *covered with dark patches of night* (10:27) or with fire (14:50); see also 21:39; 27:90; 33:66. *Saqar* is said to be either a proper name of Hell or an attribute of it (see 74:26–28c). To *taste* its *touch* is thus to taste the punishment of the Fire; see 54:39c.

49 This verse can be understood as a straightforward affirmation of God's creation of all things (M). In relation to the preceding verses, it can also be understood as a simple statement that God decreed or "measured" a punishment for the disbelievers and cast them into *Saqar.* But due to the Prophet's own debate with those who denied God's *qadar,* or Decree, this verse became a focal point for discussing the relation between

Divine determinism and human choice. *Qadar,* or "measuring out," is also said to be one of the tenets of faith, regarding which the Prophet said, "No servant of God truly believes until he believes in *qadar,* its good and evil, and until he realizes that what has befallen him was not going to miss him and what missed him was not going to befall him."

The earliest determinists, known as the Jabriyyah (lit. "Compulsionists"), held that all human acts were determined by God, including acts of belief, disbelief, good, and evil. From their perspective, 54:49 supports the position that God has predetermined all events, especially when read in light of 76:30: *And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing, Wise* (cf. 81:29). When considering this verse, those who favored a greater degree of human choice or self-determination preferred to focus upon the manner in which God has created everything with precision or "in a perfect *measure.*" This theological debate correlates with the debate over how this verse should be read. As translated, *everything* (*kull shayʾ*) is read in the accusative (*kulla shayʾin*), the reading preferred by most commentators and found in all schools of recitation, but one that is more problematic from a grammatical perspective. If, however, *kull shayʾ* is read in the nominative (*kullu shayʾin*), the verse could be understood to mean, "Everything that We have created is according to a measure." This interpretation would still allow one to see the verse as a declaration of God's Omnipotence and of Divine determinism, especially when read in light of the phrase found in 13:16 and 39:62: *God is the Creator of all things* (see also 40:62). But it could also lead one to think that there might be things that God has not created that are not "according to [His] measure." This reading would then allow for the possibility that human beings create actions of their own free will, an understanding that would support both the early Qadarite theological trend and the Muʿtazilite school of theology. It is thus reported that adherents of both of these theologies held fast to the reading of *kull shayʾ* in the nominative (Iṭ).

The Qadarites held that human beings are free and are the authors of their own acts, but this does not contravene God's Omnipotence. The Muʿtazilites held that human beings are fully responsible for the creation of their evil deeds and that God simply punishes them accordingly, a position that seeks to absolve a just and merciful God from the apparent injustice of creating the very acts for which He then punishes their perpetrators. The Ashʿarite school of theology finds both of these positions abhorrent, because each would posit a creative agent outside of God. At the same time, they find the Jabrite position to be monstrously fatalistic, reducing human beings to passive agents with no will of their own. Ashʿarite theologians thus sought to explain that God is Just and Merciful and does not punish people for things for which they are not responsible, and that human beings bear responsibility for their actions but are not the creators of these actions, since from their perspective God must be the Creator of all human acts, as He is the *Creator of all things* (40:62).

In their efforts to maintain God's Omnipotence and explain how human beings could have effective agency in performing their acts, Ashʿarite theologians make a distinction between the creation of acts and their acquisition (*kasb*). From this perspective, although human beings cannot create anything because God creates everything that exists or that comes to pass, human beings nonetheless choose among the options that God has created and thus freely choose to engage in or play out the acts that God has created, thereby acquiring the acts.

Commentators who incline more toward the Muʿtazilite position and favor a greater degree of free will than that allowed for by the Ashʿarite position do not argue that v. 49 supports their view, but focus instead upon the Divine Wisdom behind the precise measure with which the universe is created (Ṭs, Z). The Muʿtazilite theologian al-Zamakhsharī writes, "We have created everything in a determined measure, ordered according to that which wisdom has decreed, or in a measure written on the *Tablet* [see 85:22c], known [to God] before its existence (*kawn*); We knew its state and its duration (*zamān*)." Likewise, the Shiite theologian al-Ṭabrisī emphasizes that this verse indicates that nothing has been created haphazardly, but only as decreed by Divine Wisdom. Everything is thus created according to "a known measure" and for a known purpose: "the tongue for speech, the hand for striking, the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, the stomach for food; and if anything increased or decreased from what We

measured, then the objective [of creation] would not be attained."

Many who are more closely aligned with the Ashᶜarite position also see this verse as an expression of the Divine Wisdom according to which everything is "measured" (Aj, Āl) and as an affirmation that everything is inscribed on the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; IJ). But many also argue that although human beings have some effective agency in bringing about their acts through acquisition, or *kasb,* they are not able to create and determine, or "measure," their own actions, and they see vv. 47–48 as a criticism of those who adhered to such positions. Along these lines they cite several *aḥādīth,* among them: "Every community has its Magians, and the Magians of my community are those who say that there is no measuring out (*qadar*)" (Āl, IK, Q, R). In elaborating upon their understanding of Divine determinism, Ashᶜarites identify two stages or aspects of the Divine Decree: the first they call *qaḍāʾ,* which indicates the pretemporal Decree of God; the second they call *qadar,* which indicates the Divine Decree that brings things into existence in the temporal order, rendering to each its measure and limit. *Qaḍāʾ* pertains to the Divine Essence and is neither created nor finite, while *qadar* is an attribute of Divine Action that is contingent by virtue of its association with the contingencies it brings forth. Drawing upon this distinction, al-Rāzī argues against the philosophical notion that it is necessary for things to be created in the manner that they are created, saying, "*Qaḍāʾ* is what pertains to [God's] Knowledge, while *qadar* is what pertains to [God's] Will. Therefore, His saying, *Truly We have created everything according to a measure,* means by His Measure with His Will, and not, as they claim, that it is 'necessitated.'"

Following upon the Ashᶜarite position, some see this verse as an indication that one must put all of one's trust in God. Thus Ibn ᶜAjībah writes: "It washes the heart of sorrows and of all that is other [than God], and relieves the servant from the toil of [trying to] arrange and choose, because when a person of intellect knows with *the knowledge of certainty* [see 102:5c] that his affairs and his states and all that comes upon him has been embraced by *the measure,* with nothing preceding or coming after its [measured] moment, he entrusts his *affair to God* [an allusion to 40:44], surrenders to the decrees (*aḥkām*) of his Master, and meets all that comes upon him with contentment (*riḍā*) and acceptance, be it good or evil." In this same vein, the commentator al-Maybudī writes of this verse, "One who is deprived [of God], though he may have found everything, has found nothing, whereas one who has found Him, though he may have found nothing, has found everything."

For many Sufi thinkers, such as those of the school of Ibn ᶜArabī and Mullā Ṣadrā, human choice and Divine determinism are understood in light of the teaching that human beings bear within them the potential to know *the names, all of them* (2:31) and "God created humankind in His image" (Genesis 1:27), and among God's Names are *al-Murīd* (He Who Wills or Wishes) and *al-Qadīr* (the Powerful, the Possessor of Power). Human freedom is itself a Divine creation, and because of this could not be in ultimate conflict with God's creative act. Thus, unlike some schools of Islamic theology (*kalām*) that see between God and human beings two competing wills, Sufis see the human will as a manifestation of God's own Power and Will. Rather than seeing the question of human free will as a question merely of choices between options on a particular plane of reality, Sufis have seen free will ultimately as a characteristic pertaining to a particular state of being. Only insofar as human beings rise above their egotistical desires and submit the will that pertains to their own individuality to God do they realize true freedom in God. But those who attain this true freedom only will what God wills, because they exist in a state of perfect submission to the good and thus also display the attributes of something that is, as it were, totally determined. This is exemplified in a paradox discussed by Ibn ᶜArabī, who says that those saints (*awliyāʾ*) most capable of performing miracles are the least likely to do so, since they are most content with God's Will for the world and themselves. Moreover, *qadar,* or one's "lot," is seen, in the ultimate sense, as a manifestation of one's own nature or essence as known by God before one's creation. Since God transcends the dualities of the world, He transcends the duality between free will and determinism, but insofar as human beings are free, they were already free in God by virtue of God's breathing into the first human being of His Spirit (see 32:9c).

(50) And Our Command is naught but one, like the blinking of an eye. (51) We have indeed destroyed the likes of you; so is there any who remembers? (52) Everything that they have done is in the scriptures; (53) everything small and great is inscribed. (54) Truly the reverent are amidst Gardens and a stream, (55) upon a seat of truth before an Omnipotent King.

50 There is no difference between God's willing a thing to be and its coming into being, nor is there a time lag between the two, for *when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is* (2:117; 3:47; 16:40; 19:35; 40:68; see also 36:82; Z). It is thus instantaneous, *like the blinking of an eye.* In the context of this *sūrah,* this verse also indicates the manner in which God's Punishment can come about instantaneously.

51 The destruction of former peoples is called upon throughout the Quran as a warning to disbelievers (see, e.g., 6:6c; 7:4; 18:59; 19:74, 98; 20:128; 22:45; 28:58; 32:26; 50:36). For the manner in which such destruction serves as a reminder or admonition for *any who remembers,* see especially 32:26c.

52 This verse is understood by most commentators to refer to the recording of people's deeds in scrolls (JJ, Ṭ), thus meaning that God knows all that they have done (18:49c; 84:7–10c). When *scriptures* is understood as a reference to Divine revelations, this verse refers to God's warnings in all of the previous revelations that people failed to heed and for which they are punished. As God's *Mercy encompasses all things* (7:156) and His Mercy precedes His Wrath, God provides every human collectivity with both guidance and warnings of what will befall them if they do not follow His Guidance before He brings His Wrath upon them, as in 28:59: *And thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs. And We never destroy towns, save when their people are wrongdoers* (see also 6:131–32; 10:13; 15:4; 26:208–9).

53 For a more extended discussion of the nature of the deeds inscribed, see commentary on 18:49: *And the Book will be set down. Then thou wilt see the guilty fearful of what is in it. And they will say, "Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof." And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did.*

54 Cf. 51:15. The rivers of Heaven are usually referred to in the plural as *streams, rivers,* or *springs.* Here *a stream* can be taken either as a reference to the genus and thus to all the streams of Heaven (Bg, R, Z) or as a reference to one of the streams in the Garden, such as *Kawthar* (see 108:1c) or *Tasnīm,* the latter of which is described as *a spring whence drink those brought nigh* (83:28).

55 *A seat of truth* or "truthfulness" indicates a place of contentment (Z), a place *wherein there is no idle talk, nor incitement to sin* (52:23; see also 19:62; 56:25; 88:11; Q, Sh, Ṭ), and a place for those who gather for the sake of truth. *Omnipotent* translates *muqtadir,* which derives from the same root as *qadar,* or *measure.* It thus refers back to v. 49 and reaffirms that it is God *Who created everything, then measured it out with due measure* (25:2). Regarding this verse, Maybudī writes: "The people of the Garden will enter in upon the Invincible twice a day and recite the Quran for Him. Each person among them will sit in his own sitting place, on a pulpit of pearls, rubies, emeralds, gold, and silver, in accordance with his works. Their eyes will never be so delighted as they are by this. They will never have heard anything more tremendous and more beautiful. Then they will turn back to their lodging places, blissful, their eyes delighted, until the like of it on the morrow."



# 55

# The Compassionate

## *al-Raḥmān*

Most scholars take all of *al-Raḥmān* to be a Makkan *sūrah,* although Ibn ʿAbbās is said to have maintained that v. 29 is from the Madinan period (Āl, Q). A minority maintain that the entire *sūrah* is Madinan (Āl, Q). It takes its name from the mention of the Divine Name *the Compassionate* at the opening, the only Divine Name to be directly equated with the Name Allāh, as in 17:110: *Say, "Call upon God* (Allāh), *or call upon the Compassionate (al-Raḥmān). Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names."* Because the last verse of the preceding *sūrah* and the first verse of this *sūrah* contain two Divine Names that can be read in complementary opposition to one another, *Omnipotent King* (54:55) and *the Compassionate* (v. 1), *al-Raḥmān* is seen by some as an extension of *al-Qamar* (Āl). This *sūrah* is known to many Muslims as "The Bride of the Quran" after a well-known yet unauthenticated *ḥadīth* that says, "For everything there is a bride, and the bride of the Quran is *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*" (Aj, Āl, Q).

Some commentaries maintain that this *sūrah* was revealed in response to the idolaters of Makkah, who are said to have asked the meaning of the Prophet's frequent references to *the Compassionate,* as in 25:60: *And when it is said unto them, "Prostrate before the Compassionate," they say, "And what is the Compassionate? Shall we prostrate before that [to] which you command us?" And it increases them in aversion.* The idolaters' disbelief in *the Compassionate* is also mentioned in 13:30, where the Prophet is ordered to declare belief in the Lord: *Thus have We sent thee unto a community before whom other communities have passed away, that thou mayest recite unto them that which We have revealed unto thee; yet they disbelieve in the Compassionate. Say, "He is my Lord; there is no god but He. In Him do I trust and unto Him do I turn."*

The first section of the *sūrah* (vv. 1–25) discusses the nature of *the Compassionate* as Creator, Teacher, and Revealer and the blessings He provides in the created world. It then transitions into an extended discussion of the blessings of Heaven and its many Gardens. The duality between Heaven and earth and the dualities within them are present throughout the *sūrah.* This thematic structure

is reflected in the grammatical structure, which employs the dual form in many of the verbs and pronouns and in the refrain, addressed to both human beings and jinn, *So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?* This duality is offset by the discussion of *the Compassionate* in vv. 1–10 and by vv. 26–27, which emphasize that God remains while all else fades away. Appearing in the middle of the *sūrah,* these verses imply that God's Essence is the center that lies at the heart of and yet transcends all dualities, even those in the Gardens of Heaven. V. 27 is then echoed in the last verse (v. 78), showing that just as God transcends the blessings of this earth, so too does He transcend the blessings of Heaven.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) The Compassionate (2) taught the Quran; (3) created man; (4) taught him speech. (5) The sun and the moon are upon a reckoning. (6) And the stars and the trees prostrate. (7) Heaven He has raised and the Balance He has set, (8) that you transgress not in the balance. (9) So set right the weight and fall not short in the balance. (10) The earth has He laid down for creatures. (11) Therein

1 *The Compassionate* translates *al-Raḥmān,* which is considered to denote that aspect of mercy and compassion that is unqualified, boundless, and prior to the created order. In this regard, *al-Raḥmān* has also been rendered "the Infinitely Good" and "the Loving." It is said to be one of the Divine Names that can only apply to God, for it is one of the Names by which existence itself is made manifest, a universal blessing or mercy (*raḥmah*) that cannot be attributed to anyone other than God. In this regard, many Sufis say that all of creation is brought forth through "the Breath of the Compassionate." It thus differs from *the Merciful* (*al-Raḥīm*), which is said to pertain to a more particular form of Divine Mercy and by which human beings may also be described. From this perspective, *al-Raḥmān* relates more directly to the Divine Essence, while *al-Raḥīm* can be seen as referring to the extension of God's Mercy in all acts (see 1:3c). It is also *the Compassionate* who is said to assume the Throne of God in 20:5 (cf. 25:59).

2 That the verb *taught* comes directly after the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān* indicates that teaching revelation is intrinsic to God's compassionate nature. From one perspective, revelation is a blessing through which God sustains creation. Throughout the Quran teaching is presented as one of God's essential functions in relation to human beings, for human beings are created for knowledge and God teaches Adam and thus all of humanity (2:31) before commanding, providing laws, and judging. According to some commentators, this verse is a direct response to the disbelievers who said of the Prophet and the Quran, *He has merely been taught by a human being* (16:103; Q, Sh). Others understand it as an allusion to the manner in which God has made the Quran easy to learn, as in the refrain of the previous *sūrah: And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember* (54:17, 22, 32, 40; Q). This verse could also be understood as the beginning of a new thought, that is, "He taught the Quran."

3 Here *man* is understood by some as a specific reference to the Prophet Muhammad or to Adam (Q). But most understand it as a reference to all of humanity. The creation of human beings following directly upon the mention of God's teaching the Quran indicates that human beings were made to know revelation (Aj) even before their creation in this world. The correspondence

between the mention of human beings and revelation here is similar to the combination mentioned in 96:1–2, which are considered by most to be the first two verses in the chronological order of revelation. The present verse also provides a subtle allusion to the mercy and blessing of the creation of human beings and animals, since the word for "womb," *raḥim,* derives from the same root, *r-ḥ-m,* as *the Compassionate, al-Raḥmān.* In this vein a famous *ḥadīth* says, "The word 'womb' (*al-raḥim*) derives its name from *al-Raḥmān,* and God said [to the womb], 'I will keep good relations with one who keeps good relations with you, and will sever relations with one who severs relations with you,'" meaning one who severs relations with family and kin; for the importance of maintaining womb relations, see 4:1c.

4 Just as human beings are distinguished by their ability to know revelation, so too are they distinguished from all other creatures by the faculty of speech through which they both articulate and comprehend (Aj). Vv. 2–4 can also be taken as an allusion to God's honoring human beings by making the Quran, His very Word, something they are capable of learning and reciting (Q), as in 44:58: *We have only made this easy upon thy tongue, that haply they may remember* (cf. 54:17, 22, 32, 40). *Speech* translates *bayān,* which also means something that is clear or evident. It is thus seen by some as an allusion to God's having *taught Adam the names, all of them* (2:31; see 2:31c) or to God's giving human beings the ability to distinguish between good and evil, between what is permitted and what is forbidden (Q, Sh) or between truth and falsehood, all of which is believed to be taught through revelation. *Bayān* is also considered one of the names of the Quran (Q, R), as in 3:138: *This is an exposition (bayān) for mankind, and a guidance and exhortation for the reverent.*

5 *Are upon a reckoning* (cf. 6:96) means that the sun and the moon run according to a known and established pattern from which they do not deviate and without which human beings would have no temporal or geographical bearings (Q), as in 10:5: *He it is Who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time].* This is of particular importance to Muslims, as the position of the sun and the moon determines the times for the performance of three of the five pillars of the faith: prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. This verse can also be seen as an allusion to the fact that celestial bodies were created and are therefore transient, as in 13:2 and 39:5: *and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed* (Q). It would then be a rebuke to those who worshipped celestial bodies, as in 41:37: *Prostrate not unto the sun, nor unto the moon. Prostrate unto God, Who created them, if it is He Whom you worship* (cf. 6:76–78).

6 As translated, this verse alludes to the prostration before God of all celestial and earthly entities, as in 22:18: *Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth* (cf. 16:49). *Stars* translates *najm,* which occurs in the singular, but is understood as a reference to all stars. *Najm* could also be translated "herbs," in which case the verse could be read as a reference to herbs, or all soft-stemmed plants, and trees, or all hard-stemmed plants (Aj, Ṭ). In either interpretation, their prostration is an indication of their complete submission to God's Will.

7 *The Balance* is seen by most as a reference to justice (JJ, Q, Ṭ), religious law (*al-sharīʿah*), or the Quran itself (Q; see 57:25c). It can also be seen as a reference to honoring the balance and harmony of the created order.

8–9 In the translation, v. 8 is taken as a subjunctive. But it can also be taken as an imperative: "So transgress not in the balance." The injunction differs slightly in each translation: the first indicates that one must not be tyrannical and oppressive; the second indicates that one must not withhold what is due to another (Aj), a theme found in many other passages; see 11:84; 83:1–3c. Insofar as *the balance* is related to justice, the fact that it is here thrice mentioned indicates the fundamental importance of justice as intrinsic to the order of God's creation and also to human transactions. As the Prophet is reported to have said, "The heavens and the earth are founded upon justice."

10 Vv. 1–9 mentioned the realities that provide spiritual nourishment; vv. 10–12 now move to those that provide physical nourishment (Aj). This verse is taken variously as an allusion to all domesticated animals, to all that crawls upon the earth, or to all human beings and jinn (Q).

11 The word for *fruit, fākihah,* derives from the same root as *tafakkaha,* meaning to "take delight" in something. This verse is thus interpreted

are fruit and date palms bearing sheaths, (12) husked grains and fragrant herbs. (13) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (14) He created man from dried clay, like earthen vessels, (15) and He created jinn from smokeless fire. (16) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (17) Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests. (18) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (19) He mixed the two seas, such that they meet one another. (20) Between them

by some as an allusion to all the blessings of this earth in which people take delight (Q). The *date* was for the Arabs the best of fruits. It is thus interpreted as a reference the greatest of God's Blessings in the physical realm and indirectly as an allusion to all forms of fruit.

12 When v. 11 is taken as a reference to the delights one can find in food and earthly blessings in general, this verse can be understood as a reference to the more nutritive dimension of food (Aj). Some say *husked grains* refers to the stems of plants and *fragrant herbs* to their leaves (Q).

13 This refrain, which is addressed to both human beings and jinn, is repeated thirty-one times in this *sūrah*. Both the possessive pronoun in *your Lord* (*rabbikumā*) and the predicate in *do you two deny* are in the dual form, referring to human beings and jinn. *Deny* may indicate their refusal to acknowledge that a particular blessing is from God by attributing it implicitly or explicitly to themselves or to some other human or natural agency. It could also be taken to indicate the denial of one aspect of God, while accepting another, as do those who believe in God, but scoff at the idea of resurrection or deny the reality of revelation. It is reported that the Prophet recited this *sūrah* to some of his Companions and said, "Why do I see you silent? The jinn respond better than you, for I come not upon *So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?* but that they say, 'There is naught among Thy blessings, Our Lord, that we deny. Unto Thee be Praise; unto Thee be thanks' " (Aj, N, Q).

14 *Dried clay* is literally "sounding clay," referring to the sound fired clay makes when struck. Several verses discuss the creation of the human being from various forms of earth: *from dust* (3:59); *from dried clay, made of molded mud* (15:26); and *from a viscous clay* (37:11). When combined with v. 14, these verses can be seen as describing the stages of human creation: from *dust,* to *viscous clay,* to *molded mud,* to *dried clay, like earthen vessels* (Q), at which point it is then ready for the Spirit to be blown into it. For the breathing of the Spirit into the human being, see 32:9c; 38:72c.

15 *Smokeless fire* translates *mārij min nār,* which can also mean "something in which soot has been mixed." The verse could thus mean that the jinn are created from either pure fire, a substance mixed with fire, or a unique kind of fire (Aj). For a fuller discussion of the nature of the jinn, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 72.

17 *The two easts,* translating *mashriqayn,* could also mean "the two places from which the sun rises," as the verb for the rising of the sun, *ashraqa,* derives from the same root (*sh-r-q*) as "east," *mashriq. The two wests,* translating *maghribayn,* could also mean "the two places in which the sun sets," as the verb for the setting of the sun, *gharaba,* derives from the same root (*gh-r-b*) as "west," *maghrib. The two easts* and *the two wests* could thus be understood as a reference to the winter and summer solstices, which mark the farthest point of each rising and setting of the sun. To mention the limits in this fashion can be taken as an allusion to all the settings and risings of the sun, since to mention the limits on each end of the spectrum is to imply the whole; see also 70:40c.

19–20 This is a reference to the two seas in 35:12: *Not equal are the two seas: one sweet, satisfying, pleasant to drink, and the other salty, bitter* (see also 25:53). As the predicate in *they transgress not* is in the dual form, most interpret it as a reference to the two seas themselves, but some take it as a reference to human beings and jinn. In the first interpretation, it indicates that these two seas with their distinct natures may meet, but will not intermingle and thus dilute or compromise one another (IK, Q). Some understand the two seas as an allusion to the sky and the earth (Q,

lies a barrier that they transgress not. (21) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (22) From them come forth pearls and coral stones. (23) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (24) His are the ships towering aloft upon the sea like standards. (25) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (26) All that is upon it passes away. (27) And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty. (28) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (29) Those in the heavens and on the earth entreat Him: every day He is

Ṭ). Others see them as an allusion to this world and the Hereafter, between which lies the barrier of God's Decree (Q). Others see them as an allusion to formal religious knowledge and spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifah*), which meet in the complete human being, though the intelligence remains between them as a barrier preventing either form of knowledge from exceeding its bounds, such that one does not stifle the spiritual with the formal or compromise the formal in the name of the spiritual (Aj).

22 This verse can be understood as a reference to God's provision of ornaments that human beings extract from the sea, as in 16:14: *He it is Who made the sea subservient, that you may eat fresh meat therefrom, and extract from it ornaments that you wear. Coral stones* translates *marjān,* which is understood by some to indicate small pearls (Aj, IK) and by others to indicate large valuable pearls (IK, Q, Ṭ). The verse can also be read, "Pearls and coral stones are brought forth" (Q).

24 Most read this verse as describing the sails of ships *towering aloft upon the sea like standards* and take it as a reference to God's providing human beings with the ability to navigate and traverse the sea, as in 14:32: *He has made the ships subservient unto you, so that they sail upon the sea by His Command.* In this sense, it can be connected to the blessings mentioned in v. 5, for without the ability to measure the celestial bodies seafaring would be impossible. *Towering aloft* translates *munshaʾāt,* which can also be read as the past participle of the verb *anshaʾa,* "to bring into being." It could thus be understood as an allusion to all that has been brought into being, that is, all created things (IK, Q).

26–27 Cf. 28:88: *All things perish, save His Face.* These verses mark an important turn in this *sūrah,* as vv. 10–25 refer to the blessings or boons of this world and the remaining verses refer to the blessings of the Hereafter. *It* is taken by most as a reference to the earth, the face of the earth, or this world in general, thus indicating that all of creation will eventually "pass away." Grammatically it is *the Face* that is *Possessed of Majesty and Bounty.* Since the Arabic word for "face" (*wajh*) is often employed to indicate the very essence of a thing, it is here taken as a reference to God's Being and Essence (Q). Some theologians who see a distinction between God's Attributes and God's Essence maintain that this verse indicates that God's Attributes will also "pass away" and only the Divine Essence will remain (R). Al-Rāzī, however, maintains that for this to be the meaning, one would need to say, "And there remains nothing except the Face of thy Lord." According to some, *the Face of thy Lord* is used instead of *the Face of God,* which is used in several other verses (e.g., 2:115, 272; 30:38; 76:9), because "Lord" is closer to the theme of blessing and bounty that pervades this *sūrah* (R). The use of *Majesty and Bounty* can be seen as a reference to God's Attributes of Majesty and God's Attributes of Beauty, respectively, a division often made in the discussion of God's Names and Attributes in Islamic theology. For many Shiites the Attributes of Beauty are those positive attributes that are inherent in God's Essence and manifest the perfection of His Nature, whereas the Attributes of Majesty are the "negative attributes," those attributes having to do with physical qualities such as body, appearance, or movement that would imply limitation. The result of the negation of such possibilities is thus seen as a reaffirmation of the positive Divine Attributes.

29 The first phrase indicates that, although the angels in the heavens may be seen as higher than human beings, who live on earth, all are

upon a task. (30) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (31) We shall have leisure for you both, O weighty ones. (32) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (33) O company of jinn and men, if you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass, you shall not pass; save by a warrant. (34) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (35) A flash of fire and molten brass shall be sent against you, and you shall not prevail. (36) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (37) When the sky shall be rent asunder and when it shall turn ruddy like hide? (38) So which of your Lord's boons do you

dependent upon God and entreat Him, though those in the heavens are seen as supplicating on behalf of those on earth, while those on earth supplicate on behalf of themselves (Q). Even those who do not call upon God directly do so indirectly (Aj).

Following upon the assertion that everything entreats God, *every day He is upon a task* can be seen as an indication that God is constantly attending to requests made by those in the heavens and on earth. Regarding this interpretation of the verse, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Among God's tasks is to forgive sin, relieve distress, raise one people, and humble another" (Aj, IK, Q). *Every day He is upon a task* can also be understood as a response to those who maintain that God "rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done" (Genesis 2:2), for as 2:255 asserts, *Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep.* From an Islamic perspective, were God to be absent from His creative and sustaining activity for even the blink of an eye, creation would vanish and disappear (Qu). In this vein, this verse is taken by Ibn ʿArabī as a reference to God's Self-Disclosure, or theophany (*tajallī*), which never repeats and is never renewed, as God never discloses Himself in the same form to two individuals or twice in the same form to one individual (*Futūḥāt,* II 77.25–26). In more conventional terms, this verse indicates that God's creative Power is inexhaustible and that, as an object of knowledge, God is inexhaustible.

31 *We shall have leisure* translates *nafrughu,* which indicates leaving one task in order to attend to another, though in relation to God it is understood to indicate that there is no task or collection of tasks that will keep God from attending to other tasks (Ṭb). This verse is thus taken as a warning to jinn and human beings that they should not think that God will be too busy to resurrect them and call them to account on the Day of Judgment (Ṭb), though it could also be understood as an indication that God is always available to His servants and always watching over them. *Weighty ones,* which is in the dual form, is taken by most as a reference to jinn and human beings, indicating either that they are made from substances that are heavy (unlike angels who are made from light) or that they bear the weight of the responsibility of their deeds (Aj). A Shiite interpretation sees *weighty ones* as a reference to the Quran and the Prophet's household (Kā, Qm).

33 According to some commentators, these words will be said to people and jinn on the Day of Reckoning when the angels surround them (IK, Q, Ṭ). The implication is that they will never be able to evade God's Commands and Decrees (IK), except with God's Authority, for though there may be intercessors, none will be able to intercede, *save by His Leave* (2:255); see 2:48c; 2:255c. This verse can also be understood to mean that human beings cannot know or dominate over anything in creation except by God's Authority and Sanction.

35 This verse is understood to indicate that when people are brought forth from their graves, a flash of fire that they will be unable to escape will spur them on to the Day of Reckoning. *Molten brass* translates *nuḥās,* which is taken by some to mean the smoke of the fire (IK, Ṭ) and by others to mean liquid copper (IK, Ṭ).

37 The splitting or rending asunder of the sky is one of several events said to mark the end of this world and the coming of God's Judgment; see also 25:25; 42:5; 69:16c; 73:18; 82:1; 84:1.

two deny? (39) On that Day no man shall be questioned as to his sin; nor shall any jinn. (40) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (41) The guilty shall be known by their marks; and they shall be seized by the forelocks and by the feet. (42) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (43) This is Hell that the guilty deny; (44) to and fro shall they pass, between it and boiling waters. (45) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (46) And for one who fears

39 Cf. 28:78: *And the guilty will not be questioned about their sins;* and 77:35–36: *That is the Day on which they speak not; nor is permission granted them, such that they might offer excuses.* None shall be questioned that day, since their deeds have already been recorded (see 17:71; 18:49; 50:17–18; 69:19–28; 82:11–12). And they will not be able to speak for themselves, for *on that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn* (36:65); and *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do* (41:20). Interpreting the present verse in light of 15:92–93, *So by thy Lord, We shall question them all concerning that which they used to do,* some say that they will be questioned, and then their mouths will be sealed (Aj, IK). It is also said that they will not be questioned in order to elicit a response, but only rhetorically, as a form of reproach (Aj). From a Sufi perspective, when the attributes of the lower self have been effaced, after one has passed through the stations of both annihilation and subsistence in God, no sin remains, since at this stage one cannot but act in accord with the Will of God (Aj).

41 The first part of this verse can also be read as an adverbial clause modifying v. 39, meaning that they will not be asked about their sins, because they will already be known by their marks. This is in contrast to the marks by which the believers will be known, such as the light that shines from the parts of their bodies they washed when performing ablutions (IK) or the *mark upon their faces . . . from the effect of prostration* (48:29). Being *seized by the forelocks and by the feet* is interpreted by some to mean that their heads will be bent down and bound to their feet (IK, Q), and by others to indicate that the angels will drag them by the forelock or by the feet (Q). From a Quranic perspective, *there is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock* (11:56).

43 For a similar verse, see 32:20: *And as for those who are iniquitous, their refuge is the Fire. Whenever they desire to go forth therefrom, they are returned unto it, and it is said unto them, "Taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny."*

44 *It* is interpreted by most as a reference to the Fire of Hell, meaning that they will sometimes be punished with Fire and sometimes with boiling liquid (IK), which could be taken as a reference to experiencing the punishment of Hell both externally and internally. A similar passage is 40:71–72: *They will be dragged, with shackles and chains around their necks, into boiling liquid; then they will be set aflame in the Fire* (cf. 20:19; 44:48; 56:42). For verses that speak of those who are made to drink boiling liquid, see 6:70; 10:4; 18:29; 37:67; 38:57; 44:46; 47:15; 78:24–25; 88:5. The word here translated *boiling, ān,* indicates something that has reached the highest possible temperature (IK, Ṭ); others say *ān* means "prepared" (IK, Ṭ), though the two readings do not necessarily contradict one another (IK).

46 Cf. 79:40–41: *As for one who fears standing before his Lord and forbids the soul from its caprice, truly the Garden is the refuge.* In both verses, the phrase *standing before his Lord* translates *maqāma rabbihi,* which could also be translated "the station of his Lord." It can be understood to indicate that one will stand before God on the Day of Judgment, answering for all of one's deeds, as in 83:6: *A day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds,* for the reckoning. Or it could be understood as a reference to God's overseeing every soul, as in 13:33, where God is referred to as *He Who attends to (qā'im ʿalā) every soul in accordance with what it has earned.* According to Mujāhid, one of the leading scholars among the second generation of Muslims, "One *who fears*

standing before his Lord, there are two Gardens. (47) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (48) Each abounding in green branches. (49) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (50) In each are two fountains flowing. (51) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (52) In each are two kinds of every fruit. (53) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (54) They recline upon beds lined with rich brocade, the fruits of the two Gardens near at hand. (55) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (56) Therein are maidens of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinn has ever touched. (57) So which of

*standing before his Lord* is one who thinks of committing a sin, then remembers God and abandons it out of fear" (Aj, Q). There are many interpretations to explain the meaning of *two Gardens:* one as a reward for faith, the other as a reward for good deeds (Aj, Q); one for fearing God, another for abandoning lusts (Aj); one that is spiritual, another that is physical (Aj); one that is created especially for the believer, and one that the believer inherits (Q); one garden of eternity, another of blessing (Q); one that is one's own abode, the other for celestial spouses (Q); one for human beings, the other for jinn; or one for *the foremost,* the other for *the companions of the right* (Aj); also see commentary on 56:8–10.

48 This verse begins the description of the first two Gardens, which extends to v. 58 or v. 60. Two other Gardens are then described in vv. 62–76. According to some these first two Gardens are for *the foremost* (see 56:10c), who are also identified with *those brought nigh* (56:88), while the next two Gardens are for *the companions of the right* (see 56:8–9; Aj, IK). This interpretation finds support in a *ḥadīth:* "Two golden Gardens for *the foremost* and two silver Gardens for the *companions of the right*" (Aj, IK). *Green branches* translates *afnān,* which denotes branches that bear fruit and leaves providing both shade and nourishment. *Afnān* could also be read as a plural of *fann,* meaning "sort" or "variety," thus indicating many different kinds of trees and fruits.

50 Some see this verse as indicating that each garden has a spring of water that flows in it (Q). Others see it as an allusion to the springs mentioned in other verses, such as *Tasnīm* (83:27) and *Salsabīl* (76:18; Aj, IK, Q, Ṭ). It could also be understood as a reference to the rivers of wine and milk in 47:15.

52 *Two kinds* translates *zawjān,* which can also mean "varieties" or "pairs." Here it is understood to mean one kind that is familiar and one that is not (Z).

54 Cf. 76:13–14: *Therein they recline upon couches, seeing neither sun nor bitter cold. Its shade shall be close above them, and its clusters shall be made to hang low.* Reclining upon beds or couches is seen as an allusion to being content and at peace (R). The *rich brocade* is said to be a thick silk embroidered with gold (IK, Ṭ). Many comment on this verse with a sense of wonderment, remarking, "If this is the exterior, then what about the interior?" (Aj, IK). The fruits being *near at hand* indicates that they will be easy to access whenever one wishes (Aj, IK), similar to the reference to *low-hanging clusters* in 69:23.

56 *Therein* refers to the two Gardens. But it could also be rendered "upon them," as a reference to the *beds* mentioned in v. 54 (IK). Some also allow that it could refer to all the dwelling places of Heaven (Aj). *Maidens of modest gaze* means those who look upon none but their own spouses (Aj, IK, Q). *Touched* translates *yaṭmith,* which also implies loss of virginity when a woman is the direct object of the sentence and menstruation when she is the subject of the sentence (Iṣ). This verse can thus be taken to indicate both that the women of Paradise are chaste and that they are free of the burdens of menstruation and childbearing that beset women in this world.

your Lord's boons do you two deny? (58) Even as the ruby and as the coral stone are they. (59) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (60) Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness? (61) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (62) And beyond these two are two Gardens— (63) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?— (64) of deepest green. (65) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (66) In each are two fountains bubbling. (67) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (68) In each are fruits, date palms, and pomegranates. (69) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (70) Therein are good and beautiful ones; (71) so which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (72) Maidens secluded in pavilions; (73) so which of your Lord's boons do

58 The maidens of Paradise are said to be as pure as rubies and as white as coral stones (*marjān;* IK), which can be taken to mean tiny pearls as well as coral stone. If the latter, it is said to refer to the rosy color of their complexion (Aj). A *ḥadīth* states, "If a woman among the women of the people of the Garden were to look upon the earth, she would fill what is between them [the Garden and earth] with a scent, and all that is between them would become delightful. The veil (*naṣīf*) over her head is better than this world and all that is in it" (IK). The description of their beauty in this verse hearkens back to the description of the blessings of this earth in v. 22.

60 Cf. 10:26. According to many, this verse indicates that the reward for performing good deeds in this life is goodness in the Hereafter (Aj, Q), as in 42:23: *And whosoever accomplishes a good deed, We shall increase him in goodness thereby.* In this vein, it is said that the Prophet told his Companions this verse means, "Is the reward of one whom I have blessed with testifying to oneness (*tawḥīd*) aught but the Garden?" (Aj, Ṭs). According to al-Suddī, it means, "Is the reward of those who live a life of obedience in this world aught but generosity in the Hereafter?" (Aj). And a saying attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq asserts that the meaning is, "Is the reward of those to whom I have shown My Goodness before creation (*fi'l-azal*) other than that I shall continue to show them My Goodness after creation (*fi'l-abad*)" (Aj, Q). Some also connect this verse with the famous *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, in which the Prophet says that goodness (*iḥsān*) is "to worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you" (Aj). It can furthermore be taken to mean that a virtuous act is its own reward.

62 For the difference between the two Gardens described in vv. 62–76 and vv. 48–60, see 55:48c.

64 *Deepest green* (*mudhāmmatān*) indicates a very dark shade of green due to the density of vegetation. This is taken by some to indicate that the ground of these two Gardens is covered with thick vegetation, while in the first two Gardens trees predominate, so that they are *abounding in green branches* (v. 48).

66 The springs here are *bubbling,* whereas the springs of the higher Gardens mentioned in v. 50 are free-flowing (Aj, IK) and thus believed to be more copious.

68 According to some, this verse means that the fruits of the two lower Gardens are more limited than those of the higher Gardens, in which there were pairs or two kinds of every fruit (v. 52). *Date palms* and *pomegranates* are said to be specified because the former is particularly nutritious and the latter has medicinal properties (IK). These, along with the fig and the olive, are also considered fruits given to human beings here on earth that still retain something of their paradisal quality.

70–74 Whereas the maidens of the higher Gardens are said to be *of modest gaze* (*qāṣirāt*

you two deny? (74) Untouched as yet by man or jinn; (75) so which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (76) They recline upon green cushions and beautiful wonders. (77) So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny? (78) Blessed is the Name of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty.

*al-ṭarf;* v. 56), the maidens of the lower two Gardens are *secluded* (*maqṣūrāt*), which could indicate that they are enclosed or that their gaze is lowered. Those in the higher Gardens are described with an active participle in the Arabic, while those in the lower gardens are described with the passive participle from the same root, *q-ṣ-r*. This implies that those of the higher Gardens are chaste women who restrain their glances themselves, while those of the lower Gardens have their glances guarded for them (IK). For *wide-eyed maidens,* see 44:54c.

76 The *cushions* (*rafraf*) indicate thickly brocaded cushions or fabric that can be found wherever the inhabitants of Heaven desire (Aj); they can also be understood as a metaphor for ease and comfort. *Wonders* translates *ʿabqarī,* a word used to indicate anything of genius, magnificence, or rarity (Aj, IK). *ʿAbqar* is said to be the land of the jinn and is employed as an epithet for anything displaying great skillfulness or being beyond the ken of human understanding (R).

77 Regarding the thirty-one times that this refrain occurs in this *sūrah,* al-Nasafī writes, "Eight are mentioned following verses that enumerate the marvels of God's creation. . . . Seven follow verses wherein are mentioned the Fire and its severities, in accordance with the number of the doors of the Fire. After these seven, there are eight that follow a description of the two Gardens and their inhabitants, in accordance with the number of the doors of the Garden. And there are eight after that for the two Gardens that are below them. So whoever affirms the first eight and acts in accord with what that requires, the doors of the Garden will be open to him and the doors of Hellfire will be shut to him."

78 Just as the phrase *Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* marks the end of the discussion of earthly blessings in v. 27, here it marks the end of the discussion of heavenly blessings. Here it modifies *thy Lord,* just as it modified *the Face of thy Lord* in v. 27. According to another canonical reading, *Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* could here be read as modifying *the Name* (i.e., *dhū,* rather than *dhī*; Q, Z). It is said that the Prophet advised his followers, "Persist [in invoking] 'O Possessor of Majesty and Bounty' " (IK). Many record an account attributed to ʿĀʾishah that after prayers the Prophet would often sit and say, "O God, Thou art Peace, and peace comes from Thee. Blessed art Thou, *Possessed of Majesty and Bounty*" (IK).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 56

# The Event

## *al-Wāqiᶜah*

All commentators consider *al-Wāqiᶜah* to be a Makkan *sūrah*, although some maintain that vv. 81–82 are from the Madinan period (Āl), and others say that v. 83 is Madinan (IJ). A minority consider vv. 39–40 to have been revealed during the Prophet's emigration from Makkah to Madinah (Q). The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of *the Event* in v. 1, a reference to the Day of Judgment.

The central theme of this *sūrah* is the nature of the Hereafter for three different classes of people, *the foremost, the companions of the right,* and *the companions of the left.* Since the previous *sūrah, al-Raḥmān,* also mentions the states of the Hereafter, this *sūrah* can be seen as a continuation and completion of it (Aj). Although *al-Raḥmān* deals mostly with the different blessings attained in different levels of Paradise, *al-Wāqiᶜah* contrasts the blessings of Paradise, which are enjoyed by *the foremost* and *the companions of the right,* with the punishments of Hell, which are suffered by *the companions of the left.* The *sūrah* comprises five overlapping sections: the first (vv. 1–7) discusses the signs of the Day of Judgment; the second and longest (vv. 7–56) compares the ends of the three groups mentioned above; the third (vv. 57–74) presents reminders of God's Power and Generosity as proofs or signs of God's ability to resurrect; the fourth (vv. 75–82) speaks of the nature of the revelation, chastising those who scorn it; and the fifth (vv. 83–96) discusses the nature of death and the Afterlife, returning to the threefold classification that had been discussed at length in the second section, and concludes with an exhortation to glorify God.

According to a well-known *ḥadīth,* "Whosoever recites *al-Wāqiᶜah* every night shall never be afflicted by need" (Aj, Āl, IK, Q). Ibn ᶜAjībah states that this is because whoever understands the things mentioned in this *sūrah* regarding the Hereafter will set about preparing for it. The attribution of such qualities to this *sūrah* has led to its being one of the most often recited *sūrahs* of the Quran, especially in moments of great significance and portent, including for the dying or recently dead.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) When the Event befalls, (2) none shall deny its befalling, (3) abasing, exalting. (4) When the earth is shaken violently, (5) and the mountains are pulverized to powder, (6) such that they become scattered dust, (7) and you shall be of three kinds: (8) the companions of the right; what of the companions of the right? (9) And the companions of the left; what of the companions of the left?

1–2 When v. 1 is read with a full stop at the end, *when* (*idhā*) is taken to introduce something too terrifying to be mentioned directly. If it is read continuously with v. 2, it is considered an adverbial clause: "When the Event befalls, no denial is there of its befalling." The first verse may also be read as a reference to the previous *sūrah,* meaning that all of the blessings promised to the companions of the right and to the foremost will be granted to them *when the Event befalls.* In each reading, *the Event* refers to the eschatological event of the end of the world leading to the Day of Judgment. *The Event* (*al-wāqiᶜah*), deriving from the verb "to fall" (*waqaᶜa*), which can also mean "to happen" or "to occur," expresses a sense of inevitability, as if to say, "When what must happen happens" (Aj). It will be so overwhelming that none of those who denied it in this life will be able to deny it any longer (Q). These verses can also be seen as an allusion to individual transformation through sudden or profound spiritual realization.

3 The event of the Hour of Judgment abases some, lowering them into the depths of the Fire, and exalts others, raising them to the ranks of Heaven. Some take this verse as an allusion to the destruction of the natural order, when the stars and mountains will fall (e.g., 77:8–10; Aj, Ṭ). From another perspective, the Truth abases those who realize it by leveling everything within the soul that may have been opposed to the Truth, and thus exalts the ones it abases by preparing them to receive the Truth. As Ibn ᶜAjībah expresses it, "The supreme Truth exists in the soul like butter in milk: only when the milk is churned does the butter appear."

4 Cf. 99:1; 73:14.

5–6 That *mountains* will be destroyed at the end of the world is mentioned in several verses, as in 69:14, where they are *ground up in a single grinding,* and in 70:9 and 101:5, where they are likened to *carded wool* (see also 18:47; 52:10; 73:14; 81:3). The destruction of mountains symbolizes the destruction of all that seems firm and everlasting, as in 27:88: *And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away like clouds—the work of God, Who perfects all things.* Here *scattered dust* translates *habāʾ,* which literally means "floating specks of dust that can only be seen when struck by light" (Aj, Q, Ṭ); the image of *scattered dust* is similar to that of *heaps of shifting sand* in 73:14.

7 Almost all commentators take these *three* divisions to indicate the three categories into which human beings will be divided on the Day of Resurrection.

8–9 In Arabic, as in numerous other cultural-linguistic systems, the right is associated with righteousness and blessedness. The *companions of the right* are those who will be seated to the right of God's Throne, who will receive the record of their deeds in their right hand (see 17:71; 69:19; 84:7), and who are described as having *light spreading before them and on their right* (57:12). They are believed to comprise the majority of the residents of the Garden (IK). The *companions of the left* are those who will receive the record of their deeds in their left hand (see 69:25). *What of* (*mā*) in both verses could also be taken to indicate amazement, thus meaning, "How wondrous are the companions of the right" and "How wretched are the companions of the left" (Z). In one account of the Prophet Muhammad's Ascension through the heavens (see 17:1c; 53:1–17c), he is reported to have said, "We went over the nearest heaven, and

(10) And the foremost shall be the foremost. (11) They are the ones brought nigh, (12) in Gardens of bliss— (13) many from those of old, (14) and few from those of later times— (15) upon embroidered couches, (16) reclining upon them, facing

there we saw a man sitting with some people on his right and some on his left. When he looked toward his right, he laughed, and when he looked toward his left, he wept. Then he said, 'Welcome! O pious Prophet and pious son.' I asked Gabriel, 'Who is he?' He replied, 'He is Adam, and the people on his right and left are the souls of his offspring. Those on his right are the people of Paradise, and those on his left are the people of Hell. When he looks toward his right, he laughs, and when he looks toward his left, he weeps.'"

10 *The foremost* translates *al-sābiqūn,* which derives from the verb *sabaqa,* meaning "to go first, to go ahead, to outstrip" or "to win a race." The syntax of this verse, in which the same word is the subject and the complement, is used to express something that is great and known to all (Aj, Z). The commentaries vary in identifying *the foremost.* Many identify them with the spiritual elite of the community, who understand the inner meaning of the religion and walk toward God in this life. Most commentators consider *the foremost* to be the prophets (IK, JJ). Some include the saints, the truthful (*ṣiddīqūn*), and the martyrs with them, since they too "outstrip" all others in faith (Ṭū), while others believe the prophets to be beyond *the foremost* (Aj). Other interpretations include: the first to accept Islam (Aj, IK, Ṭ); the first members of the religious community (*ummah;* IK, Ṭ); the sincere (*mukhliṣ*), who are foremost in responding to the call of God and spare nothing in seeking God's Contentment (Z); the first to come to the mosque, and the first to set out in the way of God (IK, Ṭ); those who are foremost in attaining virtue (Aj); and the residents of the highest parts of Heaven (see 83:18; IK). According to some, *the foremost* will not be subject to the Reckoning before God on the Day of Judgment, going straight to Paradise, while *the companions of the left* and *the companions of the right* will stand before God for judgment (R).

11–14 These verses could mean that the foremost are "*brought nigh* in Gardens of bliss" (Ṭ), *brought nigh* to the Divine Throne (Z), or *brought nigh* unto God Himself (Aj, JJ). Ibn ᶜAjībah notes that *the ones brought nigh* were greater in earlier times with regard to quantity, not quality. Those toward the end of time are considered by some to be of a higher degree, because they have awakened in a time of heedlessness and exerted themselves in a time of lassitude. Thus because they achieve spiritual awakening without many of the supports available to previous generations, God grants them a rank given to no others (Aj). Regarding the spiritual devolution of human beings over time, the Prophet said to his Companions, "You live at a time when whoever omits one-tenth of what he has been commanded [to do] shall be ruined. But there will come a time when whoever fulfills one-tenth of what he has been commanded [to do] shall be saved."

Some maintain that *those of old* means earlier religious communities and *those of later times* means the Muslim community (IK, JJ, Ṭ). Others interpret them as references to earlier and later generations of Muslims (Z), in accordance with a famous *ḥadīth,* "The best generation is mine, then those who follow them, then those who follow them" (Aj, IK). *The foremost* among *those of later times* are seen as those mentioned in another *ḥadīth:* "A group among my community ceases not to follow the truth (*ẓāhirīna ᶜala'l-ḥaqq*) until the Hour is come, unharmed by those who fail to support them and those who oppose them" (IK). Regarding the conditions of later times that cause others not to support *the foremost,* a *ḥadīth* states that at this time, "rapacity reigns, passions are obeyed, the world is given priority, and each person admires his own opinion." From this perspective, these verses point to an ever greater spiritual devolution of human beings rather than progress over time.

15–16 Several verses indicate that the people of Paradise recline upon *couches,* meaning that they are content and at peace (see 18:31c; 55:54c). *Embroidered* is here interpreted to mean that the cushions are encrusted with gold or pearls and rubies (Q, Sh). Some also view the couches as thrones, indicating that those reclining upon them have attained a high rank (see also 18:31;

one another. (17) Immortal youths wait upon them (18) with goblets, ewers, and a cup from a flowing spring, (19) wherefrom they suffer neither headache nor stupefaction, (20) with fruits as they choose, (21) and the meat of birds as they desire, (22) and [there shall be] wide-eyed maidens, (23) the likeness of concealed pearls, (24) as a recompense for that which they used to do. (25) They hear no idle talk therein, nor incitement to sin, (26) save that "Peace! Peace!" is uttered.

36:56; 52:20; 76:13; 83:23, 35). *Facing one another* (cf. 15:47; 37:44; 44:53) implies that none shall need to sit behind another since all will be equally exalted.

17 According to the Islamic tradition, those who died before they were of the age to be held accountable for their sins or rewarded for their good deeds serve the believers in Paradise. According to a saying attributed to the Prophet's Companion Salmān al-Fārsī, "The servants of heaven are the children of the idolaters" (Aj, Q, Sh). In contrast, in a statement attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, they are said to be the children of Muslims (Q, Sh).

18–19 The mention of drinking vessels is used as a metonym for the drink itself. *Ewers* translates *abārīq,* which is said to derive from the verb *baraqa,* meaning, "to shine, glitter, sparkle," and is thus taken to indicate vessels that glitter and sparkle from their purity (Q, Sh). From *a flowing spring* (cf. 37:45) indicates that the liquid is pure and the source never runs dry. Though wine is forbidden to Muslims in this life (see 4:43; 5:90), they are said to enjoy a wine in the Hereafter that bears none of the negative side effects of the wine of this world (cf. 83:25–28). *Nor stupefaction* (cf. 37:47) translates *lā yunzafūn,* which can also be read as describing the springs, in which case it is read *lā yunzifūn,* an expression said of a well that does not dry up, thus indicating that this wine will never cease to flow (Q). For more on the wine of Paradise, see 47:15, which speaks of Paradise containing *rivers of wine delicious for those who imbibe.* Of this wine, the poet ʿUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235) writes in his *Wine Ode:* "It refines the character of those who drink it: / The irresolute it guides to the path of resolve, / The miser's hand it makes generous, / And when anger strikes it instills / Forbearance in one with no clemency."

20–21 Cf. 52:22; 77:42. Several other verses also refer to the fruits of Paradise that will be at the disposal of the believers (e.g., 37:42; 38:61; 43:73); see 36:57c. The birds of Paradise are described in several *aḥādīth* as multicolored birds with extraordinary necks and wings; yet when people expressed wonder at their beauty, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Those who eat them are more blessed than are they" (Q, Sy). Elsewhere it is said that the inhabitants of Paradise *shall have whatsoever they will* (16:31; 25:16; 39:34; 42:22; 50:35).

22–24 For the meaning of *wide-eyed maidens,* see 44:54c. Here it may be read as the subject of the sentence along with *immortal youths* (v. 17), meaning that both serve *the foremost.* Or it may be read as another of those blessings that the foremost receive in Paradise. The likening of *wide-eyed maidens* to *concealed pearls* indicates both their exquisite beauty and that they remain untouched, as in 55:56 and 55:74. Regarding all such allusions to the blessings of Paradise, there is a famous *ḥadīth qudsī:* "God says, 'I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being; so recite if you will, *No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it* [32:17].'"

25–26 Cf. 14:23; 19:62; 52:23; 78:35; 88:11. *Nor incitement to sin* (see also 52:23) translates *taʾthīm,* which can also indicate that there is no lying or any form of sinful speech. These verses can be taken to mean that the inhabitants of the Garden will hear only the greeting "Peace be upon you" (Sh), with which Muslims greet one another in this world, that they will hear only peaceful speech, or that they will hear the words "Peace, Peace" (Aj), as the discourse of the people of the Garden is said to be remembrance of God and wisdom (Aj). *Peace* (*salām*) as employed here comprises spiritual soundness, freedom from all evils and defects, and inner contentment.

(27) And the companions of the right; what of the companions of the right? (28) Among thornless lote trees, (29) clustered plantains, (30) and extended shade, (31) gushing water, (32) and abundant fruit, (33) neither out of reach, nor forbidden, (34) and [upon] raised beds. (35) Truly We brought them into being as a [new] creation, (36) then made for them virgins, (37) amorous peers, (38) for the companions of the right— (39) many from those of old, (40) and many from those

27 As translated, *what of the companions of the right?* expresses wonder at their state (Aj). Others interpret it as an expression of God's Grace, meaning, "How fortunate are the companions of the right" (IK).

28 Whereas the lote trees of this world have thorns and few fruits, those of Paradise are said to have no thorns and many fruits (IK). Arabian lote trees are believed to be mentioned as a tree of Heaven because of their large leaves under which one can find shade (Iṣ), and can thus be understood as a reference to shade as part of the contentment one finds in Paradise. *Thornless* translates *makhḍūd,* which could also mean "fruit-laden," implying that they almost touch the ground.

29 *Clustered* (*manḍūd*) indicates fruit that covers a tree from top to bottom (JJ) and is so dense that the trunk of the tree is no longer visible (Aj). Though most interpret the trees bearing the clusters as *plantains,* which are called *ṭalḥ* in Yemen (JJ), others believe what is meant is a large thorny shrub that used to grow in the Ḥijāz (IK).

30 According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said, "In the Garden there is a tree in whose shade a rider would travel for a hundred years without the shade being broken. That is the *extended shade*" (Q, R, Ṭ). *Shade* translates *ẓill,* which also denotes "covering" or "shelter," and can be used figuratively to imply "protection" (Iṣ). *Ẓill* is also taken by some to indicate "a state of ease, pleasure, and plenty," thus "happiness." This verse and other references to "shade" can thus be seen as allusions to the eternal security and felicity attained in Paradise.

31 *Gushing* translates *mamdūd,* which indicates water that is not confined to channels (IK, R, Ṭ, Z), and is interpreted to mean that water flows to those in Paradise wherever and however they wish without any effort on their part (Aj, Z). While there is wine for *the foremost* and *boiling liquid* for *the companions of the left, the companions of the right* enjoy pure water.

32–33 That this fruit is not *out of reach* is consistent with the descriptions of *low-hanging clusters* (69:23, cf. 76:14) and the fruits *near at hand* (55:54) mentioned in other verses. It could also be translated "not cut off," meaning that there is no season in which this fruit is not available (IK, R, Z).

34 *Raised beds* translates *furush,* which can also be used in classical Arabic as an allusion to women (Iṣ). Thus several commentators relate this verse to 36:55–56: *Truly the inhabitants of the Garden on that Day will be busy rejoicing, they and their spouses reclining upon couches in the shade* (Aj, Z). This interpretation is supported by the use of the feminine plural pronoun *hunna* in the following verse, so that this verse could be read "spouses made high," in which case it is related to the mention of the *wide-eyed maidens* in v. 22; 44:54; 52:20; 56:22.

35 *As a [new] creation* could also be translated "in an immediate manner." This verse implies that the maidens of Heaven are always fresh and untouched.

36–37 According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet was asked about those referred to in vv. 35–37 by his wife Umm Salamah. He responded, "They are those who in this world were rendered gray, bleary-eyed, and blind. After their old age God will make them [youthful] *peers*" (Āl, IK, Q, Ṭ). *Amorous* implies intimacy and love, while *peers* implies both that they are of the same age, which is said to be thirty-three years (Aj, Q), and that they are spiritually compatible.

38–40 Although vv. 35–37 can be read as a description of the *wide-eyed maidens* (v. 22) when v. 34 is read as an allusion to them, others see *the wide-eyed maidens* as bestowed upon *the foremost,* and the *amorous peers* as bestowed upon the

of later times. (41) And the companions of the left; what of the companions of the left? (42) Amidst scorching wind and boiling liquid, (43) and the shadow of black smoke, (44) neither cool nor refreshing. (45) Truly before that they lived in luxury, (46) would persist in great sin, (47) and would say, "What! When we are dead and have become dust and bones, are we to be resurrected? (48) What! And our fathers of old?" (49) Say, "Truly those of old and those of later times (50) are gathered for the tryst of a day appointed." (51) Then indeed you—O you straying deniers— (52) shall eat from a tree of Zaqqūm, (53) and fill your bellies there-

*companions of the right* (Q). Whereas *the foremost* who are *brought nigh* are few in later generations, the *companions of the right* will continue to be plentiful as time goes on.

41 Just as this form of expression indicates wonder at the state of the *companions of the right* in v. 27, here it indicates wonder at the ignominy of the *companions of the left.*

42 *Scorching wind* translates *samūm,* which indicates a wind that penetrates the pores (*masāmm*) of one's body (Aj, Q, Z). *Boiling liquid* translates *ḥamīm,* which can mean both intense heat and severe cold, both of which are said to afflict the denizens of Hell (see 78:24–25).

43–44 In contrast to the *extended shade* (v. 30) that provides unending security and peace for the inhabitants of Paradise, the shade of Hell has no positive attributes (Z); the comforting image of shade is replaced with the ominous image of the *shadow of black smoke,* which obscures true vision and indicates impure, even choking air. Like the passions and distractions of this world, such shadows are ephemeral, appearing to grant shade, but only obscuring true vision and understanding by cutting off one's supply of the air of intellectual and spiritual clarity until they blow away. Such ephemeral shade can even harm the one who seeks shelter in it, as in 77:29–32: *Away to that which you used to deny! Away to a threefold shadow that provides no shade, nor avails against the flame. Indeed, it throws up sparks like massive tree trunks.*

45 That *they lived in luxury* indicates that the companions of the left had no inkling of the judgment to which they would be subjected. It translates *mutrafīn,* which can also indicate pursuing pleasures without any moral considerations.

46 That the companions of the left *would persist in great sin* alludes to the fact that God's Forgiveness was open to them, had they desisted and repented. *Great sin* can mean sin in general or the one *great sin,* namely, polytheism (Aj, IK), which is considered the only unforgiveable sin, as in 4:48 and 4:116: *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will.* In the present verse, *sin* translates *ḥinth,* a word that alludes to the phrase *ḥanitha fī yamīnihi,* meaning, "He broke the oath that he had taken with his right hand" (Q, Sh, Z), and could thus be seen as an allusion to breaking the covenant with God (see 7:172c). When a youth reaches the age of puberty it is said that he or she has reached the age of *ḥinth,* meaning the age at which a person can now break the original covenant made with God before the creation of the world and must now adopt the observance of a revealed religion in order to properly maintain the covenant.

47–48 These verses express a common objection to the Quranic teaching regarding bodily resurrection (cf. 17:49, 98; 23:82–83; 36:78; 37:16–17, 53; 50:3; 79:11).

49–50 All human beings from the beginning of creation until the end of time will be gathered together on the Day of Judgment; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

51–53 Just as the inhabitants of Paradise have fruits that befit their station, so too the inhabitants of Hell are provided with "nourishment" befitting their station. The *tree of Zaqqūm* is best

with. (54) Then you shall drink from boiling liquid, (55) drinking as do parched camels. (56) This shall be their welcome on the Day of Judgment. (57) We created you. Would that you affirm it. (58) Have you considered that which you emit? (59) Is it you who created it or are We the creators? (60) We have decreed death among you, and none outstrips Us (61) in replacing [you with] your likenesses and bringing you into being again in what you know not. (62) You have indeed known the first genesis. Why, then, do you not reflect? (63) Have you considered what you reap? (64) Is it you who sow it or are We the sowers? (65) Had We willed, We would have turned it to chaff, such that you would remain bitterly jesting, (66) [saying] "Truly we have suffered loss. (67) Nay! We are deprived." (68) Have

described in 44:43–46: *Truly the tree of Zaqqūm is the food of the sinner, like molten lead boiling in their bellies, like the boiling of boiling liquid* (also see commentary on 37:62–63; 44:43–46). That their stomachs are full implies that they continue eating even when full, because their rapacious natures can never be satiated.

54–55 For *boiling liquid* (*ḥamīm*), see 56:42c. *Parched camels* translates *al-hīm,* which relates to rabid camels (*hiyām*); the disease gives them an unquenchable thirst (Aj, IK, Z). *Al-hīm* is also interpreted to mean smooth earth covered with sand, indicating that they drink sand or a sandy beverage that increases thirst rather than quenching it (Q, Z).

56 *Welcome* translates *nuzul,* which literally means food prepared to honor "one who is arriving" (*nāzil*). There is a sense of irony here, as if to say that they have received the meal they sought, similar to the irony in 3:21: *Give them glad tidings of a painful punishment* (Q); and 4:138: *Give glad tidings to the hypocrites that for them awaits a painful punishment.*

57 *Would that you affirm it* could also mean, "Even if you do not affirm [it]." Here the deniers are being asked to affirm either that God created them, that they will be resurrected (Q, Z), or both.

58–59 *That which you emit* is taken by most as a reference either to sperm alone (Ṭ, Z), as in 53:46, *from a drop when emitted* (Z), or to both sperm and ovum, as in some interpretations of 86:6–7. For v. 59, see also 52:35.

60 *We have decreed death among you* indicates that God takes people at various times, through various infirmities, and for varied reasons that they cannot discern (Aj, Qu) and that no one is able to avoid or delay the moment of death that God has ordained. For a similar verse, see 70:41.

61–62 These verses are taken to mean that if one recognizes that it is God Who creates and fashions human beings in *the first genesis,* meaning the first time, one will recognize that God has the ability to resurrect them (Q). Some also take it to indicate that God can resurrect human beings as monkeys or pigs or any form He chooses (Aj, Q). *Why, then, do you not reflect?* could also be rendered as an expression of amazement, "Yet you do not reflect!" (Q), or of regret, "Would that you had reflected."

63–67 This pericope is similar to 18:42, which says of a disbeliever who had lost his crop: *So he began to wring his hands on account of what he had spent on it, while it lay in waste upon its trellises, saying, "Would that I had not ascribed anyone as partner unto my Lord!"* It is reported that the Prophet said, "Let none of you say, 'We caused [something] to grow,' but rather, 'We sowed it'" (Aj, Āl, IK, Q). There is also an implication, as in the next pericope, that human beings fail to be thankful for the provisions God gives them, focusing more upon what does not come to fruition than upon what God provides them, as is also implied in v. 82. *Bitterly jesting* translates *tafakkahūn,* and here indicates both amazement

you considered the water that you drink? (69) Is it you who sent it down from the clouds, or is it We Who send down? (70) If We had willed, We would have made it bitter; will you not, then, give thanks? (71) Have you considered the fire that you kindle? (72) Is it you who brought into being the tree thereof, or is it We Who bring into being? (73) We made it a reminder and an enjoyment for the desert dwellers. (74) So glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Magnificent! (75) I swear by the places where the stars descend! (76) And truly it is a magnificent oath, if you but knew. (77) Truly it is a Noble Quran (78) in a Book concealed. (79) None touch it, save those made pure, (80) a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. (81) Do you then scorn this discourse, (82) and make the denial thereof your provision? (83) Why, then, when it reaches the throat, (84) while you are

and regret (Q). *Deprived* translates *maḥrūmūn,* which indicates someone who has been cut off from receiving provision (Aj).

68–70 Other verses allude to God's power to remove water at any time (e.g., 18:41; 67:30), and in several verses, *water . . . sent down* is used as an allusion to blessings from God (e.g., 35:27; 39:21; 41:39); in others, the manner in which God brings forth life through water is cited as a sign for those who believe (e.g., 2:164; 6:99; 7:57; 80:25–30); and 21:30 states, *And We made every living thing from water* (see also 24:45; 25:54). Ingratitude for water thus implies ingratitude for all God's Blessings and for the gift of life itself.

71–73 Fire is *a reminder* insofar as it reminds one of the Resurrection or the Fire in Hell (Aj, Bd, Ṭ), regarding which the Prophet said, "This fire of yours that human beings kindle contains but a seventieth of the heat in Hell" (Ṭ). *Desert dwellers* translates *muqwīn,* which can also refer to all travelers (Q, Sh, Ṭ) and is taken by some as a reference to everyone who benefits from the use of fire (Q, Sh, Ṭ).

74 This is one of many verses in which human beings are enjoined to glorify God. It can also mean, "Glorify by the Name of thy Lord," thus indicating a command to invoke the Name of God. The term for "glorification," *tasbīḥ,* indicates declaring something transcendent beyond all else. In this context it indicates that, although God is responsible for all of the things mentioned in vv. 58–73, He is completely beyond them, both insofar as He performs many other tasks and insofar as none of their perceived deficiencies can be attributed to Him. *The Magnificent* can be taken to modify either *Name* or *Lord* (Bd). This verse can also be seen as a command to glorify God, since God's Glory is beyond what anyone else can say of it (Aj).

75 *I swear* translates *fa-lā uqsimu.* In this context, the particle *lā* in *fa-lā* could imply emphasis or negation. Most interpret it to function as the former, but some see it as a particle of negation, in which case it would be translated, "Nay, I swear" (Q, Sh, Ṭ). The verse would then mean, "I denounce what you say, [and] I swear . . ." *The places where the stars descend* most likely refers to the time, place, or manner in which celestial bodies set or to the stations of the stars referred to in 85:1 and 25:61 (R, Ṭ). It can also be taken as a reference to the fading of the stars on the Day of Judgment (see 81:2; R, Ṭ). When taken as a reference to the setting of the stars, it is seen as an allusion to the times of night that are thought to be best for supererogatory devotions (Aj; see 76:26; commentary on 73:1–2, 20). *Stars* translates *nujūm,* which could also mean "portions or progressive installments." It could thus be rendered, "I swear by the descending of the progressive installments [of the Quran]," an interpretation attributed to some early commentators who see this verse as a reference to the gradual revelation of the Quran, three, four, and five verses at a time, over a period of twenty-three years (610–32; IK, Q, Ṭ); see 17:106c; 25:32c. *The*

*places where the stars descend* can also be seen as an allusion to the hearts of God's servants, angels, messengers, and the righteous among the believers into which the stars or the progressive installments of the Quran descend (R).

76 This verse is read by some with a full grammatical stop after *oath,* in which case *if you but knew* is read as a conditional phrase with an implied response, such as, "If you but knew, you would affirm" (Aj, R), or "If you but knew, you would act on what that knowledge entails" (Aj), or "If you but knew, you would strive to attain certainty" (R).

77 *It* can be seen as a reference to everything that has been mentioned thus far in this *sūrah* or to the whole of the Quran (R). In this instance, *Quran* may be read according to its linguistic meaning, "Truly it is a noble recitation." *Noble* translates *karīm,* which indicates the joining together of all praiseworthy attributes (R, Sh). What is *noble* (*karīm*) is said to be of pure origin and manifest bounty (R).

78 In this context, *Book* is taken by most to mean the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Aj, Q, R, Sh, Ṭ), which is said to contain all of the books of revelation. That it is both *noble* and *concealed* indicates that the Quran is preserved from the influence of anyone but God and thus that it is not, as the Prophet's detractors alleged, the whisperings of jinn or *fables of those of old* (6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13; R).

79 *It* may be read as referring to *a Noble Quran* (v. 77), or *a Book concealed* (v. 78) and thus to the *Preserved Tablet* (Aj, Q, R, Ṭ). Others take it as a reference to the physical book containing the written Arabic Quran (*muṣḥaf;* Aj, Q, Ṭ). Based upon this latter interpretation, many interpret this verse to mean that no one may touch the physical Quran unless they are in a state of ritual purity, though there is extensive debate regarding this issue. If taken as a reference to the *Book concealed,* then *those made pure* can be taken as a reference to the angels (Aj, Q, Ṭ) or to the angels and prophets. In this vein, some relate this verse to 80:13–14, which speaks of *pages honored, exalted and purified* (Q, Ṭ). It can also be understood to mean that no one will actually understand the allusions of the verses that they are reciting, save one whose heart has been purified (Aj). As al-Ghazzālī writes in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences,* "Just as the external side of the leather of a Quranic codex and its pages are protected against the external skin of a person who touches it except when he is pure, so also its internal meaning is veiled, by the authority of its greatness and might, from the internal aspect of the reader's mind, except when it is pure from all defilement and is illuminated by the light of glorification and reverence. Just as every hand is not fit to touch the leather of the codex, so too every tongue is not fit to recite its letters, nor every mind fit to understand its meanings" (*Iḥyāʾ,* K. *Qirāʾat al-Qurʾān*).

80 This verse is repeated in 69:43. Both instances can be taken as direct responses to those who said that the Quran was *fables of those of old* (6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 68:15; 83:13), poetry, or mere whisperings from Satan and jinn. In this vein, it is related to 26:210–11: *And the satans did not descend with it, nor is it fitting for them, nor are they able.*

81 *Scorn* translates *mudhinūn,* which implies both demeaning and denying or "those who take something lightly" (Aj). It can also indicate those who appear tractable and compliant in order to hide their disbelief (Q). The verbal form *adhana* is thus translated "compromise," when it is said of the disbelievers in 68:9: *They wish that thou might compromise and that they might compromise.* In this *sūrah, mudhinūn* can also be understood to indicate those who take religion lightly and are thus willing to deny the revelation secretly, while pretending to believe in it publicly.

82 This verse is interpreted to mean, "Do you deny that your provision is from God, when in fact you should thank God for your provision?" (Aj, Q). It is reported that some read this verse with "thanks" (*shukr*) in the place of *provision* (IK, Q, Sh, Ṭ, Z), though this is probably a case where an interpretation was recorded as a noncanonical reading. According to a *ḥadīth,* one morning after a downpour, the Prophet said, "God has said, 'Some of My servants arose as believers in Me and some as disbelievers. He who has said, "We have had a rainfall by the grace (*faḍl*) and Mercy of God," is a believer in Me and a disbeliever in the stars; and he who has said, "We have had a rainfall by the rising of such and such [a star]," is a disbeliever in Me and a believer in the stars'" (IK, Q). Some say that it was in relation to this event that this verse was revealed (Sh, Ṭ).

83 *It* is a reference to the soul when it reaches the *throat* at the moment of death, as in 75:26–28:

looking on (85) —and We are nearer to him than you, though you see not— (86) why, then, if you are unconstrained, (87) do you not return it, if you are truthful? (88) So if one be among those brought nigh, (89) then comfort, bounty, and a Garden of bliss. (90) And if one be among the companions of the right, (91) then peace unto thee from the companions of the right. (92) But if one be among the

*Nay! But when it reaches the collarbones, and it is said, "Who will [make him] ascend?" And he knows for certain that it is the parting.*

84 This verse refers to those who are *looking on* as another dies, yet have no ability to make the soul stay in the body (IK, Ṭ). Vv. 83–85 point to the unique perspective that death imparts both to the dying and to those witnessing the death of another. Suddenly one realizes that the connection to this world is ephemeral and that God is ever near. Upon witnessing death, one is thus reminded that *truly we are God's, and unto Him we return* (2:156).

85 God is nearer to human beings at all times than they are to themselves, and He has power over them at every moment, despite their illusions to the contrary, as in 50:16: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.* The manner in which God exercises this power at the moment of death is most clearly expressed in 6:61–62: *And He is Dominant over His servants. He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, Our messengers take him, and they neglect not their duty. Then they are returned unto God, their true Master. Surely judgment belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners.*

86–87 This verse asks, "If you do not owe your life to God and are yourself responsible for it, why do you not control the moment of death when the soul will be returned whence it came?" or "Why are you unable to return the soul to the body after it has reached the throat?" (Aj, IK, Q). *Unconstrained* translates *ghayr madīnīn,* which could also mean "if you are not indebted," indicating, "If you truly own your own soul and do not owe the debt of your soul to God, then you should be able to control whence it came and whither it will go."

88–94 This last section returns to the categories of human beings discussed in the first half of the *sūrah*. Each reference is in the singular, as if referring to the soul of the dying person mentioned in vv. 83–87, but nonetheless entails a general discussion of what confronts all souls at the moment of death. These verses are read by some as a discussion of the intermediate realm said to be experienced by all souls after the smaller resurrection, when they reside in the grave before the final resurrection of all human beings for the Day of Judgment (Aj); regarding this intermediary realm, known as the *barzakh,* and the relationship between the two resurrections, see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

88–89 *Those brought nigh* will be relieved of the cares of this world (Aj, Q, Sh, Ṭ). *Comfort* is interpreted as an allusion to being in God's Mercy (*raḥmah*), a cooling breeze (*nasīm;* Aj, Q), or the direct vision of God's Face, while *bounty* alludes to hearing God's Word (Q). *Bounty* translates *rayḥān,* which is also the name for sweet basil. *Rayḥān* is also rendered *fragrant herbs* in 55:12, where it refers to the blessings of this world rather than the bounties of the next. As employed here, some say it refers to the basil of this earth (Th), while others say it refers to the scent of Paradise, a perfume that fills the souls of *those brought nigh* (Aj, IK). Several commentators quote a saying attributed to Abū al-ʿĀliyah (d. 90/708), a Quran teacher among the second generation of Muslims: "None among *those brought nigh* departs this world until they have been given some of the *rayḥān* of the Garden; so he smells it, and is then taken" (Aj, IK, Th). *Rayḥān* is also understood as an allusion to and symbol of the provisions in Heaven or to Heaven itself (Aj, Th). Others say *comfort* means being saved from the Fire, and *bounty* means entering the Everlasting Abode (Th). Still others say *comfort* refers to the grave and *bounty* refers to the Garden (Th).

90–91 These verses can be understood to mean that, after souls are questioned by the angels (see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in

deniers who are astray, (93) then a welcome of boiling liquid, (94) and burning in Hellfire. (95) Verily, this is the truth of certainty; (96) so glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Magnificent!

the Quran"), one who is among *the companions of the right* will be greeted with salutations of peace *from the companions of the right* (Aj) or salutations from the angels (IK), as in 41:30–31: *Truly those who say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm, the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Fear not, nor grieve, and rejoice in the Garden that you have been promised. We are your protectors in the life of this world and in the Hereafter; therein you shall have whatsoever your souls desire, and therein you shall have whatsoever you call for"* (IK). In this vein, these verses are also interpreted as an indication that they are promised safety from any and all harm (Q). The shift to the second-person singular, *thee,* is interpreted by some to mean that *the companions of the right* give salutations of peace to the Prophet, saying, "Peace unto thee, O Muhammad" (Aj, Q, Th). Alternately, it can be understood as an address to the individual who hears or reads this verse.

92–94 *Welcome* translates *nuzul;* see 56:56c. V. 93 is similar to 37:67: *Then on top of it they will have a brew of a boiling liquid;* for the broader implications of *boiling liquid* (*ḥamīm*), see 56:42c. As with vv. 88–91, some see these verses as referring to the intermediary realm, though others cite them as proof that disbelievers may be cast into the Fire at the moment of death (Aj). They can also be understood as describing both their punishment in the intermediate realm after the lesser resurrection yet before the greater resurrection and their punishment in Hell after the greater resurrection; for the distinction between these two resurrections, see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

95 *This* is read as a reference to what has been mentioned in the immediately preceding verses regarding states of souls in the intermediate realm (R, Ṭ) or to all that has been mentioned in this *sūrah* (Aj, Q, Sh). *The truth of certainty* is understood by most to indicate "the truth of what is certain" (Q, R, Sh, Ṭ). It is reported that regarding this verse Qatādah (d. 117/726), one of the foremost commentators from the third generation of Muslim scholars, said, "God does not leave anyone until He has informed him of this Quran; as for the believer, he is made certain of it in this world, and that benefits him on the Day of Resurrection. As for the disbeliever, he is made certain of it on the Day of Resurrection when certainty of it will not benefit him" (Q, Ṭ). According to this interpretation, this verse could be taken as a reference to the entire Quran (R). The *truth of certainty* is considered by many to be a reference to the highest level of certainty, above the *knowledge of certainty* (102:5) and the *eye of certainty* (102:7); see 102:5c. In discussing these levels, some liken the *knowledge of certainty* to hearing of or being informed of a fire, the *eye of certainty* to seeing the fire, and the *truth of certainty* to being consumed by the fire; see 27:7c.

96 *So,* which translates the particle *fa,* can be understood to indicate either the order of actions or that the truth that this *sūrah* contains requires the affirmation of God's Greatness and Transcendence (Aj).

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 57

# Iron

## *al-Ḥadīd*

Some scholars consider *al-Ḥadīd* Makkan, while most consider it Madinan (Āl, IK, JJ, Sh). The sixth/twelfth-century commentator Ibn ʿAṭiyyah proposes a potential resolution to this dispute, saying that it has Madinan verses, but it appears that its middle part is Makkan. It takes its name from the phrase *We sent down iron* in v. 25. *Al-Ḥadīd* is the first in a group of five *sūrah*s known as "The Glorifiers" (*al-Musabbiḥāt*), meaning those *sūrah*s that begin with a glorification of God; the others are 59, 61, 62, and 64. According to a *ḥadīth,* "Within [the Glorifiers] there is a verse that is better than a thousand verses" (IK, Q, Sh). Some scholars are of the opinion that this *ḥadīth* refers to v. 3 of this *sūrah* (IK, Sh), while others propose that it refers to the last verse of *Sūrah* 59, *al-Ḥashr* (Sh).

*Al-Ḥadīd* begins with six verses that emphasize the Omnipresence and Omnipotence of God. The next five verses (vv. 7–11) then enjoin belief in God and spending one's wealth in the way of God. This is followed by four verses (vv. 12–15) that contrast the fate that awaits the believers and the hypocrites on the Day of Judgment. The fourth and longest section (vv. 16–24) begins with a call in v. 16, which most say is to believers, to humble or soften their hearts to the remembrance of God. It then discusses the ephemerality of this world and the illusory nature of its delights, continuing the call to spend of one's wealth from the second section and the contrast between believers and disbelievers from the third. The last section (vv. 25–29) extends the discussion to the People of the Book, criticizing them for having failed to be true to their prophets and calling upon them to believe in the prophethood of Muhammad.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (2) Unto Him belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. He gives life and causes death, and He is Powerful over all things. (3) He is the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things. (4) He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days.

1 *Whatsoever* (*mā*) is used rather than *whosoever* (*man*) to indicate that the praise of God predominates throughout all that exists (JJ). All existing realities in the heavens and on the earth glorify God through their tongues or through their states of being (Aj, Z). The verb "to glorify" (*sabbaḥa*) indicates declaring something to be beyond all evil, which derives from the original meaning of the verb *sabaḥa*, "he went beyond" (Aj, N, Z). The verb "to glorify" occurs in several different forms in the Quran: past, present, imperative, and verbal noun, indicating that from the moment existents come into being they continuously glorify God through speech and deeds, willingly and unwillingly, for *there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise* (17:44; Ālī). In this and other verses, *sabbaḥa* is followed by the particle *li*, meaning "to" or "for," an addition that can convey the exact same meaning as when *sabbaḥa* occurs without it, or it can convey a sense of glorifying God for God's sake alone (N, Z).

2 That *unto Him belongs sovereignty* (cf. 2:107; 3:189; 5:17, 18, 40, 120; 7:158; 9:116; 24:42; 25:2; et passim) indicates God's complete control over all modes of existence. That *He gives life and causes death* (cf. 2:258; 3:156; 7:158; 9:116; 10:56; 22:6; 23:80; 40:68; 44:8; 53:44) indicates God's power over all phases of life, existence and nonexistence, at all times (for the stages of life and death, see, e.g., 2:28). Among the Divine Names are the Giver of Life (*al-Muḥyī*) and the Causer of Death (*al-Mumīt*). Although neither Divine Name occurs in the Quran, the many Quranic references to God's giving life and causing death serve as their source, and both Names occur in the traditional lists of the Ninety-Nine Names of God.

3 God is *the First* in that "God was and there was nothing other than Him"; *the Last* in that *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* (55:26–27); *the Outward* in that *Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God* (2:115); and *the Inward* in that *Sight comprehends Him not* (6:103) and *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* (50:16). According to al-Zamakhsharī, rather than a simple list of four Divine Names, this verse can be read as two pairs, "He is the First and the Last, and He is the Outward and the Inward," indicating that God is outwardly manifest and inwardly hidden at every moment, past and future (Ālī, Z). It is also said that *the Outward* indicates the One Who is above all things, predominating over them, and *the Inward* indicates the One Who is within everything, such that He knows their inner dimensions (Z). From a Sufi perspective, that God is *the Outward* points to the manner in which everything that exists can be understood as a "Self-Disclosure" of God.

One of the more famous supplications that the Prophet taught his followers invokes all four of these Divine Names: "O God, Lord of the seven heavens and Lord of the Magnificent Throne! Our Lord, and Lord of everything, Revealer of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Criterion [i.e., the Quran], Splitter of the grain of corn and the date stone! I seek refuge with Thee from the evil of everything over whose forehead Thou hast control. O God! Thou art the First, for nothing is before Thee; the Last, for nothing is after Thee; the Outward, for nothing is above Thee; and the Inward, for nothing is below Thee. Remove the burden of debt from us and free us from poverty" (IK).

4 For the meaning of creation in six days followed by a reference to God's mounting the

Then He mounted the Throne. He knows that which enters the earth and that which issues therefrom, that which descends from Heaven and that which ascends thereto. He is with you wheresoever you are, and God sees whatsoever you do. (5) Unto Him belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and unto God are all matters returned. (6) He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and He knows what lies within breasts. (7) Believe in God and His Messenger and spend from that over which He has appointed you as trustees. For those of you who believe and spend, theirs shall be a great reward. (8) How is it that you believe not in God when the Messenger calls you to believe in your Lord—and He has indeed made a cov-

Throne, see 7:54c; 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4. The second part of this verse, beginning with *He knows,* is repeated in 34:2. *That which enters the earth* refers to both rain and buried corpses, while *that which issues therefrom* refers to vegetation and minerals (JJ). The manner in which God is *with* human beings is debated; some say it refers to God's Knowledge (JJ) or His Knowledge and Power (Q), while others maintain that it is through His very Essence (Aj) or Being (*wujūd;* R). That God is *with you wheresoever you are* at all times follows from His being *the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward.* Nonetheless, such "with-ness" can only be affirmed for God in relation to human beings, but not for human beings in relation to God, since *you are needful of God; and He is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised* (35:15).

5 For *unto God are all matters returned,* see 2:210; 3:109; 8:44; 11:123; 22:76; 35:4c; 42:52–53c.

6 The passing of the *night* into the *day* and the *day* into the *night* (cf. 22:61; 31:29; 35:13) can refer to either the daily exchange of light and darkness (Aj) or seasonal variations in the length of days and nights (JJ). The references to God's Knowledge in vv. 3–6 can be seen as an extension of God being the Outward and the Inward. That God *knows all things* is made clear in v. 3; v. 4 then relates this to the Outward, saying, *God sees whatsoever you do* (cf. 2:233, 237; 3:156; 33:9; 48:24; 49:18; 60:3; 64:2); and the present verse relates it to the Inward, saying, *He knows what lies within breasts* (cf. 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 64:4; 67:13), emphasizing that God is aware of the intentions behind all deeds and all inner thoughts. In this way the *sūrah* prepares for the discussion of the hypocrites in vv. 13–15, who are often unable to discern between inner intentions and outward actions or who would prefer that there were no way to discern between inner intentions and outward actions.

7 That God has appointed people *as trustees* over some things indicates that nothing is actually their property, but the property of God, which He has entrusted to them (R, Z). So spending from it should be just as easy as spending from another person's wealth (Aj, Z). Or the verse can indicate that the property people have inherited from others will then be passed on to the generation after them, so they should not be stingy with it (R, Z). *Trustees* (*mustakhlafīn*) derives from the same root as *vicegerent* (*khalīfah*). In this way, the command to spend of what God has entrusted is connected to the very purpose for which human beings were created (see 2:30; 6:165; 35:39).

8 *He has indeed made a covenant with you* could also be read, "Your covenant has indeed been made" (Aj, Bg). Both readings refer to the pretemporal covenant made by God with all of humanity before creation when they were still in Adam's loins (see 7:172c; JJ, N). In this context, the expression *How is it that you believe not . . . if you are believers?* reflects the broad Quranic argument that everyone has an innate ability to recognize the truth, if they would only follow what

enant with you—if you are believers? (9) He it is Who sends down clear signs upon His servant to bring you out of darkness into light, and truly God is Kind and Merciful unto you. (10) And how is it that you do not spend in the way of God when unto God belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth? Not equal among you are those who spent and fought before the victory. They are greater in rank than those who spend and fight afterwards; yet God has promised unto each that which is most beautiful, and God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (11) Who is it that will lend unto God a goodly loan, that He might

is available to them through the intellect and through revelation (N, R).

9 *Clear signs* refers to the Quran or to the Quran and other miracles given to the Prophet. In other verses, *clear signs* refers to the miracles that Moses performed (17:101; 28:36). For *bring you out of darkness into light,* see also 14:1, 5; 33:43. Regarding the many implications of this phrase, Ibn ʿAjībah writes, "*out of the darkness* of sin *into the light* of repentance and righteousness; *out of the darkness* of heedlessness *into the light* of wakefulness; *out of the darkness* of desire and selfishness *into the light* of renunciation and purity; *out of the darkness* of the sensual *into the light* of the spiritual; *out of the darkness* of ignorance *into the light* of knowledge through God." For the symbolism of light in the Quran, see 24:35c.

10 The Inheritor is one of the Divine Names, as in 15:23: *Surely it is We Who give life and cause death, and We are the Inheritor* (cf. 28:58), implying that all things return to God. As all things return to God, nothing should prevent one from spending what belongs to God in the first place (see 57:7c). *Unto God are all matters returned* (v. 5); so if one willingly spends in the way of God, one derives benefit from it, and if one does not, the property still returns to God, but one derives no benefit.

*The victory* refers to the conquest of Makkah in 8/630, after which Islam quickly spread throughout the rest of Arabia and it became politically advantageous to donate to its cause. Whereas before *the victory,* or "opening," anyone who spent, fought, or emigrated for its cause was clearly doing so *in the way of God* (e.g., 2:195, 218, 244, 261). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said with regard to those who spent and fought before the conquest, "If one of you were to spend the equivalent of Mt. Uḥud [a mountain on the outskirts of Madinah] in gold, it would not reach the extent of what one of them did, not even half of it" (Aj, IK). Some propose that this verse refers specifically to Abū Bakr's willingness to spend all of his wealth in the cause of Islam (R). According to a *ḥadīth* narrated by Ibn ʿUmar, "One time when the Prophet was sitting with Abū Bakr, Gabriel came and inquired about Abū Bakr's impoverished condition, to which the Prophet responded, 'O Gabriel, he has spent all his wealth before the victory [over Makkah]!' Gabriel said, 'In that case, convey to him God's greetings of peace and tell him that his Lord asks him, "Are you pleased with Me in your state of poverty or are you averse?"' The Prophet addressed Abū Bakr, 'O Abū Bakr, Gabriel is here to convey the greetings of peace from God, and He is asking you whether are you pleased with Him in your state of poverty or are you averse?' Upon hearing this, Abū Bakr wept and said, 'How can I be averse unto my Lord? I am pleased with my Lord! I am pleased with my Lord!' " (Q, W).

This verse introduces a clear gradation among the believers, as does 4:95: *God favors those who strive with their goods and their lives a degree above those who stay behind. Unto both God has promised that which is most beautiful. But He favors those who strive with a great reward above those who stay behind.* Regarding this distinction, a *ḥadīth* states, "One who is strong in belief is better and more beloved to God than one who is weak in belief, but in each there is good" (IK).

11 The idea of lending *unto God a goodly loan* (cf. 2:245; 5:12; 57:18; 64:17; 73:20) may refer to anything given in charity. Some, however,

multiply it for him, and his shall be a generous reward? (12) On the Day when you see the believing men and the believing women with their light spreading before them and on their right, "Glad tidings unto you this Day: Gardens with rivers running below, therein to abide. That is the great triumph." (13) On the Day

stipulate that for charity to be *goodly* it must meet certain conditions. The most complete list is provided by al-Rāzī: (1) what is given must be from wealth earned in a permissible (*ḥalāl*) manner; (2) what is given must be from the best of what one owns rather than the dregs (see 2:267); (3) one should give charity despite one's love for the thing given (see 2:177; 76:8); (4) the charity should be distributed to those who are most needy and most worthy of receiving it; (5) the charity should be concealed to the extent possible (see 2:271); (6) charitable deeds must not be followed by preening or harm (see 2:264); (7) in giving one should seek to please God rather than to be *seen of men* (see 4:38); (8) what one has given should be regarded as little, no matter how large, as one can only give of the things of this world, which are themselves little; (9) one should give out of what is most valued and loved, for *you will never attain piety till you spend from that which you love* (3:92); (10) one must not think highly of oneself and poorly of the recipient of the charity. Regarding the multiplication of good deeds, see 57:18c.

12 This verse may be read as a continuation of the previous verse ("his shall be a generous reward on the Day when . . .") or as the beginning of a new sentence with an implied "Remember" at the beginning (Aj, Bḍ). *Their light* can refer to the light of faith that is hidden in the breast while in this world, but becomes outwardly manifest in the next (Aj); the light of good deeds (Aj, IK); or the light that shines from the countenance of the believers. Al-Rāzī, however, notes, "The real light is God, and the light of knowledge, which is the light of insight, is the most worthy of being [called] light." Despite these varying perspectives, *their light* is seen by most as the light by which God guides the believers over the traverse (*ṣirāṭ* that leads from the plain of Judgment (see 18:47; 79:14) to Paradise (Aj, IK, R); see 57:28c and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." The light spreads *before them and on their right* (cf. 66:8), because that is the direction from which they receive the scrolls of their deeds (IK, Q, R, Sh). For *the great triumph* as the attainment of the Garden of Paradise, see also 4:13; 5:119; 9:89, 100; 61:12; 64:9; 85:11.

13 *Wait for us* (*unẓurūnā*) could also be rendered "Look upon us"; if the believers were to look upon the hypocrites, the hypocrites could *borrow from* their *light,* as the light of the believers shines in front of them (Aj, R, Ṭ, Z). An alternate reading is *anẓirūnā,* meaning, "Give us a chance" (JJ). The believers tell the hypocrites to *turn back and seek a light,* that is, to return to the place where the believers themselves received the light from God (Aj, Z) or to return to the world below to perform good deeds through which these lights are earned (R, Z). After they turn back trying to attain this light, which is no longer available to them, a wall is *set down between them.* According to Mujāhid, one of the earliest Quran commentators, the gate in the wall is the same as the veil mentioned in 7:46: *And there will be a veil between them* (JJ, R, Ṭ). *The inner side* refers to the side of the wall on which the believers stand, which *contains mercy,* and the *outer side* refers to the side on which the hypocrites find themselves, which faces the Fire (JJ). The hypocrites thus stand between the wall and the punishment (Aj). That the hypocrites can see through the gate, seeing the light that is not theirs, only increases their sorrow (Aj). Alternately, the *inner* and *outer* refer to the two sides of the gate within the wall (Ṭ, Z). The existence of a gate in the wall can be seen as an allusion to the continuing possibility of Divine intercession for those who have been denied Paradise. According to a long *ḥadīth qudsī,* God tells the angels to bring from the Fire those upon whom God wishes to show mercy, those who did not ascribe any partners to Him. They are removed from the Fire, scraped and torn, and then brought back to life by the water of life. When there is only one who remains looking toward the Fire, God turns him away from the Fire upon his request. Then after he gazes upon the Garden for as long as God

when the hypocrites, men and women, will say to those who believe, "Wait for us that we may borrow from your light," it will be said, "Turn back and seek a light!" Thereupon a wall with a gate will be set down between them, the inner side of which contains mercy, and on the outer side of which lies punishment. (14) They will call unto them, "Were we not with you?" They reply, "Indeed! But you tempted yourselves, bided your time, and doubted; and false hopes deluded you till the Command of God came, and the Deluder deluded you concerning God. (15) So this day no ransom shall be taken from you, or from those who disbelieved." Your refuge shall be the Fire; it shall be your master. What an evil journey's end! (16) Has not the time come for those who believe for their hearts to be humbled to the remembrance of God and the truth that has come down, and to be not like those who were given the Book aforetime? But the span of time was too long for them, such that their hearts hardened and many of them

wills, God brings him to the door of the Garden, and after he requests, "My Lord bring me into the Garden!" the door of the Garden is opened unto him and God admits him to the Garden, granting every wish until all his wishes and desires are exhausted.

14 When their fate becomes apparent, the hypocrites call to the believers, *Were we not with you?* They *tempted* themselves, thus bringing trials and tribulations into their own lives, and *bided* either to overcome the believers themselves or for disaster to afflict the believers, as in 4:141, which describes the hypocrites and disbelievers as *those who wait upon you, and if a victory comes to you from God, they say, "Were we not with you?" But if the disbelievers have some success, they say, "Did we not overwhelm you, and did we not protect you from the believers?"* Here *waited* can also imply that they wavered in their faith, never truly affirming it (Ṭ). *Till the Command of God came* refers to the moment of death or to the Day of Judgment, indicating that they wavered in religion until the opportunity to repent had passed. *The Deluder* (*gharūr*) is a reference to Satan, but can also indicate anything that deludes a person. It could also be rendered "delusion" (*ghurūr* instead of *gharūr*), in which case it indicates the self-deluding expectations of one who knowingly commits a sin, thinking that God will forgive it (Bg, Ṭ, Z; see 31:33c). Reading this verse in conjunction with v. 16, "delusion" can be read as an allusion to more subtle degrees of hypocrisy that afflict those who become self-satisfied with their religious attainments and cease to strive upon the spiritual path.

15 *No ransom shall be taken from you* means that on the Day of Judgment the hypocrites have no way of redeeming themselves, as they did in this world through repentance and performing good deeds (regarding *ransom*, see 2:48c). That the Fire shall be their master (*mawlā*) implies both that it has complete control over them and that it is what is nearest to them (*awlā bihim;* Aj), that is, to their true nature.

16 *To be humbled* translates *takhshaʿ*, which is related to the word *khushūʿ*, "humility," one of the most important virtues in Islam, some say the root of all true virtue. The Prophet is reported to have often prayed, "I seek refuge in God from a heart that is not humbled (*lā yakhshaʿ*)." According to a *ḥadīth*, "The first thing to be removed from this community will be humility, until you will not see a single humble person" (Sy). Some maintain that this verse refers to the hypocrites, who displayed faith outwardly, while failing to manifest it in their hearts. But most agree that it is

are iniquitous. (17) Know that God revives the earth after its death. We have indeed made the signs clear for you, that haply you may understand. (18) Truly men who give in charity and women who give in charity and lend unto God a goodly loan, it will be multiplied for them, and theirs shall be a generous reward. (19) And those who believe in God and His messengers—it is they who are truthful and are witnesses before their Lord. They have their reward and their light. And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, they are the

addressed to Muslims, as "the believer is not truly a believer without humility of heart" (R). According to Ibn Masʿūd, "There were but four years between the time we entered Islam and the time this verse came to reproach us" (Aj, Āl, IK, Z). Others view this verse as a later revelation, based upon a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, "The believers' hearts had grown tepid; so they were reproached at the beginning of the thirteenth year of the revelation" (Aj, IK). In this context, *the remembrance of God* may indicate either the mention of God's Name, as in 8:2, *Only they are believers whose hearts quake with fear when God is mentioned,* or the Quran, among whose names is the "Remembrance of God" (*Dhikr Allāh*). If taken as a reference to God, *the truth that has come down* refers to the Quran (R), while in this particular context *the Book* refers to scripture in general.

From a Quranic perspective, hearts harden when they become distant from revelation. That *the span of time was too long for them* thus indicates that hardness overcame the hearts of many Jews and Christians who were living much later in time than their prophets (Aj, R). This verse thus evokes a Biblical theme, as expressed in a prayer of the Prophet Isaiah: "Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage" (Isaiah 63:17; cf. Isaiah 6:9–10; Psalm 95:8; 1 Samuel 6:6; Mark 8:17; John 12:40; Romans 9:18; Hebrews 3:8; 4:7). Regarding the hardness of hearts among previous religious communities, see 2:74c; 5:13c; 6:42–44c. In other verses, hearts are referred to as blind (22:46), diseased (2:10; 5:52; 33:12, 32, 60; 47:20, 29; 74:31), locked (47:24), sealed (2:7; 9:87; 47:16), and rusted (83:14). In contrast, the healthy heart *softens unto the remembrance of God* (39:23), is *at peace in the remembrance of God* (13:28), and is infused with *Tranquility* (*sakīnah;* 48:4).

17 *God revives the earth after its death* by bringing forth vegetation. So too does He revive hearts by restoring them to humility (IK, JJ, R, Z). The relation of this verse to the previous one is found in the following *ḥadīth,* "The difference between one who remembers God and one who does not is like the difference between the living and the dead."

18 *Who give in charity* (*muṣṣaddiqūn*) can also be read, "who confirm [the truth]" (*muṣaddiqūn*), which would link it more closely to the mention of the *truthful* (*al-ṣiddīqūn*) in v. 19. For *a goodly loan,* see 57:11c. The manner in which God multiplies charitable offerings is best reflected in 2:261: *The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain that grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And God multiplies for whomsoever He will* (see also 2:245; 4:40; 6:160; 64:17). Those who *lend unto God a goodly loan* can also refer to those who strive in the way of God until they have removed the love of all that is other than God from their hearts and have thus given their very selves to Him. He will then *multiply* the Divine lights and the knowledge of Divine mysteries for them (Aj).

19 It is reported that Mujāhid said, "Every believer is truthful and a witness," and then recited this verse (R, Ṭ). This verse is thus read by some as a reference to all believers, though many maintain that it designates a select group of believers who exceed others in faith (Aj). *Truthful* (*ṣiddīq*) is an emphatic form that indicates both those who fervently affirm the truth and those who are ut-

inhabitants of Hellfire. (20) Know that the life of this world is but play, diversion, ornament, mutual boasting among you, and vying for increase in property and children—the likeness of a rain whose vegetation impresses the farmers; then it withers such that you see it turn yellow; then it becomes chaff. And in the Hereafter there shall be severe punishment, forgiveness from God, and contentment, and the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion. (21) Race unto forgiveness from your Lord and to a garden whose breadth is as the breadth of Heaven and earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers. That is the Bounty of God, which He gives to whomsoever He will, and God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. (22) No misfortune befalls

terly honest and sincere. It is thus interpreted to mean those who have the same virtues inwardly and outwardly (Aj). This verse could also be read as making a distinction between the truthful and the witnesses: "Those who believe in God and His messengers, they are the truthful. And those who are witnesses before their Lord shall have their reward and their light" (R, Ṭ). *Witnesses* translates *shuhadāʾ*, which is interpreted by some to mean martyrs (IK, Ṭ), as it relates to those who "witness" by dying in the service of their faith, just as "striving" (*jihād*) is a spiritual virtue that can include fighting in the cause of God; see 4:69–70c.

20 The relativity of the wealth of this world is a recurring Quranic theme. Such wealth is seen as a cause of gratitude and should be managed properly, as in 28:77: *And forget not your portion in this world;* see 34:35–37c. Crops that dry or fail are also used as a metaphor for the relativity of the joys of this world in 2:266; 18:32–42; 39:21; 68:17–33. In this passage, *farmers* translates *kuffār,* which can also mean "disbelievers" and could be rendered as such in this passage. For *the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion,* see also 3:185; 6:32. The discussion of the deceptive nature of this world continues this *sūrah*'s focus upon the relationship between the inward and the outward, about which Ibn ʿAjībah writes: "[The world] is something that appears beautiful on the outside, but that conceals what is ugly within it, like one who tricks people and then cheats them. The world appears to those who pursue it as sweetness and infatuation, overtaking them little by little, until they become totally entangled in it and neglect all preparation for the Hereafter. Life passes from their hand in vanity, and the world continues to delude and betray them until it brings them bankrupt to the moment of their death."

21 *Race unto* is an encouragement to aspire toward God, Heaven, and all that is good. Elsewhere the believers are told to *vie in good deeds* (2:148; 5:48) and to *vie in patience* (3:200). For *the breadth of Heaven and earth,* see 3:133, which is almost identical to this verse.

22 From an Islamic perspective, misfortunes and afflictions can be a means of spiritual purification if they are endured with patience. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "No illness or fatigue, no sickness or sadness, not even a worry afflicts a believer without expiating some of the wrongs he has committed." That all things have been recorded *in a Book* (cf. 20:52; 22:70; 78:29) before time indicates that all events of this earth have been recorded on the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) before entering this realm (R), a point made emphatically in 35:11: *God created you from dust, then from a drop, then He made you pairs, and no female bears or brings forth save with His Knowledge. And none who grows old grows old, nor has aught lessened of his life, but that it is in a Book. Truly that is easy for God.* For an extended discussion of the issues of predestination and free will onto which this discussion opens, see 4:79c; 54:49c; see also 76:29–30.

the earth nor yourselves, save that it is in a Book before We bring it forth—truly that is easy for God— (23) that you not despair over what has passed you by, nor exult in that which He has given unto you. And God loves not any vainglorious boaster, (24) those who are miserly and enjoin people to miserliness. Yet whosoever turns away, truly God, He is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised. (25) We have indeed sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and We sent down the Book and the Balance with them, that the people would uphold justice. And We sent down iron, wherein are great might and benefits for mankind, and so that God may know those who will help Him and His messengers unseen. Truly God is Strong, Mighty. (26) And indeed We sent Noah and Abraham and established prophethood and the Book among their progeny. And among them is he who

23 Patience and gratitude are considered the proper responses for all that God bestows (see 2:156–57), as a *ḥadīth* states, "How remarkable is the situation of the believer: everything is good for him; yet this cannot be said except of the believer. If comfort and ease come to him, he is grateful and that is good for him; and if hardship befalls him, he is patient, and that is good for him." Given that *the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (v. 20), one should not despair over what has passed nor exult in worldly achievements or possessions; for in the final analysis *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88). Elsewhere the Quran indicates that one must also avoid being overly exuberant, lest it turn into wanton exultation or lest one attribute blessings from God to other sources or to one's own merit and forget to remember God (see, e.g., 17:67; 30:33; 39:50).

24 The first phrase of this verse is repeated in 4:37. To be miserly and encourage others to be the same is connected to being a *vainglorious boaster,* as it is only by attributing to one's own merit what God has given that one is able to ignore God's Command to *spend from that over which He has appointed you as trustees* (v. 7), that is, property that is ultimately His. Some commentators see this verse as a critique of the Madinan hypocrites, who only gave charity for self-serving purposes (see 2:264; 4:142; 8:47; 107:4–7). Others see it as a general critique of "miserliness" in both wealth and knowledge (Aj). *Turns away* indicates turning from God or from the duty to give charity (JJ).

25 For *clear proofs*, see the introduction to *Sūrah* 98. In this context, *the Book* refers to all scriptures (Q). *The Balance* has many meanings, including the religious Law (*Sharīʿah*), which provides the standard by which to weigh what is good and beneficial against what is evil and harmful; see 42:17c. From another perspective, *the Balance* indicates all of those things by which human beings uphold the justice enjoined in the scriptures, and *iron* containing *great might* is the means of fashioning weapons with which to defend the truth and to oppose those who revolt against justice (Aj, N). The *benefits* in iron are then taken as a reference to tools such as the scythe and the pickax, which facilitate other activities. *Sent down* may be taken literally to mean that iron was sent down directly by God or simply that God created iron, in the same way that 39:6 states that God *sent down for you of cattle eight pairs* (Q), meaning that He created them. Those who help God are those who help His religion (Q, T, Z). That they do so *unseen* refers to those who work for religion even though they have not seen one of God's messengers (Q, Z), or to those who do not perform good deeds for them to be seen by others.

26 *The Book* refers in a collective manner to each of the scriptures that the progeny of Abraham was given: the Torah, the Psalms, the Gos-

is rightly guided; yet many of them are iniquitous. (27) Then We sent Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We sent Jesus son of Mary, and We gave him the Gospel and placed kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who follow him. And monasticism they invented—We did not ordain it for them—only to seek God's Contentment. Yet they did not observe it with proper observance. So We gave those of them who believed their reward, yet many of them are iniquitous. (28) O you who believe! Reverence God and believe in His Messenger; He will give you a twofold portion of His Mercy, make a light for you by which you may walk, and forgive you—and God is Forgiving, Merciful—

pel, and the Quran (JJ). The Quran here suggests that, although many of those who followed these revelations are iniquitous, it is not a condemnation of their respective religions or revealed books, but of human nature. That such iniquity can afflict Muslims as well is reflected in a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says of the Muslim community in later times, "The upright will depart one after another until nothing remains but impoverished people, the like of leftover barley and dates."

27 *We placed kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who follow him* indicates that God disposed the followers of Jesus to love one another. This verse could also be read, "and [We] placed kindness, mercy, and monasticism in the hearts of those who follow him," meaning that God gave monasticism to them initially, but then they altered it and made their own innovations in the practices that God had given them (Q). In this sense it is similar to the accusation that some People of the Book *distort the meaning of the word* (4:46; 5:13, 41). Most interpret *only to seek God's Contentment* to mean that they wanted to please God by inventing monasticism or to mean that God did not ordain them to practice that; rather, God ordained them only to seek what pleases God (IK). According to the latter interpretation, the translation would be, "and We gave him the Gospel and placed kindness, mercy, and monasticism in the hearts of those who follow him; yet they made inventions therein. We did not ordain it for them except for [the purpose of] seeking God's Contentment." According to the interpretation represented in the translation, *Yet they did not observe it with proper observance* indicates that they were not able to maintain the practices they had imposed upon themselves (IK), namely, monasticism. In contrast, the alternate translation implies that they were not able to maintain the practices enjoined by God. The view that some form of monasticism may have been enjoined upon Christians by God is supported by a *ḥadīth:* "Every Prophet has a form of monasticism; striving (*jihād*) in the way of God is the monasticism of this community" (IK). Regarding the ascetic practices associated with the Christian form of monasticism, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Giving up the world does not mean making lawful things unlawful or wasting possessions. Rather, giving up the world means that you do not rely more upon what is in your hand than upon what is in the Hands of God."

28 In this context, *O you who believe* is understood by many commentators as an address to Jews and Christians, calling them to believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (IK, Q, R, Z). *A twofold portion of His Mercy* is thus apportioned to them for following their religion and then believing in and following the Prophet (IK, Q, R, Z). This interpretation is supported by a well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet stated that among those who will receive their reward twice is "a believer from the People of the Book who has been a true believer in his prophet and then believes in me" (Aj, IK). Others understand this verse as an address to Muslims (Aj, Q), calling upon them to deepen their faith, as in v. 16.

The *light for you* alludes to guidance or to the Quran (Q), although some say it is the same light mentioned in v. 12 (Z). *By which you may walk* is understood to be the light by which God guides

(29) such that the People of the Book may know that they have no power over any of God's Bounty, and that the Bounty is in God's Hand; He gives it unto whomsoever He will; and God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty.

the believers over the traverse (*ṣirāṭ*) that leads from the plain of Judgment (see 18:47; 79:14) to Paradise (Q). According to many accounts in the *Ḥadīth* literature, on the Day of Judgment all believers are called to cross a traverse (*ṣirāṭ*) over Hell that is as fine as a hair and as sharp as a sword and has large thorns that afflict those who must walk or crawl upon it in accordance with their sins. God provides the believers a light whereby they are able to cross, but does not provide any light for the disbelievers, since *he for whom God has not appointed any light has no light* (24:40); see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." From a spiritual perspective, *light for you* refers to the lights of the spirit and the Self-Disclosure of God's Attributes in the heart of the believer (K) and thus to the light of spiritual guidance from God.

29 According to some, this verse indicates the People of the Book who do not believe in the Prophet Muhammad (Z), as distinguished from those who follow the command to do so in the previous verse. Many see this verse as a response to those who argued that, since Muslims have come later than previous religious communities, their reward with God would be less. Regarding this interpretation, the Prophet is reported to have said to his Companions, "The parable of you and the Jews and Christians is that of a man who employed some laborers and asked them, 'Who will work for me from the dawn prayer until midday for one *qīrāṭ* [a special weight of gold] each?' And the Jews worked. Then he asked, 'Who will work for me from the early afternoon prayer until the time of the late afternoon prayer for one *qīrāṭ* each?' And the Christians worked. Then he said, 'Who will work for me from the later afternoon prayer until sunset for two *qīrāṭ* each?' You are those who did this work. The Jews and the Christians got angry and said, 'We did more work, but got less wages.' God responded, 'Have I been unjust to you with your reward?' They said, 'No.' So God said, 'Then it is My Bounty, which I give unto whomsoever I will.' " (IK). The verse can also be taken to mean that no one has any control over whom God appoints as a prophet, prophethood and revelation being His greatest bounties. The Jews of Arabia are said to have rejected the prophethood of Muhammad on the grounds that he was not of their lineage and thus could not be a prophet (see 2:90c), while many Arabs opposed him on the grounds that he was not already a leader among them when he was chosen as a prophet (see 43:31c).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 58

# She Who Disputes

## *al-Mujādilah*

*Al-Mujādilah* is a Madinan *sūrah,* although some commentators maintain that only the first ten verses are from the Madinan period and the remainder is from the Makkan period; others maintain that the entire *sūrah* is Madinan except for v. 9 (Āl, Q). It takes its name from the story of a woman named Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah, whose husband, Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit, divorced her according to the pre-Islamic custom of *ẓihār,* in which a man could renounce his wife by saying, "You are to me as my mother's back." Because it addresses this issue, the *sūrah* is also known as *al-Ẓihār.* By custom, the invocation of *ẓihār* meant that the husband was now free of all duties toward the wife, but that his wife was not free to leave her husband and contract another marriage. Khawlah complained of this injustice to the Prophet and to God. Her plea was heard, and God provided a means whereby she and her husband could reconcile.

*Al-Mujādilah* is the first in a series of ten Madinan *sūrah*s addressing many of the legal issues that confronted the newly independent Muslim community in Madinah. Insofar as they demonstrate God's immediate involvement in the affairs of the Muslim community, this series of *sūrah*s follows upon the statement in 57:4: *He knows that which enters the earth and that which issues therefrom, that which descends from Heaven and that which ascends thereto. And He is with you wheresoever you are, and God sees whatsoever you do.* God's Omnipresence is especially indicated in this *sūrah,* as the first four verses provide an example of God's responding directly and instantly to the plea of a Muslim woman.

After the opening verses (vv. 1–4), which address the issue of *ẓihār,* vv. 5–6 introduce the discussion of *those who oppose God and His Messenger,* the theme of the remainder of the *sūrah.* Vv. 7–10 discuss the *secret converse* of those who oppose and deride the Prophet and the proper manner in which to hold private discourse, followed by vv. 11–13, which initially enjoin Muslims to offer alms before conversing with the Prophet and then lighten this injunction. The longest section, vv. 14–21, addresses the nature of the hypocrites and their opposition to the Prophet, and the *sūrah* concludes with a long verse regarding the rewards that God gives to those *who believe in God and the Last Day.*

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) God has indeed heard the words of she who disputes with thee concerning her husband and complains to God. And God hears your conversation. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing. (2) Those among you who commit *ẓihār* against their wives, those are not their mothers. None are their mothers save those who gave birth to them. Truly they speak indecent words and calumny. And truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving. (3) As for those who commit *ẓihār* against their wives and then go back on what they have said, let them free a slave before they touch one another; to that are you counseled. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (4) And whosoever finds not [the means], let him fast two consecutive months before they touch one another. And whosoever is unable, let him feed sixty indigent people. That is so that you may believe in God and His Messenger. These are the limits set by God, and the disbelievers shall have a

1–2 The majority of commentators agree that *she who disputes* refers to Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah, though some propose other names, which are, however, based upon different lineages of the same individual (Q). It is reported that after her husband said to her, "You are to me as my mother's back," Khawlah complained to the Prophet, saying, "He has worn out my youth and I let him enjoy me, but when I grew older and could no longer bear children, he put me away, saying that I am as his mother's back. O God! I complain to Thee," and that she did not move from her position until the Angel Gabriel came down with vv. 1–4 (IK, Q, Ṭ, W). In other accounts of this story, the Prophet is reported to have said, "You are [now] forbidden to him," implying that there was no way they could reconcile. But she objected that he had not invoked divorce as such, making a distinction between divorce and *ẓihār*, and complained again of her situation. The Prophet, likely seeing *ẓihār* as tantamount to divorce, again said, "You are [now] forbidden to him." And they went back and forth in this manner until Gabriel came down with vv. 1–4 (IK, Q, T). That *God is Hearing, Seeing* (see also 4:58, 134; 22:61, 75; 31:28) would seem to indicate here that God hears and knows the pleas of all people, as in the case of Khawlah. More generally, it reinforces the notion of God's Omniscience; see 4:58c.

3–4 After vv. 1–4 had been revealed, the Prophet said to Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah, "He should set free a slave." She replied, "He cannot afford it." He said, "He should fast for two consecutive months." She replied, "Messenger of God, he is an old man; he cannot keep fasts." The Prophet then said, "He should feed sixty poor people." She replied, "He has nothing to give in alms." At that moment an *ʿarq* (a date basket holding thirty measures of dates) was brought to the Prophet. Khawlah said, "I shall help him with another *ʿarq*." The Prophet replied, "You have done well. Go and feed sixty poor people on his behalf, and return to your cousin [meaning her husband]" (Q, W). In other narrations, a similar conversation is said to have occurred between the Prophet and Khawlah's husband, Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit; the final resolution was that the Prophet gave him half of the dates necessary to feed sixty people and attain expiation, and Aws furnished the other half (Q, Ṭ, W).

Freeing *a slave* also serves as expiation for other offenses, such as slaying a person inadvertently (4:92) or breaking a pledge (5:89), and

painful punishment. (5) Truly those who oppose God and His Messenger shall be abased, just as those before them were abased. We have indeed sent down clear signs, and the disbelievers shall have a humiliating punishment (6) on the Day when God resurrects them all together, then informs them of that which they did. God has kept account of it while they have forgotten it; and God is Witness over all things. (7) Hast thou not considered that God knows whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth? There is no secret con-

is considered a praiseworthy form of charity (90:13). A slave freed in expiation must be in good health, without physical deficiency (Q, Ṭ). If one does not own a slave, one may pay for the slave of another to be freed (Q). *Before they touch one another* means before they engage in sexual intercourse (JJ). For those who do not have the means, a fast of *two consecutive months* serves as expiation in place of freeing a slave, as it does in the case of killing another believer accidentally (see 4:92). For those whose health prevents them from fasting, feeding the indigent can then serve as expiation. Feeding the indigent is also a "ransom" from fasting the month of Ramadan for those who are unable, but fasting is considered preferable (see 2:184). There is some debate as to how much food one must give the indigent to satisfy this requirement. Most maintain that it is one *mudd* (JJ), which would be enough food to feed one person two full meals in one day. According to most schools of law, one must feed sixty people. But according to the Ḥanafī school of law, one can also feed a single indigent for sixty days or more, until one has given the equivalent to what one would have given for sixty people (Q). Regarding the requirements for feeding the indigent, see 5:89c.

*That is so that you may believe in God and His Messenger* (cf. 48:9) indicates that God has revealed these rulings in order to clarify and teach His Decree, so that, knowing the Divine Decree, those who follow God and His Messenger can now act upon the rulings and cease to follow those of the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance (R).

5 *Those who oppose God and His Messenger,* which occurs three times in this *sūrah* (vv. 5, 20, 22), can be understood as emphasizing the legislative dimension of the *sūrah* and the nine *sūrah*s that follow. In this context the phrase thus indicates those who choose to follow rulings that differ from those that God has established (Bḍ); see commentary on 33:36: *Whosoever disobeys God and His Messenger has strayed into manifest error.*

6 The beginning of this verse is either a clause modifying *humiliating punishment* or the object of an implied verb, "mention" or "remember" (*udhkur*), which would mean, "Remember" or "make mention of the Day when God will gather every human being on an open, barren plain for judgment" (see 18:47c; 20:106; 39:69–70c; 79:14c). God keeps account of people's deeds in a book or registry that is then presented to them on the Day of Judgment, whereupon the disbelievers say, *"Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof." And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did* (18:49; see also 6:59; 17:13–14). For *God is Witness over all things,* see also 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 33:55; 34:47; 41:53; 85:9. Elsewhere it is said that *God is Witness over what you do* (see, e.g., 3:98).

7 Vv. 7–8 address the *secret converse* (*najwā*) of those who conspire against the Prophet, insult him, and attempt to divert others from following him, as in 21:2–3: *No new Reminder came unto them from their Lord, but that they listened to it while they played, with their hearts diverted. And those who do wrong confide in secret converse, "Is this not but a human being like yourselves? Will you then yield to sorcery, while you see clearly?"* Also see 43:80, where the disbelievers and hypocrites are warned that God knows and hears *their secret and their secret converse* (cf. 9:78). For a discussion of the manner in which God can be said to be "with" human beings, see commentary on 50:16: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein;* and 57:4: *And He is with you wheresoever you are.*

verse among three, but that He is their fourth, nor among five, but that He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but that He is with them wheresoever they are. Then on the Day of Resurrection He will inform them of that which they did. Truly God is Knower of all things. (8) Hast thou not seen those who were forbidden from secretly conversing then returned to that which they had been forbidden, secretly conversing with a view to sin, enmity, and disobeying the Messenger? And when they come to thee and greet thee, they greet thee in a manner that God has not greeted thee and say within themselves, "Why does God not punish us for what we say?" Hell suffices them, burning therein. What an evil journey's end! (9) O you who believe! If you converse in secret, then do not converse in secret with a view to sin, enmity, and disobeying the Messenger; converse in secret with a view to piety and reverence. And reverence God, unto Whom you shall be gathered. (10) Secret converse is only from Satan, so that those who believe may grieve; yet he harms them not a whit, save by God's Leave. And in God let the believers trust. (11) O you who believe! When it is said unto you, "Make room for one another in the assemblies," then make

8 The first half of this verse is reported to have been revealed in connection with the Jewish tribes of Madinah and the hypocrites. The latter would reportedly speak secretly among themselves, then look at the believers and wink at each other. When the believers saw this, they thought the hypocrites had news about their relatives who went out on military expeditions, that they had been killed, wounded, or defeated. But when these secret conversations continued, they complained to the Prophet, and he commanded them not to converse in this manner. They did not heed his command and went back to secret conversations among themselves. God therefore revealed this verse (Q, Sy, Ṭ, W).

The second half of the verse is said to have been revealed in response to some of the Jews of Madinah who, instead of saying, "Peace be upon you (*al-salāmu ʿalaykum*)" to the Prophet, said mockingly, "Death be upon you (*al-sāmmu ʿalaykum*)." The Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah was present and responded, "Death be upon you. God has cursed you and is wroth with you," to which the Prophet responded, "Go easy, O ʿĀ'ishah! You must be kind." In another account of this same incident, the Prophet is reported to have said, "God does not like indecency, nor the uttering of indecent words" (W). When ʿĀ'ishah objected that she had only responded in kind, the second half of this verse, beginning with *And when they come to thee,* was revealed (Q, Sy, Ṭ, W). *Within themselves* could also be rendered "among themselves." Their question, *Why does God not punish us?* indicates their position that, if Muhammad were a true prophet, God would punish them for greeting him as they did (IK, JJ). *Hell suffices them* means that, although they may not be punished for abusing the Prophet in this life, in the Hereafter they will receive the appropriate punishment for their deeds (IK).

9–10 Whereas vv. 7–8 discuss the *secret converse* of the disbelievers and the hypocrites, these verses clarify that, although *secret converse* is often of an insidious nature, private discourse is not evil in and of itself, as in 4:114: *There is no good in most of their secret converse, save for him who enjoins charity or kindness or reconciliation between men. And whosoever does that, seeking God's good plea-*

*sure, We shall grant him a great reward.* In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "The speech of the Children of Adam always works against them, not for them, except when it is to command the right and forbid the wrong, or to remember God." That Satan does not harm anyone *save by God's Leave* indicates that he is ultimately powerless, as in 14:22: *And Satan will say, when the matter has been decreed, "Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves."*

11 Regarding the revelation of this verse, the early commentator Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767) is reported to have said, "The Prophet was at *al-ṣuffah* [a veranda in front of the mosque in Madinah where many who were known for their piety and asceticism would congregate]. The place was not spacious, and it was a Friday. The Messenger of God had the habit of honoring those from among the Emigrants and the Helpers who had taken part in the Battle of Badr. Some of those who had participated in Badr came to the gathering and found that people were already there before them. They stood, therefore, facing the Prophet and waiting for people to make room for them. But no one made room for them. The Messenger of God was pained to see this; so he asked those who did not take part in Badr to get up, and he moved as many people as the number of those who were standing who had participated in the Battle of Badr. Those who were asked to vacate their seats were not pleased, and the Messenger of God saw the displeasure on their faces. Then the hypocrites said to the Muslims, 'Did you not claim that your man deals fairly with people? By God, he has not been fair with these people. He removed people who wanted to be close to their Prophet from places in which they were already sitting and seated in their stead people who came late!' God then revealed this verse" (Q, R, W).

More broadly, this verse indicates that when one follows the example set by God and His Messenger and makes room for God and His Messenger, God makes room or "expands" matters for them, such as their provision and their accommodation, their knowledge and their breast—expansion of the breast implies psychological ease and spiritual understanding. It may also pertain to matters of the Hereafter, meaning that God expands the grave and the Garden for them (Aj), thus making them places of ease and joy. Al-Rāzī argues for the broad applicability of this verse, saying, "For one who opens the doors of goodness and ease (*rāḥah*) for God's servants, God will expand for him what is good in this life and the Hereafter. Hence no reasonable person could restrict this verse to making room in an assembly. Rather, what is intended by it is extending good to Muslims and making happiness enter their hearts. In this vein, [the Prophet] has said, 'God ceases not to aid the servant so long as the servant aids his Muslim brother.'"

*And when it is said, "Rise," then rise* means to rise to perform the prayer or other good deeds (JJ). In the words of Qatādah, "Whenever you are called upon to perform a good deed, respond to the call" (Ṭ). Both sentences in the present verse reflect the broader Quranic theme of reciprocity between the Divine and the human, most evident in 2:152: *So remember Me, and I shall remember you.* From an Islamic perspective, the sincere human effort to seek God is met by God with immeasurable compensation, as in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, "I am as My servant thinks of Me. I am with him when he remembers Me. If he mentions Me within himself, I mention him within Myself. If he mentions Me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly. If he comes near to Me by a hand's length, I come near to him by the distance of a cubit. If he comes near to Me the distance of a cubit, I come near to him the distance of two outspread arms. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running."

Though belief or faith (*īmān*) in and of itself is considered superior to knowledge in and of itself, the believer who has *knowledge* is considered superior to the believer who does not have knowledge. There are many *aḥādīth* to this effect, among them, "The superiority of one who has knowledge over the one who [merely] worships is as the superiority of the full moon over all the planets" (Aj, Q, Z). It is also said to have been revealed to Abraham, "I am Knowing, and I love those who know" (Aj, Āl, Z). Regarding knowledge *in degrees,* Ibn ʿAjībah writes, "There are different kinds of knowledge. Their nobility corresponds to that which is known [through each kind of knowledge]. The most superior kind of knowledge is knowledge of [God's] Highest Essence (*al-dhāt al-ʿulyā*) by way of unveiling and eyewitnessing, then knowledge of the Divine Attributes and Names, then knowledge of

room, and God will make room for you. And when it is said, "Rise," then rise, and God will raise in degrees those among you who believe and those who have been given knowledge. God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (12) O you who believe! When you converse in secret with the Messenger, offer charity before your secret converse. That is better for you and purer. But if you do not find [the means], truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (13) Are you apprehensive about offering charity before your secret converse? If you do not do so and God relents unto you, then perform the prayer, give the alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (14) Hast thou not seen those who befriend a people with whom God is wroth? They are not of you, nor are you of them. And they knowingly swear upon falsehood. (15) God has prepared for them a severe punishment. Evil indeed is that which they used to do. (16) They took their oaths as a shield and thus turned from the way of God; so theirs shall be a humiliating punishment. (17) Neither their property nor their children will avail them aught against God. They are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. (18) On the Day when God resurrects them all, they will swear to Him just as they swear to you, supposing that they have some standing. Lo! Truly they are the liars. (19) Satan has overwhelmed them, and so made them forget the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. Lo! The party of Satan are losers. (20) Truly those who oppose God and His Messenger, they will be among the abased. (21) God has decreed, "I shall surely prevail, I and My messengers!" Truly God is Strong, Mighty. (22) You shall not find a people who

the decrees (*aḥkām*), then knowledge of the bounties connected to Him."

12–13 These verses were reportedly revealed about some wealthy members of the Muslim community who used to go to gatherings with the Prophet and monopolize the conversation with him, so that the poor had no opportunity, and the Prophet disliked this. God therefore revealed v. 12, commanding that alms be given before each conference with the Prophet. Those in straitened circumstances did not have anything to give for alms, while those who were well off were miserly. The Companions of the Prophet found this difficult, and so a dispensation was revealed in v. 13 (IK, Sy, W). ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said regarding v. 12: "There is one verse in the Book of God that no one has applied before me; nor is there anyone who applied it after me [58:12]. I had a piece of gold that I exchanged for silver pieces, and whenever I conferred with the Messenger, I spent one silver piece in charity until I spent them all. Then the verse was abrogated with another verse [58:13]" (Q, Sy, Ṭ, W). According to a minority, there was only one hour between the revelation of v. 12 and its abrogation or modification by v. 13 (IK).

The Command in v. 13 to *obey God and His Messenger* (cf. 3:32, 132; 4:59; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 24:54; 47:33; 49:14; 64:12; see also 7:156–57; 59:7) stands in juxtaposition to the condemnation in this same *sūrah* of those who *oppose God and His Messenger* (vv. 5, 20, 22). That the Command is combined with the injunctions to *perform the prayer* and *give the alms* (as in 33:33) implies that it is through prayer and almsgiving, among other things, that such obedience is achieved.

14–18 These verses address the issue of hypocrisy among the Muslims of Madinah, which is dealt with more fully in *Sūrah* 63. The present passage is said to have been revealed with regard to a man of whom the Prophet said to a group of Muslims, "A man will come to you and look with the eyes of Satan. When he comes to you, do not speak to him!" A man of blue complexion then entered. The Prophet greeted him and said, "Why do you and your companions insult me?" The man said, "Let me bring them to you." And he and his friends swore by God and made excuses. Then God revealed this verse (Sh, Sy, Ṭ, W). In another account, the man in question is identified as a hypocrite named ʿAbd Allāh ibn Nabtal, who used to keep the company of the Prophet and then report what he heard from him to the Jews of Madinah. When asked why he and his friends insulted the Prophet, he swore by God that he did not, but the Prophet said that he did. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Nabtal went and brought his friends who then swore by God that they did not insult him. Then God revealed vv. 14–18 (Q, W, Z). This verse is also part of the general command to not take enemies of Muslims as protectors, as in 3:28: *Let not the believers take the disbelievers as protectors apart from the believers. Whosoever does that has no bond with God* (see also 4:139, 144; 5:51, 57; 9:23).

16 That the hypocrites *took their oaths as a shield* (cf. 63:2) indicates that they have used them deceptively, a practice also abhorred in pre-Islamic Arabia. The Quran thus extols those who keep their oaths (3:77; 38:44) and warns against using them to harm or deceive, as in 16:94: *Take not your oaths to practice deception among yourselves, lest a foot slip after it had been firmly planted, and you taste evil for your having turned from the way of God, and yours should be a great punishment* (see also 2:224; 5:53, 89; 6:109; 9:13; 16:38, 91–92; 24:53; 35:42). That they *turned from the way of God* is understood to indicate the manner in which they turn others away or block them from *the way of God* by disparaging the Muslims and sowing doubt (Sh). But it can also mean that they themselves turned away.

17 This verse is almost identical to 3:10 and 3:116. In the Hereafter, nothing other than belief and good deeds can avail anyone. Thus Abraham is reported to have said that the Day of Resurrection is *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89).

18 The hypocrites swear to God that they are Muslims (Z), *supposing that they have some standing* because they think their outward declarations of faith will benefit them (Z). Such a sentiment also indicates the implacability of their duplicity, as nothing can convince them of their error.

19 Satan rules over the hypocrites, so that their obedience is to him in all that he asks of them, they are among his flock, and they forget to remember God with their tongues and their hearts (Sh, Z). And as a famous *ḥadīth* states, "The likeness of one who remembers his Lord and one who does not remember is as the likeness of the living and the dead."

20 *Those who oppose God and His Messenger* refers to those who outwardly oppose and conspire against the Muslim community. Normal relations between Muslims and those non-Muslims who do not oppose them is allowed on an individual and communal level by verses such as 60:8: *God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, from treating them righteously and being just toward them;* and on a societal level by verses such as 8:61: *And if they incline toward peace, incline thou toward it.*

21 *Decreed* could also be rendered "inscribed," indicating that this has been written upon the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; JJ, Sh, Z). The manner in which God and His messengers prevail is understood to be by means of both proof, which could refer to revelation, and the sword (Sh, Z).

22 This verse is in the second-person singular and can thus be taken as an address to the Muslims in general, as translated, or as an address to the Prophet himself, meaning, "Thou shalt not find" (Sh). The first sentence of this verse was reportedly revealed regarding several instances in which Muslims fought in battle against their own family members for the cause of Islam. Interpreted in

believe in God and the Last Day loving those who oppose God and His Messenger, even if they be their fathers, their sons, their brothers, or their tribe. God has inscribed faith upon their hearts and strengthened them with a Spirit from Him. He causes them to enter Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein, God content with them and they content with Him. They are the party of God. Truly the party of God—it is they who shall prosper.

this manner, *their fathers* refers to Abū ʿUbaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ, who killed his father, ʿAbd Allāh, a soldier in the opposing Makkan army, at the Battle of Uḥud (IK, Q, Sy, W); *their sons* refers to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, who challenged his son to a duel at the Battle of Badr, saying "O Messenger of God, let me be among the first [to fight or to die]" (IK, W); *their brothers* refers to Muṣʿab ibn ʿUmayr, who killed his brother, ʿUbayd ibn ʿUmayr, during the Battle of Badr (IK, Q, W); and *their tribe* refers to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who killed his uncle al-ʿĀṣ ibn Hishām at the Battle of Badr (Q, W). Beyond these specific instances to which the verse may refer, it indicates that the bond of faith and belief overrides that of family and provides greater protection (Sh); see 49:10c. It also reflects the broader Quranic theme that one must not love anything of this world at the expense of one's love for God and His Messenger, as when the Prophet is commanded: *Say, "If your fathers, your children, your brothers, your spouses, your tribe, the wealth you have acquired, commerce whose stagnation you fear, and dwellings you find pleasing are more beloved to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His way, then wait till God comes with His Command." And God guides not iniquitous people* (9:24).

That God has *inscribed faith upon their hearts* indicates that He has established it firmly in believers' hearts and expanded their breasts for it (Z) or that He has consolidated faith in their hearts so that they believe in it fully, rather than believing some parts of it but not others (Q, R). That He has *strengthened them with a Spirit from Him* is understood in various ways. Some say it indicates the manner in which God aids believers in overcoming their enemies (Sh). Others say that *a Spirit from Him* refers to the Quran and its proofs; to light and faith; to clear proof and guidance; to the Mercy of God; or to the Archangel Gabriel (Q), all of which are profoundly interrelated. It can also be seen as a reference to the light of certainty (Aj). In this vein, the commentator al-Ālūsī writes, "What is intended [here] by *Spirit* is the light of the heart, which is the light that God casts into the hearts of whomsoever He will among His servants, and by which hearts attain peace [see 13:28] and ascend to the heights of realization (*taḥqīq*)." The pronominal suffix *from Him* (*minhu*), here interpreted as a reference to God, could also be read "from it," in which case it would refer to the faith that He has inscribed *upon their hearts* (Aj, Āl, R, Z).

*God content with them and they content with Him* (cf. 5:119; 9:100; 98:8) indicates that God is content with their obedience to Him and they are content with His Recompense for them in the Hereafter and with what He has ordained for them in the world (Aj, IK). According to al-Rāzī, the items mentioned in this verse can be seen as four blessings from God: faith in the heart, support through a *Spirit from Him*, being admitted to the Garden, and mutual contentment with God; he also says, "The blessing of contentment is the greatest of blessings and the most distinguished of [spiritual] ranks." Regarding this state of contentment, a *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever has submitted is provided for sufficiently, and whomsoever God has caused to be content with that which He has given him has succeeded" (Bg on 98:8). Also see 5:119c.

*The party of God* is also mentioned in 5:56, where it is used to describe those who avoid taking protectors other than God, the Messenger, and the believers, as enjoined in 5:51 and 5:55. Here it is placed in contrast to the *party of Satan* (v. 19), which in referring to the hypocrites mentioned in this *sūrah* indicates those who would compromise the Prophet and the Muslim community for the paltry gains of this world.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 59

# The Gathering

## *al-Ḥashr*

*Al-Ḥashr,* a Madinan *sūrah,* takes its name from the mention of *the first gathering* in v. 2. It is also known as *al-Naḍīr* or *Banu 'l-Naḍīr* (Āl, IJ, Ṭ), since most of its verses are said to have been revealed in relation to the Jewish tribe of Banu 'l-Naḍīr after they were banished from Madinah for having broken their treaty with the nascent Muslim polity. This is the second in a group of *sūrah*s known as "The Glorifiers" (*al-Musabbiḥāt*), because they begin with a reference to the glorification of God; the other *sūrah*s in the group are 57, 61, 62, and 64. According to a *ḥadīth,* "Within [the Glorifiers] there is a verse that is better than a thousand verses" (IK, Q, Sh). Some scholars are of the opinion that this *ḥadīth* refers to v. 3 of *Sūrah* 57, *al-Ḥadīd* (IK, Sh), while others propose that it refers to the last verse of this *sūrah* (Sh).

After arriving in Madinah, the Prophet established peaceful relations with the Jewish tribes of the surrounding oasis, of which the largest were the Banū Qaynuqāᶜ, the Banu 'l-Naḍīr, and the Banū Qurayẓah. The tribes of the oasis had made a covenant, often known as the Constitution of Madinah, in which they pledged to support one another, should any of them be attacked by outside forces, and to make no alliances against one another. The Muslims believed that the Banū Qaynuqāᶜ had broken these terms after the Battle of Badr; hence the Banū Qaynuqāᶜ were subsequently banished from the oasis.

After the Battle of Uḥud, the Banu 'l-Naḍīr were accused of having entered into an alliance against the Muslims and having plotted to kill the Prophet. When the Prophet heard of their treachery, some say from the Archangel Gabriel, others say through a woman of the Banu 'l-Naḍīr, the Prophet presented them with the choice of leaving the oasis with all their possessions, but retaining the right to the proceeds from their crops, or facing war. They requested a respite of ten days. After conferring with their allies, among whom were some of the hypocrites within Madinah, they chose the latter course, thinking that reinforcements would be forthcoming. The Muslim armies besieged their fortresses for twenty-one days, during which time the fighting was limited to brief exchanges of arrows. The Banu 'l-Naḍīr's hopes dwindled when none of the

promised reinforcements arrived. When the Muslim armies cut some of the Banu 'l-Naḍīr's prized date palms that lay just outside their fortresses, it was more than they could bear. They sent word they would agree to the initial terms of exile. The Prophet, however, was no longer willing to offer the same terms. Under the new terms, they would be banished, allowed to keep their considerable wealth, except their armaments, but had to forfeit their land, crops and all. The Banu 'l-Naḍīr had no choice but to accept.

Dealing with the complexities of administering justice when a treacherous group makes up a part of a small community, this *sūrah* addresses all of the groups that were to be found in the nascent Muslim community: the Emigrants from Makkah; the Helpers who had embraced Islam before the emigration; the Helpers who had embraced Islam after the emigration; the hypocrites, who embraced Islam outwardly but betrayed it inwardly, many of whom conspired against the Prophet; and the Jewish tribes, who initially welcomed the Prophet, but many of whom later developed animosity toward him and his followers. After the first section (vv. 1–5) addresses the situation of the Banu 'l-Naḍīr, vv. 6–10 discuss the proper distribution of spoils from their banishment among the different groups of believers and the relationships among these groups. Their harmonious relations are then contrasted to the disharmony between the hypocrites and the Banu 'l-Naḍīr (vv. 11–19), whose counsel toward one another is likened to that of Satan (v. 16). After declaring the incommensurability of those destined for the Fire and those destined for the Garden (v. 20), the *sūrah* ends with a famous passage that discusses the nature of the revelation (v. 21) and provides the most comprehensive list of Divine Names in the Quran (vv. 22–24).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (2) He it is Who expelled those who disbelieve among the People of the Book from their homes at the first gathering. You did not think they would go forth, and they thought their fortresses would protect them from God. Then God came upon them whence they reckoned not, and cast terror into their hearts, as they razed their houses with their own hands and with the hands of the believers. So take heed, O you who are possessed of sight. (3) Had God not ordained banishment for them, He would have punished them in this world. And in the Hereafter theirs shall be the punishment of the Fire. (4) That is because they defied God and His Messenger; and whosoever defies God and His Messenger, truly God is severe in retribution. (5) Whatsoever of the palm trees you cut down or left standing upon their roots, it was by

1 *Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God* is repeated in 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; see 64:1c. To the many permutations of this phrase in the Quran, 17:44 adds, *And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise.*

2 Here *those who disbelieve among the People of the Book* is a specific reference to the Banu 'l-Naḍīr; see the introduction to this *sūrah*. *At the first gathering* refers to the gathering of the Muslim forces. Alternately, it can be read "to the first gathering" as a reference to the Banu 'l-Naḍīr having been banished to Syria (Ṭ), but then gathering in Khaybar. God *cast terror into their hearts* when the Prophet heard of their plans to assassinate him and had their leader, Kaʿb ibn Ashraf, executed instead (Q). *God came upon them whence they reckoned not* refers to the fact that those who executed Kaʿb had previously been trusted allies of the Banu 'l-Naḍīr (Q). After being forced to leave their homes, the Banu 'l-Naḍīr are reported to have taken them apart *with their own hands*, as they sought to take with them anything of value (Ṭ). That *they razed their houses with their own hands* could also be taken as an allusion to the fact that their banishment and loss of property resulted from their breaking their treaty and then rejecting more congenial terms before being forced to forfeit their homes and their land altogether. The injunction to *take heed*, or "reflect," *O you who are possessed of sight*, is understood by the philosopher and jurisprudent Ibn Rushd as a "proof of the obligatory nature of the syllogism, or of both the syllogism and legal reasoning (*qiyās*)" (*Faṣl al-maqāl*, 28).

3–4 *He would have punished them in this world* is interpreted to mean that, had the Banu 'l-Naḍīr not been banished, God would have punished them with execution and capture (Ṭ), just as the Banū Qurayẓah were punished for their treachery after the Battle of the Trench in 4/627.

5 After the siege of the Banu 'l-Naḍīr had lasted for several days, the Prophet ordered the cutting down and burning of some palm trees that lay within sight of their fortresses. The Banu 'l-Naḍīr were alarmed and said, "You claim, O Muhammad, that you seek goodness. Is there any goodness in damaging productive trees and cutting them down?" They also said to him, "Is corruption upon the earth part of what you claim has

God's Leave, and that He might disgrace the iniquitous. (6) As for what God has given in spoils from them to the Messenger, you spurred neither horse nor camel for it. But God grants His messengers authority over whomsoever He will, and God is Powerful over all things. (7) That which God has given in spoils to His Messenger from the people of the towns is for God and His Messenger, and for kinfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler, that it not come to circulate among your wealthy. Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo, and reverence God. Truly God is severe in retribution. (8) For the poor emigrants who were expelled from their homes and their property seeking bounty and contentment from God and who help

been revealed to you?" The Prophet was distressed upon hearing this, and the Muslims began to fear that cutting down the trees may have been an act of corruption. Yet they disagreed among themselves. Some said not to cut the palm trees down, for they were part of what God had given as spoils, but others wanted to cut them down. And so God revealed v. 5, confirming the opinion of those who warned against cutting the palm trees down, while at the same time affirming the lawfulness of cutting them down under these particular circumstances. God informed them that the cutting down of trees or leaving them standing is only by His Leave (IK, W). Gratuitous destruction of enemy property, especially trees and crops, is prohibited by Islamic Law (Bg, IK, R, Ṭ, Z).

6 *You spurred neither horse nor camel for it* indicates that the property taken from the Banū Naḍīr was not to be treated as booty acquired in battle, which would have been distributed among the victorious combatants with one-fifth going to the Prophet for the needs of the Muslim community, as stipulated in 8:41: *Whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and His Messenger, and for kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, and the traveler.* But in this instance, as the booty had in effect been surrendered without a fight, the Prophet was to be granted full authority over its distribution. He then gave it to the Emigrants, many of whom had been in straitened circumstances since their emigration from Makkah, and to two of the Helpers, the Muslims who had made Madinah their home before the migration of the Prophet. The remainder he used for the needs of his family and to purchase armaments for the Muslims (IK).

7 The recipients of the booty listed here appear in one form or another in several other verses (e.g., 2:177, 214; 4:36; 8:41); see also the essay "Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society." *That it not come to circulate among your wealthy* indicates that the Prophet sought to distribute the spoils of the siege in a manner that would establish greater economic parity among the Muslims. Although this verse provides specific rulings pertaining to the distribution of booty after the defeat of the Banu 'l-Naḍīr, Muslims have often taken the injunction *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo, and reverence God* as a more general command applying to all that was enjoined by the Prophet, in accord with many verses that command Muslims to *obey God and obey the Messenger* (3:32; 4:59; 5:92; 24:54; 47:33; 64:12; see also 3:132; 4:80; 7:156–57; 8:1, 20, 46; 33:33; 49:14; 58:13). Hence this verse is often linked to a famous saying of the Prophet: "When I order you to do something, then do as much of it as you can. If I forbid something for you, then shun it" (IK, Q).

8 Rather than being used to further enrich the wealthy, the spoils of war are to be distributed among the poor (Q). *Bounty* indicates what the emigrants sought in this world, and *contentment*

God and His Messenger—it is, they who are the truthful. (9) And those who were settled in the land and in belief before them love those who emigrated to them and find in their breasts no need for that which they were given. They prefer others over themselves, even if they be impoverished. And whosoever is shielded from the avarice of his soul, it is they who shall prosper. (10) And those who came after them say, "Our Lord! Forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith, and place no rancor in our hearts toward those who believe. Our

indicates what they sought in the Hereafter (Q). They *help God and His Messenger* by striving and fighting in the way of God (Q). *Truthful* translates *ṣādiqūn,* which can also mean "sincere," and here indicates those who act in accord with their beliefs, in stark contrast to the hypocrites, who are criticized in vv. 11–12.

9 *In the land* refers to Madinah, and *those who were settled . . . in belief before them* refers to the Muslims of Madinah who had embraced Islam before the arrival of the Prophet and the Emigrants from Makkah. This verse was reportedly revealed in relation to an incident in which the Prophet entrusted one of the People of the Veranda (the poor who lived outside the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah; see 2:273c) to a man from the Helpers. The Helper took the man to his family and asked his wife, "Do we have anything [to feed him]?" She said, "We do not have anything except the children's food." He said, "Put them to sleep, and then bring me the food. And when you put the food down, turn the lamp off." He then offered what he had to his guest. The following morning he took him back to the Messenger of God. The Prophet said, "Truly the dwellers of the heavens are amazed at what you two have done." This verse was then revealed (IK, W). *They prefer others over themselves* is related to those verses that praise giving wealth *despite loving it* (2:177; 76:8). *Find in their breasts no need* has broader implications, as it indicates removing this world from one's heart, so that the heart is no longer attached to what passes it by (Aj). In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Abstain from the world, and God will love you; abstain from what pertains to other people, and the people will love you." *Whosoever is shielded from the avarice of his soul* (cf. 64:16) thus describes those who feel no need for what is destined for others and are thereby protected, as in another *ḥadīth,* "Your worst enemy is the soul between your two sides." In this same vein, the Prophet warned his followers, "Be on your guard against committing oppression, for oppression is a darkness on the Day of Resurrection. Be on your guard against avarice, for avarice is what destroyed those who were before you. It made them shed blood and make lawful that which was unlawful for them" (IK).

10 *Those who came after them* refers to those who embraced Islam after the Prophet and his followers had emigrated from Makkah, in contrast to those Helpers who had embraced Islam before the emigration. It is thus seen as designating a third category of believers, alluded to in 9:100: *[As for] the foremost, the first among the Emigrants and the Helpers, and those who followed them with virtue, God is content with them, and they are content with Him* (IK). Their prayer indicates their desire that there be no discord between them and those who preceded them in religion. But it can also be understood to impart an attitude that all Muslims should have toward one another (R). *Those who came after them* can also be read as a reference to everyone who enters Islam until the Day of Resurrection, while *our brothers who preceded us in faith* can be read as a reference to the People of the Book, who preceded the Muslims in belief (Q). In this sense, the verse indicates that the preferred course with the Banū Naḍīr would have been reconciliation, but that once they had become resolute in their defiance, there was no alternative but banishment.

Lord! Truly Thou art Kind, Merciful." (11) Hast thou not seen those who act with hypocrisy, saying to their brothers who disbelieve among the People of the Book, "If you are expelled, surely we shall go forth with you. And we shall never obey anyone against you. And if you are fought, we shall help you." God bears witness that they are surely liars. (12) Were they expelled, they would not go forth with them, and were they fought, they would not help them. And were they to help them, they would surely turn their backs. Then they would not be helped. (13) Truly you incite more intense dread in their breasts than God. That is because they are a people who do not comprehend. (14) They will not fight you all together, save in fortified towns or from behind walls. Their might is fierce among themselves. You suppose that they are together; yet their hearts are divided. That is because they are a people who do not understand, (15) like those who shortly before them tasted the evil consequences of their affair—and theirs shall be a painful punishment— (16) like Satan when he says unto man,

11–12 In contrast to the different categories of believers mentioned above, these verses discuss the hypocrites of Madinah, chiefly ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, who reportedly promised the Banū Naḍīr that he and his followers would support them in their fight against the Muslims. But when they could not muster sufficient forces, they reneged on their promise and watched as one of their allies was forced to leave the oasis. The hypocrites are here considered so cowardly and duplicitous that even if they did muster the promised forces, they would soon be driven away by the Muslim army; hence the Banū Naḍīr would still *not be helped* (Ṭ).

13 The Banū Naḍīr are condemned here for breaking their pact and thus violating the principles of their religion, for, had they feared God, they would not have done so and would not now need to seek refuge from the Muslim army. That they fear human beings more than God indicates that they are focused upon this world rather than the Hereafter.

14 *Their might is fierce among themselves* has two meanings: first, the Banū Naḍīr believe that they are strong and courageous, though in reality they are not; second, "their enmity is great among themselves," indicating that they appear united but are in fact at odds with one another (IK). *You suppose that they are together; yet their hearts are divided* refers to either the discord between the Jews of Madinah and the hypocrites (IK) or inner discord among the Jews of Madinah themselves. Although one might see them combining forces and think that these forces are harmonious, in reality they are severely divided (IK). The discord that people experience among themselves is a form of punishment sent by God, as in 6:65: *He is the One Who has power to send a punishment upon you from above you or from beneath your feet, or to confound you as discordant factions and make you taste the might of one another.* In contrast, it is a sign of God's Mercy when the hearts of those who had been enemies are joined; see 3:103.

15 *Those who shortly before them* refers to the Banū Qaynuqāʿ, another Jewish tribe which had been driven out of Madinah for similar treachery two years before the Banū Naḍīr (IK). They *tasted the evil consequences of their affair* through the punishment imposed upon them in this life, *and theirs shall be a painful punishment* in the Hereafter (Bḍ).

16–17 These verses draw an analogy between the way the hypocrites betrayed the Jews and the way Satan betrays human beings (Bḍ), as in 8:48:

"Disbelieve!" Then when he disbelieves, he says, "Surely I am quit of you. Truly I fear God, Lord of the worlds." (17) The end of both is that they will be in the Fire, abiding therein. That is the recompense of the wrongdoers. (18) O you who believe! Reverence God and let every soul consider what it has sent forth for the morrow; and reverence God. Truly God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (19) And be not like those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls. It is they who are the iniquitous. (20) Not equal are the inhabitants of the Fire and the inhabitants of the Garden. The inhabitants of the Garden—they are the triumphant. (21) Had We made this Quran descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God. These

*Satan made their deeds seem fair unto them, and said, "None among mankind shall overcome you today, and I am indeed your defender." But when the two hosts saw each other, he turned on his heels and said, "I am quit of you!"* The manner in which Satan declares himself to be quit or innocent of what he entices the disbelievers to ascribe to him is most evident in 14:22: *And Satan will say, when the matter has been decreed, "Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help. Truly I disbelieved in your ascribing me as partner aforetime."*

18 *Let every soul consider what it has sent forth for the morrow* indicates that everyone should reflect upon their deeds and evaluate how they may fare on the Day of Judgment. It is reported that upon seeing the impoverished state of some Muslims, the Prophet called the people together and then recited 4:1, *O mankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women,* followed by this verse, whereupon many Muslims brought food and clothes for the impoverished members of the community (IK).

19 That God makes those who forget God *forget their souls*, or themselves, indicates that they cease to listen to what benefits the soul and to do what would purify it (Bḍ), and that they are therefore unable to prepare for the Day of Judgment. Some say this means that they forget the right of God and thus the right of their souls, or the share that is their due (Bḍ, Ṭ). From another perspective, *those who forget God, such that He makes them forget their souls* is an inversion of the famous saying, sometimes regarded as a *ḥadīth*, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Since forgetfulness of God is the cause of forgetfulness of self, remembering the self necessitates that God first remember the self, and God's remembering the self will itself necessitate the self's remembering itself, as in 2:152: *Remember Me, and I shall remember you.* From this perspective, whoever does not have self-knowledge does not know God and will be unfortunate in the next life. Thus 8:45 enjoins, *Be firm and remember God much, that haply you may prosper.*

20 This is one of several verses that indicate the disparity between believers and disbelievers (see 38:28). Elsewhere the chasm between the believers and disbelievers is likened to that between *the seeing* and *the blind* (see 35:19; 40:58) and to *those who know* and *those who do not know* (39:9).

21 *Humbled* can also be read as "brought low." Most understand this verse as a reprimand to human beings whose hearts remain hard and unmoved in the face of the Quran (Aj, IK, Z), as if to say, "How is it that your hearts are so hard that they do not soften to the Quran, as even the mountains would?" (IK). This verse is thus an injunction for human beings to listen to and receive

are the parables We set forth for mankind, that haply they may reflect. (22) He is God, other than Whom there is no god, Knower of the Unseen and the seen. And He is the Compassionate, the Merciful. (23) He is God, other than Whom there is no god, the Sovereign, the Holy, Peace, the Faithful, the Protector, the

the Quran with fear and humility (IK, Ṭ). From another perspective, this verse exalts the potentiality of the human heart, which alone among all created things can contain the Quran, as alluded to in 33:72: *Truly We offered the Trust unto the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were wary of it—yet man bore it* (Aj). Seen in this light, the Divine Names presented in the verses that follow are an allusion to the Divine Qualities to which it is said the heart of God's believing servants can attain. In this vein, a well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "My heavens and My earth embrace Me not, but the heart of My believing servant does embrace Me" (al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, III.1.5).

22–24 This passage is considered to be among the "Jewels of the Quran" and is often recited in both obligatory and supererogatory prayers. It provides the most extensive list of Divine Names in the Quran, seventeen in all—or eighteen, if one includes the pronoun *He* (*huwa*) with which the passage begins and which many consider a Divine Name pertaining to the Divine Essence. Many sayings extol the recitation of this *sūrah,* especially these last three verses (sometimes including v. 21 as well). According to one saying attributed to the early *Ḥadīth* specialist Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ (d. 187/803), "One who reads the end of the *sūrah* of 'The Gathering' [vv. 21–24] until the morning and then dies on that very day is stamped with the stamp of those who witness [God]. One who reads it in the evening and then dies that very night is stamped with the stamp of those who witness [God]" (*Iḥyāʾ*, *K. Qirāʾat al-Qurʾān*).

22 For an explanation of the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahādah*), with which this passage begins, see 2:255c. The Name *Allāh*—"God"—is referred to as the all-comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jāmiʿ*), because it is said to comprise all the particular qualities that each of the other Names conveys. It is also the most specific of the Names, since it cannot be used to describe any being other than God, whereas many other Divine Names, such as the Merciful or the Clement, can. *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (cf. 6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 62:8; 64:18) indicates that God knows all that is hidden and all that is manifest on all levels of reality, in both this world and the Hereafter (Q, R). It can also mean that God knows all things before they become manifest in external existence, when they are "Unseen," and after they come into external existence, when they can be *seen* (Aj). Regarding *the Compassionate, the Merciful,* see 1:3c.

23 According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī in his *Commentary on the Most Beautiful Names of God,* there is a progression in the first five Names listed here from those that pertain more closely to the Divine Essence to those that pertain more closely to Divine Action. *The Sovereign* is the One Who in both His Essence and His Attributes has no need of any other being, while all other things are in need of Him. *The Holy* is the One Who transcends utterly any quality that one might attribute to Him, thus indicating that His Perfection is beyond human conception. *Peace* translates *salām,* which indicates being flawless, beyond all imperfections, and untarnished by any evil or inner contradiction. According to a *ḥadīth,* some Companions used to pray "Peace upon God," until the Prophet corrected them, indicating that God was Himself Peace. *The Faithful* translates *al-Muʾmin,* the same word that is rendered "believer" when used to describe human beings. When said of God, *al-Muʾmin* refers to the One Who provides all safety and security. *The Protector* is the One Who watches over His creation, tending to their actions and their provision at every moment. *The Mighty* indicates the One Who is eminent, of Whom others have need and to Whom access is difficult. *The Compeller* is the One Whose Will prevails over the will of all others, the One Whose grasp nothing escapes, yet Whom nothing else can grasp. *The Proud* is the

Mighty, the Compeller, the Proud. Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe. (24) He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

One Who is majestic to the exclusion of all else, so that nothing is worthy of being considered in relation to Him.

24 *The Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner* can be correlated to three stages in the unfolding of creation: *the Creator* indicates the Quality of God through which He measures things out before they come into existence in this world; *the Maker* indicates the manner in which God then brings things into being; and *the Fashioner* indicates the manner in which God then gives things form with various characteristics (Q). Alternately, these three Divine Names can be seen as referring more specifically to the three stages through which creatures, in particular human beings, develop in the womb (Q).

Regarding *unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names* (cf. 7:180; 17:110; 20:8), a famous *ḥadīth* states, "God has ninety-nine Names—one hundred minus one—and whosoever enumerates them will enter the Garden" (IK), though many scholars maintain that God has more than ninety-nine Names, many of which are not revealed to human beings. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have called upon God saying, "I implore Thee by every Name that is Thine, by which Thou hast named Thyself, or which Thou hast revealed in Thy Book, or which Thou hast taught to any of Thy creation, or which Thou hast assigned to Thyself in Thy knowledge of things unseen."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 60

# She Who Is Examined

## *al-Mumtaḥanah*

A Madinan *sūrah, al-Mumtaḥanah* was most likely revealed sometime after the year 6/628. Some maintain that the first verse was revealed on the day Makkah was conquered by the Muslim army in 8/630. The *sūrah* takes its name from the injunction to *examine them* in v. 10. As translated, the title refers to the woman regarding whom several of its verses are said to have been revealed, Umm Kulthūm bint ʿUqbah (Āl, Q). It is also known as *al-Imtiḥān,* "The Examining" (Āl) or "The Examiner," which describes the *sūrah* as one that examines and exposes the faults of human beings (Q), a quality that could also be attributed to the entire Quran. Some have also named this *sūrah al-Mawaddah,* "Affection" (Āl), most likely after the phrases *you offer them affection* (v. 1) and *God will forge affection* (v. 7), and because the entire *sūrah* clarifies where the affections of the believers should lie.

That there should be no affection for or alliances with an enemy party is made clear in vv. 1–3. The case of Abraham and his followers is then cited as an example to be followed (vv. 4–6) in this regard. The next passage (vv. 7–9) provides hope that better relations can be established with enemy parties and allows for good relations with those who do not oppose the Muslims. The last section (vv. 10–12) addresses the complex situation brought about by the emigration of women from Makkah to Madinah and the rules to be observed when women who are married to idolaters choose to embrace Islam. Marriages between believers and disbelievers were henceforth considered invalid, but were to be dissolved in as equitable a manner as possible.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O you who believe! Take not Mine enemy and your enemy as friends—you offer them affection, though they have indeed disbelieved in the truth that has come to you, expelling the Messenger and you for having believed in God your Lord—if you have gone forth striving in My way and seeking My Good Pleasure. You show them affection in secret, while I know best that which you hide and that which you disclose. And whosoever among you does so has indeed strayed from the right way. (2) Were they to come upon you, they would be enemies unto you and would stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you in evil. And they wish you to disbelieve. (3) Your family relations and your children will not benefit you on the Day of Resurrection; He will distinguish

1 *Friends* translates *awliyāʾ*, which could also be rendered "protectors," "helpers," or "allies" (Ṭ). This verse was reportedly revealed in relation to a member of the Muslim community who attempted to disclose the Prophet's plans to the Quraysh. The Prophet sent several Companions to intercept the letter sent by Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah. After intercepting the letter, which had information about the Prophet's plans to march upon Makkah, the Prophet asked, "What is this, O Ḥāṭib?" He answered, "Be not hasty [in judging me], I am a man who is merely allied with the Quraysh, for I am not myself a Qurayshite. All the Emigrants with you have relatives who will protect them. I have no relatives in Makkah; so I wanted to obtain some assistance from the Quraysh. By God, I did not do it because I doubt my religion, nor because I have turned to disbelief after choosing Islam." The Prophet said, "He has spoken the truth!" But 'Umar exclaimed, "Let me strike the neck of this hypocrite!" To which the Prophet responded, "He has taken part in the Battle of Badr. You do not know; perhaps God has looked upon those who took part in the Battle of Badr and said, 'Do as you please, for I have forgiven you.'" Then this verse was revealed (Q, Ṭ, W). Despite the Prophet's leniency, the verse indicates that to choose alliance with disbelievers over alliance with the Prophet and the Muslim community is to stray from *the right way* (*sawāʾ al-sabīl*), which literally means, "the middle way."

2 *Stretch forth their hands* means that they would fight and try to kill the believers (JJ, Ṭ), while *stretch forth . . . their tongues* means that they will insult and revile them (JJ). *They wish for* derives from the same root as *affection* in v. 1, *w-d-d*, indicating that, while some believers still harbor affection for some of the disbelievers, many of the disbelievers only maintain their bonds in the hopes that the believers will revert to idolatry.

3 Here *your family relations and your children* could be a specific reference to those who remain idolatrous (JJ) or a broader reference to the fact that each person stands alone before God on the Day of Judgment, which is thus described as *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89). For other references to this broad Quranic theme, see 3:10, 14, 116; 8:28; 9:24, 55, 69, 85; 18:39–40, 46; 23:55–56; 26:88; 34:35–37; 63:9c; 64:14–15; 68:14; 71:21. This verse could also be read, "Your family relations and your children will not benefit you. On the Day of Resurrection He will distinguish between you." In both readings, that God *will distinguish between you* means

between you. And God sees whatsoever you do. (4) There is indeed a beautiful example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, "Truly we are quit of you and of all that you worship apart from God. We have rejected you, and enmity and hatred have arisen between us and you forever, till you believe in God alone"; save for Abraham's saying to his father, "I shall assuredly ask forgiveness for you, though I have no power to avail you aught from God." "Our Lord, in Thee do we trust, unto Thee do we turn in repentance, and unto Thee is the journey's end. (5) Our Lord! Make us not a trial for those who disbelieve, and forgive us. Our Lord! Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise." (6) You have a beautiful example in them for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day. And whosoever turns away—truly God is

that the believers and disbelievers will be divided from one another and judged separately.

4 *Those with him* refers to the prophets (Ṭ) or to those who followed Abraham (JJ, R). According to the first interpretation, the believers are told to look to the examples set by all previous prophets. *When they said to their people* thus refers to the manner in which all prophets sought to distance themselves from the disbelievers in their respective communities (Ṭ). According to the second interpretation, the believers are enjoined to follow the example of Abraham and his followers in rejecting the idolaters (R). According to both interpretations, Abraham's seeking forgiveness for his father is not *a beautiful example* to be followed, because one should not seek forgiveness for disbelievers (JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). Thus 9:113 says of Abraham's prayer for his father, *But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him.* In other passages, Muhammad is told to seek forgiveness for his followers (3:159; 24:62), and Jacob agrees to seek forgiveness for his sons (12:97–8). But where there is no corresponding attitude of repentance on the part of those for whom forgiveness is sought, the Quran says, *It is the same for them whether thou askest forgiveness for them or thou askest forgiveness for them not; God will never forgive them. Truly God guides not iniquitous people* (63:6; see also 4:107; 9:80). The ability of prophets and angels (see 40:7; 42:5) to pray for the forgiveness of others is related to the heavily debated Quranic topic of intercession, regarding which see 2:48c; 2:255c.

5 The plea in this verse is, "Do not let the disbelievers defeat us such that they are fooled into thinking they are followers of the truth" (Bg, JJ, R), or "Do not let the disbelievers defeat us such that they will be punished on account of what they have done to us" (R); cf. 10:85; 25:20. It can also be seen as expressing the desire that evil not befall the disbelievers, since from a Quranic perspective that is the likely outcome of a situation in which the believers are a trial for disbelievers, as in 85:10: *Truly those who persecute believing men and believing women, then do not repent, theirs shall be the punishment of Hell, and theirs shall be the punishment of burning.* The verse could also be understood as a general prayer that trial and strife (*fitnah*) not arise between the two communities.

6 The *example* of Abraham and his people dissociating themselves from the disbelievers among their own tribe is the model for those who anticipate the meeting with God and hope for the reward of the Hereafter (R); see 43:26–27: *Abraham said to his father and his people, "Truly I am quit of that which you worship, save Him who originated me, for surely He will guide me."* In the present verse, *whosoever turns away* refers to those who do not follow the injunctions of vv. 1–4 and

the Self-Sufficient, the Praised. (7) It may be that God will forge affection between you and those of them with whom you are in enmity. God is Powerful, and God is Forgiving, Merciful. (8) God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, from treating them righteously and being just toward them. Truly God loves the just. (9) God only forbids you, with regard to those who fought you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported your expulsion, from befriending them; whosoever befriends them, they are the wrongdoers. (10) O you who believe! When the believing women come unto you as emigrants, examine them. God knows best their faith. Then if you know them to be believers, do not return them to the disbelievers. Those women are

maintain ties with the enemies among the disbelievers (JJ).

7 According to some accounts, after the revelation of vv. 4–6, extolling the example of Abraham and his followers, who shunned the idolaters among them, many Muslims declared their relatives among the idolaters to be their enemies. Knowing that this was hard on them, God revealed this verse (W). God "forged affection" between them through marriage, for example, when the Prophet married Umm Ḥabībah, the daughter of the Qurayshī leader Abū Sufyān (Q, W), and by guiding the disbelievers to belief (JJ). *God is Powerful* to do that, *Forgiving* of their past deeds if they repent, and *Merciful* to them by continuing to offer guidance.

8 Muslims are here encouraged not to treat an entire people as enemies, if only some of those people are in fact enemies. In this context, *God does not forbid you* is understood as a positive exhortation meaning, "God wishes you to do so" (Q, R, Ṭ). This verse was reportedly revealed in response to a specific incident when Asmāʾ, the daughter of Abū Bakr, refused to meet her mother, who had come from Makkah to visit her in Madinah, because her mother had remained an idolater rather than embracing Islam. When the situation was brought to the attention of the Prophet, this verse was revealed. Asmāʾ then received her mother in her house (Q, Ṭ, W). In this context, that *God loves the just* (cf. 5:42) indicates that God loves those who are able to discern between those who are enemies and those who are not, thus avoiding indiscriminate animosity.

9 Though Muslims are enjoined to not bear animosity toward an entire people, they are also not to befriend or make alliances with members of an enemy force. Such clarifications were crucial at the beginning of the formation of the Islamic community, because many Muslims still had relatives among the Quraysh of Makkah or had previously held alliances with other tribes that were allied with the Quraysh. Nonetheless, the injunctions of this verse have more general implications; see also 5:51c.

10 This verse discusses the legality of marriage between Muslims and people of other communities, forbidding marriage between Muslims and disbelievers (see also 2:221). *Examine them* means that when women come to embrace Islam, the Muslims must first be sure that they have migrated to Madinah out of sincere belief, not out of enmity toward their husbands or because they were enamored of other men (JJ). *God knows best their faith* indicates that, once they have taken an oath, their word is to be trusted and the matter is between them and God. Though marriage between believers and disbelievers is forbidden, in 5:5, one of the last verses to be revealed, marriage between Muslim men and women from among the People of the Book (i.e., Jews and Christians) is permitted; see 5:5c.

not lawful for those men; nor are those men lawful for those women. And give them what they have spent. There is no blame upon you if you marry them when you have given them their bridewealth. And hold not to the ties of disbelieving women. Ask for what you have spent, and let them ask for what they have spent. That is the Judgment of God; He judges between you. And God is Knowing, Wise. (11) And if any of your wives should go over to the disbelievers, and then you have your turn, give those whose wives have gone the like of what they have spent. And reverence God, in Whom you are believers. (12) O Prophet! When believing women come unto thee, pledging unto thee that they will not

This verse was reportedly revealed after the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah in 6/628, which stipulated that the Makkans who fled to the Prophet should be returned to the Makkans, but that anyone among the Prophet's Companions who fled to the people of Makkah would not be returned to Madinah. A Qurayshī man whose wife had joined the Muslims then went to the Prophet and said, "O Muhammad, return my wife to me, for you have agreed to return to us whosoever flees to you." Then this verse was revealed stipulating that Muslim women could not be married to idolaters and that their return was excluded from the treaty. *And give them what they have spent* stipulates that any bridewealth that had been paid to the Muslim women before they left their disbelieving husbands in order to embrace Islam must be returned to their disbelieving husbands when they are removed from wedlock with them. The Prophet therefore allowed the believing women who had migrated to Madinah to stay and sent back to the Quraysh the men who had fled the Quraysh to join the Muslims in Madinah (Q, W).

11 *Any of your wives* may refer to the wives themselves, their bridewealth (JJ, Ṭ), or both. *And then you have your turn* can mean either when Muslim men succeed in battle against their adversaries (JJ) or when they are afflicted with the loss of their women, as were the disbelievers whose wives went over to the Muslims. As the disbelievers could not be expected to follow the Quranic injunction to pay back the bridewealth if a woman left her husband and returned to them from the Muslims (which is said to have happened six times during the life of the Prophet; Z), the Muslim community was then asked to spend from the treasury or the spoils of war to *give those whose wives have gone the like of what they have spent* on the woman's bridewealth (Bg, Ṭ, Z). The Muslims carried out this command by way of paying back the disbelievers the bridewealth of their former wives, but the idolaters refused to do the same (IK, Ṭ).

12 This verse is reported to constitute the elements of the oath that the Prophet would take from women who came to him to embrace Islam (IK, Q). *Nor steal* implies any acquisitions or gains made by unlawful means (R). *Nor slay their children* refers to the pre-Islamic Arabian practice of burying newborn girls to avoid shame and poverty (JJ). Some argue that it applies by extension to those who kill an unborn fetus (IK), though this issue is debated. A *slanderous lie that they have fabricated between their hands and feet* refers to a baby conceived in adultery whom a woman falsely claims was her husband's child (IK, JJ, Z). When taking this pledge from women, the Prophet is reported to have added on one occasion that they not wail for the dead and on another occasion to have said, "Whosoever among you fulfills the pledge will be rewarded by God, and whosoever commits any of those sins and is punished [in this life], that will serve as expiation for the sin; and whosoever commits any of these sins and God covers that, then it is up to God to punish or to forgive" (Q). In this context, it is important to note that the Prophet took an independent pledge from women, indicating that women remain spiritually

ascribe any as partners unto God, nor steal, nor fornicate, nor slay their children, nor bring a slanderous lie that they have fabricated between their hands and feet, nor disobey thee in anything honorable, then accept their pledge and seek God's Forgiveness for them. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (13) O you who believe! Do not befriend a people with whom God is wroth; those who have despaired of the Hereafter, just as the disbelievers have despaired of the inhabitants of graves.

independent of their husbands and responsible for themselves before God and the Prophet, an issue revisited in *Sūrah* 66.

13 This verse was reportedly revealed regarding some poor Muslims who would inform the Jews of the activities of the Muslims in exchange for provisions (Q, R, W, Z). In this sense, the *sūrah* ends with an injunction similar to the one with which it began—to not take God's enemies as friends (Q). *Those who have despaired of the Hereafter* refers to the Jews of Madinah, who would be in despair for denying the prophethood of Muhammad (Q, R, Ṭ), or to the hypocrites, who would despair for conspiring against the Prophet (Q). It can also be seen as a reference to all those who despair of the Hereafter because they preferred and thus worked only for this world. That they despair as do the disbelievers, here referring specifically to the idolatrous Makkans, indicates that both will be punished in the Hereafter. That they despair *of the inhabitants of graves* is understood as a reference to the manner in which the disbelievers despair of seeing their deceased relations because they have no concept of a Hereafter (Q), or to the belief that no good will come to those who die as disbelievers (Q).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 61

# The Ranks

## *al-Ṣaff*

Most commentators consider *al-Ṣaff* to be a Madinan *sūrah,* although a small minority consider it to be Makkan (Āl). It takes its name from the mention of those who *fight in His way in ranks* in v. 4, but it is also known as *al-Ḥawāriyyūn,* "The Apostles," after the discussion of Jesus' apostles in v. 14, and as *ʿĪsā,* "Jesus," after the references to Jesus in vv. 6 and 14 (Āl). This is the third in the group of *sūrah*s known as "The Glorifiers" (*al-Musabbiḥāt*), *sūrah*s that begin with a reference to the glorification of God; the others are 57, 59, 62, and 64.

The previous *sūrah* enjoins *striving in My way and seeking My good pleasure* (60:1), but this *sūrah* begins by extolling those who fight in the way of God and chastising those who shrink from the task (vv. 1–4). Brief mention of the opposition encountered by Moses and Jesus (vv. 5–6) and condemnation of those who oppose God's revelations (vv. 7–8) leads into a prophecy of the eventual triumph of Islam (v. 9) and a foretelling of the rewards that await those who strive in the way of God (vv. 10–14).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (2) O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? (3) Grievously odious is it in the Sight of God that you say that which you do not do. (4) Truly God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure. (5) And [remember] when Moses said unto his people, "O my people! Why do you hurt me, though you know well that I am the Messenger of God unto you?" So when they swerved, God

1 All that exists bears witness to God's Lordship and Oneness. He is *the Mighty* in that He overcomes all that is other than Him and nothing can overcome Him (R); cf. 57:1; 59:1; 62:1; 64:1. For the meaning of the various modes in which God is said to be glorified in the Quran, see 64:1c.

2–3 It is reported that some Muslims would say, "If we knew the deeds most beloved to God, we would expend our wealth and souls to perform such deeds." So God directed them to the works most beloved to Him, saying, *Truly God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure* (v. 4). But when the Muslims were tested at the Battle of Uḥud (see 3:121c; 3:155c), they retreated, and so God chastised them by revealing, *O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?* (Q, R, Ṭ, W), meaning, "Why did you claim that you would do what is most beloved to God, but then not do it?" These verses can also be seen as a reference to the hypocrites, who when fighting is enjoined upon them say, *Our Lord! Why hast Thou prescribed fighting for us?* (4:77; R). V. 2 can also be taken as a reference to all believers, as they have agreed to fulfill that which God has required of them through humility and surrender to God, but if they do not fulfill their promise, they can be accused of claiming falsely to do something that in fact they do not do (R). In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Whosoever claims for himself qualities that he does not have is not one of us; let him prepare his seat in Hell." Regarding those who love to be praised for what they have not done, see 3:188: *Do not suppose that those who exult in what they have brought about and love to be praised for what they have not done—do not suppose that they are delivered from the punishment; theirs is a painful punishment.*

4 In contrast to vv. 2–3, this verse praises those who heed God's Command to strive in His way. That *God loves those who fight in His way in ranks* indicates both His Contentment with them and praise for them (R). *Solid structure* suggests a building made of bricks that are sealed together so that there are no cracks between them. Here it is a metaphor for the Muslim community, who are joined by bonds of love and brotherhood, as in 49:10: *The believers are naught but brothers,* and in a famous *ḥadīth:* "A Muslim believer is a mirror reflection of another Muslim. A believer is a brother to another believer; he safeguards him from destruction and prevents his annihilation during his absence." In this regard, another *ḥadīth* states, "The entire Muslim group is like one single body. If the eye aches, then the whole body is in pain, and if the head aches, then the whole body is in pain." For the importance of the brotherhood of Muslims, see commentary on 49:9–12.

5 The hurt Moses' people caused him can be attributed to several events. The first was when they challenged Moses by saying, *Show us God openly* (4:153), and worshipped the golden calf (see 7:148–52; also 2:92–93; 20:88). Then, after they had been provided manna from Heaven, they said, *O Moses, we will not endure one food* (2:61). And finally they refused to enter Israel and fight with him, saying, *O Moses! We shall never enter it, so long as they remain therein. So go forth, thou and thy Lord, and fight! We shall sit here* (5:24). *They*

caused their hearts to swerve; and God guides not iniquitous people. (6) And [remember] when Jesus son of Mary said, "O Children of Israel! Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which came before me in the Torah and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me whose name is Aḥmad." And when he came unto them with clear proofs, they said, "This is manifest sorcery." (7) Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates lies against God, while he is being called to submission? And God guides not wrongdoing people. (8) They desire to extinguish the Light of God with

– *swerved* means that they inclined away from the truth (Q, R). Here their swerving can be read as referring to their deeds, as a result of which moral and spiritual "swerving" became manifest in their hearts. They thus came to be among the iniquitous, those whose outward actions manifest their inner iniquity, and for this they were left to wander astray. For *God guides not iniquitous people* (cf. 5:108; 9:24, 80; 63:6).

6 A function of every Divine messenger is to confirm the revelations that have come before; thus 6:92 says of the Quran, *This is a blessed Book that We have sent down, confirming that which came before it* (cf. 35:31; 46:30). That the prophets would confirm one another is said to be part of the primordial covenant that they made with God in 3:81 and 33:7. The prophets' confirmation of other messengers is also understood to refer to those who would follow them in time, and several verses are interpreted as references to the mention of the Prophet Muhammad in the Old and New Testaments (see 7:157c). The name Aḥmad means "most praised"; it derives from the same root as Muhammad—*ḥ-m-d*—and has long been recognized by Muslims as one of the many honorific names given to the Prophet by God Himself. This is based upon a saying of the Prophet: "I have several names: I am Muhammad; I am Aḥmad; I am al-Māḥī (the Effacer) by means of whom God eliminates unbelief." Many other *aḥadīth* simply refer to the Prophet as Aḥmad.

Some Muslims have likened Jesus' reference to Aḥmad here in the Quran to the reference to the Paraclete (Gk. *Paraklētos*) or Advocate of whom Jesus speaks in the Gospel of John 14:15–16: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (see also John 16:7–14; Āl, R). Such an interpretation is, however, complicated by the next verse, 14:17, where the Advocate or Paraclete is said to be "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you," and by 14:26, where the Advocate is again equated with the Holy Spirit.

The *clear proofs* refers to the many miracles that Jesus performed, such as breathing life into a clay bird, healing the blind and the leper, and raising the dead; see 5:110. The accusation that such evidentiary miracles are *manifest sorcery* is also brought against Moses (10:76; 27:13). It is also a charge the disbelievers are said to bring against the Prophet Muhammad, as in general *those who disbelieve say to the Truth when it comes to them, "This is naught but manifest sorcery"* (34:43).

7 To fabricate *lies against God* (cf. 3:94; 6:21, 93, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68) indicates seeking to lead others astray by falsely attributing words of revelation to God (see 6:93, 144), declaring what is lawful to be unlawful and what is unlawful to be lawful (see 16:116), and reverting to a false creed after being shown the truth (see 7:89). *While he is being called to submission* could also be read in the active voice, "while he [the Prophet] calls them to submission." In both cases it expresses amazement that people could fabricate *lies against God* or deny God in any way while a prophet is present among them (Q).

8 *They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths* by saying that it is sorcery,

their mouths, but God completes His Light, though the disbelievers be averse. (9) He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion, though the idolaters be averse. (10) O you who believe! Shall I direct you to a commerce that will save you from a painful punishment: (11) that you believe in God and the Messenger and strive in God's way with your wealth and your souls? That is better for you, if you but knew. (12) He will forgive you your sins and cause you to enter Gardens with rivers running below, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of Eden—that is the great

poetry, or soothsaying (JJ). This phrase is repeated in 9:32, where it is said of Jews and Christians who make human judgment a higher authority than the word of scripture. *Light* is frequently associated with the guidance that comes through the prophets and revelation (see 6:91; 7:157; 21:48; 42:52; 57:9, 28). That *God completes His Light* thus implies completing His Guidance. In this context, *the Light of God* is also interpreted as a reference to the Quran, Islam, or the Prophet (Q), who is referred to elsewhere as *a luminous lamp* (33:46). According to a Shiite interpretation, this verse refers to those who would seek to extinguish the *walāyah/wilāyah,* that is, the sanctity and rightful successorship of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, though God completes his position as leader (*imāmah*). This light is believed to be the light referred to in 64:8: *So believe in God and His Messenger and the light We have sent down* (Kā); see 64:8c.

9 *He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion* is repeated verbatim in 9:33 and 48:28. *Guidance* can here be seen as a reference to the Quran (Aj, Āl) or to the truth itself (Q). *All religion* is understood to mean all religions (Q); see 9:32–33c; 48:28c. Almost all classical commentators interpret *Religion of Truth* here and in 9:33 and 48:28 as a reference to Islam and thus see all three verses as a reference to the triumph of Islam over all other religions. But as the Quran attests to the veracity and salvific efficacy of other religions (see, e.g., 2:62c; 5:69c), the *Religion of Truth* can be more broadly understood to mean all revealed religions. From this perspective, the disbelievers' aversion to the completion of God's Light in v. 8, can be understood as a reference to the idolaters who desire to extinguish the light of all revelation and to the People of the Book, most of whom reject the completion of revelation in the Prophet Muhammad. V. 9 would then refer only to the idolaters, as they are opposed to all truthful religion, whereas the People of the Book still seek the *Religion of Truth* in one form or another. See the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

10–11 These verses can be seen as addressing the wish expressed by the Companions when they said, "If we knew the deeds most beloved to God, we would expend our wealth and souls to perform such deeds" (see 61:2–3c). The *commerce* that saves *from a painful punishment* is the one that is based upon the Hereafter rather than this world. When one strives in the way of God with one's wealth and self or soul, it is then said, *Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs. They fight in the way of God, slaying and being slain. [It is] a promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is truer to His pact than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made* (9:111). *That is better for you* thus means that faith or belief (*īmān*) and striving (*jihād*) are better for one than one's wealth and one's soul (Aj).

12 Attaining "the Garden" is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57. Regarding God's causing people to enter *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c; 3:195; 5:12; 48:5; 64:9.

13 *Something else that you love* can be a reference to another commerce, thus referring back to

triumph— (13) and something else that you love: help from God and a victory nigh. So give glad tidings to the believers. (14) O you who believe! Be helpers of God, just as Jesus son of Mary said to the apostles, "Who are my helpers unto God?" The apostles replied, "We are helpers unto God." Then a group from the Children of Israel believed and a group disbelieved. So We strengthened those who believed against their enemies, and they came to prevail.

v. 10 (Q, R, Ṭ), or to another "blessing" in addition to the forgiveness and Gardens mentioned in v. 12 (Āl, Z). The *victory nigh* is understood as a reference to the conquest of Makkah or the victories over Byzantium and Persia soon after the death of the Prophet (Q, Z). *Victory* translates *fatḥ,* which can also mean "opening" and can thus be seen as a reference to either opening the gates of nearness to God, opening the gates of the Unseen (Aj), or opening the heart to spiritual realities.

14 *Be helpers of God* indicates being helpers for God's religion and His Prophet (R), since God has no need of human assistance. As *helpers* is here a noun rather than a verb, as it is in 47:7, *If you help God, He will help you,* it implies that to be a believer is to be a helper of God at all times (R). Those who are *helpers of God* are then likened to Jesus' apostles, whose name in Arabic, *ḥawāriyyūn,* is thought by some to indicate purity (R). While some maintain that *ḥawāriyyūn* is from the Ethiopic *ḥawārya* meaning "apostle," others see it as deriving from the word *ḥawwara,* meaning "to transform" or "to whiten" (Iṣ). The title could thus refer to those who transform and purify the souls of people by guiding them in religion and knowledge (Iṣ). The *ḥawāriyyūn* are also said to be those who are fully devoted to a prophet and are thus purified from any faults (Ṭs). The Prophet is reported to have said, "Every prophet has his apostle (*ḥawārī*), and my apostle is Zubayr" (Iṣ).

A group among the Israelites then confirmed the prophethood of Jesus, while others disbelieved. According to many commentators, those who *disbelieved* includes not only those who rejected Jesus, but also those who maintained that Jesus was God as well as those who maintained that he was the son of God (R, Ṭs).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 62

# The Congregational Prayer

## *al-Jumuᶜah*

Although a minority maintain that *al-Jumuᶜah* is a Makkan *sūrah,* internal indicators, such as the reference to the Jews in v. 6, affirm that it is from the Madinan period (Āl). It takes its name from the exhortation to gather for the Friday *congregational prayer* in v. 9 and is the fourth in the group of *sūrah*s known as "The Glorifiers" (*al-Musabbiḥāt*), which begin with a reference to the glorification of God; the other *sūrah*s are 57, 59, 61, and 64. This *sūrah* is connected to the previous *sūrah* by the manner in which both compare the commerce of this world with the affairs of the next. Some also liken the praise for *those who fight in His way in ranks* in the previous *sūrah* (61:4) to the call to attend the congregational prayer, as Muslims are also called to stand in ranks during prayer (Āl).

The Prophet is reported to have often recited this *sūrah* and the following *sūrah, al-Munāfiqūn,* together during the congregational prayer on Fridays (Āl). According to a *ḥadīth,* "The best day over which the sun has risen is the day of the congregational prayer (*al-jumuᶜah*); on it did God create Adam, and on it did Adam enter the Garden, and on it was he removed from the Garden. And the Hour will not come save on the day of the congregational prayer" (Q). According to another *ḥadīth,* "It is named 'The Gathering' [another translation for *al-jumuᶜah*], because that is the day on which Adam's physical nature (*khalq*) was gathered together" (R) or "in which God gathered together the physical nature of Adam" (Q; also see IK, Sy).

After extolling the Prophet as a blessing for his followers present and future (vv. 1–4), *al-Jumuᶜah* warns of the afflictions that befell the Jews for having failed to uphold the Torah (vv. 5–8). It then calls the Muslims to take leave of worldly transactions for a time in order to observe the Friday congregational prayer (vv. 9–11).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Mighty, the Wise. (2) He it is Who sent among the unlettered a Messenger from among themselves, reciting unto them His signs, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and Wisdom, though before they were in manifest error, (3) and others among them, who have not yet joined them. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. (4) That is the Bounty of God, which He gives to whomsoever He will. And God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty. (5) The parable of those [who were] made to bear the Torah, then did not bear it, is that of an ass bearing books. How evil is the likeness of the people

1 *Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God* is repeated in 59:1; 61:1; and 64:1 (see also 24:41; 57:1; 59:24); see 64:1c.

2 *Unlettered* (*ummī*) indicates those who can neither read nor write, but in this context can refer to the idolatrous Arabs, who had no scripture (Ṭ), or to anyone without a Divine book (R; cf. 3:20). *Purifying them* refers to purification from idolatry (JJ, Ṭs). This is one of several verses in which the Prophet is said to teach *the Book and Wisdom* (cf. 2:129, 151, 231; 3:164), the teaching of which is part of the primordial covenant made with all prophets, when God said to them, *Should a messenger then come to you confirming that which is with you, you shall surely believe in him and you shall help him* (3:81). The teaching of *the Book and Wisdom* is also mentioned in relation to Abraham (4:54), Jesus (5:110), and Muhammad (4:113). In this context, some interpret *Wisdom* as a reference to the prophetic wont (*sunnah*), though it also can be understood more broadly as a reference to all Divinely inspired knowledge pertaining to this world and the Hereafter (Ṭs).

3 *And others* follows upon *the unlettered*, meaning those who are alive among them, and those who will come after them, *who have not yet joined them* (JJ). The verse may refer to everyone who will enter Islam from the time of the Prophet until the Day of Resurrection (Qm, R, Ṭs), in which case *purifying them, and teaching them* (v. 2) describes the Prophet's function in relation to all later generations of Muslims in all lands (R). Given the precedence that the earliest generations of Muslims are afforded, this verse is seen by many as a reference to the generation immediately after the Companions of the Prophet, known as the Followers (*tābiʿūn;* JJ, R), who are noted especially by Sunni Muslims for their piety and credited with many significant developments in Islamic religion and intellectual life. From this perspective, v. 2 establishes the preeminence of the Companions and this verse establishes the merit of the Followers, as each generation of Muslims is believed to be better than the succeeding one (JJ).

4 *That is the Bounty of God, which He gives to whomsoever He will* is repeated verbatim in 5:54 and 57:21. In this context, *the Bounty of God* can also be taken as a reference to the Prophet or to prophethood in general (R).

5 *Made to bear* is understood to mean "enjoined to act in accord with it" (Q). That they *did not bear it* thus indicates that they do not implement the teachings of the Torah as enjoined upon them and thus derive no benefit from it. That they are as *an ass bearing books* means that they have no true knowledge of what their scripture contains (Q, Ṭ). That people recite their scriptures without acting upon them is the same charge brought against the priests by the prophets of the Old Testament in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and others

who denied God's signs! And God guides not wrongdoing people. (6) Say, "O you who are Jews! If you claim that you are friends unto God apart from [other] people, then long for death, if you are truthful." (7) But they will never long for it due to that which their hands have sent forth. And God knows the wrongdoers. (8) Say, "Truly the death from which you flee will surely meet you; then you shall be returned to the Knower of the Unseen and the seen, and He

(see, e.g., Isaiah 24:5; 29:13; Jeremiah 8:5–9; Ezekiel 22:26; Hosea 4:6–7). This verse is not simply a condemnation of Jews for forgetting the tenets of Judaism; it is also a warning to Muslims that this is how human beings often treat revelation. In this vein, the Prophet once warned his community that many calamities would befall Muslims when religious understanding had been lost and falsified. When a Companion asked him how that could happen when Muslims would continue to teach the Quran generation after generation, the Prophet replied, "May your mother weep for you! Do you not see these Jews and these Christians? They read the Torah and the Gospel but do not act in accord with them." Another *ḥadīth* states, "There will soon come upon the people a time in which nothing of the Quran remains save its trace and nothing of Islam remains save its name; their mosques will be full, though they will be devoid of guidance. Their scholars are the worst people under the sky; from them strife will emerge and spread." For further development of this theme as it pertains to Jews and Christians in the Quran, see 2:75; 5:41, 65–69.

6 According to this verse, if the Jews are indeed favored by God above others, then they should prefer the Hereafter to the life of this world (JJ). *Long for death* (cf. 2:94) indicates that those who are sure of their standing before God would not fear the coming of death, but would welcome it, or that those who truly believe long to meet God, as in a *ḥadīth*, "Whosoever desires to meet God, God desires to meet him, and whosoever abhors meeting God, God abhors to meet him."

7 *That which their hands have sent forth* is understood as a reference to the Jews' evil deeds, especially their denial of the prophethood of Muhammad (JJ) and distortion of the scriptures (see 4:47; 5:13, 41; R). The implication is that they are subtly aware of what awaits them in the next life for their transgressions and thus fear death. Elsewhere the judgment wrongdoers receive in the next life is said to result from *that which their hands have sent forth* (2:95; 4:62; 28:47; 30:36; 42:48; see also 5:80; 18:57; 36:12; 78:40), as does the evil that befalls them in this life.

8 In commenting upon this verse, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī mentions human beings of four different dispositions with regard to death. There are those who are engrossed with this world, so that remembering death only increases their distance from God, as in 21:1: *For mankind, their reckoning draws nigh, while they turn away heedless.* Such people will have an unfortunate end because, as the Prophet has said, "Whosoever abhors meeting with God, God abhors the meeting with him." Then there are those who are penitent, who do not abhor death, but fear the meeting with God because they are aware of their deficiencies and know that they will be held accountable for their sins. They thus busy themselves with preparing for death. Beyond this there are those with spiritual knowledge (*al-ʿārifūn*), who remember death constantly and yearn for it as a lover yearns for the meeting with the Beloved. Last, there are those of the highest spiritual rank, who yearn for neither death nor life but only for what pleases their Lord (*Iḥyāʾ, Kitāb Dhikr al-mawt*, 4:391); see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." In this context, that God is *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* indicates that the intentions behind actions cannot be hidden from God. God then informs all human beings of the true nature of what they did while on this earth and requites those who do what is good with good and those who do what is evil with what their actions merit (Ṭ). This is one of several verses where it is said that at the Final Judgment, God will "inform" people about their actions in this life; see also 5:14, 105;

will inform you of that which you used to do." (9) "O you who believe! When you are called to the congregational prayer, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off trade. That is better for you, if you but knew. (10) And when the prayer is completed, disperse throughout the land and seek the Bounty of God, and remember God much, that haply you may prosper." (11) And when they see some commerce or diversion, they scatter toward it and leave thee standing. Say, "That which is with God is better than diversion and commerce; and God is the best of providers."

6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 29:8; 31:15, 23; 39:7; 41:50; 58:6–7; 64:7; 75:13.

9 The day of the congregational prayer was also market day in Madinah; hence the Muslims are called to *leave off trade* during the time of the prayer. In Islam the day of the congregational prayer is not understood as a Sabbath day of rest as in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Thus the injunction to *leave off trade* does not apply to the entire day, but only to the period of time during which the congregational prayer is held. This verse is connected to the previous verses in that those who flee death do so out of preference for the attractions of this world; so God guides the believers to what will benefit them in the Hereafter, *the remembrance of God* (R), as that is *a commerce that will never perish* (35:29). *Hasten* renders *asᶜaw,* which can also mean "endeavor," indicating that one should leave off worldly endeavors for a time and focus upon religious endeavors, as in a *ḥadīth,* "When you come to prayer do not come while you are endeavoring [for this world], but come to it while you are at peace (*wa ᶜalaykum al-sakīnah*)" (Q, R). In this sense, *hasten* or "endeavor" can refer to both the attitude in one's heart and one's deeds (Q, Ṭ), indicating that one should prepare for the congregational prayer outwardly by performing the ablutions and purifying one's clothing and inwardly through humility (Q).

According to al-Qurṭubī, Asᶜad ibn Zurārah (d. 1/623) and Muṣᶜab ibn ᶜUmayr (d. 3/625), who had been among the first Madinans to embrace Islam, began the practice of the congregational prayer so that Muslims would have a day for prayer and remembrance like the Jews and Christians. The Friday congregational prayer was thus begun by the Helpers in Madinah before the migration of the Prophet, then institutionalized by the Prophet when he arrived in Madinah, and later given Divine sanction in these verses. The Prophet first led the Friday congregational prayer himself during his migration to Madinah; he had stopped in Qubāʾ, just south of Madinah, for twelve days, then set out for Madinah on a Friday. When the time for prayer came, he prayed with the people in a seasonal riverbed that they used as a mosque. It was here that he delivered the first congregational sermon (*khuṭbah;* Q).

10 *Disperse throughout the land* is not a command, but a statement indicating permissibility (Q, R, Ṭ). *Seek the Bounty of God* can mean that people may now engage in commerce or that they should seek knowledge (Q). Ibn ᶜAbbās is reported to have said that this injunction is not to *disperse* in order to seek worldly things, but rather to call upon the sick, attend funerals (which are often held after the Friday congregational prayer), and visit one's brothers in God (Q, Sy, Ṭ). *And remember God much* implies at all times and in all that is done, *that haply you may prosper* in both this world and the Hereafter (Aj).

11 According to a *ḥadīth,* the Prophet was delivering a sermon during the Friday congregational prayer when a caravan arrived from Syria. Many people left the mosque during his sermon to attend to the caravan until only twelve people remained. Then this verse was revealed (JJ, Q, Ṭ). This verse thus affirms the precedence of the prayer over commerce. Before this event the Prophet reportedly used to perform the Friday congregational prayer before delivering the ser-

mon. But after that he would perform the prayer after the sermon (Q), as this would ensure that people would stay for both the sermon and the prayer. This is the practice that Muslims follow to this day. *That which is with God* is understood to mean the reward for performing the congregational prayer or that the provision that God will give those who attend the congregational prayer is better than what they would have attained through commerce (Q). Since *God is the best of providers* (cf. 5:114; 22:58; 23:72; 34:39), believers should hasten to Him and seek provision from Him rather than from worldly activities, knowing that the provision given by God will not pass them by (Aj).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 63

# The Hypocrites

## *al-Munāfiqūn*

A Madinan *sūrah, al-Munāfiqūn* takes its name from the discussion of the hypocrites who attested to the prophethood of Muhammad and swore fealty to him, but continued to ally themselves with his enemies. It can be seen as a contrast to the previous *sūrah, al-Jumuʿah,* which addresses the believers. During the Friday congregational prayer, the Prophet is reported to have frequently recited these two *sūrah*s together—*al-Jumuʿah* in the first cycle of the prayer as encouragement for the believers and *al-Munāfiqūn* in the second cycle as a rebuke to the hypocrites (Āl). Most of the *sūrah* warns of the treachery of the hypocrites (vv. 1–8). Then, like the final verses of the previous *sūrah* (62:9–11), the final verses of this *sūrah* (vv. 9–11) enjoin the believers not to allow the responsibilities and desires of this world to distract them from remembering God. In this way, the placement of this *sūrah* also serves as a reminder of the more subtle forms of hypocrisy that can distract those who believe from the proper fulfillment of their religious obligations.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) When the hypocrites come unto thee, they say, "We bear witness that thou art indeed the Messenger of God." Yet God knows that thou art indeed His Messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars. (2) They took their oaths as a shield and thus turned from the way of God. Evil indeed is that which they used to do. (3) That is because they believed, and then disbelieved; so a seal was set upon their hearts such that they comprehend not. (4) And when thou seest them, their bodies impress thee, and if they speak, thou listenest to their speech. [Yet] they are like leaning timbers. They suppose that every cry is against them. They are the enemy; so be wary of them. May

1 This verse, along with vv. 2, 7, and 8, was reportedly revealed regarding ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy (d. 631), known as the leader of the hypocrites in Madinah, who said while on an expedition with the Prophet, "Do not spend on those who are with God's Messenger, that they may disperse and go away. And if we return to Madinah, surely the mightier will expel the weaker therefrom" (cf. v. 7–8). When the Prophet heard of this utterance from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy's nephew, Zayd ibn Arqam, he sent for ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy and his companions, who swore that they did not say it. The Prophet did not believe Zayd and believed ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy. Then vv. 1–8 were revealed, after which the Prophet said, "O Zayd! God confirmed your statement" (Q, Ṭ, W). *God bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars* indicates that faith is an affirmation with the heart, not only with the tongue, and that true speech comes from the heart (Q); see also 9:74.

2 In swearing that they had not said what Zayd reported to the Prophet, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy and his companions *took their oaths as a shield* to protect their possessions and their lives (JJ), as in Islam the blood, property, and honor of Muslims were protected by their oath of allegiance to the Muslim polity. In this sense *they swear by God that truly they are of you, but they are not of you* (9:56). They thus *sell . . . their oaths for a paltry price* (3:77), because they are more concerned about the affairs of this world than those of the next. That they *turned from the way of God* indicates both that they turned believers away from observing God's Decree by dissuading the disbelievers and the Jews of Madinah from entering Islam (Q) and that they themselves turned away. Regarding the nature of the hypocrite, the Prophet is reported to have said, "The signs of the hypocrite are four and whosoever possesses one of them possesses the characteristic of hypocrisy until he abandons it: when he is entrusted, he betrays his trust; when he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he quarrels, he uses foul words."

3 This verse means either that the hypocrites first *believed* and then came to disbelieve or that they affirmed with their tongues, although they *disbelieved* with their hearts (Q). *A seal was set upon their hearts* (cf. 2:7; 6:46; 7:100–101; 9:87, 93; 10:74; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57; 30:59; 40:35; 41:5; 42:24; 47:16) implies spiritual insensitivity and ignorance, as the heart is considered the principle faculty of knowledge and understanding (see 6:25; 22:46). That a seal has been placed upon the heart as a barrier to religious understanding may be understood either as an inherent insensitivity toward revelation or as a Divinely imposed punishment in response to moral transgression and disobedience (see, e.g., 10:74; 42:24; 2:7c).

4 This first sentence is usually understood to describe ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy and some of his companions, who were said to be handsome and

God curse them! How are they perverted? (5) And when it is said unto them, "Come! The Messenger of God will ask forgiveness for you," they twist their heads, and thou seest them turning away in arrogance. (6) It is the same for them whether thou askest forgiveness for them or thou askest not forgiveness for them; God will never forgive them. Truly God guides not iniquitous people. (7) They are the ones who say, "Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of God, that they may disperse." Yet to God belong the treasuries of the heavens and the earth, but the hypocrites comprehend not. (8) They say, "If we return to Madinah, the mightier will surely expel the weaker therefrom." Yet unto God belongs the might and unto His Messenger and the believers,

well spoken (Q). *Like leaning timbers* indicates that the hypocrites have no roots of their own to support them, but rely upon another structure for support. They are thus "like shapes without spirits, or bodies without minds" or like wood that has been eaten from the inside, so that the exterior seems strong but the interior is hollow (Q). The hypocrites are afraid every time they hear a battle *cry,* because they fear that their true nature, and in some cases their alliances with enemies, may have been discovered (JJ), in which case their oaths might be discovered to be false and thus no longer protect them. Believers are to *be wary of them* because their words may deceive (Q) or they may communicate believers' secrets to the disbelievers (JJ). *How are they perverted?* means, "How can they turn from the truth and deviate from guidance, and how can their intellects be blind to the clarity of these proofs?" (Q).

5–6 After verses such as vv. 1–4 were revealed, some Muslims enjoined the hypocrites to apologize and seek forgiveness from the Prophet. But the hypocrites mocked them and rejected their proposal (Q). Their failure to repent indicates a hardness of heart. Thus the Prophet is told in 9:80, *Seek forgiveness for them, or seek not forgiveness for them. If thou seekest forgiveness for them seventy times, God will not forgive them* (see also 9:113–15). For similar verses where warnings and guidance are said to be of no avail to disbelievers, see 2:7; 7:193; 26:136; 36:10. These verses remind the Prophet that he cannot guide those whom God has not guided and should leave them to God, as in 35:8: *Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will; so let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them.*

7 These are the words of the hypocrites to the Helpers, those Muslims who had been residents of Madinah before the Prophet's emigration from Makkah. Many hypocrites thought the spoils of war that the Muslims were now enjoying derived more from the strength of the Madinan forces than from anything the Prophet or God had done for them and thus sought to keep the spoils for themselves. When they first migrated to Madinah, many of the Emigrants had been completely dependent upon the generosity of the Helpers, who provided food, shelter, clothing, fertile land, and others forms of aid, without which many Emigrants might not have survived. The newly acquired spoils of war, however, made many of the Emigrants more self-sufficient and thus altered the balance of power within Madinah, to which some of the hypocrites took exception. *To God belong the treasuries of the heavens and the earth* thus reminds them that it is God Who has provided all of their wealth and who provides spiritual and material benefits to whomsoever He will, whether the hypocrites *spend on those who are with the Messenger* or not. Elsewhere the disbelievers are reported to have said of the Prophet, *Why has no treasure been sent down upon him?* (11:12; see also 25:8).

8 *The mightier will surely expel the weaker therefrom* could also be rendered, "The more noble will expel the meaner therefrom." ʿAbd Allāh ibn

but the hypocrites know not. (9) O you who believe! Let neither your property nor your children divert you from the remembrance of God. Whosoever does so, it is they who are the losers. (10) And spend of that which We have provided you before death comes upon one of you and he says, "My Lord, wouldst that Thou grant me reprieve till a term nigh, that I may give charity and be among the righteous!" (11) Yet God will not grant any soul reprieve when its term has come. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do.

Ubayy is reported to have uttered these words, arguing that he and his companions were morally superior to and physically more powerful than the Prophet and his Companions (see 63:1c). But even his son saw the folly in this position and urged him to recant his statement before returning to Madinah from the expedition. He did not, and is reported to have died soon thereafter.

9 Elsewhere the Quran cautions: *It is not your wealth or your children that bring you nigh in nearness unto Us, save those who believe and work righteousness* (34:37); and *Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world, but that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord* (18:46). The Day of Judgment is thus described as *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89). Those who meet the challenge, dealing justly with their worldly possessions and responsibilities, shall be rewarded, but for *those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against God* (3:10, 116). In this vein, 9:55 and 9:85 caution: *And let not their wealth or their children impress thee. God desires but to punish them thereby in the life of this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers* (cf. 68:10–14); see also 2:212; 3:14; 8:28; 9:69; 26:88; 60:3; 64:14–15; 68:14; 71:21. As rendered, *the remembrance of God* refers to the practice of *ḏhikr* or remembrance of God (see 13:28c; 29:45c). It could also be rendered "the reminder of God," in which case it would refer to the Quran (Q), since *the Reminder* is one of the names of the Quran, as in 6:90; 12:104; and 38:87, which say of the Quran: *It is naught but a reminder for the worlds* (see, e.g., 11:114, 120; 15:9; 16:44; 20:3, 99; 21:10, 24, 50; 36:69; 38:49; 43:44; 65:10; 68:51–52; 69:48; 73:19).

10–11 These verses are understood to indicate the need to pay the *zakāh* (alms) with dispatch; likewise, there should be no delay in performing any obligatory religious duties (Q). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, "Every person who has fallen short in [paying] *zakāh* will ask to be returned [to this world] at the moment of death" (JJ, Q), ostensibly in order to make up for failing to pay the *zakāh*. *When its term has come* refers to the moment of death, at which point the door of repentance is closed. This discussion of Divine reprieve follows directly upon the central theme of this *sūrah,* that is, religious hypocrisy. Although every soul is granted reprieve until the moment of death to make sincere repentance, from a Quranic perspective one should not make a calculated decision to wait until that moment to repent, as in 4:18: *Repentance is accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly now I repent," nor from those who die as disbelievers* (see 4:17–18c). On the one hand, everyone is granted reprieve out of God's Mercy and Forgiveness, as in 35:45: *Were God to take mankind to task for that which they have earned, He would not leave a single creature upon the surface of the earth. But He grants them reprieve till a term appointed* (see also 14:42; 16:61). On the other hand, those who deliberately wait until the moment of death to repent and perform good deeds are granted no reprieve when one's *term has come,* as in the present verse, or respite, as in 2:162: *The punishment shall not be lightened for them; nor shall they be granted respite* (see also 3:88; 16:85; 21:40).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 64

# Mutual Dispossession

## *al-Taghābun*

*Al-Taghābun* is considered by most to be Madinan, and by some to be Makkan (Āl, Q). According to a saying attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, the entire *sūrah* was revealed in Makkah except the last verse (Q). Others are said to have maintained that all but vv. 14–16 are Makkan (IJ). It takes its name from the reference to the Day of Judgment as *the Day of Mutual Dispossession* in v. 9, a concept unique to the Quran. *Al-Taghābun* is the last in the group of *sūrah*s known as "The Glorifiers" (*al-Musabbiḥāt*), which begin with a reference to the glorification of God; the other "Glorifiers" are 57, 59, 61, and 62. Just as the previous *sūrah* distinguishes between the hypocrites and the believers, calling upon the hypocrites to repent, so too does this *sūrah* distinguish between the believers and the disbelievers, warning the disbelievers of the fate that awaits them. Both *sūrah*s end with a warning that property and children can be a source of diversion and thus of trial (63:9; 64:15) and with a reminder to spend in the way of God before being overcome by death (63:10; 64:16).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God. His is the Sovereignty and His is the praise, and He is Powerful over all things. (2) He it is Who created you; among you are disbelievers and among you are believers. And God sees whatsoever you do. (3) He created the heavens and the earth in truth and formed you, then made beautiful your forms, and unto Him is the journey's end. (4) He knows whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, and He knows what you hide and what you disclose; God knows what lies within breasts. (5) Has not the account come to you of those who disbelieved aforetime such that they tasted the evil consequences of their affair,

1 *Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God* also appears in 59:1; 61:1; and 62:1 (cf. 57:1; 59:24). Here, as in 24:41, 59:24, and 62:1, *glorifies* appears in the present tense (*yusabbiḥu*). In 57:1; 59:1; and 61:1, it is in the past tense (*sabbaḥa*), and in 87:1 it occurs as an imperative: *Glorify the Name of thy Lord.* According to al-Rāzī, this is to indicate that the glorification of God should be and in reality is constant in the past, present, and future: the past tense conveys glorification from the beginning of time until the present moment, the present tense conveys glorification from the present moment into the future until the end of time (as the present tense can be used to indicate the future in Arabic), and the imperative indicates glorification at the present moment (R on 61:1).

2 The whole of this verse implies that only God knows those who are truly disbelievers and those who are truly believers. According to a *ḥadīth*, "People are born in various degrees (*ṭabaqāt*). A person may be born as a believer, live as a believer, and die as a believer. A person may be born as a disbeliever, live as a disbeliever, and die as a disbeliever. [Another] person may be born as a believer, live as a believer, and die as a disbeliever. And [another] person may be born as a disbeliever, live as a disbeliever, and die as a believer" (Q). With regard to one's actions, another *ḥadīth* states, "A person may act like the people of the Garden as it appears to the people, though he is among the people of the Fire. And a person may act like the people of the Fire as it appears to the people, though he is among the people of the Garden" (Q).

3 The final words of *He created the heavens and the earth in truth* (cf. 6:73; 14:19; 16:3; 29:44; 39:5, 45:22; 46:3) may also be rendered "for truth," so that those who do evil and those who do good will be requited in accord with what they have done (Q); see 6:73c. That God *made beautiful your forms* can mean the human form; the inner reality of the human being, as in 95:4, *Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature;* or the forms of all things, as it is God *Who made beautiful all that He created* (32:7), *and He formed you and made beautiful your forms* (40:64); see 32:7c; 95:4c.

4 In this context, this verse indicates that God knows the actions, intentions, and inner thoughts of all believers and disbelievers and is able to distinguish sincerity from insincerity, as in 2:284: *And whether you disclose what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it* (see also 3:29); cf. 2:77; 11:5; 16:19, 23; 36:76. That *God knows what lies within breasts* is repeated in 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 67:13; see 5:7c.

5 That the disbelievers have *tasted the evil consequences of their affair* (cf. 5:95; 59:15; 65:9) indicates the afflictions that befell them in this life, while the *painful punishment* refers to the

and theirs shall be a painful punishment? (6) That is because their messengers brought them clear proofs, at which they said, "Shall a human being guide us?" So they disbelieved and turned away; yet God is beyond need. And God is Self-Sufficient, Praised. (7) Those who disbelieve claim that they will not be resurrected. Say, "Yea! By my Lord! Surely you shall be resurrected. Then you shall be informed of that which you did; and that is easy for God." (8) So believe in God and His Messenger and the light We have sent down. God is Aware of whatsoever you do. (9) The day that He gathers you for the Day of Gathering, that is the Day of Mutual Dispossession. And whosoever believes in God and

punishment that they will receive in the Hereafter. *Those who disbelieved aforetime* refers to all previous peoples who rejected the messengers that *came to them with clear proofs* (see 3:183–84; 7:101; 9:70; 10:13; 14:9; 30:47). Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad are most frequently cited as those who were sent with the clear proofs of revelation, but this can also be said of all the other prophets (see 9:70).

6 People's incredulousness at the idea that Divine messages would be sent through human messengers—reflected here in their question *Shall a human being guide us?*—is presented in the Quran as one of the constant barriers to belief, as in 17:94: *And naught hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?"* (see also 6:6–9, 50, 91; 11:12, 27; 14:10–11; 21:3; 23:24, 33, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 41:14; 50:2; 54:24; 74:25). This same objection is attributed to those who rejected the prophethood of Muhammad: *And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?"* (25:7). That *God is Self-Sufficient* could indicate that God has no need of them or no need for them to believe in Him; thus He did not compel them to believe in Him despite His ability to do so (R, Z). That God is *Praised* indicates that being praised is intrinsic to the Divine Nature and not dependent upon anything to praise Him (Āl), thus it is often joined with the mention of God's being Self-Sufficient (see 4:131; 14:8; 22:64; 31:12, 26; 35:15; 60:6).

7 *They claim* translates *zaʿama,* which refers to false claims of knowledge and thus indicates lying (Z). This is one of several verses where the disbelievers' denial of resurrection is made explicit (see also 6:29; 23:37; 44:35). In other verses, their rejection takes the form of amazement or disparagement, as in 37:16–17: *What! When we have died and are dust and bones, are we to be resurrected, and our fathers of old?* (see also 17:49; 37:53; 50:3; 56:47; 79:11). That people will be informed of their past actions is central to the Quranic understanding of the Resurrection and the Final Judgment (see 5:14, 105; 6:60, 108, 159; 9:94, 105; 10:23; 24:64; 29:8; 31:15, 23; 39:7; 41:50; 58:6–7; 62:8; 75:13); see 6:60c.

8 Here *light* refers primarily to the Quran (Q, R, Ṭ, Z), though it can also be understood as a reference to Divine Guidance in general. In the Quran, *light* is frequently associated with the guidance that comes through the prophets and revelation (see 6:91; 7:157; 21:48; 42:52; 57:9, 28), and in 9:32–33 and 61:8–9 the Quran mentions those who would try to *extinguish the Light of God,* which in relation to this verse could be read as an attempt to conceal Divine Revelation. According to a Shiite interpretation, in this verse *light* refers to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as the leader of the believers after the Prophet (Kā, Qm), all of the Shiite Imams, or the Imam within the hearts of the believers (Qm).

9 *The Day of Gathering* (cf. 42:7) refers to the Day of Resurrection, when all human beings of all generations and all jinn will be gathered on a single open, barren plain for judgment (see, e.g.,

works righteousness, He will absolve him of his evil deeds and cause him to enter Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein forever. That is the great triumph. (10) And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein. What an evil journey's end! (11) No misfortune befalls, save by God's Leave. And whosoever believes in God, He guides his heart. And God is Knower of all things. (12) Obey God and obey the Messenger. Then if you turn away—only the clear proclamation is incumbent upon Our Messenger. (13) God, there is no god but He, and in God let the be-

3:25; 4:87; 6:128; 18:47; 20:106; 79:14), each community behind its prophet (see 17:71), as all living things are *gathered unto their Lord in the end* (6:38). It can also be seen as a reference to God's gathering together one's bones for resurrection, since one of the objections to resurrection posed by the disbelievers was to say, *What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?* (17:49, 98; see also 23:35, 82; 36:78; 37:16, 53; 56:47; 75:3).

*Mutual Dispossession* renders *taghābun,* which derives from *ghabana,* meaning "to stint or shortchange another in a transaction" and implying an element of deception or subterfuge (Iṣ). It is most likely used as a reference to the Day of Resurrection because there is no way that human beings can fully repay the debt they owe to God. Although *every soul will be paid in full for that which it has done* (16:111; see also, e.g., 2:272, 281; 3:25, 57, 161, 185; 8:60; 11:15, 111), no soul can pay God in full for that which God has done. The believer is also said to be *one who sells his soul seeking God's good pleasure* (2:207) and one *who would sell the life of this world for the Hereafter* (4:74). For those who have succeeded in making this transaction, 9:111 says, *Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs* (see also 35:29). Such a transaction is so completely one-sided that one could be said to have "stinted" (*ghabana*) God. In addition, *those who sell God's pact and their oaths for a paltry price* (3:77) have stinted or shortchanged themselves by not honoring the agreement in which they were guaranteed that they would be *paid in full.* Thus 2:16 says of them, *It is they who have purchased error at the price of guidance. Their commerce has not brought them profit, and they are not rightly guided* (see also 2:175; 3:177). In contrast, those who sell their souls for God have their evil deeds absolved in this life and enter Paradise in the next; see 66:8c. Attaining the Garden is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57. Regarding God's admitting people into *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c; 3:195; 5:12; 48:5.

10–11 *Signs* can also mean "verses," in which case v. 10 would contain a direct reference to the Quran. Together, these verses along with v. 12 are a reminder to the Prophet and his followers that no matter what they do, there are some who will continue to reject revelation, since only God can guide, as in 17:97: *Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided, and whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protectors for them apart from Him* (see also 18:17).

12 Cf. 5:92. Regarding the relationship between obedience to God and obedience to the Messenger, see 3:32, 132; 4:59; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 24:54, 56; 33:33; 49:14; 58:13 (see also 7:156–57; 59:7). From a Quranic perspective, to obey the Messenger is in fact to obey God, since *whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God* (4:80); *thus those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him, it is they who shall prosper* (7:157). Prophets are only responsible for delivering the message (see 3:20; 5:92, 99; 13:40; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48), meaning that their duty is to fulfill this responsibility; the salvation or damnation of human souls is for God alone to determine.

13 Regarding the virtue of *trust* in God (*tawakkul*), see 14:11–12c; cf. 3:122, 160; 5:11; 9:51; 12:67; 14:11–12; 39:38; 58:10.

lievers trust. (14) O you who believe! Among your spouses and your children there is indeed an enemy unto you; so be wary of them. Yet if you pardon, forbear, and forgive, then truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. (15) Your property and your children are only a trial; and God—with Him is a great reward. (16) So reverence God as much as you are able. Listen, obey, and spend; that is better for your souls. And whosoever is shielded from the avarice of his soul, it is they who shall prosper. (17) If you lend unto God a goodly loan, He will multiply it for you and forgive you; and God is Thankful, Clement, (18) Knower of the Unseen and the seen, the Mighty, the Wise.

14 This verse reportedly refers to those who were prevented by their families from migrating to Madinah after they had embraced Islam. Some took pity on their own families and did not emigrate or delayed their emigration (Q, Sy, Ṭ, W). Then this verse was revealed to instruct them to be on their guard against family members who did not support them in their religion, but also not to punish them for it. For other references to the manner in which family can serve as a distraction or even hindrance in religious matters, see 3:10, 14, 116; 8:28; 9:24, 55, 69, 85; 18:39–40, 46; 23:55–56; 26:88; 34:35–37; 60:3; 63:9; 64:15; 71:21.

15 Cf. 8:28. Property and possessions are a trial insofar as one becomes overly attached to them, even a slave to them, rather than to God. In this vein a famous *ḥadīth* states, "Wretched is the slave of *dīnār*s. Wretched is the slave of *dirhams*. Wretched is the slave of fine dress. Wretched is the slave of fine cloth" (Q). Regarding the manner in which property and children can be said to be a trial, see 9:55c; 63:9c.

16 According to some, *Reverence God as much as you are able* was later abrogated by *Reverence God as He should be reverenced* (3:102; Q), in which case this verse would be seen as an incremental step toward complete reverence for God. Nonetheless, the two phrases can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Together, listening and obeying indicate the two necessary dispositions toward revelation, first to contemplate it and understand it, and second to act upon it by refraining from what it forbids and doing what it enjoins. Thus listening must precede obeying as contemplation must precede action. Here *spend* means in charity, in alms (*zakāh*), or upon oneself (Q). It could also be rendered, "Spend what is better for your souls" (Q), which, in relation to vv. 9 and 17, would mean that those who spend what is best will not experience "dispossession" on the Day of Judgment, as they are those who *lend unto God a goodly loan* (v. 17). In this context, *whosoever is shielded from the avarice of his soul* (cf. 59:9) indicates both a general principle and that for those who do not succumb to the trials associated with family and property (see vv. 13–15) but are able to treat them in a just and equitable manner, *it is they who shall prosper;* see 59:9c.

17 This verse follows upon the reference to *the Day of Mutual Dispossession* in v. 9. In contrast to the disbelievers, *who have purchased error at the price of guidance, and punishment at the price of forgiveness* (2:175), the believers sell their souls seeking God's good pleasure (see 2:207) and thus *lend unto God a goodly loan* (cf. 2:245; 5:12; 57:11, 18; 73:20); see 57:11c; 57:18c. The manner in which God multiplies charitable offerings is best reflected in 2:261: *The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain that grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And God multiplies for whomsoever He will* (see also 2:245; 4:40; 6:160). Regarding the manner in which God can be understood as *Thankful,* see 35:30c.

18 Regarding God as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (cf. 6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 23:92; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8), see 9:94c; 59:22c.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 65

# Divorce

## *al-Ṭalāq*

*Al-Ṭalāq* is a Madinan *sūrah* that takes its name from the guidelines it provides for divorce. It is also known as *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ al-Quṣrā,* "The Shorter *Sūrah* Regarding Women," in juxtaposition to *Sūrah* 4, *al-Nisāʾ,* "Women" (Āl, IJ). Although divorce is permitted in Islam, a *ḥadīth* states, "Verily, of that which is permitted, the most abhorred by God is divorce." Nonetheless, in 33:28–29 the Prophet himself is permitted to divorce his wives.

The *sūrah* can be divided into two main sections. The first (vv. 1–7) provides details regarding the waiting period to be observed in cases of divorce, especially for women who are not menstruating, and the manner in which the husband is to provide for the wife, especially if she is pregnant or suckling. The second section (vv. 8–12) admonishes Muslims to observe these laws by providing reminders of previous peoples who failed to follow the laws revealed by God.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O Prophet! When you divorce your wives, divorce them for the waiting period and count well the waiting period, and reverence your Lord. Expel them not from their houses; nor shall they depart, unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the limits set by God, and whosoever transgresses the limits set by God has surely wronged himself. Thou knowest not: perhaps God will bring something new to pass thereafter. (2) So when they have fulfilled their

1 Although this verse is addressed to the Prophet in the second-person singular, it is meant for the entire community (JJ). Such double signification of the second-person singular is found in several verses, such as 4:79. It is reported that the Prophet divorced his wife Ḥafṣah, and so God revealed this verse. It was said to him, "Take her back, for she is one who fasts often and stands often in night vigil, and she is one of your wives in the Garden" (Q, Ṭ, W). *The waiting period* refers to the *three courses* of menstruation discussed in 2:228. If, however, the marriage were not consummated, no *waiting period* would be enforced, as stipulated in 33:49: *O you who believe! If you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them, there shall be no waiting period for you to reckon against them. But provide for them and release them in a fair manner.* In the present verse, *for the waiting period* can also be read to mean "during the waiting period," in which case it is understood to indicate that a man cannot divorce his wife while she is menstruating, but must wait until her menstruation is finished, as when the Prophet told ʿUmar regarding his son ʿAbd Allāh, who had declared divorce from his wife while she was menstruating, "Tell him to take her back and keep her until she is clean and then to wait till she gets her next period and becomes clean again, whereupon, if he wishes to keep her, he can do so. And if he wishes to divorce her, he can divorce her before having sexual intercourse with her; that is the prescribed waiting period that God has fixed for the women one intends to divorce" (Q). *Expel them not* indicates the rights that the wife continues to have over the husband, and *nor shall they depart* indicates the rights that the husband continues to have over the wife (Q; see 33:33), though they are no longer to engage in conjugal relations. *Unless they commit a flagrant indecency* indicates that a woman cannot be expelled from her house based upon a suspicion or an accusation of adultery; rather, any charges of infidelity must be properly substantiated (R) through the testimony of four trustworthy witnesses; see 4:15c. *Perhaps God will bring something new to pass thereafter* means that God may reconcile their hearts during the *waiting period* that was being observed after the first or second declaration of divorce and before the third (JJ, Q), since after the third declaration divorce is final and marital relations cannot be resumed; see 2:230c.

2 The first sentence of this verse is similar to that of 2:231. When the full period of three menstrual cycles required for a divorce to be final has passed, men may choose to reconcile with their wives and thus *take them back in an honorable way,* that is, out of a genuine desire to continue the marriage rather than harming them by taking them back just before the waiting period is over and then beginning the divorce process again (see 2:231c). Alternately, the divorce can be finalized *in an honorable way,* meaning that each party must fulfill its obligations to the other; see 2:228. If the hearts of the husband and wife are reconciled and they wish to retain the marriage bond after initiating the divorce process, they must call two witnesses; some say this is required, others that it is only recommended (Q). In this context, that God *will appoint a way out* for the reverent means that

term, take them back in an honorable way or separate from them in an honorable way. And call two just persons among yourselves to witness and uphold the testimony for God. By this is exhorted whosoever believes in God and the Last Day. And whosoever reverences God, He will appoint a way out for him, (3) and will provide for him whence he reckons not. And whosoever trusts in God, He suffices him. Truly God fulfills His Command. God has indeed set a measure for all things. (4) As for those of your women who no longer await menstruation, if you are unsure, then their waiting period is three months, as it is for those who are yet to menstruate. But as for those who are pregnant, their term is until they deliver. And whosoever reverences God, He will appoint ease for his affair. (5) That is the Command of God that He has sent down unto you.

those who observe the requirements of divorce, despite the difficulties such requirements may entail, will be rewarded. More generally, the phrase indicates that anyone who endures an affliction patiently will be granted a way from the Fire to the Garden in the Hereafter (R).

3 This verse and the last sentence of the preceding verse were reportedly revealed in connection with a poor man who had numerous children. When he asked the Prophet for help, the Prophet told him, "Fear God, and be patient!" Not long after this, a son of this man, who had been captured by the enemy, escaped and led away many of the enemy's sheep, four thousand according to some (Q, W), one hundred according to others (R). The man went to the Prophet to ask him what he should do with the sheep. The Prophet said, "Keep them. They are yours" (Q, R, Sy, Ṭ, W), because they would technically have been spoils of war. The virtue of trusting in God is extolled throughout the Quran (see 14:11–12c). Here it is directly linked to God's *set measure for all things*. In this specific context, it indicates that observing the *waiting period* (v. 1) for divorce is part of trusting in God and of observing the measure God has established (R). More generally, it indicates complete trust in the Divine *qadar*, or "measuring out," as this is considered one of the tenets of faith: "Faith is to believe in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and *al-qadar*, the good of it and the evil of it"; regarding God's "measuring out," see 54:49c.

4 It is reported that the Companion Ubayy ibn Kaʿb said to the Prophet, "People say that there remain women regarding whom nothing was mentioned in the Quran, the young and those who are pregnant"; then this verse was revealed (IK, Q, W). As the *three courses* (see 2:228) for women who no longer menstruate or who have not yet begun to menstruate cannot be determined, they are to wait *three months* until the divorce is complete. If, however, their spouses have died, they are to wait *four months and ten days* before they may remarry (see 2:234). But those who are pregnant are to wait until they have delivered before the divorce is considered complete. *If you are unsure* can be seen as a clarification related to v. 1, meaning, "*Expel them not from their houses* if you are unsure that the [waiting] period has concluded" (Q). That God appoints ease for those who reverence Him is here understood to mean that, if a couple are mindful of these conditions, God will make it easy for them to reconcile before the divorce is complete (Q). It could also be a general recognition of the difficulties divorce entails, especially during the waiting period when the estranged spouses might continue to have regular contact with one another.

5 This verse is a reaffirmation that the above restrictions regarding the prescribed waiting period are part of the revealed Law. God covers over

Whosoever reverences God, He will absolve him of his evil deeds and honor him with reward. (6) Let them dwell where you dwell according to your means, and do not harm them so as to put them in straits. And if they are pregnant, then spend on them until they deliver. Then if they are suckling for you, give them their compensation, and consult together in an honorable way. And if you have difficulty with one another, then another shall suckle for him. (7) Let one who has abundant wealth spend from his abundance. And let one whose provision is straitened spend from that which God has given him. God tasks no soul beyond that which He has given it. God will bring ease after hardship. (8) And how many a town insolently defied the Command of its Lord and His messengers, such that We called it to a severe reckoning and punished it with a terrible punishment! (9) Then did it taste the evil consequences of its affair, and the end

evil deeds through good deeds, which wipe away evil deeds (Aj); see 66:8c.

6 During the prescribed waiting period, men are to continue to provide for their wives as they provided for them while married. Some argue that this verse means only that shelter must be provided, while others maintain that the man must also continue to spend for the woman's provision (Q). If the woman is pregnant and the divorce is irrevocable, the man must continue to provide for her until she gives birth and as long as she suckles the child, usually a period of *two full years* (for the conditions pertaining to suckling, see 2:233). *Consult together in an honorable way* regarding the care of the child, so that *no mother be harmed on account of her child, nor father on account of his child* (2:233). Some say that the present verse means that the man must pay for the provisions of the mother and the child, others that he must pay only for the provisions of the child (Q). If they are not able to reach an agreement because either the father withholds payment or the mother refrains from suckling, the mother should not be compelled to do so, and another woman can be chosen to suckle the child (JJ). Providing for the suckling child is said to be the responsibility of husbands, because they are legally obligated to provide for all of their children's needs. Regarding the legal status of "milk relations," see 4:23c.

7 Some interpret this verse to mean that the amount paid by the husband to his former wife depends upon both her needs and his circumstances, while others maintain that the amount the wife must be paid is to be limited to her immediate needs (Q). This verse is also viewed as evidence for the position that the husband is solely responsible for providing provisions for the child whether the couple is married or divorced (Q). The last sentence indicates that if one finds it difficult to meet these obligations, God will ease one's circumstances, either in this life by providing additional means or in the Hereafter by easing one's way into the Garden for striving to observe the Command of God even when it was difficult. Regarding the relationship between hardship and ease, see 94:5–6c.

8–9 Given the extent to which the rulings regarding the treatment of divorced wives outlined in vv. 1–7 and in 2:222–37 differed from those of pre-Islamic times, these verses remind the Muslims of the dire consequences of failing to follow God's Law. The *severe reckoning* can be seen as a reference to the punishment they receive in this world and the *terrible punishment* as that of the Hereafter (Q). They tasted the consequences of disbelief (Q), and regretted their actions when regret was no longer of any benefit to them (IK). Similar warnings regarding following God's

of its affair was loss. (10) God prepared a severe punishment for them. So reverence God, O possessors of intellect, who have believed. God has certainly sent down unto you a reminder: (11) a Messenger reciting unto you the clear signs of God to bring those who believe and perform righteous deeds out of darkness into light. And whosoever believes in God and works righteousness, He causes him to enter Gardens with rivers running below, to abide therein forever. God has indeed prepared for him a beautiful provision. (12) God it is Who created the seven heavens, and from the earth the like thereof. The Command descends among them, that you may know that God is Powerful over all things and that God has encompassed all things in knowledge.

Command and observing the limits He sets are issued after the revelation of the inheritance verses, which were also controversial for some because of the unprecedented rights they gave to women; see commentary on 4:11–14.

10 *Possessors of intellect* (2:179, 197, 269; 3:7, 190; 5:100; 12:111; 13:19; 14:52; 38:29, 43; 39:9, 18, 21; 40:54) indicates those who possess true knowledge of the inner essence of things; see 5:100c; 39:9c. *A reminder* is read by most as a reference to the Quran, but in relation to v. 11 it could also be seen as a reference to the Prophet (IK, Q).

11 Bringing the believers *out of darkness into light* (cf. 2:257; 5:16; 14:1, 5; 33:43; 57:9) indicates bringing them from disbelief and ignorance to belief and knowledge (IK), a function ascribed to scripture in general in 42:52: *Thou knewest not what scripture was, nor faith. But We made it a light whereby We guide whomsoever We will among Our servants* (see also 5:16c; 14:1c). Here the phrase can also be understood as a reference to the Prophet bringing people from darkness into light, as in 14:1: *[This is] a Book that We have sent down unto thee, that thou mightest bring mankind out of darkness into light, by the leave of their Lord.* Regarding God's admitting people into *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c; 3:195; 5:12; 48:5; 64:9.

12 The creation of seven heavens is referred to elsewhere (e.g., 2:29; 17:44; 23:86; 41:12; 67:3; 71:15; 78:12), but this is the only verse to allude to seven earths or lands, which is supported by a *ḥadīth:* "Whosoever usurps a span of land unjustly, it will encircle his neck on the Day of Resurrection from the seven earths" (Q). When viewed in light of this *ḥadīth,* this verse is understood to mean seven lands "one upon another" (Mw, Q), just as the seven heavens are described in 67:3 and 71:15. But the seven earths or lands can also be understood as a reference not to seven levels, but to seven lands spread across the earth (Q), hence to the seven continents or climes. In this vein, Ibn ʿAbbās reportedly said regarding this verse, "Were I to tell you of the interpretation of it, you would disbelieve, and your disbelief would be your denial of it" (Ṭ). He is also reported to have said, "Seven lands: in each land there is a prophet like your prophet, and an Adam like Adam, and a Noah like Noah, and an Abraham like Abraham, and a Jesus like Jesus" (IK, Ṭ). In this sense, *the Command descends among them* can be seen as an allusion to the universality of revelation, as in 16:36: *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community.*

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 66

# Forbiddance

## *al-Taḥrīm*

Likely from the year 7/629, *al-Taḥrīm* is a Madinan *sūrah,* although a minority maintain that only the first nine verses are Madinan and that the last three are Makkan (Āl). It takes its name from the opening verse, in which the Prophet is told not to forbid for himself what God has permitted for him. Along these lines, it is also known as *Lima tuḥarrimu,* "Why Dost Thou Forbid?" (Āl), and as *al-Mutaḥḥaram,* "The Forbidden" (al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*). Since it directly addresses the Prophet's family situation, it is also known as *Sūrat al-Nabī,* "The *Sūrah* of the Prophet" (Āl, Z).

Whereas the first half of the previous *sūrah* provides details for divorce pertaining to all women, the subject of this *sūrah* is the relationship between the Prophet and his wives (vv. 1–5). This is followed by injunctions instructing the believers on how to protect themselves and repent (vv. 6, 8), warning the disbelievers of their fate (v. 7), and enjoining the Prophet to strive against those who do not accept the revelation (v. 9). The final verses (vv. 10–12) provide examples of believing and disbelieving women. In providing examples of women whose state of virtue stood in stark contrast to that of their husbands, it demonstrates that everyone, even the wives of the Prophet, is responsible for the state of his or her own soul. In this way it complements *Sūrah* 60, *al-Mumtaḥanah,* the last verses of which emphasize the manner in which women made their own pledge with the Prophet.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O Prophet! Why dost thou forbid that which God has made lawful unto thee, seeking the good pleasure of thy wives? And God is Forgiving, Merciful. (2) God has already ordained for you the absolution of your oaths. And God is your Master. He is the Knower, the Wise. (3) When the Prophet confided a certain matter to one of his wives, but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said, "Who informed thee of this?" He replied, "The Knower, the Aware informed me." (4) If you both repent unto God . . . For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, He

1 This verse was reportedly revealed after the Prophet had sworn to his wife Ḥafṣah that he would no longer have intimate relations with his Coptic slave girl, Māriyah. The Prophet had been intimate with Māriyah in Ḥafṣah's apartment on Ḥafṣah's day (the Prophet's wives rotated, each having one day with him in turn). When Ḥafṣah became upset, the Prophet asked her to tell no one of it and then told Māriyah that she was forbidden to him, after which this verse and the following verses were revealed (Q, Sy, Ṭ, W), according to some after a period of twenty-one days (W). According to others, this verse was revealed after the Prophet forbade a certain beverage to himself that God had not forbidden, though it could apply to any instance in which the Prophet might have forbidden something that was permitted to him (Ṭ), an error that all Muslims are counseled to avoid, as in 5:87: *O you who believe! Forbid not the good things that God has made lawful unto you* (see also 6:140).

2 The absolution for breaking oaths is found in 5:89: *the feeding of ten indigent people with the equivalent of that which you feed your own family, or clothing them,* or fasting three days if one does not have the means to feed and clothe others. According to some commentators, in this instance the Prophet made expiation for going back on the oath not to be intimate with Māriyah by freeing a slave (JJ). Others maintain that, as God had absolved him of the oath, there was no need for expiation (JJ).

3 *She divulged it* refers to Ḥafṣah's telling ʿĀʾishah, another of the Prophet's wives, of the Prophet's intimacy with Māriyah in Ḥafṣah's apartment, though the Prophet had requested that Ḥafṣah say nothing of it. When he asked her if she had spoken of the matter, she denied doing so (W). The Prophet then informed Ḥafṣah of some of what she had divulged and passed over some of it out of kindness toward her (JJ, Ṭs), or else God informed the Prophet of some of it and passed over some of it.

4 *You both* is an address to Ḥafṣah and ʿĀʾishah. The response to the elided conditional phrase *if you both repent unto God* is understood to be "it will be accepted of both of you" (JJ). Their hearts inclined to the prohibition of Māriyah (JJ), thus to the Prophet's prohibiting what God had made licit. That their hearts inclined is understood by some to mean that they swerved or deviated from the truth (Q, Ṭ). If the two wives were to *aid one another* in continuing to oppose the Prophet and thus failing to repent, this verse informs them, they would then be opposing the side of God, the believers, and the angels, all of whom assist the Prophet against those who harm him (Ṭ). *The righteous among the believers* is taken as a reference to ʿUmar and Abū Bakr, who were the fathers of Ḥafṣah and ʿĀʾishah, respectively;

is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal. (5) It may be that if he divorces you, his Lord would give him wives in your stead who are better than you, submitting, believing, devoutly obedient, penitent, worshipping, and given to wayfaring—previously married, and virgins. (6) O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded. (7) O you who disbelieve! Make no excuses this day! You are only requited for that which you used to do. (8) O you who believe! Repent

to the best among the believers (Ṭ, Ṭs, Ṭū); or to the prophets (Ṭ, Ṭs). In Shiite commentaries, it is understood as a reference to ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Qm, Ṭs, Ṭū), and it is reported that the Prophet took ᶜAlī by the hand and said, "O people! This one is *the righteous among the believers*" (Ṭs).

5 This verse is addressed to the Prophet's wives, chastising them for succumbing to jealousy and forcing the Prophet to forbid what God had permitted. It can also be taken in a broader sense as a reminder to all believers to honor their spouses. *Submitting* translates *muslimāt,* indicating submission and thus humility before God (Ṭ). *Devoutly obedient* (*qānit*) indicates spiritual and religious obedience and conveys constancy and serenity (see 4:34c). In the Quran, words derived from the root *q-n-t* relate exclusively to obedience toward and worship of God, not obedience to human beings (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 4:34; 16:120; 33:31, 35; 39:9). *Given to wayfaring* translates *sāʾiḥāt,* which in this context would refer to those given to emigrating for the sake of their religion (JJ, Ṭ). From another perspective, it could indicate those who travel the spiritual path. *Sāʾiḥāt* can also mean "given to fasting," which in this context is interpreted to have a broader meaning, that of preserving one's limbs from any disobedient acts (Iṣ). Although more commentators seem to interpret it to mean "given to fasting," such interpretations may arise from later attempts to limit the roles of women; see 9:112c.

6 *Shield yourselves and your families* by being obedient and reverent and enjoining obedience and reverence to God (Ṭ). This is the only verse in which believers are told to shield themselves from the Fire; in other verses it is the believers who call upon God to *shield* them *from the punishment of the Fire* (see 3:16, 191; 40:7). Here *stones* likely refers to the idols worshipped by the idolaters, as they were made of stone (JJ) or were in fact stones. The angels referred to here are the guardians of Hell, of whom the Quran says there are nineteen (74:30).

7 This verse is a direct address to the disbelievers as they enter the Fire (JJ). *This day* thus refers to the Day of Resurrection (Ṭ). *You are only requited for that which you used to do* (cf. 52:16) indicates that God is just in punishing souls and wrongs no one, as in 45:22: *God created the heavens and the earth in truth, and so that every soul may be recompensed for that which it has earned; and they shall not be wronged* (see also 27:90; 34:33; 37:39; 83:36). When people see the reality of their deeds on the Day of Resurrection, it is said that they will know the truth and thus not try to make any excuses for their actions, as in 67:10–11.

8 *Repent unto God* can also mean "turn unto God," indicating turning from sin to obedience to God (Ṭ). *Sincere repentance* indicates that it is not a mere turning away from sin, but turning with true contrition, so that one never returns to the sin of which one has repented (Ṭ) and resolves not to commit the sin again. *It may be* translates *ᶜasā,* which conveys a sense of hope. In line with this verse, a *ḥadīth* says, "O people! Repent unto your Lord before you die, and draw yourselves nigh

unto God with sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your evil deeds and cause you to enter Gardens with rivers running below—the Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believe with him, with their light spreading before them and on their right, while they say, "Our Lord, complete our light for us and forgive us. Truly Thou art Powerful over all things." (9) O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh with them. Their refuge is Hell. What an evil journey's end! (10) God sets forth as an example for those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants; then they betrayed

unto Him with righteous deeds before you become preoccupied"; also see 3:193. That God will *absolve* human beings of their *evil deeds* is asserted in several verses. In some, as here, such absolution is linked to reverence for God (8:29; 5:65; 65:5); in others it is linked to faith and belief (29:7; 47:2; 48:5; 64:9). In 4:31 absolution from evil deeds is said to be the reward for repenting and then shunning major sins, while in other verses such absolution is linked with specific deeds, such as performing charitable acts in secret (2:271), fighting or being slain in the way of God (3:195), or performing prayer and giving alms (*zakāh;* 5:12). In general such absolution indicates the manner in which God shields those of faith from the evil consequences of their own actions in both this life and the Hereafter (see 40:9, 45; 42:25): *God may absolve them of the worst of that which they have done and render unto them their reward for the best of that which they used to do* (39:35; see also 9:121; 16:96; 24:38; 29:7; 46:16). Such absolution is thus linked with God's admitting people into *Gardens with rivers running below,* see 2:25c; 3:195; 5:12; 48:5; 64:9.

Regarding *their light spreading before them and on their right,* see 57:12c. The supplication at the end of the verse is understood as the words uttered by the believers when they see God extinguish the light of the hypocrites (Q, R); see commentary on 57:13–14. According to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, God completes their light for them, but they continue to call upon God, seeking to draw nearer unto Him (R).

9 This verse is identical to 9:73. In this context, *strive against the disbelievers* is understood to mean with the sword as well as through preaching and calling them to God (Q), while *strive against . . . the hypocrites* is understood to mean by applying the legal punishments for their transgressions (Q, Ṭ).

10–12 These last three verses speak to the situation of the Prophet's wives by providing examples of disbelievers from among the wives of previous prophets and examples of the most pious women in the history of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. They also provide an example for all believers by demonstrating that the righteousness of another does not benefit one who works corruption and the corruption of another does not harm one who is righteous (R).

10 *They betrayed them;* that is, they both betrayed their husbands. Lot's wife's betrayal of him is alluded to in several verses (7:83; 11:81; 15:60; 27:57; 29:32), but this is the only explicit Quranic reference to Noah's wife's betrayal. Their lives are *an example* because they demonstrate that marriage to a prophet did not assure salvation; and in the case of Lot's wife it did not protect her from being punished with the other disbelievers when Sodom was destroyed (see 7:83; 11:81; 15:59–60; 26:170–71; 27:57; 29:32; 54:34; cf. Genesis 19:26). Noah's wife is reported to have said to the people that he was a madman (JJ, R), while Lot's wife is reported to have told the people the whereabouts of Lot's guests, whom they sought to molest (JJ, R).

them, and they availed them naught against God. And it was said unto both, "Enter the Fire with those who enter." (11) And God sets forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said, "My Lord, build for me a house near unto Thee in the Garden, deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people," (12) and Mary, the daughter of ᶜImrān, who preserved her chastity. Then We breathed therein of Our Spirit, and she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books; and she was among the devoutly obedient.

11 In contrast to the wives of Noah and Lot, who were sinners despite being married to righteous men, Pharaoh's wife Āsiyah was righteous despite being married to the greatest of sinners. Āsiyah is said to be one of four women who were pure of sin regarding whom the Prophet is reported to have said, "The best among the women of the Garden are Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, Fāṭimah bint Muhammad, Maryam bint ᶜImrān, and Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, the wife of Pharaoh" (IK). According to commentators, Āsiyah was tortured by Pharaoh for believing in Moses, at which time she uttered the words attributed to her in this verse and was taken to Paradise (IK, JJ, R). The Prophet is also reported to have said, "Verily in the Garden God has married me to Mary bint ᶜImrān, the wife of Pharaoh, and the sister of Moses" (Āl).

12 *And Mary* follows upon *the wife of Pharaoh* from v. 11, meaning that she is also *set forth as an example for those who believe* (Āl). For the story of Jesus' mother, Mary, see *Sūrah* 19. ᶜImrān is the name of Mary's father, who is not named in the Bible but is known in extra-Biblical literature as Joachim (see commentary on 3:33–35). *She preserved her chastity* (cf. 21:91) is in part a response to the accusations of being unchaste that Mary's people made against her (R); see 19:27–28. Some read *Our Spirit* here and in 21:91 as a reference to the Angel Gabriel (IK, JJ, Ṭ), while others say *Our Spirit* refers to a spirit among the spirits God has created, which would here be the spirit of Jesus (Q; for the debates regarding this issue, see 4:171c). Taken most literally, it would refer to the Spirit of God. That *she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books* means that she believed in all previous revelations (R). Regarding *devoutly obedient,* see 66:5c; 4:34c. Here the last phrase could also mean "she was from the devoutly obedient," thus indicating purity of lineage (Āl).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 67

# Sovereignty

## *al-Mulk*

Although there are no definitive accounts as to when *al-Mulk* was revealed, most consider it to be from the middle of the Makkan period. In the sayings attributed to the Prophet, it is called by the first word, *Tabāraka,* meaning "Blessed," or by the first few words, *Tabāraka al-ladhī bi yadihi 'l-mulk,* "Blessed Is He in Whose Hand Lies Sovereignty." It is also known as *al-Māniᶜ,* meaning "The Shield" or "The Protector," after a famous *ḥadīth:* "*Sūrah Tabāraka* is a shield (*māniᶜ*) from the punishment of the grave." According to some it was also known as *al-Munjiyah,* "The Savior," after another *ḥadīth:* "Verily, there is a *sūrah* in the Quran which contains thirty verses that will intercede on behalf of one who recites it until he is forgiven: *Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty*" (IK, Ṭs). Another *ḥadīth* states, "There is a *sūrah* of the Quran which is but thirty verses that will argue on behalf of its companion until it causes him to enter the Garden: *Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty*" (IK).

Based upon such *aḥādīth* and upon several sayings of the Companions of the Prophet, it is believed that one who recites this *sūrah* will be spared from trials in both this life and the next. It is also reported that the Prophet said regarding *al-Mulk,* "I would love for it to be in the heart of every person among my community" (IK, Sy). Consequently, this is one of the best-known and most frequently recited *sūrahs* of the Quran.

The *sūrah* begins with an attestation to God's omnipotence and the perfection of creation (vv. 1–4), followed by an assertion of the inability of the jinn to penetrate the heavens (v. 5). The dreadful ends of those who deny God's messengers (vv. 6–11) are contrasted with the final ends of those who fear God (v. 12). God's omnipotence and omniscience is then reasserted through a series of interposed statements and rhetorical questions (vv. 13–24), and the *sūrah* concludes with a series of questions that the Prophet is told to pose to those who question him regarding the end of time (vv. 25–30).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty, and He is Powerful over all things, (2) Who created death and life that He may try you as to which of you is most virtuous in deed, and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving, (3) Who created seven heavens one upon another; no disproportion dost thou see in the Merciful's creation. Cast thy sight again; dost thou see any flaw? (4) Then

1 *Sovereignty* translates *mulk,* a word closely related to *malakūt,* which is rendered *dominion* in 36:83; they derive from the same root, *m-l-k,* which in verbal form means "to possess," "to control," "to rule," or "to reign." According to some, *malakūt* refers to God's Lordship over the unseen realm, while *mulk* refers to God's Lordship over the visible world. The Divine Name *Mālik* ("Master") also derives from this root, as does the word for "king" (*malik*) and the most widely used word for "angels" (*malāʾikah;* sing. *malak*); for more on these terms and their use in Islamic cosmology, see 36:83c.

2 God's creation of life and death is often understood as His granting existence to what is nonexistent, as in 2:28: *How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life?* (IK). That the mention of death precedes life in this verse can be seen as an indication that God has created death for human beings in relation to this world, for *every soul shall taste death* (3:185; 21:35; 29:57), and life in relation to both this life and the Hereafter (Q). As a *ḥadīth* states, "God has humbled the son of Adam with death, and has made the world an abode of life, then an abode of death, and made the Hereafter an abode of recompense (*jazāʾ*), then an abode of eternal abiding (*baqāʾ*)" (IK, Q, Sy). Regarding the second half of the verse, see 18:7: *Surely We made whatsoever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may try them as to which of them is most virtuous in deed* (see also 11:7). That God tries human beings is not considered unjust, for as other verses say, *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity* (2:286; see also 2:233; 6:152; 7:42; 23:62), *and thy Lord wrongs no one* (18:49). Trials are considered an aspect of God's Mercy, since they are an integral part of the process of purification. When asked which human beings suffer the greatest trials, the Prophet answered, "The prophets, then those most like them. A person is tested according to the level of his faith. If his faith is firm, his trials increase in severity, and if there is weakness in his faith, he will be tried accordingly." With regard to trials faced by believers, another *ḥadīth* says, "No fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt, or distress befalls a Muslim—even if he be pricked by a thorn—but that God expiates some of his sins thereby." In this sense, affliction can be a blessing for the opportunities it presents; another *ḥadīth* says, "If God wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials." Conversely, wealth can be a curse for those who do not manage it properly, as in 9:85: *And let not their wealth or their children impress thee. God desires only to punish them thereby in this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers.* Thus one is tried both by affliction, in the face of which one must be patient, and by blessings, for which one must be thankful, recognizing that God *is Powerful over all things* (v. 1). Several early commentators note the significance of the fact that the verse says *most virtuous in deed* rather than "most accomplished" or simply "most" (IK), a position that reflects the emphasis upon intention found throughout the Quran and *Ḥadīth.* As the Prophet says in one of the most famous of *aḥādīth,* "Deeds are only in accord with their intentions. And every person has only what he intended." It is said that upon reciting this *sūrah* the Prophet stopped when he reached *which of you is most virtuous in deed* and said, "The most wary of what God has forbidden and the quickest to obey God" (Āl, Q).

3–4 The *heavens* can be seen as a reference only to the *heavens,* the whole of the created

cast thy sight twice again; thy sight will return to thee humbled and wearied. (5) Truly We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and made them missiles against the satans; and We have prepared for them the punishment of the Blaze. (6) And for those who disbelieve in their Lord is the punishment of Hell. What an evil journey's end! (7) When they are cast therein, they will hear it blaring as it boils over, (8) well-nigh bursting with rage. Whenever a group is cast therein, its keepers ask them, "Did not a warner come unto you?" (9) They say, "Indeed, a warner came unto us, but we denied him and said, 'God did not

order, or the universal levels or grades of existence, the last of which serves as a basis for various hierarchical cosmological schemes in some commentaries. *Disproportion* translates *tafāwut*, which here indicates something that lacks proportion or balance such that parts of it fail to connect with other parts of it (R, Z); thus some say it has the same meaning as *rifts* in 50:6: *Have they not looked upon the sky above them, how We built it and adorned it, and [how it] has no rifts?* The lack of *disproportion* can be understood as the absence of *rifts* between the seven heavens or more generally as an indication that there are no gaps in God's creation. As several verses indicate, all things are created *in truth*, as in 44:38–39: *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them in play. We did not create them, save in truth. But most of them know not* (see also 6:73; 10:5; 14:19; 15:85; 16:3; 29:44; 30:8; 39:5; 45:22; 46:3). That the eye returns *humbled* could also mean that an eye that tries to find defect returns "humiliated" or "debased" (IK). This verse is also related to 4:82, which maintains that for one who contemplates the Quran no *discrepancy* will be found in it.

5 According to a famous saying attributed to Qatādah, one of the foremost commentators from the third generation of Muslim scholars, "The creation of the stars is for three things: decoration of the nearest heaven, missiles to hit the satans, and signs to guide travelers" (IK, Ṭ). The first two functions are mentioned in this verse. It is said that the function of meteors or shooting stars is to bar the satans from listening to the secrets of Heaven, to which they had previously enjoyed access; see 15:16–18; 37:6–10c; 72:8–9c, as well as the introduction to *Sūrah* 72.

6 This verse can be seen as a general warning against all forms of disbelief. But in relation to the discussion of satans in v. 5, it is said to apply to those who would seek information from fortune-tellers and sorcerers as an alternative to religion. As a *ḥadīth* says of this practice, "Whosoever comes to a fortune-teller (*kāhin*) or diviner (*ʿarrāf*) and considers what he says to be true has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad."

7–8 These verses refer to the hideous sound that Hellfire is said to make as the disbelievers are dragged into its depths. It is similar to the sound described in 25:12: *When it sees them from a place far off, they will hear its raging and roaring. Its keepers* refers to the angels serving as the gatekeepers of Hell, who are described elsewhere as *angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded* (66:6). They number nineteen in 74:30–31, and the main keeper is identified as Mālik in 43:77–78: *And they will call, "O Mālik, let thy Lord put an end to us." He will reply, "You will surely remain. We did indeed bring you the Truth, but most of you were averse to the Truth."* Their question to the disbelievers, *Did not a warner come unto you?* is by way of reproach, for as 35:24 states, *There has been no community but that a warner has passed among them.*

9 As many verses attest, God promises that none will be punished unless they have been sent a clear warner, part of the test alluded to in v. 2. As 17:15 states, *And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger.*

send anything down; you are in naught but great error.'" (10) They say, "Had we listened or had we understood, we would not be among the inhabitants of the Blaze." (11) Thus do they admit their sin; so away with the inhabitants of the Blaze! (12) Truly for those who fear their Lord unseen there shall be forgiveness and a great reward. (13) Keep your speech secret or proclaim it; truly He knows what lies within breasts. (14) Does He Who created not know? He is the Subtle, the Aware. (15) He is the One Who made the earth tractable for you; so travel

10–11 On the Day of Judgment, all will see the truth. Those who denied it in this life will thus realize that they had been astray and admit the error of their ways, though it will be of no avail against the punishment of the Fire; as 4:18 says, *Repentance is not accepted from those who do evil deeds till, when death confronts one of them, he says, "Truly now I repent," nor from those who die as disbelievers. For those We have prepared a painful punishment.* In a similar verse, the disbelievers even bear witness that they deserve Hellfire, saying, *"Yea, indeed!" But the Word of punishment has come due for the disbelievers* (39:71). The door of repentance is thus open until the moment of death. As a *ḥadīth* states, "God will accept the repentance of His servant until his death rattle"; see 4:17–18c.

12 Cf. 36:11; 50:33. Some verses indicate that the fear of God is incumbent upon all believers, as in 3:175: *So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are believers.* To *fear* God *unseen* can be interpreted as a reference to worshipping God, Who is unseen, or as a reference to worshipping God in seclusion (IK, Q, Sh, Ṭs). The former interpretation sees one as worshipping God because one fears the punishment, even though one does not see the punishment. The latter implies a deeper level of devotion and reverence in which one fears to displease God because of the depth of one's love for God, and thus refrains from any acts of disobedience both in public and in private. In a famous *ḥadīth,* one of seven categories of people said to be "shaded by God on the Day wherein there will be no shade other than His shade" is "a person who remembers God while alone and his eyes flow [with tears]" (IK). The *great reward* refers to Paradise (Q, Sh) and is also taken to imply that the delights of this world become small in the eyes of those who fear God (Bḍ).

13 According to Ibn ʿAbbās, this verse was revealed about the idolaters who would slander the Prophet and say to one another, "Lower your voices, lest Muhammad's God hear you" (Q, W). As God overhears all, the Prophet advised his followers, "Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him speak well or be silent." That God *knows what lies within breasts* (3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 29:10; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4) indicates that God is aware of the intentions behind all deeds and all inner thoughts. It does not, however, mean that one is accountable for all that one thinks unless that thought is put into action. In this vein, another *ḥadīth* states, "For my community God passes over that which arises within their souls, so long as they do not speak of it or act upon it."

14 This verse could also be read, "Does He not know whom He has created, though He is the Subtle, the Aware?" (IK, Q). The idea expressed both in this reading and in the translation is further explained by 50:16: *We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.* If read as a reference to the disbeliever's ignorance of God, a third reading could be, "Does he not know Who creates, though He is the Subtle, the Aware?" Of the several Divine Names that refer to God's Omniscience, *the Aware* refers in particular to God's Knowledge of things before they come into existence (Q). In contrast, *the Subtle* refers to God's Knowledge of the minutest details. *The Subtle* renders *al-Laṭīf,* which can also mean "the Kind"; see 42:19c.

15 The beginning of this verse is similar to part of what Noah says to his people in 71:19–20: *And God made the earth an open expanse for you, that you may travel spacious paths therein* (see

the open roads thereof and eat of His provision. And unto Him is the Resurrection. (16) Do you feel secure that He Who is in Heaven will not cause the earth to engulf you while it churns? (17) Or do you feel secure that He Who is in Heaven will not unleash a torrent of stones upon you? Soon shall you know how My warning is. (18) And indeed those before them denied. How, then, was the change I wrought! (19) Have they not considered the birds above them, spreading and folding up [their wings]? None holds them save the Compassionate. Truly He sees all things. (20) Who is it that will be a host for you, who may help you, apart from the Compassionate? The disbelievers are in naught but delusion. (21) Who is it that will provide for you if He withholds His provi-

also 20:53; 21:31; 43:10). The command to travel or journey upon the earth and reflect upon the nature of the created order is a frequent refrain in the Quran. It is usually mentioned in relation to the transience of life (cf. 3:137; 6:11; 12:109; 16:36; 27:69; 30:9; 30:42; 35:44; 40:21, 82; 47:10), but is also mentioned in relation to understanding the nature of God's creative power, as in 29:20: *Journey upon the earth and observe how He originated creation. Then God shall bring the next genesis into being. Truly God is Powerful over all things.* The exhortation to travel or journey is thus an exhortation to reflect and contemplate, so that the heart may open to the truth, as in 22:46: *Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts by which to understand or ears by which to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind.*

16 Cf. 16:45: *Do those who have plotted evil deeds feel secure that God will not cause the earth to engulf them, or that the punishment will not come upon them whence they are not aware?* (see also 17:68–69). In 28:76–82 and 29:39–40 the story is told of Korah, who possessed great wealth, but was nonetheless engulfed by the earth as a punishment for oppressing the people.

17 Cf. 17:68. This verse is an allusion to the punishment sent upon the people of Lot (see 29:40; 54:34), and upon *the masters of the elephant* (105:1), who are said to have attempted to destroy the Kaʿbah just forty years before the beginning of Islam; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 105. The last phrase could also be read "how my warner is," as a reference to the Prophet, meaning that the disbelievers will know his truthfulness and the punishment they deserve for denying him, as did those mentioned in vv. 8–11.

18 *How, then, was the change I wrought!* (cf. 22:44; 34:45; 35:26) could also be rendered, "How, then, was My reproach!" Both translations indicate that the punishment will be as severe as what befell the generations before; see 22:42–45c.

19 Cf. 16:79: *Have they not considered the birds, made subservient, in midair? None holds them save God. Truly in that are signs for a people who believe.* In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Were you to trust in God as He merits, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds; they depart with empty stomachs and return full" (IK).

20 The idolaters of Makkah are said to have claimed that their gods would protect them from the punishments like those mentioned in vv. 17–18 and elsewhere. But as 36:75 says, *They cannot help them, though they be a host made ready for them.* Satan deluded them into thinking that they would be helped, but he then admits to this delusion on the Day of Judgment, saying, *Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help* (14:22).

21 This is similar to 16:73: *And they worship, apart from God, that which has no power over any provision that may come for them from the heavens*

sion? Nay, but they persist in insolence and aversion. (22) Is one who walks with his face stooped down more guided, or one who walks upright upon a straight path? (23) Say, "He it is Who brought you into being and endowed you with hearing, sight, and hearts. Little do you give thanks!" (24) Say, "He it is Who multiplied you upon the earth, and unto Him shall you be gathered." (25) And they say, "When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?" (26) Say, "Knowledge lies with God alone, and I am only a clear warner." (27) And when they see it close at hand, the faces of those who disbelieved shall be stricken, and

*and the earth, nor are they capable [of such].* That God is the provider of all sustenance is a constant theme of the Quran. Human beings are thus enjoined to recognize that nothing truly belongs to them and to spend in charity from what God has provided them.

22 *One who walks with his face stooped down* is seen as a metaphor for disbelievers, who do not look at the path ahead, to the right, or to the left in this life (Q, Ṭs) and thus do not consider the full reality of their state; rather, they are focused only upon petty desires and immediate concerns. It is also seen as a reference to the state of disbelievers in the Hereafter; as 25:34 says, they are *those who are gathered upon their faces to Hell, their place is worse and they are further astray from the way.* In contrast, believers are said to walk upright, so that they see and are not beset by afflictions that would cause them to go astray.

23 Cf. 23:78; 32:9. The gifts of hearing, sight, and heart are mentioned together in several verses, and human beings are exhorted to reflect upon these gifts (see 16:78); in 17:36 it is said that these three gifts *will be called to account,* meaning that one will be held accountable for their proper or improper use. The ingratitude stems from an illness in human beings' hearts, for *truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* (22:46).

24 God has distributed human beings throughout the various regions of the earth and given them different languages, colors, shapes, appearances, and forms (IK). Other verses also call upon human beings to reflect upon the diversity of races and tribes (see 5:48; 49:13). And although God has spread human beings, with their different creeds and colors, throughout the habitable earth, He will gather them all together on a single plain on the Day of Judgment, which is also known as *the Day of Gathering* (64:9).

25 Cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; see 36:48c.

26 That knowledge of the end of time lies only with God is mentioned in several Quranic verses (see 7:187; 31:34; 33:63; 41:47; 43:85; 79:42–46) and in Biblical passages such as Mark 13:31–32: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In this vein, the Prophet is told to say, *I am only a clear warner,* in several verses (22:49; 29:50; 38:70; 46:9; also see 27:92), while in other verses God addresses the Prophet, *Thou art but a warner* (13:7; 79:45), and *Thou art naught but a warner* (35:23).

27 *It* refers to the Final Hour or to the Day of Judgment. Their *faces* will be *stricken* because *the evils of that which they have earned will appear unto them, and that which they used to mock will beset them* (39:48). *That for which you called* is the promise of Judgment that they questioned in v. 25 and that they sought to hasten (Ṭ). Several other passages indicate that those who do not believe in the punishment seek to hasten the Judgment; e.g., 42:18: *Those who do not believe in it would seek to hasten it* (see also 6:57–59; 10:48–51; 26:200–207; 27:71–72; 29:53–54; 46:22–24; 51:12–14). In this vein, it is said that Qatādah related v. 27 to 8:32: *And [remember] when they said, "O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain*

it shall be said, "This is that for which you called." (28) Say, "Have you considered whether God destroys me and those with me or has mercy upon us? Who will protect the disbelievers from a painful punishment?" (29) Say, "He is the Compassionate; we believe in Him and trust in Him, and you will soon know who is in manifest error." (30) Say, "Have you considered? Were your water to vanish into the ground, then who would bring you flowing water?"

*down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment"* (Ṭ).

28 The command *say* at the beginning of each of the last three verses (vv. 28–30) is taken by most as a command to the Prophet. Here it is as if to say, "How is it that you seek to hasten the punishment, when I and those with me will not be destroyed, but none will save you from the punishment?" (Ṭ).

29 This verse is read by the vast majority of commentators as a declaration of faith contrasting the manner in which believers trust in the Compassionate to the manner in which disbelievers trust in the things of this world. The verse can also be understood as an answer to the previous verse, meaning that the only one who can protect the disbelievers is *the Compassionate*. It is said that when the Judgment comes, the disbelievers will realize that they had been wrong. Of this event 26:96–97 states, *They will say, as they dispute with one another therein, "By God, indeed we were in manifest error."*

The translation *you will soon know* follows that of most schools of recitation, *sa-taʿlamūn*. But in the school of *al-Kisāʾī*, it is read *sa-yaʿlamūn*, meaning "soon they will know," in which case what the Prophet is commanded to say stops after the second instance of "Him."

30 *Flowing* translates *maʿīn*, which is understood by some to mean "clear" or "sweet" (Ṭ). In many verses, that water is sent down from the sky is used as an allusion to blessings from God (e.g., 35:27; 39:21; 41:39); in others the manner in which God brings forth life through water is cited as a sign for those who believe (e.g., 2:164; 6:99; 7:57; 80:25–30); and 21:30 says, *We made every living thing from water*. God's removal of water (cf. 56:68–70) can thus be taken as an allusion to God's removing His blessings or the gift of life; for the place of water in the Quran, see also 21:30–31c; 24:45c.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 68

# The Pen

## *al-Qalam*

*Al-Qalam* is generally thought to be from the early Makkan period (JJ). It is reported that the early commentators Ibn ʿAbbās and Qatādah (d. 117/726) maintained that vv. 1–16, 34–47, and 51–52 are Makkan, while vv. 17–33 and 48–50 are Madinan (Āl, Q). It takes its name from the mention of *the pen* in the first verse.

The first section of the *sūrah* (vv. 1–10) contrasts the natures of those who believe and those who disbelieve, indicating that many of the disbelievers will not know their true nature until the Day of Resurrection and Judgment. This is followed by a brief passage (vv. 11–16) cautioning the believers not to follow people of base character simply because of their worldly wealth. The third section (vv. 17–34) provides the parable of *the owners of the garden,* who lost their harvest because of their miserliness. The fourth section (vv. 35–47) returns to the contrast of the believers and the disbelievers, indicating the vacuity of the disbelievers' position through a series of rhetorical questions. This is followed by a brief reference to the Prophet Jonah as an example of one who repented and was forgiven in full (vv. 48–50), a reminder to be wary of those who oppose revelation (v. 51), and an affirmation that the Quran (or the Prophet) is a reminder for all (v. 52).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) *Nūn.* By the pen and that which they inscribe, (2) thou art not, by the blessing of thy Lord, possessed. (3) Truly thine shall be a reward unceasing. (4) And truly thou art of an exalted character. (5) So thou wilt see and they

1 *Nūn* is the Arabic letter *n* and is among the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaᶜāt*) at the beginning of several *sūrah*s, whose meaning is not specified outwardly and, according to many, is known only to God (IK). This is the earliest *sūrah* in the chronological order of revelation in which the separated letters appear. *Nūn* is also an Arabic word for "fish"; some commentators thus relate it to an old Arab myth that holds that the earth is upon the back of a mythical fish (Bg, Q, Ṭ, Z).

In light of its cup-shaped form in Arabic script (ن), others say it refers to the "inkwell" from which the pen draws the ink with which it inscribes (Bg, Z). In Islamic metaphysics, the Pen is often taken as a symbol for the Divine Intellect or Logos, through which God brought all things into being. What is "written" by the Pen then means existiation of beings in the created order, and the *nūn* is seen to symbolize the reservoir that contains all the possibilities that are manifested in creation. In this regard, a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "The first thing God created was the Pen. Then he said to it, 'Write!' It responded, 'What shall I write?' He said, 'Write the decree (*al-qadar*) of what will be until the Hour is come.'" (AH, Bg, IK, Q, Ṭ).

Here the *nūn* is also seen as an allusion to one of the Divine Names, because it points to the *n* (*nūn*) at the end of *al-Raḥmān* ("the Compassionate") or at the beginning of *al-Nūr* ("the Light") or *al-Nāṣir* ("the Helper"; Bg, Q). Others see it as a reference to God's helping the believers (*naṣr al-muᵓminīn;* Bg, Q), a phrase that occurs in 30:47. Some attribute to the Prophet the saying: "*Nūn* is a tablet of light" (Āl, IK, Q).

The pronoun *they* in *that which they inscribe* may be seen as a reference to the angels who record all human deeds (Bg, IK, JJ, Q); see 43:80; 50:17–18c; 80:15–16; 82:10–12; 86:4. According to al-Qurṭubī, pens are of three principal types: the one that God commanded to write all that would be until the Day of Resurrection; those with which the angels record the deeds of human beings (see 18:49c); and those with which human beings write (Q on 96:4–5).

2 *The blessing of thy Lord* may be a reference to prophethood (Bg), and the verse's assertion that the Prophet is not *possessed* can be seen as a direct response to the derogatory statement of the disbelievers in 15:6–7: *O you unto whom the Reminder has been sent down, truly you are possessed. Why do you not bring us the angels, if you are among the truthful?* (Bg, Q).

3 *A reward unceasing* (cf. 41:8; 84:25; 95:6) indicates a reward that comes directly from God and is never cut off, as opposed to the rewards of this world, whose fleeting nature is discussed in the parable in vv. 17–34. In this context, it is understood as a reference to the reward the Prophet receives for carrying the burden of prophethood (Q).

4 This is among the most famous verses of the Quran. Some interpret *exalted character* as a descriptor of the religion of Islam (IK, Ṭ), but most associate it with the Prophet himself; his character is said to be exalted because he had no aspiration other than God (Q). The Prophet's wife ᶜĀᵓishah was once asked about the Prophet's character and responded, "Do you not read the Quran?... His character was the Quran" (Āl, Bg, IK, Q, Z). *Character* translates *khuluq,* which is closely related to the primary Quranic word for "creation" (*khalq*). In this vein, it is reported that the Prophet used to pray, "O God, Thou hast beautified my created form (*khalqī*), beautify my character (*khuluqī*)." Another *ḥadīth* states, "I was only sent to perfect the noble traits of character" (Bg, Q). The Prophet is also reported to have enjoined good character traits upon his followers, saying, "The best of you are those who are best in character traits" (Bg), and, "Reverence God wherever you may be; follow a bad deed with a good deed, and it will efface it; and comport with the people with good character" (Q). Regarding the

will see (6) which of you is afflicted. (7) Truly thy Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided; (8) so obey not the deniers. (9) They wish that thou might compromise so that they might compromise. (10) So obey not any vile oath-monger— (11) slanderer spreading calumny, (12) hinderer of good, a transgressing sinner, (13) churlish, surly, and ignoble withal— (14) simply because he possesses wealth and children.

importance of good character for the Hereafter, he is reported to have said, "What admits people most into Paradise is beauty of character" (Bg, Q), and "Nothing is placed on the scales of a believer that is weightier than beauty of character; and one who has beauty of character will reach thereby the degree of one who prays and fasts" (Bg, Q). More generally, this verse can be understood to mean that those with beautiful character traits are far from the state of being possessed referred to in verse 2 (Āl).

5–6 When the punishment comes upon the disbelievers, they will see which of the two parties, the believers or the disbelievers, has been tried with possession or madness (Bg, JJ, Z) or which of the two is to be tried (Bg, Z).

7 This verse is repeated with minor variation in 6:117 and 53:30 (see also 28:85). Here it indicates that God knows best which of the two parties is astray and *afflicted* and which is *guided,* as both parties claimed.

8 The *deniers* refers to the Makkan disbelievers who were bidding the Prophet and his followers to follow the religion of their forefathers rather than the religion revealed to the Prophet.

9 *Compromise* translates the verb *dahana,* which can mean both "to demean" and "to deny" or "to take something lightly." This verse can be read to mean either that the disbelievers will compromise when the Prophet and his followers compromise or that the disbelievers are already compromising; so they want the believers to compromise too (Z). According to the first reading, it means they want believers to be willing to give up part of their religion, so that they might then give up part of theirs, or that the believers worship their gods for a while and then they worship the believers' God for a while (Bg). According to the second reading, it means that they are disbelievers; so they wish for believers to become disbelievers as well (Bg).

10–16 Most commentators agree that these verses refer to al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, a leader among the Quraysh and one of the Prophet's staunchest opponents (Z). Others propose that it may refer to his detractors in general, such as Abū Jahl, al-Aswad ibn ʿAbd Yaghūth, and al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq (Z).

10 *Vile oath-monger* refers to one given to frequent swearing by falsehood (JJ) or one who swears falsely by God's Name (IK). Even in pre-Islamic Arabia it was considered a vice to be immoderate in taking oaths. Regarding the Quranic position on taking oaths, see 5:89c.

11 This verse is said to refer to one who spreads gossip in order to create discord and turn people against one another (Z). Several *aḥādīth* state that those who spread *calumny* (*namīmah*), which can also mean "gossip," will not enter Paradise (IK); regarding the vices of calumny and backbiting, see 49:12c.

12 *Hinderer of good* refers either to one who is miserly and encourages miserliness or to one who bars the way to Islam (Z).

13 *Ignoble* translates *zanīm,* which indicates one who is born illegitimately (Z). It may also be related to the word *zanamah,* which denotes the fleshy skin hanging below the ears of a goat. As these protuberances serve no apparent function, the word *zanīm* came to signify something that serves no positive function (*Tāj al-ʿarūs*).

14 This verse alludes to the Quranic teaching that one should not put stock in worldly wealth and outward appearances, but in those things that reflect the nature of the heart, for the Day of Judgment is *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89). For other references to this broad Quranic theme, see 3:10, 14, 116; 8:28; 9:24, 55, 69, 85; 18:39–40, 46; 23:55–56; 34:35–37; 60:3; 63:9; 64:14–15; 71:21. Alternately, vv. 14–15

(15) When Our signs are recited unto him he says, "Fables of those of old." (16) We shall brand him on the snout. (17) Truly We tried them, just as We tried the owners of the garden who vowed that they would harvest its fruit in the morning. (18) And they made no exception. (19) Whereupon a visitation from your Lord came upon it while they slept, (20) such that it became like a garden plucked. (21) Then they called to one another in the morning, (22) "Go early to your tillage if you would harvest." (23) So they set forth while whispering to one another, (24) "Surely no indigent shall come to you therein today." (25) And they set out early, strong in their purpose. (26) Then when they saw it, they said,

can be read, "Is it because he possesses wealth and children that when Our signs are read to him he says, 'Fables of those of old'?" (JJ, Z).

15 Cf. 83:13. Referring to the Prophet's revelations as *fables of those of old* was a common way for the disbelievers to dismiss the message and is repeated in eight other verses (6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 83:13).

16 Most commentators take this to be an idiomatic expression meaning, "We will stigmatize him with indelible disgrace" (Iṣ). Some believe that this promise was fulfilled when al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah's nose was cut off at the Battle of Badr (JJ). It could also mean that God will make his true nature apparent to all, so that he cannot hide it, as if he had been branded on the nose (IK, Ṭ), an interpretation that accords with 55:41, *the guilty shall be known by their marks.*

17–34 Most commentators maintain that these verses were revealed in Madinah and that the story refers to three either Christian or Jewish brothers in Yemen who had inherited a fertile garden from their father. Their father's custom had been to leave some produce behind for the poor whenever he harvested. But when he died, his sons felt that, given the demands of their large family, it would no longer be prudent to leave the produce for the poor and thus set out to harvest the land when no one would know.

18 *Made no exception* is taken to indicate that they did not say, "If God wills" (Bg, IK, Z) and thus trusted in themselves rather than in God (R). It could also be a reference to the harvest, indicating that they left no portion for the poor (R).

19 *Visitation* here indicates some form of scourge sent by God.

20 *Like a garden plucked* translates *ka'l-ṣarīm,* which can also mean "like the blackness of night" (IK, JJ). The Prophet reportedly said, "Avoid sins of disobedience. Verily, the servant commits sins, and the sustenance which he has is taken from him," and then he recited, *Such that it became like a garden plucked* (AH, IK).

21–24 These verses represent a violation of ancient Near Eastern custom in which the poor are allowed to glean a share of the harvest and of the Quranic injunction to pay the poor the portion of a harvest that is due immediately: *Eat of their fruit when they grow, and pay the due thereof on the day of its harvest* (6:141).

25 *Strong in their purpose* indicates that the brothers were determined or that they overestimated their own abilities, thinking that they could control who would get this produce, though in fact only God determines (JJ).

26 Here *we are astray* indicates that they thought they had arrived at the wrong place (IK, JJ) or that they recognized the error of their ways. It can also be seen as an allusion to the distinction between the believers and the disbelievers mentioned in vv. 5–7, as those who oppose the Prophet Muhammad believe they are guided, but will eventually come to realize that they were astray. Like the owners of the garden mentioned here, the disbelievers will initially think that there has been some mistake, but will then realize that the recompense they receive on the Day of Judgment is what they had earned.

"Surely, we are astray! (27) Nay! we are deprived!" (28) The most moderate of them said, "Did I not say to you, why do you not glorify?" (29) They said, "Glory be to our Lord! Truly we were wrongdoers." (30) Then they turned to one another, reproaching each other. (31) They said, "Oh, woe unto us! Truly we were rebellious. (32) Perhaps our Lord will give us something better in its stead. Truly we beseech our Lord." (33) Such is the punishment; yet the punishment of the Hereafter is surely greater, if they but knew. (34) Truly for the reverent there shall be Gardens of bliss in the presence of their Lord. (35) Are We then to treat the submitters like the guilty? (36) What ails you? How do you judge? (37) Or do you

27 This verse is similar to 56:67; it reflects the broader application of this story to all manner of harvesting, as in 56:63–66: *Have you considered what you reap? Is it you who sow it or are We the sowers? Had We willed, We would have turned it to chaff, such that you would remain bitterly jesting, [saying] "Truly we have suffered loss."* In both instances, the verse could also be rendered, "Nay! We are rendered destitute."

28 *The most moderate* could also be taken to indicate the most equitable or most just among them (IK). *Why do you not glorify?* means, "Why do you not thank God and attribute these blessings to Him rather than to yourselves?"

29 They were *wrongdoers* for preventing the poor from receiving their due (JJ).

30 The owners of the garden reproached one another for their failure to help the poor (IK). Such mutual recriminations are part of the torment that afflicts wrongdoers in both this life and the next. In several Quranic passages, wrongdoers attempt to blame Satan, their forefathers, and even God for their ignorance or misguidance.

31–32 *Woe unto us* translates *waylanā*. *Wayl* is an exclamation of spiritual regret found elsewhere in the Quran (see 2:79c; 18:49; 21:14, 47, 97; 25:28; 36:52; 37:20), often when the certainty of Divine Punishment is realized. Having realized the error of their ways and repented, they then became aware that God is able to provide them with something better than anything they could have produced with their own hands. It is reported that they were indeed given a better garden in place of the one that they had lost (Bg, IK, JJ), which can be understood as a reference to a garden in this world or as an allusion to the Garden in the Hereafter.

33 Just as the owners of the garden were punished for failing to give some portion of their harvest to the poor, so too will the disbelievers be punished for their miserliness. That *the punishment of the Hereafter is surely greater* (cf. 39:26) is a reminder to the disbelievers that what befalls them in the Hereafter is greater than the disgrace they will encounter in this life.

34 *Gardens of bliss* (*naʿīm*) indicates that the enjoyment of blessings (*tanaʿʿum*) is pure and unadulterated unlike the blessings garnered from the gardens of this world (Q, R). It is reported that when v. 34 was revealed, the disbelievers boasted to the Muslims that the favors they enjoyed in this world would continue in the next (Q, R). V. 35 was then revealed as a direct response.

35–36 *Submitters* translates *muslimīn* ("Muslims") and is most likely the first use of the word "Muslim" in the chronological order of revelation. This verse is similar to 38:28: *Or shall We make those who believe and perform righteous deeds like those who work corruption upon the earth? Or shall We make the reverent like the profligate?* The rhetorical question in both verses reflects the one posed and answered in 32:18: *Is one who believes like one who is iniquitous? They are not equal.* Like v. 14, such verses reflect a broader Quranic theme regarding the differences between outward appearances and inward realities, which many human beings are unable to discern, as they judge by human standards instead of Divine principles. Other verses speak of the differences between the blind and those who see, as in 35:19: *Not equal are*

have a book wherein you learn (38) that you shall have therein whatsoever you choose? (39) Or do you have oaths binding upon Us until the Day of Resurrection that you shall have whatever you ordain? (40) Ask them which of them shall vouch for that. (41) Or do they have partners? Then let them bring their partners if they are truthful. (42) On the Day when the shank is laid bare and

*the blind and the seeing;* and 40:58: *And the blind and the seer are not equal; nor are those who believe and perform righteous deeds and the evildoer.* And in other verses, the comparison is related to knowledge: *Are those who know and those who do not know equal? Only possessors of intellect reflect* (39:9).

37–38 This verse asks, "Do they have a revealed scripture that they are able to study and use as a source of judgment?" (IK). This challenge is similar to that posed in 37:156–57, where the disbelievers are challenged regarding their belief in deities as the offspring of God: *Or have you a manifest authority? Bring your Book, then, if you are truthful* (cf. 34:44; 35:40; 43:21; 46:4). V. 37 could be read with a stop before v. 38. In which case the text would read, "Or do you have a book wherein you learn? Truly in it you find whatsoever you choose." (Q).

*Therein* means in the Hereafter or, more specifically, Paradise. This is an indication that, even among those who have a book from God, there are some who read it to find whatever judgment they wish to find rather than the rulings of God, as in 2:78: *And among them are the illiterate who know nothing of the Book but hearsay, and they only conjecture* (see also 5:13c). It also implies that in choosing to judge by their laws rather than God's laws, they have chosen the punishment of the Hereafter, as in 2:85: *Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part? And what is the recompense of those who do so but disgrace in the life of this world? And on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most terrible punishment. And God is not heedless of what you do.*

39 This verse asks, "Do you have a promise from God that things shall be as you wish and desire, so that you can reject the revelation of the Quran and the prophethood of Muhammad?" (see also 54:43).

40 *Vouch for* means "say they have received," and what the disbelievers say they have received is thought to be either a revelation as implied in vv. 37–38, a promise from God as implied in v. 39, or a reward better than that of the believers (JJ).

41 *Partners* may imply idols and other deities that they ascribe as partners to God or *partners* who will guarantee their claim (JJ). It may also indicate wise people (*ʿuqalāʾ*) among them who they believe are able to substantiate their claims (R, Z). In 7:195, which was most likely revealed after this verse, the Prophet is enjoined to make a more direct challenge to the disbelievers: *Say, "Call upon your partners, then scheme against me, and grant me no respite."* In this same vein, 28:64 says, *It will be said, "Call upon your partners." So they will call upon them, but they will not answer them. And they will see the punishment—if only they had been rightly guided!*

42 *The shank is laid bare* is an idiomatic expression indicating something very serious and severe (Q, Sh). When a person wearing traditional Arab clothing engages in a strenuous endeavor (and sometimes in battle), he begins by rolling up his garment in such a fashion that his shank is exposed; hence the idiomatic Arabic phrase, "The war broke out upon the shank," meaning "The war broke out with vehemence" (JJ, Sh). Some exegetes say that in this verse it is God Who exposes His own Shank to signal the beginning of the judgment process. In this vein, a variant reading is "We lay bare the shank" (*nakshifu ʿan sāq*), meaning God (Q). Others say *the shank is laid bare* refers to the secrets that will be unveiled. In relation to this verse, a *ḥadīth* states, "God will lay bare His Shank and then the believers, men and women, will prostrate before Him; and there will remain those who in this world used to prostrate themselves only in order to be seen and heard by others. Such a one will try to prostrate, but his back will be

they are called to prostrate, yet are not able, (43) their eyes humbled, abasement overcoming them; for they had indeed been called to prostrate while they were yet sound. (44) So leave Me with those who deny this discourse. We shall lead them on little by little, whence they know not. (45) And I shall grant them respite; truly My scheme is firm. (46) Or dost thou ask a reward of them, such that they are burdened with debt? (47) Or do they possess the Unseen, such that they write it down? (48) So be patient with thy Lord's Judgment and be not like the

transformed into a stiff plate" (Āl, IK). In a third variant, this verse is read, "It lays bare the shank" (*takshifu ʿan sāq*), meaning that the Resurrection exposes great severities (Q).

43 Cf. 70:44. Some Arabs had objected that the position required for prostration, on one's knees with one's forehead on the ground, was humiliating, but in the Hereafter the disbelievers will find much greater humiliation and be unable to prostrate, as mentioned in v. 42. Some interpret the references to prostration in both vv. 42–43 as references to prostrating for prayer in this world, while others understand v. 42 as a reference to prostration on the Day of Judgment and v. 43 as a reference to those who did not heed the call to prostration, meaning to prayer, in this world (Q, Sh). According to the latter interpretation the disbelievers are not able to prostrate when they are called on the Day of Judgment (v. 42) because they did not prostrate when called during the life of this world (v. 43; Sh).

44 *This discourse* indicates the Quran (JJ, Q). The implication is that the deniers' punishment should be left to God. *We shall lead them on little by little, whence they know not* (cf. 7:182–83) indicates that they fall gradually into deception and delusion, continuing to commit even greater sins because they think their worldly success is an indication of favor with God. This theme is found in several other passages, most notably 23:54–56: *So leave them in their heedlessness for a time. Do they reckon that, [on account of] the wealth and the children that We have provided them, We hasten unto good for them? Nay, but they are unaware!* (see also 6:44). According to a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet said, "God grants the wrongdoer respite, but when He seizes him, there is no escape." Then he recited: *Such is the seizing of thy Lord when He seizes the towns while they are doing wrong. Surely His seizing is painful, severe* (11:102; IK).

45 Cf. 7:183. From a Quranic perspective, God grants respite to the disbelievers and thus they suppose that they have avoided or forestalled Divine Punishment; yet in fact they are moving *little by little* toward a gruesome fate, and if they do not repent, they will commit more sins for which they will be taken to account. This is stated most directly in 3:178: *And let not those who disbelieve suppose that the respite We grant them is good for them. We only grant them respite that they may increase in sin, and theirs shall be a humiliating punishment* (see 71:4c; 35:45c).

46–47 These verses are repeated in 52:40–41. See also 23:72: *Dost thou ask any recompense of them? For thy Lord's recompense is better, and He is the best of providers.* The rhetorical question in v. 46 is answered by the Quran itself in 12:104: *And thou askest of them no reward for it; it is naught but a reminder for the worlds.* V. 47 is most likely the first mention of *the Unseen* in the chronological order of revelation; regarding *the Unseen*, see 2:3c. Here the disbelievers are asked whether they have direct access to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22), which would make what they say of equal status to the revelation of the Quran (JJ, Sh). This line of questioning is similar to that in 52:37–38: *Do they possess the treasuries of your Lord? Or are they in control? Or do they have a ladder whereby they listen? Then let their listener bring a clear warrant.* This verse reflects the broader Quranic theme of humanity's illusions of self-sufficiency vis-à-vis the Divine, as in 96:6–7: *Nay, truly man is rebellious in that he considers himself beyond need.*

48–50 These verses refer to the prophet Jonah, who is said to have fled from the task entrusted to him by God (37:140), but to have repented

companion of the fish, who cried out while choking with anguish. (49) Had not the blessing from his Lord reached him, he would surely have been cast upon the barren shore still blameworthy. (50) But his Lord chose him and made him among the righteous. (51) Indeed, those who disbelieve would well-nigh smite thee down with their glances when they hear the Reminder, saying, "Surely, he is possessed." (52) Yet it is naught but a reminder for the worlds.

and been forgiven (cf. 21:87–88; 37:139–48). *Still blameworthy* indicates that, *had not the blessing from his Lord reached him,* he would have died in a state of sin. *His Lord chose him* for prophethood *and made him among the righteous,* meaning the prophets (JJ). For the Quranic account of Jonah, see 37:139–48.

51 It is said that the Quraysh were trying to attack the Prophet through the use of the evil eye, but that this verse was revealed as a means of protection (Q). According to one report, "There was a man among the Arabs who used to abstain from food for two or three days and then raise part of his tent as the cattle passed by and say, 'There are no grazing camels or sheep today better than these,' and the cattle would not proceed far before some of them would fall dead. The disbelievers asked this man to give the evil eye to the Messenger of God, but God protected His Prophet and revealed this verse" (Q, W). Although some attribute the evil eye, which afflicts people with misfortune through envy and jealousy, to legend, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Seek refuge in God, for the [evil] eye is real" (IK). In this vein, he enjoined his Companions, "If one of you sees something of his brother, or himself, or his wealth that he admires, then glorify God, for the [evil] eye is real" (IK). In general the last two *sūrahs* of the Quran, known as "The Two Protectors" (*al-muʿawwidhatān*), are used by Muslims to this day for protection from many evils, including the evil eye and the casting of spells.

52 *A reminder* refers to the Quran, as in 16:44: *And We have sent down the Reminder unto thee that thou mightest clarify for mankind that which has been sent down unto them, that haply they may reflect* (see also 15:9). To remind people of God is considered a primary function of all revelation; hence the Torah is also referred to as *a reminder* in 40:54. Alternately, this verse could be interpreted as a reference to the Prophet and translated, "He is naught but a reminder for the worlds." The Prophet is referred to directly as *a reminder* in 65:10–11.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 69

# The Undeniable Reality

## *al-Ḥāqqah*

A late Makkan *sūrah, al-Ḥāqqah* is generally believed to have been revealed shortly after *Sūrah 67, al-Mulk.* It takes its name from the mention of *the Undeniable Reality* in the first three verses, a descriptive name for the Day of Judgment. This *sūrah* can be seen as connected to the previous *sūrah* both because the later verses provide a more complete response to the charge that the Prophet was possessed (68:2, 51) and because it provides a more complete description of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment, to which allusion is made throughout the previous *sūrah.*

The *sūrah* begins with a warning to avoid the fate of those who had denied religion before, using both Arabian tribes and Old Testament references as examples (vv. 1–12). The next section (vv. 13–17) describes some aspects of the Day of Judgment, followed by a contrast between those who receive the book of their deeds in the right hand and those who receive it in the left hand (vv. 18–37). As often happens in the Quran, this contrast between those who are believed to be destined for Heaven and those who are believed to be destined for Hell is followed by a reaffirmation of the revealed nature of the Quran (vv. 38–52).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) The Undeniable Reality! (2) What is the Undeniable Reality? (3) And what shall apprise thee of the Undeniable Reality? (4) Thamūd and ᶜĀd denied the calamity. (5) As for Thamūd, they were destroyed by the overwhelming. (6) And as for ᶜĀd, they were destroyed by a howling, raging wind. (7) He imposed it upon them for seven nights and eight days consecutively, so that thou might see the people felled as if they were hollowed palm trunks. (8) So dost thou see

1–3 *Undeniable Reality* translates *ḥāqqah,* which is an emphatic form of *ḥaqq,* meaning "truth" or "reality." In this context *ḥāqqah* conveys the sense of the overwhelming and inevitable reality or truth that none can avoid. All commentators agree that *the Undeniable Reality* is a reference to the Day of Resurrection and Judgment, but they differ as to which aspect of that Day it refers (R). Some say it indicates that all that was rejected by disbelievers in this life will be realized and made evident (JJ) or that everyone will see the true nature of their deeds, as in 67:11: *Thus do they admit their sin.* The repetition of the question in vv. 2–3, which is similar to that in 101:2–3, is meant to emphasize that it is beyond mere rational comprehension.

4 What is denied is the Day of Judgment. For the meaning of *the calamity,* see 101:1–3c. The triple affirmation of *the Undeniable Reality* followed by the mention of the pre-Islamic Arabian tribes ᶜĀd and Thamūd and what befell them as a consequence of rejecting their prophets serves as an admonition for the disbelievers of Makkah, to whom the stories of these tribes would have been familiar. For the story of the tribe of Thamūd, who rejected the Prophet Ṣāliḥ, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31. For the story of the tribe of ᶜĀd, whose prosperity led to their decadence and who rejected the Prophet Hūd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16.

5 *Overwhelming* translates *ṭāghiyah,* which implies something that reaches the utmost severity, and can be taken to indicate one of the calamities that afflicted Thamūd: a *cry* (11:67; 54:31), an *earthquake* (7:78), or a *thunderbolt* (41:13; 51:44). It could also mean "rebellion" or "upheaval" (*ṭughyān;* R). The reference to some form of calamity indicates the manner in which the people of Thamūd were destroyed, while the reference to "rebellion" indicates that they were destroyed by their own sinfulness, though the two are not mutually exclusive. Finally, *ṭāghiyah* could mean "those who overwhelmed or oppressed," indicating that the tribe of Thamūd was destroyed because they allowed themselves to be persuaded, or "overwhelmed," by a powerful minority or a single individual who enjoined them to hamstring the *she-camel of God* (91:13) and leave her for dead (see 54:23–30; R).

6 *Howling* translates *ṣarṣar,* which indicates either a wind that makes a severe noise or a wind so cold that it feels as if it burns (R). In this context, some say that it pierced through to their hearts (IK). *Raging* translates *ᶜātiyah,* which indicates both that it overcame the people in such a manner that they could find no cover and that it was the utmost in strength and severity (R). The tribe of ᶜĀd is also reported to have been destroyed by *a howling wind* in 41:16 and 54:19 and by *the barren wind* in 51:41.

7–8 *Consecutively* translates *ḥusūman,* which most likely indicates "seven days and eight nights in a row," but could also indicate one calamity following after another. *Ḥusūm* derives from the verb *ḥasama,* meaning "to sever." Thus it is also interpreted to mean a wind that severs all good and demolishes all blessings (R). The people of ᶜĀd are also compared to felled palm trees in 54:20, where the howling wind is said to tear *out people as if they were uprooted palm trunks.*

any remnant of them? (9) And Pharaoh and those before him, and those subverted brought iniquity. (10) They disobeyed the messenger of their Lord, and He seized them with a devastating blow. (11) Truly when the waters overflowed, We carried you upon the ship, (12) that We might make it a reminder for you, and that attentive ears might take heed. (13) Then when a single blast is blown in the trumpet (14) and the earth and mountains are borne away and ground up in a single grinding, (15) on that Day the Event shall befall, (16) the sky shall be rent asunder; for that Day it shall be frail. (17) And the angels shall be at its sides;

9–10 These verses mark a shift from the discussion of the afflictions that befell the disbelievers from pre-Islamic Arabian tribes to those who disbelieved in prophets of the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Those before him* indicates the generations before Pharaoh; if read with a different voweling (*wa man qibalahu*), however, it could be translated "those who were with him," meaning those who followed Pharaoh (IK, R). *Those subverted* is most likely an allusion to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, to whom Lot had been sent as a messenger (R, Ṭ, Z); see 7:80–84; 11:77–83. *The messenger of their Lord* could refer to Moses, Lot, or both (R). In this context, some take *messenger* (*rasūl*) to mean "message" (*risālah;* Q), in which case the verse may refer to any of the disbelieving peoples mentioned in this *sūrah*. *Devastating* translates *rābiyah,* which indicates increase, suggesting either a punishment that surpasses that of all others (Q, R) or one that is devastating in this world but becomes more severe in the Hereafter, as with those who disbelieved in Noah: *They were drowned, then made to enter a Fire* (71:25; R).

11–12 These verses are taken as an allusion to Noah's Ark, regarding which, see 7:64c. *We carried you* means We carried your forefathers while you were still in their loins (JJ, Q, R), as in 36:41: *And a sign unto them is that We carried their progeny in the full-laden ark* (IK). The *it* in *make it a reminder* in v. 12 can be taken as a reference to *the ship* in v. 11 or to the events of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment that this *sūrah* describes. V. 12 is similar to 50:37: *Truly in that is a reminder for whosoever has a heart, or gives ear as witness.* According to one account, the Prophet said to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, "God has commanded me to draw you closer to me and not exclude you, and that I teach you so that you understand; and God has taken it upon Himself that you understand," and then this verse was revealed (W). According to a more widespread account, when this verse was revealed, the Prophet said, "I asked my Lord that He make it the ear of ʿAlī," meaning make ʿAlī's ear one that *takes heed;* and ʿAlī is reported to have said, "I never heard anything from the Messenger of God but that I remembered it" (AH, IK, Q, R, Ṭ).

13 Here the *single blast* of the trumpet is understood by most commentators to be the first blast blown by the Archangel Seraphiel (Isrāfīl), which will herald the end of the world (Bḍ, Q, R, Ṭ), and by some to be the second blast, which will herald the Day of Judgment and Resurrection (IK, JJ; see also 6:73; 18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68; 50:20; 74:8; 78:18). Regarding the two trumpet blasts, see 39:68c; 78:18c.

14 Several verses indicate that the mountains will be dispatched on the Day of Judgment, as in 27:88: *And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid, pass away like clouds—the work of God, Who perfects all things;* see also 18:47; 52:10; 70:8–9; 73:14; 78:20; 81:3; 89:21; 101:5.

15 *The Event* is the end of the world, which leads to the Day of Resurrection; see 56:1–2c.

16 *The sky shall be rent asunder* is repeated in 55:37; 73:18; 84:1; see also 82:1; 25:25; and 42:5, which refers to the heavens being *rent asunder.* This phrase refers to the sky, the heavens, or both. The sky being *opened as if it were gates* (78:19) is considered one of the marks of the Day of Judgment.

17 *At its sides* could also mean "at its ends." Based upon several *aḥādīth,* most take *eight* as a reference to eight angels who carry the Throne (IK, Ṭ; cf. 40:7); others say it could mean eight or eight thousand and could refer to individuals or

that Day eight shall carry the Throne of thy Lord above them. (18) That Day you shall be exposed; no secret of yours shall be hidden. (19) As for one who is given his book in his right hand, he will say, "Here, read my book. (20) Truly I knew for certain that I would meet my reckoning." (21) So he shall enjoy a life contenting, (22) in a lofty Garden (23) with low-hanging clusters. (24) Eat and drink in enjoyment for that which you did in the past in days gone by. (25) And as for one who is given his book in his left hand, he will say, "Would that I had not

rows (R, Z). According to a *ḥadīth,* "Today those carrying the throne are four, but when the Day of Resurrection comes, God supports them with four more; so they will be eight" (Bḍ, Q, R, Sy). The number eight has a symbolic value in Islamic geometry, as the octagon forms the transition from the square, which is seen to represent the earth, to the circle of the dome, which represents Heaven. In this sense, it is significant that this passage moves progressively from the lowest level, earth in v. 14, to the highest level, the Heaven of the archangels, in v. 17.

18 *You shall be exposed* translates *tuʿraḍūn,* which could also be rendered "you shall be brought forth," as in 11:18: *And who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God? It is they who will be brought before their Lord* (*yuʿraḍūna ʿalā rabbihim*). In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "The people are brought forth on the Day of Resurrection for three arraignments (*ʿarḍāt*): during the first two arraignments, they will argue and make excuses; at the third, the scrolls will be cast into their hands; so some will take with their right hand and others will take with their left" (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). *No secret of yours shall be hidden* indicates either that nothing is hidden from God, as in 40:16, *the Day when they come forth with naught concerning them hidden from God,* or that the inner states and thoughts of human beings will now be known, and the result will be that the believers will rejoice and the disbelievers will grieve (R). This phrase can also be translated, "None among you shall be hidden" (Q), meaning that no human being can evade God's Judgment.

19–29 For the symbolic distinction between *right* and *left,* see 56:8–9c; for the meaning of the *book* presented on the Day of Judgment in which one's deeds are recorded, see 17:71; 18:49; 84:7. Also see 56:27, 38, where *the righteous* are referred to as the *companions of the right.*

19–20 Those who receive their book in the *right hand* have spent their life in this world conscious that the Day of Judgment would come and have prepared for it accordingly. When asked, "Who are the most intelligent of believers?" the Prophet replied, "The most frequent in recalling death, and the best prepared for what follows it; they are the most intelligent." *Here* is in the second person plural, indicating that his words are addressed to a group. In other readings, it is the second person singular (Q). *I knew for certain* translates *ẓanantu,* a word that in some contexts indicates doubt. If read in this manner, the verse would indicate that one was not entirely certain of the final outcome, but nonetheless followed the commands of God and the Prophet and was rewarded accordingly.

21 This verse is repeated in 101:7; regarding contentment, see 89:28c.

22–23 That the clusters are *low-hanging* indicates that they are readily accessible and no one will be turned away from them (Ṭ). Regarding the clusters of the Garden, a *ḥadīth* states, "Verily I saw the Garden and came upon a cluster of grapes. Had I taken it, you would have eaten of it so long as the world remained." Also see 55:54, which speaks of fruits *near at hand,* and 76:14, which says of the Garden: *Its shade shall be close above them, and its clusters shall be made to hang low.*

24 *That which you did in the past* indicates the good deeds one did while in the life of this world, as in 52:19 and 77:43: *Eat and drink in enjoyment for that which you used to do.* The phrase *days gone by* translates *al-ayyām al-khāliyah,* which can also mean "empty days," in which case it is interpreted as a reference to days of fasting (R, Sy).

been given my book. (26) And did not know of my reckoning. (27) Would that it were the final end. (28) My wealth availed me not. (29) My power has passed from me." (30) Take him and shackle him. (31) Then cast him in Hellfire. (32) Then put him in a chain whose length is seventy cubits. (33) Truly he did not believe in God the Magnificent, (34) and did not urge feeding the indigent. (35) So today

25–26 Those given the book in the left hand will be cast into Hell for their deeds. About receiving this record, the Quran also says, *but as for one who is given his book from behind his back, he will cry out for destruction, and will enter a Blaze* (84:10–12). To reconcile v. 25 and 84:10, commentators say that the left hand will be tied behind the back (IK, Q, Ṭs, Z on 84:10–12). *Would that I had not been given* may imply a desire to avoid punishment altogether; or it may indicate that the shame at witnessing one's deeds is worse than the pain of the Fire, and that it would be preferable to be cast into the Fire without being forced to endure the shame of judgment and reckoning (R).

27 This verse is understood to mean, "Would that death had been the final end, and there had been no Resurrection" (Q, R).

28 The negative particle *mā* in this verse could also be understood as an interrogative particle, in which case the verse is understood as a rhetorical question, "What has my wealth availed me?" Both translations echo the broader Quranic theme that the things that provide advantages in this world are usually of no avail in the next, as in 18:46: *Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world, but that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord, and better [as a source of] hope.*

29 *My power* translates *sulṭāniyah,* which indicates authority and warrant; that it *has passed* means that those who receive the book in their left hand no longer have any control over their own destiny and will regret all that they neglected to do to prepare for the Hereafter. Here and in other verses, *sulṭān* also connotes "argument" or "proof" (*ḥujjah;* Q, R, Ṭ), meaning that they no longer have any capacity to argue against the reality of the Resurrection or even to argue for themselves, as the true reality of how they lived their life will be clear when their very limbs testify against them on the Day of Judgment and Reckoning (see 24:24; 36:65; 41:20) and they are forced to admit their sin (see 67:10–11).

30–31 These verses are a command to the angels who govern Hell (Q, Ṭ). Regarding the shackles that will be placed upon the disbelievers and made to course through their bodies in the Hereafter, see 36:8c.

32 This verse is most likely a reference to the chain of disbelievers who are shackled to one another, as in 14:49: *On that Day thou wilt see the guilty bound together in fetters.* In classical Arabic, seventy is used metonymically to denote "many." Here it implies a large number known only to God (R, Ṭ). This chain is said to go directly through one's body (Bg, IK; R).

33–34 These verses indicate the corruption of intellect (v. 33) and action (v. 34; R) and not giving God (v. 33) and human beings (v. 34) their due (IK). V. 34 and 89:18, *Nor urge you the feeding of the indigent,* are related to the objection posed by the Quraysh in 36:47: *Are we to feed those whom, if God willed, He would feed? You are in naught but manifest error.* Both imply that one is not only to give charity oneself, but also to urge others to give charity and thus encourage social justice on a broader scale. See also 107:3c.

35 Though all human beings stand together on the same plain for the Reckoning (see 18:47; 20:106; 79:14), the Quran also says that every human being *shall come unto Us alone* (19:80), indicating that the experience of the Reckoning is a solitary one. Everyone will be too consumed with his or her own state to ask about that of another, as in 70:10: *And no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend,* and 80:37: *For every man that Day his affair shall suffice him.* This will, however, be all the more severe for the disbelievers, who are said to have no one upon whom they can rely, since the folly of everything upon which they had relied is now exposed and *all recourse will be cut off from them* (2:166); thus 40:18 reads, *The wrongdoers*

he has no loyal friend here, (36) nor food, save filth, (37) which none eat, save the iniquitous. (38) So I swear by what you see (39) and by what you see not, (40) truly it is the speech of a noble messenger, (41) and not the speech of a poet. Little do you believe! (42) Nor is it the speech of a soothsayer. Little do you reflect! (43) It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. (44) Had he ascribed any statements to Us, (45) We would have taken him by the right hand. (46) Then We would have severed his life vein. (47) And none among you could have shielded him from it.

*shall have no loyal friend;* see commentary on 70:10–14.

36–37 *Filth* translates *ghislīn,* which appears in the Quran only this once and has received many different interpretations. Some commentators say it is the worst food endured while in the Fire (IK); others see it as a reference to the *oozing pus* or vile excretions that the denizens of Hell are said to eat in 14:16 (JJ).

38–39 *I swear* translates *lā uqsimu,* which could also be rendered, "Nay, I swear" (R). *By what you see* and *by what you see not* refer, respectively, to what people witness and the mysteries that remain unseen (IK), that is, this world and the Hereafter (R).

40 This same verse is repeated in 81:19. Many commentators see both instances as references to the Archangel Gabriel, while others see both as references to the Prophet Muhammad. Others argue that in this instance, *noble messenger* most likely refers to the Prophet Muhammad, because the following verses (vv. 41–42) refute those who say that the Prophet was a poet, in the sense that pre-Islamic Arabs understood the term, or who say that he was a soothsayer. They then maintain that in 81:19 *noble messenger* most likely refers to the Archangel Gabriel, because 81:25 refutes those who say the revelation was received from a satan or a jinn: *Nor is it the speech of a satan outcast* (IK, R).

41–42 *Little do you reflect* (cf. 7:3; 27:62; 40:58) could also mean, "Little do you remember," in which case it is understood by some as a reference to the fact that the disbelievers remember only some of the Prophet's positive qualities, such as good deeds, kindness toward kin, and abstinence, but not enough that it would benefit them, as they still did not acknowledge his prophethood (JJ). In both verses, *little* can also be taken to mean "not at all," as in Arabic one can say, "You visit us so little," and it means, "You do not visit us at all." It could also be interpreted to mean that a little bit of belief or reflection enters the hearts of those who oppose the Prophet, but that it leaves quickly (R). In other canonical readings of the text, *you believe* (*tu'minūn*) and *you reflect* (*tadhdhakkarūn*) are read in the third person plural, "they believe" (*yu'minūn*) and "they reflect" (*yadhdhakkarūn;* Q).

43 This verse is repeated in 56:80. In both instances, it is a rebuke to those who say that the Quran is *fables of those of old* (6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 68:15; 83:13) or that it is *the speech of a poet* (v. 41) or *the speech of a soothsayer* (v. 42).

44 This verse maintains that had the Prophet Muhammad fabricated the Quran, he would suffer the same fate as anyone else who falsely attributed words to God. Several Quranic passages condemn any who would dare to make such an attribution, as in 2:79: *So woe unto those who write the book with their hands; then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a paltry price. So woe unto them for what their hands have written and woe unto them for what they earn.* From a Quranic perspective, to fabricate lies against God is among the greatest of sins, as in 6:93: *Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, "It has been revealed unto me," though naught has been revealed unto him, and one who says, "I will send down the like of what God has sent down"?* (see also 3:94; 6:21–24, 144; 7:37; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68; 61:7c).

45 *Taken him by the right hand* indicates that God would have removed all power from him (R).

46–47 These verses indicate that none can be absolved from *fabricating lies against God* (23:38), including prophets, and that God could take their lives in an instant.

(48) Truly it is a reminder for the reverent. (49) And truly We know that among you are those who deny. (50) It is a source of regret indeed for the disbelievers. (51) It is indeed the truth of certainty. (52) So glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Magnificent.

48 Here most understand *it* as a reference to the Quran, discussed in vv. 40–43, 50–52 (Bḍ, IK, JJ, Q, Ṭ). But *it* can also be understood as a reference to the Day of Resurrection and Judgment discussed in the preceding verses. The reference to the Quran as *a reminder* (*tadhkirah*) is more in line with other Quranic verses, such as 20:2–3: *We did not send down the Quran unto thee that thou shouldst be distressed, but only as a reminder unto one who fears [God]* (also see, e.g., 43:44; 74:49–54; 80:11). In this vein, 11:114 says of the Quran: *This is a reminder for those who remember.* In the present verse, *reminder* renders *tadhkirah,* which can also indicate "an admonition."

49 Most commentators appear to understand *among you* as a reference to the disbelievers among the Makkans, though others propose that it is addressed to Muslims in general, meaning that some of them will disbelieve in the Quran (Z). Al-Rāzī remarks that those who stay on guard against excessive love for this world will be reminded or admonished by the Quran and benefit from it, but that those who incline to the world will deny the Quran and not draw near to it.

50–51 Most commentators see both of these verses as references to the Quran (JJ, Q, R). According to others, v. 50 first refers to the Day of Judgment and v. 51 refers to the Quran (Sy); still others see the first verse as a reference to the disbelievers' denial of the Quran (R). The Quran can be seen as *a source of regret indeed for the disbelievers* since, as a *ḥadīth* states, "The Quran is a proof, either for you or against you." In this vein, 17:82 states, *We send down of the Quran that which is a cure and a mercy for the believers. And it increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss.*

Al-Qurṭubī writes, "The Quran is *a source of regret for the disbelievers* on the Day of Resurrection when they see the reward of those who believe in it . . . and it is their source of regret in this world when despite their opposition to it, they are not able to answer the challenge to *bring a sūrah like it"* (2:23; cf. 10:38).

51–52 See commentary on the similar verses 56:95–96. V. 52 could also be rendered, "So glorify with (or through) the Name of thy Lord."

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# 70

# The Ascending Ways

## *al-Maᶜārij*

Taking its name from *the ascending ways* mentioned in v. 3, *al-Maᶜārij* is from the middle Makkan period. It is also known as *al-Mawāqiᶜ*, which in this context indicates "Those Matters That Are Impending," as taken from the reference to *an impending punishment* in v. 1. Another of its titles is *Saʾala,* "Someone Asked," which is taken from the first word of the *sūrah*. Some say it was revealed immediately after the preceding *sūrah* and can be seen as continuing the description of the Resurrection and the Fire in 69:18–37 (Āl).

The *sūrah* begins with a rebuke to those who ask mockingly about or even seek to hasten the Day of Judgment (vv. 1–7), followed by a description of that Day and how it will appear to those who did not believe in it and prepare for it (vv. 8–18). This is followed by three famous verses that speak of the anxious and fretful nature of human beings (vv. 19–21). The next passage describes how one can overcome this nature, listing eight responsibilities of being a Muslim (vv. 22–35). The final section (vv. 36–44) then speaks of those who reject these responsibilities and continue to deride the Prophet, having no real understanding of the message with which he was sent.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) A questioner asked about an impending punishment (2) upon the disbelievers which none can avert, (3) from God, Lord of the ascending ways. (4) Unto Him ascend the angels and the Spirit on a day whose measure is fifty thousand years. (5) So be patient with beautiful patience. (6) Truly they see it

1–2 The translation of v. 1 is based upon reading the preposition *bi* to mean *about* rather than "for," meaning that someone asked the Prophet who would be punished and when (Q, Ṭ). Many commentators, however, read the verse "a supplicator supplicated for" or "a petitioner petitioned for." In this sense, the verse would be similar to 22:47: *They bid thee to hasten the punishment,* which is said to have been revealed with regard to a certain al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, who said, *O God, if this be the truth from Thee, rain down stones upon us from the sky, or bring us a painful punishment* (8:32; IK, JJ, Q); regarding those who seek to hasten the punishment, see 10:50–51; 16:1; 26:204–7; 29:53–54; 34:30; 37:176–77; 42:18; 51:14, 59. In seeking to hasten punishment, al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith is believed to have supplicated against himself and to have unknowingly requested the punishment he received at the Battle of Badr (2/624), when he was killed in captivity (W, Z). According to others, the verse was revealed in response to another of the Prophet's adversaries among the Quraysh, Abū Jahl (Q).

3 *Ascending ways* is understood to be the paths by which one ascends to Heaven (IK), and the verse indicates that none but God can determine who may or may not ascend. *Ascending ways* can also represent the degrees of favor and blessing that God bestows upon human beings (Q).

4 Most commentators interpret *the Spirit* as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel (IK, Q, Ṭ), who is referred to as *the Trustworthy Spirit* in 26:193. It may also refer to another angel or to the spirit of a dead person when the spirit is taken from the body (Q); regarding the many different interpretations of "spirit" (*rūḥ*), see 78:38c. A *day whose measure is fifty thousand years* is understood to be the Day of Resurrection, which will be as fifty thousand years for the disbelievers (IK, Q). When asked about the length of the Day of Resurrection, the Prophet is reported to have said, "He will lighten it for the believer so that it seems to him like less time than it took for him to perform the obligatory prayer in the life of this world" (IK, Q, Sy). Others say that *fifty thousand* refers to the distance between Heaven and earth (Q). The disparity between time in the Divine or spiritual realm and time in this world is indicated in several places in the Quran (see, e.g., 22:47; 32:5; 97:3).

5 This verse, which echoes the words of the prophet Jacob, *Beautiful patience!* (12:18, 83), is addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, enjoining him to be patient with those who ask questions such as the one posed in vv. 1–4 (Aj), though it can also be seen as an exhortation to all believers to be patient when confronted with the disbelief of others or even as a response to the questioners who would seek to hasten the coming of the Hour. According to some commentators, the instruction to be patient with disbelievers was abrogated by later verses that instructed the Muslims to fight (JJ, Q), while others maintain that the command to be patient holds at all times in all situations (Ṭ) or that this verse is definitive (*muḥkam*) at all times and therefore is not abrogated (Aj). For the majority of scholars, abrogation only applies to specific legal rulings, not general principles; see 2:106c.

6 *It* refers to the Hour, the Day of Judgment, or the punishment. *Far off* indicates that the disbelievers think it is impossible (Aj) or far away enough that they need not be concerned about it.

as far off, (7) but We see it as nigh. (8) On a day when the sky is as molten lead, (9) and the mountains are as carded wool, (10) and no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend, (11) [though] they will be made to see them. The guilty would wish to ransom himself from the punishment of that Day at the price of his children, (12) his spouse, and his brother, (13) his kin who had sheltered him, (14) and all who are on the earth, that it might save him. (15) Nay, but it is a churning fire, (16) ripping away the scalp, (17) calling to those who turned their backs and fled, (18) who

7 *We* is taken by most commentators to indicate God speaking in the first-person plural (Ṭ), while others allow that it could indicate the believers (IK), who fear the Day of Judgment as if it were at hand.

8 *Molten lead* translates *muhl,* which some understand as referring to the dirty residue of boiled oil (IK, Ṭ), or oozing blood, or pus (Q). Elsewhere the food that sinners are given to eat in Hell is said to be *like molten lead boiling in their bellies* (44:45).

9 This verse is repeated in 101:5. Elsewhere it is said that the *mountains are scattered* (77:10), for the Day of Judgment is a day when *the mountains will be like heaps of shifting sand* (73:14); for other verses that speak of the crumbling of mountains, see 18:47; 19:90; 20:105–6; 27:88; 52:10; 81:3.

10–11 The Day of Judgment and the Resurrection will be so overwhelming that people will have no concern for anyone except themselves, even for their most loyal companions in earthly life, as in 80:37: *For every man that Day his affair shall suffice him* (Q, Ṭ); see also 23:101; 31:33; 35:18. *They will be made to see them* is taken to mean that, although they will ask about no one else, all human beings will see one another (Ṭ). It may also mean that God shows the believers the state of the disbelievers (Ṭ) or that God shows the angels the states of all human beings (Q).

11–14 That *the guilty,* or elsewhere *those who work evil* (39:47), will seek to *ransom* themselves on the Day of Judgment is stated in several verses. Although this pericope provides a particularly visceral image, in which one seeks *to ransom himself* with all that is most dear, other verses declare, *An earth full of gold would not be accepted from any one of them, were he to offer it in ransom* (3:91); and *Were they to possess all that is on the earth and the like of it besides, they would seek to ransom themselves thereby* (13:18); see also 2:48, 123; 10:54; 57:15. *Kin* (*faṣīlah*) in v. 13 may also denote one's tribe (IK, Ṭ) or more specifically one's mother (IK, Q).

15 *Nay* denies the possibility of ransom mentioned in the previous verses. Alternately, the verse could be translated, "Truly it is a churning fire" (Q). *Churning fire* translates *laẓā,* which is considered one of the names of Hell because it churns its flames (*talaẓẓā;* JJ).

16 *Ripping away the scalp* means burning away the scalp completely (IK, Ṭ), burning away all of one's skin (Ṭ), or burning away everything except one part, which is variously identified as the bones, fingertips, or the facial features, among body parts (IK). It is also taken by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to mean that the entire body will be burned away and only the heart will remain, and it will cry out (IK, Ṭ).

17 The Fire will summon those who are destined for it, because during the life of this world they turned away from obedience to God and fled from belief in God's books and God's messengers or from the truth (Ṭ). Then the Fire will pick out those who turned their backs and fled from the truth in the life of this world (IK).

18 For a similar verse see 104:1–2: *Woe unto every slandering backbiter who amasses wealth and tallies it.* Both passages point to those who refuse to pay the obligatory alms (*zakāh*). The punishment for hoarding is described most vividly in 9:34–35: *[As for] those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, give them tidings of a painful punishment, on the Day when it will be heated in the Fire of Hell, and their foreheads, their sides, and their backs will be branded*

amassed and hoarded. (19) Truly man was created anxious; (20) when evil befalls him, fretful; (21) and when good befalls him, begrudging, (22) save those who perform prayer, (23) who are constant in their prayers, (24) and in whose wealth is an acknowledged due (25) for the beggar and the deprived, (26) those who affirm the Day of Judgment, (27) and who are wary of the punishment of their Lord—

*with it. "This is what you hoarded up for yourselves; so taste that which you hoarded."*

19–21 The message in these verses is similar to that of 41:49–51: *Man wearies not of supplicating for good, and if evil befalls him, he is despondent, despairing. And if We make him taste some mercy from Us after hardship has befallen him, surely he will say, "This is mine; I think not that the Hour will come. If I am returned unto my Lord, surely with Him shall I have that which is most beautiful."... And when We bless man, he turns away and withdraws. Yet when evil befalls him, he is full of prolonged supplication.* In both instances, *man* (*insān*) refers to human beings in general or, according to some, disbelievers in particular (Q, Ṭ).

19 This verse is similar to 21:37, *Man was created of haste,* and 17:11, *Man is ever hasty.* Each of these verses can be taken to refer to all human beings, though some interpret them as describing disbelievers in particular (Q, R). In this *sūrah,* the exception *save those who perform prayer* (v. 22) suggests that the broader interpretation is intended (R, Z). *Anxious* translates *halūᶜ*, which denotes greed and covetousness combined with severe anxiety (Q).

20–21 In this context *evil* and *good* can be understood as any form of misfortune or good fortune, respectively, or more specifically illness and poverty, on the one hand, and health and wealth, on the other (R). *Fretful* translates *jazūᶜ*, which indicates both distress regarding one's misfortune and a lack of forbearance. It is thus the opposite of the patience and forbearance enjoined in v. 5. According to al-Rāzī, to overcome the fret and anxiety described in vv. 19–20, one should realize that the circumstances that give rise to them are from God and be content with them, as one must be content with all that comes from God. Then when health and wealth are present, they should be expended for the sake of seeking gain in the Hereafter rather than gain in this life. Those characterized by the eight qualities mentioned in the following verses (vv. 22–35) are then not subject to the blameworthy state mentioned in these verses (R). Those are *begrudging* who, when provided with wealth, fail to acknowledge the right that God and others have to it and thus fail to expend any of it in charity (IK, JJ).

22–35 Similar to 23:1–11, which adds *and who turn away from idle talk* (23:3) to the list, this pericope is among the most thorough in listing the moral and ritual responsibilities of Islam; see also 33:35.

22–23 The first of the ritual responsibilities of Islam is prayer. These verses can be taken to mean those who perform the rites as prescribed without neglecting any aspect, as in v. 34, those *who are mindful of their prayers,* or simply as those who pray all five daily prayers (Ṭ). It may also indicate those who maintain the prayer of the heart at all times (Aj).

24–25 These verses are repeated almost verbatim in 51:19. The second responsibility for Muslims is recognizing the rights of the other in regard to one's wealth. *An acknowledged due* refers to the obligatory alms (*zakāh*) rather than supererogatory charity (*ṣadaqah;* Q, R, Ṭ), though some maintain that it indicates charitable giving beyond the obligatory alms as well (R, Ṭ). *The beggar* refers to those who request, while *the deprived* may refer to those who have need but do not ask (R); for other meanings of *the deprived,* see 51:19c. For a list of those who have *an acknowledged due,* or the right, to a share of one's wealth, see 2:177.

26 The third responsibility is belief in the Resurrection and the weighing of deeds and therefore leading a life focused on the Hereafter rather than this world.

27–28 To be *wary of the punishment* could be considered an extension of the third responsibility or as a fourth responsibility, since, in addition to believing in the Day of Judgment and what is to

(28) truly there is no security from the punishment of their Lord, (29) those who guard their private parts, (30) save from their spouses or those whom their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy; (31) but whosoever seeks beyond that, they are the transgressors; (32) those who abide by their trusts and their pact, (33) who uphold their testimony, (34) and who are mindful of their prayers, (35) those shall be in Gardens, honored. (36) So how is it that those who

follow, believers must also fear the consequences of neglecting duties or committing acts of disobedience, as in 67:12: *Truly for those who fear their Lord unseen there shall be forgiveness and a great reward* (see also 13:21; 16:50; 21:49; 39:23; 98:8). *There is no security from the punishment,* because it *is inescapable* (25:65).

29–31 The fifth responsibility is refraining from illicit sexual activity. These three verses are repeated verbatim in 23:5–7. For a more extensive discussion of what it means to *guard* one's *private parts,* see commentary on 24:30–31. According to a *ḥadīth,* "Whosoever is able to guarantee what is between his jawbones and what is between his legs, I will guarantee him Paradise." Another *ḥadīth* cites the spread of illicit sexual intercourse as one of the signs of the end of time. *Whom their right hands possess* refers to slave women with whom one has sexual relations; see 4:3c; 4:25c.

32–33 The sixth responsibility is to remain true to one's commitments, both in relation to God, with whom all of humanity is said to have made an initial pretemporal covenant or *pact* (see 7:172c), and with people (see also 23:8), thus in both religion and the affairs of this world (JJ). The seventh responsibility, which follows from maintaining *trusts,* is to testify to God's Oneness and to the other articles of faith (Q), though some say this verse indicates testifying to God's edicts and remaining true to them (R). It can also be related to testifying to the truth in all matters, even if it is against one's kin, as in 6:152: *And when you speak, be just, even if it be [against] a kinsman.* This issue is addressed more fully in 2:283 and 4:135. According to a *ḥadīth,* "The signs of the hypocrite are three: when he speaks he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks [it]; and when he is entrusted, he betrays" (IK).

34 The eighth responsibility is to be among those *who are mindful of their prayers* (cf. 6:92; 23:9), which is interpreted to mean those who are careful to pray at the right time and to maintain all of the necessary and recommended aspects of prayer (IK), including being mindful and present when praying. The manner in which this extended pericope on the responsibilities of Islam begins with prayer in vv. 22–23 and ends with prayer in this verse indicates the centrality of prayer to all other religious acts. In this vein the Prophet said, "Establish [the prayer] and do not fall short. And know that the best of your deeds is prayer" (IK on 23:2). He is also reported to have found great solace in prayer, saying, "My comfort is in prayer." In warning of the consequences of failing to pray, he is reported to have said, "The first thing for which one will be taken to account is prayer," meaning for failing to pray. From one perspective, those *who are constant in their prayers* (v. 23) refers to those who always observe the appointed times for prayer, while those *who are mindful of their prayers* indicates those who remain focused upon every aspect of prayer, from correct time and direction, to the prescribed purification procedures and location, to the proper attitude (being completely present in prayer by ridding the heart of all distractions and avoiding any acts of disobedience; R on 70:23). Elsewhere the Quran enjoins, *Be mindful of your prayers* (2:238).

35 This promise is similar to that given at the end of the almost identical pericope in 23:10–11: *It is they who are the heirs, who shall inherit Paradise, abiding therein.*

36–38 It is reported that these verses were revealed in relation to the disbelievers who gathered around the Prophet to listen to him, but derived no benefit from it. Instead, they would deny him and mock him, saying, "If these were to enter Paradise, we would certainly enter it before them, and we will have more wealth therein than they would ever have" (R, W). Others say that these

disbelieve scramble toward thee (37) from the right and from the left in droves? (38) Does every man among them desire to be admitted into a Garden of bliss? (39) Nay! Truly We created them from that which they know. (40) So I swear by the Lord of the easts and the wests that We are able (41) to replace [them] with what is better than they; and none outstrips Us. (42) So leave them to indulge in idle talk and play until they meet the Day that they are promised, (43) a day when they come forth from their graves, hastening as if racing to a goal, (44) their eyes humbled, abasement overcoming them. That is the Day they have been promised.

verses refer to a group of hypocrites who would mock the Prophet (Q, R).

39 *Nay!* is meant as a negation of the disbelievers' expectation that they will enter the Garden (v. 38). *That which they know* refers to the *dust* and then the *drop* (35:11) from which God created human beings, of which 77:20 says, *Did We not create you from a base fluid?* (see also 86:5–7). In this context the reference to the mean substance from which human beings were created indicates that mere existence, which in and of itself is nothing without God, is not enough to merit the rewards of which God and His Prophet speak, as people cannot expect to enter the Garden without being reverent (JJ) or following the responsibilities outlined in vv. 22–34.

40 *The easts,* translating *mashāriq,* could also mean "the places from which the sun rises," as the rising of the sun, *shurūq,* derives from the same root, *sh-r-q,* as "east," *mashriq. The wests,* translating *maghārib,* could also mean "the places in which the sun sets," as the setting of the sun, *ghurūb,* derives from the same root, *gh-r-b,* as "west," *maghrib.* So the verse could be read as a reference to the sun, the moon, and the planets, as each has a different place where it sets and rises. If limited to the sun, this verse can also be understood as a reference to the succession of points on the horizon where the sun rises and where it sets throughout the year and thus to the whole of the horizon. Some also say that it refers to both the sun and the moon (T). It could also mean what is east of every location and what is west of every location and thus to the whole of the known world; see also 55:17c.

41 This verse means either that God is able to give them new bodies in the Hereafter (IK) or that He can replace them with another people in this world (T), as in 47:38: *And if you turn away, He will cause a people other than you to take your place, and they will not be the likes of you;* see also 5:54; 36:81–82; 46:33; 56:60–61.

42 This verse is repeated verbatim in 43:83, and both are reflected in the injunction of 6:91: *Say,* "Allāh," *then leave them to play at their vain discourse.* Elsewhere those who indulge in *idle talk* or *vain discourse* are said to be in the Fire (52:11–13; 74:45–46). In general the missteps of the tongue are considered to be among those deeds that lead most quickly to the Fire; thus 50:18 warns, *No word does he utter without a ready watcher beside him,* and the Prophet advises, "Let whosoever believes in God and in the Last Day either speak well or be silent." According to some commentators, the injunction to leave those who derided the Prophet to their own devices was abrogated by 9:5 (Q), though most commentators do not maintain that it is abrogated.

43 The Day of Resurrection is *when the earth is stretched out, and casts forth what is in it, emptying itself* (84:3–4; see also 99:2), and people are ripped from their graves unawares: *with their eyes humbled they emerge from the graves as if they were scattered locusts* (54:7; see also 101:4).

44 Abasement and humiliation are commonly referred to as the consequences of disbelief: *Truly those who oppose God and His Messenger shall be abased, just as those before them were abased* (58:5; see also 58:20). *Their eyes humbled, abasement overcoming them* (cf. 68:43) thus indicates their utter shame in the Hereafter, as in 10:27: *And as for those who commit evil deeds, the recompense of an evil is one like it, and abasement shall overcome them.*

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# 71

# Noah

## *Nūḥ*

*Nūḥ* is most likely from the middle Makkan period. It is one of four *sūrah*s named after an Old Testament prophet; the others are *Yūnus,* "Jonah," *Yūsuf,* "Joseph," and *Ibrāhīm,* "Abraham." Although it takes the name of Noah, this *sūrah* does not tell his entire story. Other aspects of the story can be found in 7:59–64; 10:71–73; 11:25–48; 21:76–77; 23:23–30; 26:105–21; 29:14–15; 37:75–82; 54:9–15. Nonetheless, a complete chronicle cannot be patched together from these various fragments, since the function of Quranic accounts of the prophets and sacred history is not to provide a historical record, but to provide guidance, as stated in 11:120: *All that We recount unto thee of the stories of the messengers is that whereby We make firm thine heart. And herein there has come unto thee the truth, and an exhortation and a reminder for the believers.*

Although the Biblical account provides details about the construction of the Ark (Genesis 6:12–16) and Noah's life after the flood (Genesis 9), the Quran focuses almost entirely upon Noah's function as *a warner* who called his people to guidance and their subsequent rejection of him. The flood with which God punishes those who opposed Noah is mentioned or alluded to in most of the accounts, but it receives no more than one line in any of them. This indicates that God's Punishment is not the focus of the Quranic account; instead, like accounts of other prophets, such as Abraham and Jesus, the Quranic account of Noah emphasizes God's Mercy and Guidance. Despite the fact that Noah's people refuse to respond to repeated calls to follow God, God continues to grant them respite and does not send the flood until they have completely rejected his calls. In this respect, the story can be seen both as a call to those who opposed the Prophet Muhammad to let them know that God's Mercy remains open to them, but that they will perish if they do not avail themselves of the guidance He has sent, and as a reminder to the Prophet Muhammad that messengers before him, such as Noah and Lot, have met with even greater defiance than he encountered.

Along with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, Noah is considered one of *the resolute among the messengers* (46:35), who are presented to the Prophet Muhammad as examples to follow and among whose ranks Muslims consider Muhammad to be. According to some, Noah was the first messenger sent by God (those before him are considered prophets rather than messengers; for this distinction see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions"), and he was sent, like Muhammad, to the entire world, rather than to a specific people (Q).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Truly We sent Noah to his people, "Warn thy people before a painful punishment comes upon them." (2) He said, "O my people! I am a clear warner unto you, (3) that you may worship God, reverence Him, and obey me, (4) that He may forgive you some of your sins and grant you reprieve until a term appointed. Truly when the term of God comes, it will not be delayed, if you but

1 The command given to Noah to warn his people is similar to that given to the Prophet Muhammad in 7:2; 14:44; 21:45; 26:14; 40:18. Noah also warns his people of the punishment in 7:59; 11:26, 39.

2 Just as Noah is commanded to declare, *I am a clear warner unto you* (cf. 11:25; 26:115), so too is Muhammad enjoined to say, *I am only a clear warner* (38:70; see also 15:89; 22:49; 29:50; 46:9; 67:26, as well as 51:49–50, the ambiguity of which allows it to be taken as a reference to either Noah or the Prophet Muhammad). Muhammad is also referred to as *a clear warner* in 7:184. All prophets are sent *as bearers of glad tidings and as warners* (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56), and every human collectivity is said to have been sent *a warner*, as in 26:208: *And never did We destroy a town save that it had warners.*

3 Al-Rāzī observes that the three duties to which Noah calls his people—worship of God, reverence for God, and following God's messenger—can be seen as comprising all of religion. This verse is similar to Noah's call to his people in 23:23: *O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him. Will you not be reverent?*

4 *Some of your sins* could also be rendered "your sins," implying all sins and thus indicating the manner in which embracing religion and following one of God's messengers can expunge all previous sins (JJ). *Grant you reprieve until a term appointed* (cf. 14:10; 16:61; 35:45) means that they are given ample time to repent for their sins. Elsewhere, presumably some time after his people had rejected this initial offer, Noah is reported to have said, *O my people! If my presence is grievous to you, and [so too] my reminding of the signs of God, then in God do I trust. So decide on your plan, you and your partners, then let there be no doubt concerning your plan, but carry it out against me, and grant no respite!* (10:71). *Until a term appointed* may refer to the death of an individual, the moment when punishment comes in this world, the end of time, or the Day of Judgment. Regarding the end that every human collectivity will eventually meet, as does Noah's, the Quran says, *For every community there is a term appointed. When their term comes,*

knew." (5) He said, "My Lord, I have called my people day and night. (6) Yet my calling has not increased them in aught but flight. (7) Truly whenever I call them, that Thou mayest forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, cover themselves with their garments, persist, and wax most arrogant. (8) Then I called them openly. (9) Then I proclaimed to them and confided to them in secret. (10) I said, 'Seek forgiveness of your Lord! Truly He is Forgiving. (11) He will send the sky upon you with abundant rains, (12) support you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens and rivers. (13) What ails you that you hope not for God with dignity, (14) seeing that He has

*they shall not delay it by a single hour, nor shall they advance it* (7:34; 10:49; see also 16:61; 23:43; 34:30).

5 Noah called his people *day and night,* that is, continuously without interruption (JJ). *Day* can also be seen as an allusion to calling them openly, and *night* to calling them privately (Q). Noah is said to have been the most steadfast of God's messengers; he began his prophethood at the age of forty and continued until he was *a thousand years, less fifty* (29:14), even though he had few followers.

6 The reaction of Noah's people to his call is similar to that attributed to the pagan Arabs in 17:41: *And We have indeed varied [Our signs] in this Quran, that they might reflect, though it increased them in naught but aversion.* For other passages where the call of God's messengers increases disbelievers' opposition and other negative reactions, see 9:125; 25:60; 35:39, 42.

7 Putting *their fingers in their ears* indicates that the people are averse to hearing God's message; covering *themselves with their garments* shows that they do not wish to see God's signs; and waxing *arrogant* implies that their hearts are closed; in a Quranic context, hearing, sight, and hearts are the three faculties that are either open or closed to revelation; see 2:7; 6:25, 46; 7:100, 179; 16:108; 17:46; 18:57; 22:46; 41:5; 46:26.

8–9 These verses indicate that Noah called to his people in many different ways, but they remained defiant. Many commentators take this to mean that Noah became ever more emphatic, first calling them in private, then openly, and then combining the two (Q, R, Z), a pattern also followed by the Prophet Muhammad, who, according to most accounts, did not preach publicly until three years after receiving the first revelation.

10–20 The promise given by Noah to his people in these verses is similar to that given by the Prophet Muhammad to his people in 61:10–14.

10–11 Noah's words repeat a portion of those of the Arab prophet Hūd in 11:52. *The sky* is often used as a metonym for "rain," which in a desert environment is synonymous with great blessing, even with the gift of life itself. *Abundance* translates *midrār,* which indicates something that is sent again and again. Most interpret it as an indication of rain. But when viewed in relation to other verses, it can be taken as a reference to all manner of Divine Blessings, both material and spiritual, promised to the disbelievers elsewhere on the condition that they reverence God: *Had the people of the towns believed and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth* (7:96); and to the Jews and Christians if they observe their scripture: *Had they observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down unto them from their Lord, they would surely have received nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet* (5:66).

13 This verse means, "How is it that you do not hope that God will honor you and magnify you [Q, R, Z] in this life, in the Hereafter, or both?" Some commentators read this to mean, "How is it that you do not fear God with dignity?" (Āl, Ṭs).

14–18 These verses allude to all stages of human existence, which are cited as proof of God's

created you in stages? (15) Have you not considered how God created the seven heavens one upon another, (16) and made the moon a light therein and made the sun a lamp? (17) And God made you grow forth from the earth like plants. (18) Then He will cause you to return to it and bring you forth again. (19) And God made the earth an open expanse for you, (20) that you may travel spacious paths therein.'" (21) Noah said, "My Lord, they disobeyed me and followed those whose wealth and children increase them in naught but loss." (22) And

Power, as in 22:5: *We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity* (see also 23:12–15).

15 For the creation of *the seven heavens one upon another,* see 67:3–4c.

16 The mention of the *moon* and the *sun* alludes to the means of guidance that God has provided, as in 10:5: *He it is Who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time]. God did not create these, save in truth. He expounds the signs for a people who know.* V. 16 could be read with "and that He" at the beginning with vv. 17 and 19, also beginning with "and that," and thus as a continuation of the rhetorical question begun in v. 15.

17 *Like plants* can mean "as growing things." On the one hand, this alludes to the creation of human beings from dust, as in 3:59: *Truly the likeness of Jesus in the Sight of God is that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, 'Be!' and he was* (R). On the other hand, it alludes to the manner in which all things are thought to emerge from a single source, God. Though the "growing things" are diverse, they remain attached to the one ontological Source, and Its substance is also within them.

18 When v. 14 is read as referring only to the stages of existence during this life, this verse would complete it by continuing to the stages of death and resurrection, as in 2:28: *How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned?*

19–20 Elsewhere God is described as *the One Who made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded paths for you therein* (20:53). Like v. 16, which alludes to the guidance God provides through the sun and the moon, *spacious paths* indicates other means of guidance that God has provided (see also 21:31; 43:10).

21 Those whom the people followed are said to have been the notables among them (JJ), who elsewhere dissuade them from following Noah by saying, *This is only a human being like yourselves, desiring to set himself above you. And had God willed, He would have sent down angels. We heard not of this from our fathers of old. He is but a man possessed. So wait concerning him, for a time* (23:24–25; see also 11:27). The criticism of Noah's people for following their notables because of their *wealth and children* is similar to the manner in which the Muslims are admonished in 9:55 and 9:85: *And let not their wealth or their children impress thee. God desires but to punish them thereby in this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers* (cf. 68:10–14). The relativity of the benefits that derive from wealth and children in this world is a recurring Quranic theme; see 34:35–37c; 64:15c.

22 Elsewhere it is said that the people threatened to stone Noah; see 26:116. According to the Prophet's cousin Ibn ʿAbbās, when Noah preached to his people, they would beat him until he passed out, wrap him in a blanket, and throw him in his house, leaving him for dead. When he awoke, he would again go out to preach to them.

they devised a mighty plot, (23) saying, "Do not leave your gods; do not leave Wadd or Suwāᶜ, or Yagūth, Yaᶜūq, or Nasr." (24) Many indeed have they led astray; and it increases the wrongdoers in naught but error. (25) Because of their iniquities they were drowned, then made to enter a Fire. And then they found no helpers for themselves apart from God. (26) Noah said, "My Lord, leave not a single disbeliever to dwell upon the earth. (27) Truly if Thou leavest them, they will mislead Thy servants and will beget naught but disbelieving profligates. (28) My Lord, forgive me and my parents, and whosoever enters my house as a believer, and the believing men and the believing women, and do not increase the wrongdoers in aught but ruin."

23 The mention of the names of the idols draws an implicit parallel to the idols of the Makkans, al-Lāt, al-ᶜUzzā, and Manāt, mentioned in 53:19–20 and said to be *naught but names that* they *have named* (53:23). According to a *ḥadīth,* the gods mentioned here were originally heroes who lived before Noah and had many followers. After their deaths, statues were built to commemorate them, but later generations took the statues as gods (IK); different tribes came to worship different gods based on the particular shapes of the carved statues (Z). Wadd was said to be in the form of a man; Suwāᶜ, a beautiful woman; Yagūth, a bull or sometimes a lion; Yaᶜūq, a horse; and Nasr, an eagle or sometimes another bird of prey (Z).

24 As the practice of idol worship persisted for many generations, the worship of idols continued to lead people astray up to the time when the Quran was revealed. *It* can refer to either disobeying Noah (Z) or leading others astray.

25 The punishment suffered by those who opposed Noah is both of this world, *they were drowned,* and of the Hereafter, *then made to enter a Fire.*

26–27 These are Noah's harshest words in any of the Quranic accounts. Elsewhere he is commanded not to plead for the disbelievers to be saved: *And address Me not concerning those who did wrong; surely they shall be drowned* (23:27). V. 26 is the only verse in the many verses pertaining to the story of Noah to imply that the flood was a universal event, similar to Genesis 6:17: "I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die." All other Quranic discussions of the flood imply that it is specific and localized. In 7:64 and 10:73 the drowned are *those who denied Our signs,* in 11:37 and 23:27 they are *those who did wrong,* and in 21:77 they are *an evil people.* In this manner the Quranic account seems to be more isolated than that of Genesis 6:5–7: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had created human beings on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them' " (see also Genesis 7:4, 20).

28 Noah's parents were reported to have been among the believers (JJ). In 21:76 God states, *We answered him and saved him and his family from great distress.* Nonetheless, his son was drowned, and in response to Noah's supplication on his behalf God says to Noah: *Truly he is not from thy family; surely such conduct was not righteous* (11:46). Though there is no mention of the Ark in this *sūrah,* it is mentioned by name in 7:64; 10:73; 36:41, discussed at length in 11:37–44, and referred to as *the ship* in 29:15 and as *a thing of planks and nails* in 54:13. The lack of any mention of the Ark in this *sūrah* may be seen to underline the severity of this particular account, since it does not emphasize the salvation provided by God in the way that other accounts do.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 72

# The Jinn

## *al-Jinn*

*Al-Jinn* is a late Makkan *sūrah* that takes its name from the mention of *jinn* in the first verse and the report about a group of jinn who heard the Prophet's recitation of the Quran, recognized it as Divine Revelation, and embraced Islam. This *sūrah*'s response to the travails of the last Messenger (*rasūl*) sent to humanity, Muhammad, connects it to the previous *sūrah,* which tells of the travails of Noah, widely regarded as the first messenger (Āl), although he had been preceded by other prophets (*anbiyāʾ*), who are thought to have had a less universal function, such as Adam. Some commentators also see a connection between the mention of the ***abundant rains*** promised to Noah's people in 71:11 and the *abundant water* promised to the Quraysh in 72:16 (Āl, Sy).

This *sūrah* is said to have been revealed at a time of great difficulty for the Prophet, in the year 619, when he had lost the protection of his uncle Abū Ṭālib and was vulnerable to those in Makkah who opposed his mission. At that time, the Prophet traveled to the nearby town of Ṭāʾif seeking support from its leaders, but they reviled him and set a mob upon him. The Prophet and Zayd ibn Ḥārithah (d. 8/629), who had traveled with him, sought refuge in an orchard, where the Prophet prayed to God for support. There he met Salmān al-Fārsī, an originally Zoroastrian slave from Persia, who helped him escape and later became one of his closest Companions. While traveling in the desert, still searching for a protector, the Prophet stood for prayer at Nakhlah. Some say that he was reciting *al-Raḥmān* (*Sūrah* 55), when a group of seven or nine jinn came upon him and stopped to listen; enraptured, they repented and embraced Islam. In light of this account, this *sūrah* is seen as a gift of solace from God, letting the Prophet know that, despite his trials, the message continued to be heard and his mission continued to spread.

According to another account, *al-Jinn* was revealed at a time when the jinn were distraught that they were no longer able to intercept messages from Heaven. After consulting among themselves, the jinn realized that obstacles to their receiving messages could only have resulted from a momentous event, so

they searched the globe. A group of them came upon the Prophet while he was leading his Companions in the morning prayer. When they heard the Quran, they listened to it attentively and said, "This is what has caused obstacles between us and the reports from Heaven." They went back to their people and said, "O our people, we have heard a marvelous Quran which directs us to the right path; we affirm our faith in it, and we would never associate anyone with our Lord." Then God revealed this *sūrah*.

To contextualize this account and the place of the jinn, one must consider the nature of the spiritual cosmology of the Quran. In Islamic cosmology, there is something both literal and symbolic about the heavens and the earth. God is not literally physically "above and beyond" the heavens; yet "up" is the reality in physical space that best symbolizes and communicates the meaning of "toward God." In this sense, the heavens represent both higher physical levels and higher ontological planes. The jinn, as psychic beings unseen to most human beings, occupy an intermediate state between the material realm of our physical experiences and the angelic and spiritual realms. Nonetheless, they are also on the earth and, according to some, occupied the earth before human beings. As witnesses to the cosmic order in ways to which most human beings are denied access, the jinn are said to have the ability to "eavesdrop" on angelic communications, inform people of what is to come, and grant special powers. It should be noted, however, that in Islamic spirituality knowledge that comes from the jinn carries no spiritual value, and the spiritual masters have always made a distinction between the forms of knowledge of the Unseen that are tantamount to magic and those that result from what is believed to be a Divine or angelic inspiration. Differentiating between these different kinds of "inspiration" is in fact an important traditional science.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Say, "It was revealed unto me that a group of jinn listened, and said, 'Truly we have heard a wondrous Quran (2) that guides to sound judgment; so we believe in it and will ascribe none as partner unto our Lord. (3) And He—exalted be the Majesty of our Lord—has neither consort nor child. (4) Truly the fool among us has uttered outrages against God, (5) though we had thought that mankind and jinn would not utter lies regarding God.' (6) Indeed, individuals among mankind did seek refuge with individuals among the jinn, and so increased them in oppression. (7) They thought, as did you, that God would

1 The *jinn listened* to the Prophet's recitation of the Quran (JJ). Their response, the speech that begins here, in which they marvel at the Quran and affirm it (v. 2), is said to have been addressed to their own community of jinn upon their return (JJ). This event is also said to be the one referred to in 46:29–32. *A wondrous Quran* could also be rendered "an amazing Quran," which is understood as a reference to an unparalleled eloquence that amazed the jinn (Bg), as it did human beings.

2 *Sound judgment* translates *rushd,* which can also mean "the right path," as it denotes a way that is free of turns and bends and thus without ambiguity. Spiritually, it can be understood to mean a way of life that is free of iniquities.

3–13 Each of these verses begins with the same particle, which can be read in one of two ways: if read *anna,* each verse would follow upon *it was revealed unto me that* (v. 1) and represent the words of the Prophet; if read *inna,* each verse would follow upon *a group of jinn listened, and said* and relate the words that the jinn are reported to have said to their own kind after hearing the Quran (Bg, Q). The latter interpretation is favored here and has thus been followed in the translation.

3 This is one of many verses where the Quran criticizes the idea that God has sons or daughters (see also 2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 39:4; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39). It is similar to 6:100 and 37:158, both of which criticize human beings who identified jinn as sons and daughters of God. Elsewhere it is said that some human beings worship jinn, as in 34:41: *They will reply, "Glory be to Thee! Thou art our Protector, apart from them!" Nay, they worshipped jinn, most of them believing in them.*

4 *The fool among us* refers to Satan (Bg, IK), who is said by some to have been originally one of the jinn (see 27:39). *Fool* could also be taken to mean "the impudent" or "the insolent."

5 According to this verse, until the jinn heard the Quran, they had believed the assertions made by men and other jinn that God had a consort and offspring, because they did not believe that anyone would tell such egregious lies (Bg, R), thus indicating that they had only fallen into such ignorance out of blind adherence (*taqlīd*) and that they now renounced that belief (R).

6 In pre-Islamic Arabia it was a common custom for people to seek protection from the jinn when they were traveling in the desert (IK, R). But doing so reportedly increased the false opinion that the jinn had of themselves and thus led them to further misguide and oppress. Here *oppression* translates *rahaq,* which indicates a combination of sin, evil, transgression, and oppression (Bg).

7 The failure of the Arabs to believe in Resurrection is a matter with which the Quran and the Prophetic *aḥādith* are particularly concerned, as even some who confirmed the Oneness of God, still denied Resurrection; see 31:25–26c; 43:87c.

resurrect no one. (8) 'We reached out to Heaven and found it filled with mighty sentries and flaming stars. (9) We used to sit in places thereof to listen, but whosoever listens now finds a flaming star lying in wait for him. (10) We know not whether evil is desired for those upon the earth, or whether their Lord desires guidance for them. (11) Some among us are righteous, and some among us are otherwise; we are on paths divided. (12) We knew for certain that we could

8–9 According to several *aḥādīth,* these verses, along with 15:16–18 and 67:5, refer to the role that jinn are said to have played in facilitating fortune-tellers and sorcerers. As subtle beings, jinn are said to have more direct access to other realms of existence than do human beings, who are more closely bound to the form and matter of this world. And it is believed that jinn employ such powers to "eavesdrop" on angels, but that they then deceive human beings, leading them astray with half-truths. Regarding this matter, a *ḥadīth* states, "Some people asked the Messenger of God about the fortune-tellers. He said, 'They are nothing.' They said, 'O Messenger of God, sometimes they tell us of a thing that turns out to be true.' The Messenger of God replied, 'A jinn snatches that true word and pours it into the ear of his friend, but then mixes a hundred lies with it.' " It is said that after the Prophet Muhammad began receiving revelations, the jinn ceased to be able to access true words from Heaven (see the introduction to the *sūrah*). Angels were then established as sentries to bar their access, and meteors were the means by which God repelled them. Regarding the transmission of such messages and the inability of the jinn to "eavesdrop" on the angels, another *ḥadīth* states, "As we were sitting during the night with the Messenger of God, a shooting meteor gave a dazzling light. The Messenger of God said, 'What did you say in the pre-Islamic days when there was such a shot?' They said, 'God and His Messenger know best, but we used to say that that very night a great man had been born and a great man had died.' Whereupon the Messenger of God said, 'These [meteors] are shot neither at the death of anyone nor on the birth of anyone. God issues a command when He decides to do a thing. Then [the angels] supporting the Throne sing His Glory; then sing the inhabitants of Heaven who are near to them until this Glory of God reaches those who are in the Heaven of this world. Then those who are near the supporters of the Throne ask these supporters of the Throne, "What has your Lord said?" And they inform them of what He says. Then the dwellers of Heaven seek information from them until this information reaches the Heaven of this world. In this process of transmission [the jinn snatches] what he manages to overhear and carries it to his friends. And when the angels see the jinn, they attack them with meteors. If they narrate only what they manage to snatch, that is correct, but they combine it with lies and make additions to it.' "

10 Here the jinn admit that they cannot listen to God's secret converse and have no knowledge of the Unseen, which indicates that the advice of fortune-tellers and soothsayers, both of whom claimed to receive their wisdom from the jinn, is ultimately not founded upon real knowledge; rather, the jinn seek to *inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive* (6:112).

11 Some jinn are believers and others disbelievers (Bg, Ṭ), thus indicating that jinn are just like human beings in relation to God and that there is therefore no basis for the exalted status that some human beings attribute to them. In this vein, 51:56 states, *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me.*

12 The pre-Islamic Arabs were given to calling upon jinn and idols for help. Some thus thought that they could *thwart* or evade God, to Whom the Prophet was calling them. But here the jinn are made to say that they themselves cannot *thwart God,* with the implication that they cannot assist anyone else in doing so either. The idea that one can thwart God or His signs is

never thwart God on earth; nor could we ever thwart Him by fleeing. (13) And when we heard the guidance, we believed in it, for whosoever believes in his Lord shall fear neither detraction nor oppression. (14) Some among us submit and some among us are unjust; those who submit seek guidance; (15) and as for the unjust, they are kindling for Hell.'" (16) And [say], "[It was revealed unto me] that if they hold firm to the path, We shall give them abundant water, (17) that

criticized in over a dozen verses (6:134; 8:59; 9:2–3; 10:53; 11:19–20, 33; 16:46; 22:51; 24:57; 29:22; 34:5, 38; 39:51; 42:31; 46:32), since from a Quranic perspective *naught in the heavens or upon the earth can thwart God* (35:44; see also 52:8).

13 Here *the guidance* refers to the Quran (Bg, JJ, Q, R), which is referred to as such in several verses (see 2:2, 97; 3:138; 6:157; 7:52, 203; 10:57; 12:111; 16:64, 89; 27:2, 77; 41:44). The Torah and the Gospel are similarly referred to as "guidance" (see, e.g., 3:3–4; 5:46; 40:53–54c); and "The Guide" (*al-hudā*) is one of the names of the Quran. That believers shall *fear neither detraction nor oppression* is understood to mean that the good deeds they perform will not decrease and their evil deeds will not increase (IK, Ṭ).

14–15 These are the only two verses where *qāsiṭ* is used to describe the disbelievers. Here translated *unjust,* it indicates those who have deviated from the right course and is thus the direct opposite of those who *seek guidance. Qāsiṭ* derives from the same root (*q-s-ṭ*) as *muqsiṭ* and *qisṭ,* meaning "just" and "justice," respectively. Al-Qurṭubī explains that the *qāsiṭ* is one who "turns away from the truth" and the *muqsiṭ* is one who "turns toward the truth." The idea that the jinn are also liable to punishment in Hellfire is stated most emphatically in God's declaration: *I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together* (11:119; 32:13).

16 Although the preceding verses clearly refer to the jinn, this verse can be seen as a reference to either the jinn (R) or the Quraysh (Bg). According to many commentators, this verse refers to a seven-year drought that would be relieved, were the disbelievers to accept Muhammad as a messenger of God (Bg). *Abundant water* can be seen as an allusion to Divine Provision (*rizq;* Bg, IK, Q, R), all manner of benefit and good, (Bg, R), a life of ease and abundance (Bg, Ṭ), or Paradise, which is often described as having *Gardens with rivers running below* (see 2:25c; 3:195; 5:12; 48:5; 64:9; R). Conversely, this verse can be understood as a reference to the wealth and provision by which God allows those who are astray to continue fooling themselves, going further astray "little by little" (cf. 7:182; 68:44; Ṭ).

17 When v. 16 is viewed in a positive manner, as a reference to those who *hold firm to the path* of Islam, this verse refers to the manner in which belief must be manifested by dealing properly with those things over which God has appointed human beings *as trustees* (see 57:7), for example, by paying the necessary alms tax on wealth and spending it *in the way of God* (2:195, 261–62; 8:60; 47:38; 57:10). But if v. 16 is viewed in a negative manner, as a reference to those who *hold firm to the path* of disbelief or opposition, this verse indicates that God allows disbelievers to fall further into deception and delusion, continuing to commit even greater sins because they think that wealth and apparent success in this world demonstrate their favor with God. But from an Islamic perspective, the wealth of this world can in fact result from the exact opposite of Divine Favor, as in 6:44: *So when they forgot about that whereof they had been reminded, We opened unto them the gates of all things, till, as they exulted in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereupon they came to despair;* and in 15:3: *Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves and to be beguiled by hopes, for soon they will know* (see also 7:182–83; 16:55; 23:54–56; 68:44). *The remembrance* can refer to the Quran (Aj, Ṭ), being a servant of God (Aj, R), testifying to the Oneness of God (Aj), or simply remembering God and His message. *A grievous punishment* is literally "an ascending punishment," said to be ascending because it only increases in severity (Bg) or because there is no relief from it (Ṭ).

We may try them therewith, and whosoever turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He leads him to a grievous punishment, (18) and that places of worship are for God; so do not call upon another alongside God, (19) and that when the servant of God rises to call upon Him, they well-nigh swarm upon him." (20) Say, "I call only upon my Lord, and I ascribe none as a partner unto Him." (21) Say, "I have no power over what harm or guidance may come to you." (22) Say, "None will protect me from God, and I shall never find refuge apart from Him (23) if I do not convey from God and His messages. And whosoever disobeys

18 *Places of worship* translates *masājid,* the plural form of both *masjid* (place of prostration) and *misjad* (instrument of prostration; Bg). *Masjid* is the standard word used by Muslims for "mosque," from which this English word derives, and is translated as such in most of its occurrences, but here is taken as a reference to all houses of worship for all religions (Bg) or to the whole of the earth (Bg, Q, Ṭ) in accordance with a famous saying of the Prophet: "The earth has been made a place of prostration (*masjid*) for me, and has been purified" (Q). If taken as the plural for *misjad,* it refers to the seven parts of the body that should all touch the ground in the formal prostration position for Muslim prayer: the forehead, the hands, the feet, and the knees (Bg).

19 *The servant of God* (*ʿabd Allāh*) is one of the seven names by which the Prophet is called in the Quran (see 73:1–2c) and one of the most common names by which the Prophet is known in the Islamic tradition. To be *the servant of God* is one of the highest spiritual stations, as it represents complete surrender to God. Overall, this verse can be taken as a reference to the jinn, who were amazed at the Quran and nearly piled upon one another to hear it (Bg, Ṭ). Or it can be seen as a reference to the jinn reporting to their own companions how amazed they were to see the devotion of the Prophet's Companions (Bg). Finally, it can be seen as a reference to the disbelievers among the Quraysh and among the jinn who would put obstacles in the Prophet's way and press in upon him when he prayed at the Kaʿbah (Bg). The verses before this verse support the interpretation of it as a reference to the jinn, while those after it support its interpretation as a reference to the disbelievers among the Quraysh.

20 *I call only upon my Lord* is a response to the objections of the Quraysh, who accused the Prophet of infringing upon the people and demanded that he abandon the message he was preaching (Q, R).

21–22 Here the Prophet is being told to deny that he has any power beyond that of delivering God's message faithfully, a frequent Quranic theme (see 67:26c). Given the tendency of the Arabs toward idol worship, this theme recurs throughout the Quran, as in 3:79–80: *It is not for any human being, God having given him the Book, judgment, and prophethood, to then say to the people, "Be servants of me instead of God." Rather, "Be sages, from having taught the Book and from having studied." And he would not command you to take the angels and the prophets as lords. Would he command you to disbelief after your having been submitters?*

23 *If I do not convey from God and His messages* could have two different grammatical functions. In this translation, *if . . . not* renders *illā* as a contraction of *in lā* (R, Ṭ), meaning, "*None will protect me from God* if I do not convey His messages" (Ṭ), or "*If I do not convey . . . I shall never find refuge*" (R). *Illā* could also be read as a clause of exception related to v. 21 (R, Ṭ, Z), meaning, "I have no power over you . . . except to convey to you what God has commanded me to convey from God and His messages" (Ṭ), or "*I have no power over what harm or guidance may come to you* (v. 21), only to convey from God" (Q, R). It could also be understood as a clause of exception related to the last phrase of v. 22, meaning, "*I shall never find refuge apart from Him,* save in conveying from God and His messages" (Q, R).

God and His Messenger, his shall be the Fire of Hell, abiding therein forever, (24) such that when they see what they are promised, they will know who is weaker in helpers and fewer in number." (25) Say, "I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh or whether my Lord has appointed a term for it; (26) Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, (27) save to the one whom He approves as a messenger. Then He dispatches before him and behind him a guard, (28) that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord. And He encompasses whatsoever is with them and keeps a numbered count of all things."

24 *What they are promised* refers to either the Day of Judgment (Bg), which is referred to elsewhere as *the Day that they are promised* (43:83; 51:60; 70:42), or the punishment (Bg), or both. Some also understand it as a reference to the Battle of Badr (JJ). This verse is similar to 19:75: *Whosoever is in error, the Compassionate will extend his term till, when they see that which they have been promised, be it the punishment or the Hour, they will know whose position is worse, and whose host is weaker* (see also 25:42). For this reason the Day of Judgment is also known as *the Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17), since when the ambiguities of this world are cast aside, the distinction between truth and falsehood becomes clear to all.

25 In both the present verse and 21:109, *that which you are promised* refers to the Day of Judgment (IK), the punishment the disbelievers will receive, or both. Both verses can be read as a response to the question posed by disbelievers in other verses: *When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?* (10:48; 21:38; 27:71; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25); see 36:48c.

26–27 Elsewhere God is referred to as *Knower of the Unseen and the seen* (6:73; 9:94, 105; 13:9; 32:6; 39:46; 59:22; 62:8; 64:18), usually taken to mean that He has knowledge of this world, the Hereafter, and all that exists on all levels of reality. V. 26 and 34:3 are the only verses in which God is referred to simply as *Knower of the Unseen*. In this context, *the Unseen* can be taken as a reference to all that is unseen, to *that which you are promised* from the previous verse (R), or to revelation (Ṭ). The reference to God's disclosing *His Unseen* indicates the manner in which God teaches the prophets revelation (Ṭ). The caveat that God only reveals *to the one whom He approves* reaffirms the denunciation of sorcerers and fortune-tellers in vv. 8–9 (R). Some also take it as refutation of the possibility that miracles could be performed by anyone other than prophets (Z), though Sunnis and Shiites generally accept the reality of "lesser miracles," which are known as *karāmāt,* while miracles performed by prophets are known as *muʿjizāt,* or "evidentiary miracles." The guards are angels who ensure that none of the jinn who attempt to gain knowledge of the Unseen hear the revelation before it reaches the prophet for whom it is intended (Ṭ); they are said to be four in number (IK).

28 As translated, this verse indicates that God sends the angels, so that God Himself may know that the prophets have *conveyed the messages* with which He sent them (JJ). But it can also be rendered "that he may know," indicating that it is for the Messenger to know that the angels *have conveyed the messages* to the prophets (Bg, Q, Ṭ), or else to know that the angels have received the message (Ṭ). In this latter sense, it may refer to the particular covenant that God makes with the prophets in 3:81 and 33:7, that they will confirm or bear witness to the revelations sent to one another. *That He may know* translates *li-yaʿlama,* which could also be read *li-yuʿlima,* meaning "that He may inform," thus indicating that God dispatches the angels as guards to inform the people that the prophets *have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord* (Bg, Q).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 73

# The Enwrapped One

## *al-Muzzammil*

*Al-Muzzammil* is among the earliest Makkan *sūrah*s. Many commentators maintain that v. 20 was revealed about one year later than the remainder of the *sūrah* (Āl, IK), while others believe that v. 20 is from the Madinan period (Āl, JJ). In either case, all of the verses except v. 20 are said to have been revealed immediately after the first five verses of *Sūrah* 74, *al-Muddaththir*. This *sūrah* takes its name from God's addressing the Prophet as *thou enwrapped* (*al-Muzzammil*) in the first verse.

The main theme is the injunction to perform night vigil (*tahajjud*), which was made obligatory before the five daily prayers had been established (Āl); however, the modification of the injunction to perform night vigil in the last verse made it henceforth voluntary. The direct address to the Prophet, which tells him of the *weighty Word* (v. 5) of revelation, follows upon the mention of the messengers in the last verses of the previous *sūrah* (Āl), all of whom received *a weighty Word* in one form or another.

The first section (vv. 1–9) establishes the supremacy of night vigil and the obligation to perform it, and the second section (vv. 10–14) counsels the Prophet not to worry about those who do not heed the revelation. The third section (vv. 15–19) shifts the address to those who deny the Prophet, likening Muhammad to Moses, and alludes to the apocalyptic inversions (see *Sūrah*s 81 and 82) that will occur on the Day of Judgment. The last verse then removes the obligation of night vigil imposed in the first section, although it enjoins prayer and paying alms.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O thou enwrapped! (2) Stand vigil at night, save a little, (3) half of it or reduce it a little, (4) or add to it; and recite the Quran in a measured pace. (5) Truly We shall soon cast upon thee a weighty Word. (6) Truly the vigil of

1–2 *Enwrapped* refers to the Prophet's wrapping himself in his cloak after the first revelation; see the introduction to *Sūrah* 96. According to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *thou enwrapped* (*al-Muzzammil*) is one of the seven names by which the Prophet said he was called in the Quran; the others are Muhammad (3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29), Aḥmad (61:6), *Ṭā Hā* (20:1), *Yā Sīn* (36:1), *thou who art covered* (*al-Muddaththir;* 74:1), and *servant of God* (*ʿAbd Allāh*; 72:19; IA, Q). *Thou enwrapped* is understood by most as a reference to the Prophet's wrapping himself in his cloak in awe of the new revelation that had come upon him (see 74:1c). But in the context of this *sūrah,* it can also be seen as an injunction from God to throw off one's bedding and stand in prayer, as in 17:78–79, as if God were calling, "O thou who art sleeping" (IK).

Before the five daily prayers were revealed, night vigil was the common practice of the Prophet and his small group of followers, who would reportedly stand in prayer until their feet swelled. The practice was then eased in v. 20 and was made explicitly supererogatory in 17:79: *And keep vigil in prayer for part of the night, as a supererogatory act for thee.* Regarding the benefits of night vigil, a famous *ḥadīth* says, "Every night during the last third of the night, our Lord descends to the Heaven of this earth and says, 'Who calls upon Me that I might answer him? Who asks of Me that I might give to him? Who seeks My Forgiveness that I might forgive him?' " Night vigil is also a supererogatory practice that the Quran attributes to the upright among the People of the Book: *Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate* (3:113); for other references to night vigil see 11:114; 21:20; 20:130; 25:63–64; 50:40; 52:49; 73:6, 20; 76:26.

3–4 These are the first verses in the chronological order of revelation to explicitly enjoin reciting the Quran as a form of worship, an injunction that appears frequently (e.g., 18:27; 27:92; 29:45). The command to *recite the Quran in a measured pace* can be seen as an injunction for all Muslims or as one that applies specifically to the Prophet, indicating that he is to deliver the revelation to others *in a measured pace.* In this way the Prophet's manner of recitation reflects the manner that God ascribes to Himself in 25:32: *And We have recited it unto thee in a measured pace.* Regarding the Prophet's manner of recitation, his wife Umm Salamah is reported to have said, "He used to divide his recitation verse by verse" (IK), meaning that he would pause at the end of each verse.

The Prophet enjoined his followers to recite the Quran, saying, "Adorn the Quran with your voices" (IK), and "Whosoever does not chant the Quran is not one of us" (IK). Many *aḥādīth* speak of the benefits of reciting the Quran, among them, "Whosoever recites the Quran fluently is with the honorable and obedient scribes [i.e., the angels], and whosoever recites it with difficulty shall receive a double reward"; "Never does a group gather in one of the houses of God, reciting the Book of God and contemplating it, but that peace descends upon them, mercy surrounds them, the angels encircle them, and God remembers them in His gathering." Regarding the different levels of recitation, a famous *ḥadīth* states, "The believer who recites the Quran is like a citrus fruit; its fragrance is pleasing and its taste is sweet. The believer who does not recite the Quran is like a dried date; it has no fragrance, but its taste is sweet. The hypocrite who recites the Quran is like basil; its fragrance is sweet, but its taste is bitter. The hypocrite who does not recite the Quran is like bitter apple [colocynth]: it has no fragrance and its taste is bitter."

5 *A weighty Word* refers to the Quran itself. The Word of God is said to be weighty both in the

the night is firmest in tread and most upright for speech. (7) For truly by day thou hast lengthy affairs. (8) So remember the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with complete devotion— (9) Lord of the East and the West, there is no god but He, so take Him as a guardian. (10) Bear patiently that which they say and take leave of them in a beautiful manner. (11) Leave to Me the deniers living in luxury, and be gentle with them for a while. (12) Truly with

obligations that it entails for the Prophet and his followers (IK, Sy) and in the weight of good that will be placed in the scales on the Day of Judgment for one who follows it and recites it (Sy). According to several accounts, the weight of the Quran was not merely figurative. The Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah reported that the Prophet would perspire when the revelation came upon him, even on a cold day (IK). On another occasion she said, "When the revelation came upon the Prophet while he was on his mount, it was like a blow to the camel's neck" (IK).

6 *Vigil of the night* translates *nāshiʾat al-layl,* which literally means "rising at night" (Ṭ). In this sense, it could also refer to the ascension of the spirit or the heart. That night vigil *is firmest in tread* means that it leaves the strongest impression on the heart (Ṭs) and is most conducive to establishing harmony between the hearing and the heart for the purpose of comprehending the Quran (JJ). It can also be understood to mean "firmer in tread," meaning that the night is better than the day for vigil, recitation, and memorization of the Quran (Ṭ). Others understand the verse to mean, "The one who rises at night" (Ṭ), meaning one who prays at night. *Tread* translates *waṭʾ,* which in variant readings is read *wiṭāʾ,* meaning "agreement," "cooperation," or "congruence." This is understood to mean that night is the best time for realizing agreement, cooperation, and congruence between the heart, ear, and tongue (Ṭ). That night is *most upright for speech* means that it is the best time for recitation of the Quran (Q, Ṭ).

7 *Lengthy affairs* refers to the responsibilities that prevent one from having time for extensive devotions during the day (JJ) or to God's granting an extensive expanse of time for worldly matters, thus implying the responsibility to devote a part of the night to prayer (IK).

8 Once believers have finished with their affairs, they should devote themselves to God, as in 94:7: *So when thou art free, exert thyself* (IK). Some say the command *remember the Name of thy Lord* means to recite the *basmalah* (In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful), at the beginning of Quranic recitation (JJ), while others see it as an exhortation to remember God at every moment of every day (Aj), since *the remembrance of God is surely greater* (29:45). *Devote* translates *tabattal,* which literally means "to sever" or "to cut off." It is thus interpreted to mean cutting oneself off from everything other than the remembrance of God (Aj).

9 God is also referred to as *Lord of the East and the West* in 26:28; see also 2:115, 142; 37:5; 55:17; 70:40. One is to *take Him as a guardian* because only *God suffices as a Guardian* (4:81, 132, 171; 33:3, 48; see also 17:65), indicating that in the end one can only entrust one's affairs to God.

10 This is similar to other verses that counsel the Prophet to be patient (e.g., 16:127; 20:130; 38:17; 46:35; 50:39; 52:48; 70:5; 86:17). If at the time of this revelation the Prophet had not yet begun to preach publicly, as most commentators maintain, it most likely refers only to the few individuals whom he had approached in private. *Take leave of them in a beautiful manner* indicates taking leave for the sake of God (Ṭ).

11–12 *Leave to Me the deniers* (cf. 68:44; 74:11) indicates that it is not for the Prophet to be concerned about those who do not accept God's message once he has delivered it to them, as God will deal with them properly in time. *Be gentle with them for a while* is a command to grant them respite, indicating both that they should be granted the opportunity to embrace Islam and follow the Prophet and that, if they do not, God will soon requite them for their disbelief, both in

Us are fetters and Hellfire, (13) food that chokes and a painful punishment— (14) on a day when the earth and the mountains shake, and the mountains will be like heaps of shifting sand. (15) We have indeed sent you a messenger as a witness concerning you, just as We sent unto Pharaoh a messenger. (16) But Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger, so We seized him with a torrential seizing. (17) So if you disbelieve, how will you guard against a day that would make children gray-haired? (18) The sky shall be rent asunder thereon. His Promise shall be fulfilled. (19) Truly this is a reminder; so let him who will, take a way unto his

this life, through the victory of the Muslims over the Quraysh, and in the Hereafter with *fetters and Hellfire*. It could also indicate that they should be allowed to continue in their ways, as they will be requited for their deeds in the end, as in 31:24: *We grant them enjoyment a little, then We compel them toward a grave punishment* (IK).

13 *Food that chokes* may refer to any of the forms of vile and unpleasant food that are provided for the people of Hellfire, including *the tree of Zaqqūm* (44:43; cf. 37:62; 56:52), *a vile thorn* (88:6), *filth, which none eat, save the iniquitous* (69:36–37), and thorns of fire, which can be neither vomited nor ingested (JJ), or else to all of them collectively.

14 That *the earth and the mountains* will *shake* and be destroyed on the Day of Judgment is one of the apocalyptic inversions mentioned in several verses, such as 69:14, where *the earth and mountains are borne away and ground up in a single grinding*, and 70:9 and 101:5, where the mountains are likened to *carded wool* (see also 18:47; 52:10; 56:5–6; 81:3); see 56:5–6c.

15–16 In this verse, the pronoun *you* may refer to the disbelievers (Āl), the people of Makkah (JJ), or humanity in general. That the Messenger is sent *as a witness concerning you* indicates that he will bear witness concerning human beings, either for them or against them on the Day of Judgment (Ṭ). It can also be understood to mean "as a witness against you," meaning that he will bear witness to their disbelief and opposition on the Day of Resurrection (Aj, Āl, Bḍ, Z). That Muhammad is likened to Moses implies that the Quraysh are likened to Pharaoh's people, thus indicating that they will suffer the same fate (IK). Given the early date of this *sūrah*, this reference also shows that the pre-Islamic Arabs were familiar with the story of Moses and Pharaoh or at least its general outline. *A torrential seizing* indicates one that is severe or evil (Ṭ); elsewhere it is said of Pharaoh and his people that God *seized them with a devastating blow* (69:10), and *such is the seizing of thy Lord when He seizes the towns while they are doing wrong. Surely His seizing is painful, severe* (11:102).

17 This verse could also be read, "How will you reverence on a day that would make children gray-haired?" (R, Z), indicating that those who disbelieve will not have the opportunity to turn their hearts from disobedience to reverence on the Day of Resurrection. The hair of children turns gray from fear and awe (Ṭ), indicating that the events of this day would make the young old. This is an example of apocalyptic inversion (see *sūrah*s 81 and 82), in which the order of this world is inverted on the Day of Resurrection. Here the inversion relates to the human order, as children's hair turning gray implies the loss of the strength and vitality associated with youth, while in the next verse, the inversion applies to the created order in general.

18 That the sky or Heaven *shall be rent asunder* is repeated in 42:5; 55:37; 69:16; 84:1, though the Arabic in each case is slightly different; also see 25:25; 82:1.

19 This verse is repeated in 76:29. The Quranic message is referred to in these verses and elsewhere as a *reminder*, indicating that it is available to provide guidance for all those willing to reflect (IK, R). In this verse, *reminder* translates *tadhkirah*, which can also mean "admonition" (Āl, Ṭ). *This* refers to either the Quran as a whole (Ṭ) or this particular *sūrah* (IK, R). *So let him who will* indicates human beings who choose the path of faith in God and obedience to Him (Ṭ). The phrase

Lord. (20) Truly thy Lord knows that thou dost stand vigil well-nigh two-thirds of the night, or a half of it, or a third of it, as do a group of those who are with thee; and God measures out the night and the day. He knows that you will not keep count of it and has relented unto you; so recite that which is easy for you of the Quran. He knows that among you will be some who are ill, others traveling upon the earth seeking God's Bounty, and others fighting in the way of God. So recite that which is easy of it, perform the prayer, give the alms, and lend unto God a goodly loan—whatever good you send forth for your souls, you will find it with God better and greater in reward. And seek God's Forgiveness. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful.

could also be interpreted with God as the subject of the verb *will*, meaning, "So let whomsoever He wills, take a way," since *you do not will but that God wills* (76:30; IK). When read in the context of this *sūrah, take a way unto his Lord* can be seen as a reference to the practices it enjoins, that is, night vigil (*tahajjud*) and Quranic recitation.

20 The form of night vigil mentioned in the first sentence relates to that enjoined in vv. 1–8 (JJ). Most likely revealed some twelve months after those verses, the present verse revoked the obligatory status of the night vigil and made it voluntary (Ṭ). *A group of those who are with thee* refers to the small group of Companions who emulated the Prophet's practice at that time, standing in prayer until their feet were swollen (JJ, Ṭ). After the first sentence, this verse changes from addressing the Prophet in the second-person singular to addressing the Prophet and his Companions in the second-person plural. *You will not keep count of it* indicates that the Prophet's Companions would not all be able to perform the obligation in full (Ṭ). Therefore, *He has relented unto you* by lessening the requirement to stand in vigil and allowing them to recite as much of the Quran as is easy for them in prayer (JJ, Ṭ). According to some, those who know the Quran should still recite a minimum of fifty or one hundred verses (Ṭ), or even just five (IK).

For those who are sick, traveling, or fighting, performing the night vigil is difficult, so they need only perform *that which is easy* of it, that is, whatever is not too taxing. The mention of fighting in this verse has caused some to surmise that it is from the Madinan period, as fighting did not begin until then. Others see it as foreshadowing the travails that the early Muslim community would face (IK). *Perform the prayer* refers to the obligatory daily prayers (Ṭ). This verse contains the first mention of *alms* (*zakāh*) in the chronological order of revelation. Some interpret it as a reference to the obligatory alms (*zakāh;* Ṭ), but since the specific form of *zakāh* was not institutionalized at this time, it may refer to charity in general. Some say that the requirement to pay alms was established during the Makkan period, but that the specifics were not established until the Madinan period (IK); for an explanation of *zakāh,* see 23:4c. To *lend unto God a goodly loan* (2:245; 5:12; 57:11, 18; 64:17) indicates expending effort and wealth for the cause of religion; see 57:11c; 57:18c. Here and in 5:12 lending *a goodly loan* is connected with the duties of prayer and almsgiving. *Whatever good you send forth for your souls* refers to all good deeds performed by believers in this life (Ṭ); see 5:80; 75:13c; 82:5c. *You will find it with God better and greater in reward* indicates that what one spends in the way of God in this life is better than what one keeps for oneself or leaves behind as an inheritance (IK). It also alludes to the manner in which good deeds are increased in the Hereafter, as in 2:261: *The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain that grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And God multiplies for whomsoever He will* (see also 2:245, 4:40; 6:160; 10:26; 64:17).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 74

# The Covered One

## *al-Muddaththir*

Among the earliest Makkan *sūrahs*, *al-Muddaththir* is, according to some commentators, Makkan in its entirety (Bg), but others maintain that the last section (vv. 31–56) is from the Madinan period (Āl). It is closely connected to the previous *sūrah,* as both are said to respond to the Prophet's covering himself when the experience of the revelation began. Whereas the first verses of *Sūrah* 73 instruct the Prophet regarding the practices that he and his Companions must follow, this *sūrah* focuses more upon his function as a warner to those who do not as yet follow him.

Although most commentators agree that 96:1–5 constitutes the first revelation of the Quran, according to an account from one of the Companions, Yaḥyā ibn Abī Kathīr, the first five verses of this *sūrah* constitute the first revelation. Ibn Abī Kathīr asked Abū Salamah ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān what the first *sūrah* of the Quran to be revealed was, and Abū Salamah replied, "*O thou who art covered.*" Ibn Abī Kathīr then said to him, "They say it was, *Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created!* [96:1]." Upon hearing that, Abū Salamah said, "I asked Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh about that, saying the same as you have said, whereupon he said, 'I will not tell you except what the Messenger of God had told us. The Messenger of God said, "I passed a month at Mt. Ḥirāʾ, and when my stay came to an end, I came down. While I was walking, I heard a voice from the sky. I looked up toward the sky, and behold! I saw the same angel who came to me in the cave of Ḥirāʾ, sitting on a stool between the sky and the earth. I was so terrified by him that I fell down on the ground. Then I went to my wife and said, 'Cover me! Cover me!' They covered me, and then God revealed [74:1–5]"'" (Bg, W).

Ibn Kathīr proposes that the reference to "the same angel who came to me in the cave of Ḥirāʾ'" indicates that this narration pertains to the second experience of the revelation, thus making the first five verses of this *sūrah* the first revelation *after* 96:1–5. Others propose that this account provides the first command to *warn,* thus to go forth as a Messenger, while 96:1–5 marks the beginning of the revelation as a whole (Āl).

After the opening exhortation to the Prophet in vv. 1–7, vv. 8–10 warn of the Day of Judgment, serving as the segue into a polemic against those who deny the prophethood of Muhammad (vv. 11–25) and an allusion to the punishment they will encounter in the Hereafter (vv. 26–31).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) O thou who art covered, (2) arise and warn! (3) Thy Lord magnify! (4) Thy garments purify! (5) And defilement shun! (6) Grant not favor, seeking gain! (7) And for the sake of thy Lord be patient. (8) For when the trumpet is blown, (9) that Day shall be a difficult day (10) for the disbelievers, not of ease.

1 Like 73:1, this verse refers to the Prophet's enfolding himself in a cloak (*dithār*) when he first experienced the revelation. As with *thou enwrapped* (73:1), *thou who art covered* is taken as one of seven names by which the Prophet is called in the Quran; see 73:1–2c.

2 *Arise and warn* indicates that this is the first call to the Prophet to deliver the new revelation, to propagate the prophetic message, while 96:1–5 is seen as the first call to prophethood (IK). From a spiritual perspective, vv. 1–2 can be understood as a call to all human beings to remove what separates them from God, *arise* through God, and drop everything other than God (My).

4 This verse can refer to the purification of both one's garments and one's character and heart before prayer (Bg, IK). In Arabic, to say that one's garments are pure is to imply that one "is free from faults and vices" (Z). Regarding ritual purification, the Prophet said, "Whosoever performs ablution, and does so in a beautiful way, his sins shall leave his body, and will even leave from under his fingernails." In another account, the Prophet said, "When a person washes his face, the sins of his eyes will be washed away, and when he washes his hands, the sins of what his hands have done will be washed away; and when he washes his feet, the sins of where he walked will be washed away, and with the last drop of water, he will be free of sin." Some also take this verse as a command to shorten one's garments rather than wearing them in the ostentatious manner of the pre-Islamic Arabs in which the hems would drag on the ground (JJ).

5 *Defilement* translates *rujz*, which is also understood to mean "idols" (Bg, JJ) or misdeeds (Bg), both indicating that one must shun all that would lead to punishment (Bd, Bg).

6 Similar to 92:18–21, this verse indicates that charity should be given freely for the sake of God, not to curry favor or seek material gain. It can be seen as a general command for all believers or as a particular command for the Prophet (Bg, JJ).

7 This verse can mean either that the Prophet should be patient in implementing and following the commands of God or that he should bear patiently the harm that he would receive from his opponents, since God's religion will ultimately prevail (Bg). Viewed in the context of the following verse, it may also mean that one must bear patiently the trials of the Day of Judgment (Bd).

8 The blowing of the trumpet on the Day of Judgment is mentioned in several verses (see 6:73; 18:99; 20:102; 23:101; 27:87; 36:51; 39:68c; 50:20; 69:13; 78:18c). Here it is understood as a reference to the second trumpet blown by the Archangel Raphael (Bg), which heralds the gathering of all humanity on a single open, barren plain for judgment (see 18:47; 20:106; 79:14).

9–10 Those who disbelieve shall find no respite or reprieve on the Day of Resurrection. This may be the first occurrence of *kāfir*, or "disbeliever," in the chronological order of revelation.

(11) Leave Me alone with the one whom I created, (12) and to whom I gave vast wealth, (13) and sons at his side, (14) and made smooth the way for him. (15) Yet he desires that I give more. (16) Nay! Truly he sets himself against Our signs. (17) I shall constrain him to endure a steep ascent. (18) Truly he reflected and determined. (19) May he perish for how he determined; (20) then may he perish for how

Only in later revelations did *kāfir* come to be juxtaposed to *mu'min,* or "believer." In earlier revelations it is juxtaposed to gratitude. *Kāfir* must thus be understood not simply as a disbeliever, but rather in the more literal sense as "one who covers over," implying that one covers over the truth by denying it and that this is the root of both disbelief and ingratitude.

11–25 These verses are believed to refer to al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, a staunch opponent of the Prophet in Makkah. Ibn ʿAbbās related that al-Walīd went to the Prophet, who recited the Quran to him, and his heart seemed to soften to it. News of this reached Abū Jahl, another of the leaders of the Quraysh; so he said to al-Walīd, "O uncle, your clan wants to collect money to give to you, for you went to Muhammad and exposed yourself to his message." He said, "The Quraysh know well that I am among their wealthiest." Abū Jahl said, "Then say something about him that will let your people know you condemn and dislike him." He said, "What shall I say? By God, there is not a man among you who is more knowledgeable about poetry and its composition than I. By God, what he says does not resemble any poetry. By God, the speech he utters is sweet and graceful, fruitful at the top, copious at the bottom; it has the upper hand, and nothing has the upper hand over it. But let me think about what I shall say about it." Then he said, "*This is naught but sorcery handed down* [v. 24], which he has simply learned from others." Then God revealed *Leave Me alone with the one whom I created* and the verses that follow it (W).

11 *Alone* refers either to God, thus emphasizing His Uniqueness as Creator, or to the human being, who begins and ends life alone before God (see 6:94; 19:80, 95). *Alone* translates *waḥīd,* which is also said to be one of the epithets by which al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah was known (Bg).

12–15 These verses are said to refer specifically to the great fortune that God had bestowed upon al-Walīd, who was among the wealthiest men in Makkah; he had either seven or ten sons and was also considered among the most learned and eloquent of the Quraysh. These verses can, however, also be taken in a general sense as a reference to the human tendency to want ever more, as in a well-known *ḥadīth,* "If the son of Adam had a valley of gold, he would wish for it to be two valleys" (IK, Q); see *sūrah* 102; 102:1c.

16 In the context of the story of al-Walīd, this verse suggests that, due to his opposition to the Prophet, God would cut off the blessings He had bestowed upon him (Bg). *Our signs* means the verses of the Quran (JJ); all the proofs of God, such as the revealed books and the prophets (Ṭ); or the blessings provided by God (Āl, IK).

17 This verse means that al-Walīd will be burdened with a severe punishment that continues to increase (Ṭ), or one from which there is no respite (Bg, Ṭ). *Steep ascent* translates *ṣuʿūd,* which is also said to be the name of a mountain of fire in Hell that al-Walīd will be made to ascend and fall from forever (Bg, JJ, Ṭ).

18 It is reported that al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah called together all of the leaders of the Quraysh and asked them about the Prophet. After reflecting upon the Prophet's nature and the Quran, al-Walīd determined that, as he was not possessed, a fortune-teller (*kāhin*), a poet, or a liar, he must then be a sorcerer (*sāḥir;* Bg, Q).

19–20 *Perish* translates *qutila,* which literally means "slain," indicating that, though he was still alive, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah had been "spiritually slain." *Qutila* is thus glossed as "accursed" or "punished" (Bg, JJ). The verse can also be read as a reference to the fact that al-Walīd determined his own fate by the manner in which he sought to determine the nature of the Prophet, and the repetition can be seen as emphasis (Bg) or to mean that

he determined! (21) Then he beheld. (22) Then he frowned and scowled. (23) Then he turned his back, and waxed arrogant, (24) and said, "This is naught but sorcery handed down; (25) this is naught but the speech of a human being." (26) I shall cast him into Saqar. (27) And what will apprise thee of Saqar? (28) It spares not, nor leaves behind. (29) It scorches the skin! (30) Over it are nineteen. (31) And We have appointed none but angels as wardens of the Fire; and We have not ap-

al-Walīd would be punished, perish, or be slain in both this life and the next.

21–22 These verses tell of al-Walīd's reaction to the Quran. That he *beheld* may allude to his having had the intelligence to discern its nature, but to have nonetheless *frowned and scowled,* searching for a way to deny it. Others take *beheld* as a reference to his looking at the faces of the leaders of the Quraysh while searching for a way to refute the Quran (JJ).

23 Al-Walīd *turned his back,* that is, on faith and the verification of the Quran (Ṭ). *Waxed arrogant* translates *istakbara,* which when combined with the preposition "from" (*ʿan*) means "disdained" or "scorned." Although the preposition does not occur here, many consider it to be implied, thus meaning, "He disdained to confirm the truth" (Ṭ), or he scorned the Prophet (JJ).

24 Discounting the other possible ways to denigrate the Prophet and the Quran, al-Walīd decided upon *sorcery* (*siḥr*) as his final "determination." Elsewhere those who opposed Muhammad and other prophets say of the various revelations, *This is naught but manifest sorcery* (see 5:110; 6:7; 11:7; 34:43; 37:15).

25 *Naught but the speech of a human being* means it is not from God. See also 16:103, where the accusation against the Prophet is that *he has merely been taught by a human being* (JJ). Alternately, this verse can be understood to echo the contention of the disbelievers that, were God to send a messenger, he would have sent an angel, as in 25:7: *And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him?"* (cf. 6:8–9, 50; 11:12; 14:10–11; 17:94–95; 23:24; 33–34, 38, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 54:24; 64:6c).

26–28 According to some *Saqar* is one of the names of Hell (Bg, Ṭ); according to others, the name of one of the gates of Hell (Ṭ). Some say it has no derivation, while others say it derives from *saqarathu al-shams,* meaning, "the sun melted or scorched it" (*Tāj al-ʿarūs*). *Spares not, nor leaves behind* indicates that it spares no one by leaving them alive, nor does it leave anyone behind dead (Bg, Ṭ; see also 87:12–13), since all are burned and then restored, only to be burned again (Bg; see 4:56); or it means that it leaves nothing of the bones, skin, and blood; it burns them all (Q).

29 *Scorching* indicates that it burns the skin until it becomes black (Bg, Ṭ). *Scorching* translates *lawwāḥah,* which can also indicate something that makes clear, indicating that *Saqar* is made clear to human beings, as in 26:91: *And Hellfire will become apparent to the errant* (Bg, Q; see also 79:36).

30 Most exegetes interpret this verse as an allusion to nineteen angels who are the keepers of Hell. The angels of punishment are called *al-zabāniyah* (96:18), and their king is named Mālik (43:77). Nineteen is one of several numbers occurring in the Quran with symbolic numerological significance. Some of the factors taken to indicate its importance are: the number of letters in the *basmalah* is nineteen; the number of words in what is most commonly held to be the first revelation, 96:1–5, is nineteen; the number of words in what is most commonly held to be the last revelation, *Sūrah* 110, is nineteen; in the science of the numerical symbolism of the letters, known as *al-jafr,* where each letter is assigned a numerical value, the numerological value of the Divine Name *al-Wāḥid* (the One), is nineteen; and the total number of *sūrahs* in the Quran is 114, which is 19 multiplied by 6.

31 Upon hearing that there were only nineteen *over it,* Abū Jahl, one of the leaders of the Quraysh, is reported to have boasted that there would be no problem in overcoming them; so

pointed their number save as a trial for those who disbelieve, to grant certainty to those who have been given the Book and increase in faith those who believe; and that those who were given the Book and the believers will not doubt; and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the disbelievers will say, "What does God desire by this as a parable?" Thus does God lead astray whomsoever He will and guide whomsoever He will. And none knows the hosts of thy Lord but He. It is but a reminder unto mankind. (32) Nay! By the moon, (33) by the night as it withdraws, (34) and by the morning as it brightens, (35) truly it is one of the greatest, (36) as a warner unto mankind, (37) for those of you who wish to go forth or stay behind. (38) Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned,

this verse clarifies that they are angels, not human beings (Bg, Q, Ṭ). God appoints their number *as a trial,* meaning either that they are something that will lead some people astray when they ask why there are nineteen (JJ) or that they are a source of punishment in the Hereafter (Q). In contrast, the believers and the People of the Book are said to increase in *faith* and *certainty.* That the appointment of the nineteen is to *grant certainty to those who have been given the Book* is understood by most to mean that nineteen was also the number known to the Jews and Christians; therefore, the similar enumeration in the Quran should give them greater certainty in the prophethood of Muhammad (Bg, IK, Q, Ṭ). *Those in whose hearts is a disease* indicates those who have hypocrisy in their hearts (Q, Ṭ; see 2:8–11; 5:52; 24:47–50; 33:12, 60; 47:20, 29) or those who opposed the Prophet (Q). The disbelievers' question, *What does God desire by this?* likely refers to the meaning behind this particular number, nineteen (Q, Ṭ). In this context, *God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will* (cf. 13:27; 29:21; 35:8) indicates the manner in which the questions posed by revelation lead some to certainty and faith and others to greater disbelief. *None knows the hosts* means that none knows their true number (Q, Ṭ), for although the guards are nineteen, they are only the leaders. Their full numbers are alluded to in a *ḥadīth:* "Hell will be brought on that Day [the Day of Judgment] with seventy thousand bridles, every bridle being held by seventy thousand angels" (Q). *It is but a reminder* most likely refers to *the hosts of thy Lord,* but may instead refer to *Saqar* or the Quran (Q). If taken as a reference to *Saqar, reminder* (*dhikrā*) could be rendered "admonition" (Q).

32–34 *Nay!* expresses a rejection of those who suppose that they can know the number of God's hosts or that they can overcome them (Āl, Ṭ). This is one of several passages in which an oath is taken on the moon (cf. 84:18; 91:2) and on the alternation of night and day (see also 81:17–18; 84:16–17; 89:1–4; 91:1–4; 92:1–2; 93:1–2).

35 Here *it* refers to *Saqar* (Q, Ṭ), meaning that *Saqar* is one of the greatest calamities (JJ). Some understand the assertion that it is only one of the calamities to mean that such calamities will be endless (Āl). *It* could also refer to the disbelievers' denial of the prophethood of Muhammad, meaning that such denial is one of the greatest sins (Q).

36 According to some exegetes, v. 36 may be a distant adverbial clause that continues the command in vv. 1–2, meaning, "O thou who art covered, arise and warn . . . as a warner to man" (Q). Most, however, view it in relation to the previous verse, indicating that the gravity of *Saqar* should serve as a warner (Q, Ṭ). In this context, *warner* may also be viewed as an Attribute of God or a reference to the Quran (Q).

37 *To go forth* means to proceed in faith, goodness, and obedience, while *stay behind* means to remain in disbelief, evil, and disobedience (Q, Ṭ).

38 Cf. 52:21. This verse means that the good and evil deeds that a soul has committed bind it to a particular end, since God *attends to every soul in accordance with what it has earned* (13:33).

(39) save the companions of the right, (40) in Gardens, questioning one another (41) about the guilty, (42) "What led you into Saqar?" (43) They say, "We were not among those who prayed, (44) nor did we feed the indigent, (45) and we engaged in vain discourse with those who do the same, (46) and we denied the Day of Judgment, (47) until certainty came upon us." (48) Thus the intercession of the intercessors will avail them not. (49) So what ails them that they turn away from the Reminder, (50) as if they were frightened asses (51) fleeing from a lion? (52) Rather, every man among them desires to be given pages unfolded.

39 This is most likely the first use of the term *companions of the right* (56:8, 27, 38, 90–91; 90:18; see 56:8–9c) in the chronological order of revelation. According to most commentators, it means those of faith and piety (Q), though in this context some take it as a reference to the children of Muslims or to the angels (Ṭ). The fifth Shiite Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733), is reported to have said, "We and our partisans are *the companions of the right*. All who oppose the People of the [Prophet's] House are those who are held in pledge" (Q). Vv. 38–39 together are understood to mean that *the companions of the right* will not be subject to punishment, because God will forgive their sins (Q, Ṭ).

40–42 *The companions of the right* are said to question one another about the predicament of their fellow believers who had failed to act in accord with the revelation (JJ). Others interpret *questioning one another* to simply mean "questioning," indicating that they speak directly to the sinners (Q, Ṭ). This would then be one of several passages to indicate that in the Hereafter those in the Garden and those in the Fire are, at least on occasion, able to communicate with one another (see also 7:44–50; 57:13–15).

43–44 In general these verses are understood to indicate those who failed to follow the Commands of God (Q, Ṭ). But one Shiite interpretation of v. 43 would be, "and we were not among the followers of the leaders (*a'immah*)," alluding to the failure to follow the Shiite Imams (Qm).

45 Literally, this verse reads "and we plunged with those who plunged." However, as employed in the Quran the verb *khāḍa* ("to plunge") implies *khāḍa fi'l-ḥadīth* ("plunged into discourse") or *khāḍa fi'l-bāṭil* ("plunged into vanity or falsehood"); cf. 6:91; 9:69; 52:12; 70:42. This verse thus indicates that they partook of the vanities of this world and went astray (Q, Ṭ); it could also mean that they associated with those whom God cursed for calling the Prophet a sorcerer (Q).

47 The guilty committed all the errors mentioned in vv. 43–46 until *certainty*—that is, death—*came upon* them (Q, Ṭ). As al-Kāshānī writes, "That is death, then we saw with our eyes that which we had denied."

48 Although some Muslims wish to limit the ability to intercede to prophets, many Sunni scholars maintain that angels and even righteous (*al-ṣiddiqūn*) believers can intercede on behalf of believers, while Shiite scholars always include the Shiite Imams among those to whom God grants the ability to intercede. The most widespread opinion is that intercession through prophets, angels, and saints is available for those who believe in God, but have been punished for some of their sins (Q); however, there can be no intercession for disbelievers. This verse would thus indicate that those whom the *companions of the right* question in v. 42 are the disbelievers. Regarding the question of intercession, see 10:3; 19:87; 20:109; 21:28; 34:23; 2:48c; 2:255c.

49–50 Here *the Reminder* is a reference to the Quran (Q, Ṭ), from which people *turn away* either by denying it or by not acting in accord with it (Q).

51 *Lion* translates *qaswarah,* an enigmatic word that is also interpreted to mean "hunting spears," "arrows," or "hunters" (Q, Ṭ).

52 Each man wants a revelation that is addressed directly to him (Q, Ṭ), as in 2:118: *Why does God not speak to us, nor a sign come to us?* (see also 17:90–93c). It is also reported that some of

(53) Nay! But they fear not the Hereafter. (54) Yea! Truly it is a reminder. (55) So let whosoever will, remember it. (56) And they remember not, save as God wills. He is most worthy of reverence and most worthy of granting forgiveness.

the Quraysh objected by saying that, if Muhammad were truly a Messenger of God, he could bring a book that would give each of them exemption and protection from the Fire (Q, Ṭ).

53–54 In both verses *nay,* translating the emphatic particle *kallā,* could also be rendered "truly" or "indeed," an alternative that fits v. 54 better than v. 53 (Q). In the recitation of Ibn ʿĀmir, *they fear not* is read, "you fear not," as a warning to the reader or listener.

*Reminder* refers to the Quran (Ṭ). In this context, *it is a reminder* indicates that revelation does not provide a list of proofs of the kind that the Prophet's detractors request when they ask for *pages unfolded* for each of them in v. 52. Rather, as a *reminder,* the revelation reawakens the knowledge of God and of the covenant with Him (see 7:172c) that all human beings bear in their *primordial nature* (30:30).

55 As rendered, this verse refers to remembering, particularly in the sense of acting in accord with the Word of God in the Quran. It could also be read as referring to the remembrance of God: "So let him who will, remember Him."

56 That *they remember* implies that they act in accord with the revelation. In this vein, God's willing that they remember refers back to v. 31: *Thus does God lead astray whomsoever He will and guide whomsoever He will.* When v. 55 is read as a reference to the remembrance of God, this verse indicates that individuals cannot remember God unless God remembers them. Regarding the last sentence of this verse, the Prophet is reported to have said, "God says, 'I am most worthy of being reverenced. So none other shall be made a God with Me. And whosoever fears to do so, it is befitting that I forgive him' " (Aj, Q).

According to the recitation of Nāfiʿ, this verse could also be read, "you remember not," in which case it is an address to the readers or listeners.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 75

# The Resurrection

## *al-Qiyāmah*

*Al-Qiyāmah* is an early Makkan *sūrah* that takes its name from God's swearing by the Resurrection in the first verse and the focus upon the Resurrection throughout. It is also known as *Lā uqsimu*, meaning "I Swear," the phrase with which the first and second verses begin (Āl). The *sūrah* begins with two oaths (vv. 1–2), the second of which is subject to much interpretation. It then rebukes those who deny the Day of Resurrection and speaks of its signs (vv. 3–15). This is followed by a famous passage (vv. 16–19) that counsels the Prophet to receive the revelation with patience. The next section (vv. 20–36) contrasts the final ends of believers and disbelievers and speaks of the inevitability of death followed by another rebuke for those who deny the truth. The *sūrah* concludes by invoking the stages of life as evidence of God's Omnipotence and of His ability to resurrect the dead (vv. 36–40).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) I swear by the Day of Resurrection. (2) And I swear by the blaming soul. (3) Does man suppose that We shall not gather his bones? (4) Nay! But We are able to fashion even his fingers and toes. (5) But man desires to defile what lies before

1–2 Both verses begin with the particle *lā,* which usually indicates negation, but can also indicate an emphatic expression when taking an oath. Hence v. 2 is interpreted by some commentators to mean, "I do not swear by the blaming soul" (Aj, Sh), though the translation given reflects the predominant interpretation of *lā* as an emphatic particle. The *blaming soul* is considered the middle state of the human soul in the process of spiritual growth, between the soul that *commands to evil* (12:53) and the *soul at peace* (89:27); see 12:53c; 89:27c. It is called *the blaming soul* because it recognizes the shortcomings of the lower concupiscent soul and chastises it in order to transform it into *the soul at peace,* which returns unto the Lord *content, contenting* (89:28); see 89:27–30c. Every soul is believed to be capable of recognizing its shortcomings, as expressed in a *ḥadīth,* "There is no pious or profligate soul but that it blames itself on the Day of Resurrection; if it has done good, it says, 'How did I not do more!' And if it has done evil, it says, 'Would that I had desisted!'" (Aj). Here, then, God swears by the reverent, God-fearing soul that blames itself for falling short, although it strives for obedience (Aj); a minority say, however, that it refers only to the soul of the disbeliever, which blames itself in the Hereafter (Sh). *The blaming soul* and *the Day of Resurrection* can thus be seen as intimately connected, not only by the role the quoted *ḥadīth* ascribes to *the blaming soul* on *the Day of Resurrection,* but also because both expose one's faults—just as one is called to account for all of one's lapses and shortcomings on *the Day of Resurrection,* so too does *the blaming soul* call one to account for them throughout the life of this world. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī thus equates *the blaming soul* with the scrupulous soul that continually asks what it desires by its own actions (IK, Q, Sh). A minority suggest that "blaming" (*lawwāmah*) is related to *talawwum,* meaning "constantly shifting," and indicates the fickle and capricious nature of the soul, which is happy, then sad, obedient, then disobedient, reverent, then heedless (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Rūḥ,* 262).

3 This verse is said to have been revealed with regard to one ʿAdī ibn Rabīʿah, who said to the Prophet, "Tell me about the Day of Resurrection. When will it be? How will it be?" The Prophet answered his questions. Then ʿAdī said, "If I were to see that Day with my own eyes, I would not attest to you, O Muhammad, as being true, nor would I believe in you. Can God really gather these bones?" (Aj, W). In this context, *man* is thus understood to mean those human beings who disbelieve and deny the Resurrection (Aj, JJ).

4 This verse is said to mean, "We are able to create him again precisely as We created him the first time"; see 36:78–79c; 17:49–51c.

5 This verse may also refer to those who deny the Hereafter that lies before them and thus "sully" or *defile* it (R). *Defile* translates *yafjur,* which also means "to waste." Although human beings have been warned of the Hereafter and all that it entails, they continue to waste the opportunity to purify their souls, meaning that they continue to ignore the admonitions of *the blaming soul* (v. 2) and to follow their own caprice. According to al-Qushayrī this applies to those who intend to prepare for the Hereafter but do not: "One continues to lapse and delays repentance, saying, 'I will repent later.' Then

him, (6) asking, "When is the Day of Resurrection?" (7) Then when the eyes are dazzled, (8) and the moon is eclipsed, (9) and the sun and the moon are brought together— (10) that Day man will say, "Where is the escape?" (11) Nay! But there shall be no refuge. (12) Unto your Lord that Day is the dwelling place. (13) Man shall be informed that Day of that which he has sent forth and of that which he has left behind. (14) Indeed, man shall be a testimony against himself, (15) though he prof-

he dies having not repented. It is said that he resolves not to continue accumulating acts of disobedience, turning over a new leaf in the time he has left. Yet, despite this, he does not immediately untie the knot of persistence from his heart. Thus his repentance is not true, for among the conditions of repentance is the resolution to not return to the like of what one had done. So if one still finds within one's heart a sweetness in lapsing and one contemplates returning to its like, then one's regret is not true" (Qu; Aj cites this same passage, but with some slight variations).

6 Although this verse repeats one of the questions posed by ʿAdī ibn Rabīʾah (see 75:3c), the question and variations upon it are repeated throughout the Qurʾān (see, e.g., 10:48; 34:29–30; 51:12; 67:25). In general it is not posed in a spirit of inquiry, but in one of derision, mockery, and denial (JJ).

7 Similar to *their glance returning not to them* in 14:43, the present verse indicates that, due to the terror of the Day of Judgment, the disbelievers will not be able to focus on anything (IK). Others interpret this verse to mean that they are amazed to see some of the things that they had denied (JJ).

8–9 These verses indicate that the sun and moon will be enfolded or rolled up (IK, Ṭ), as in 81:1–2.

10–11 One of several passages to make clear that for those who disbelieve there is no escape or refuge once the Hour comes; see also 18:53, 58; 34:51; 38:3; 41:48; 42:35, 47.

12 This verse indicates that on the Day of Judgment it is God alone who chooses the final destination in which each soul will reside or that God is one's final end (Ṭ).

13 Cf. 82:5. *That which he has sent forth* refers either to all of the deeds that individuals have performed (see 18:49; IK) or only to the good deeds performed in this life that will testify for them and for which they will receive reward in the Hereafter. *That which he has left behind* refers either to the good deeds that were not performed in this life or to the good deeds that continue to bear fruit. Regarding the latter interpretation, a famous *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever establishes a beautiful custom (*sunnah ḥasanah*) in Islam that is practiced by those who come after him, on the Day of Resurrection he will receive the reward thereof [i.e., for his own good deed] and a reward like unto that of those who practiced it after him, without its detracting from their reward in any way. And whosoever establishes a bad custom (*sunnah sayyiʾah*) in Islam bears its burden and the burden of those who practice it, without its detracting from their burdens in any way" (AḤ, IK on 36:12, Aj); regarding the nature of what is left behind, also see 36:12c.

14–15 These verses can be taken as a reference to *the blaming soul* (v. 2), which in effect testifies against every bad deed. In this vein, 17:14 says, *On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you* (see also 6:130; 7:37). Elsewhere *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do* (41:20; see also 24:24; 36:65). *Though he proffer his excuses* indicates that even when disbelievers speak to defend themselves, they bear witness against themselves (IK, Ṭ) or that none of their false excuses will be accepted (IK, Ṭ). Elsewhere the Day of Judgment is described as *The Day when the wrongdoers will not benefit from their excuses* (40:52).

fer his excuses. (16) Move not thy tongue therewith to hasten it. (17) Surely it is for Us to gather it and to recite it. (18) So when We recite it, follow its recitation. (19) Then surely it is for Us to explain it. (20) Nay! But you love the ephemeral, (21) and forsake the Hereafter. (22) Faces that Day shall be radiant,

16–18 These verses address the Prophet, encouraging him to wait patiently for the continuation of the revelation, as in 20:114: *Be not in haste with the Quran before its revelation is completed for thee, but say, "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!"* Both passages are understood as references to the Prophet's fear of forgetting the verses of revelation, which led him to repeat quickly everything that had been revealed to him, even while the revelation was coming down. Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have said, "The Messenger of God used to bear the revelation with great trouble and used to move his lips [quickly] with the revelation. . . . So God revealed [75:16–17], meaning that God will make him remember the portion of the Quran that was revealed at that time by heart and recite it." Then Ibn ʿAbbās said, "*So when We recite it, follow its recitation* means listen to it and be silent. *Then surely it is for Us to explain it* [v. 19] means that it is [for God] to make you recite it. Afterwards, the Messenger of God used to listen to Gabriel whenever he came and after his departure he used to recite it as Gabriel had recited it" (IK, Q). *It is for Us to gather it* thus indicates that God will gather it within the Prophet's breast, ensuring that he remembers it correctly (IK). These verses can also be taken as an admonition to those who wish to understand the Quran to first read and reflect upon all of its teachings rather than drawing hasty conclusions.

19 This verse means that after the Prophet memorizes and recites the Quran, God will explain it to him, clarify it, and inspire him to know its meaning according to what God intended and legislated (IK).

20–21 These verses transition from the second-person singular, in which the Prophet is addressed, to the second-person plural, addressing humanity in general. An almost identical verse is 76:27; see 76:27c. According to some other schools of recitation, *you* can be read in the third person plural, "But they love the ephemeral, and forsake the Hereafter."

22–25 The contrast between the faces of the believers and those of the disbelievers in this passage is similar to that in 3:106; 80:38–41; 88:2–10.

22–23 Most commentators take the assertion that believers will be *gazing upon their Lord* as a reference to the literal vision of God in the Hereafter (JJ), attested in many *aḥādīth,* among them, "Truly, you all will see your Lord with your own eyes" (IK, Q). When questioned by his Companions about the way in which people might see God, the Prophet said, "Are you harmed by seeing the sun and the moon when there are no clouds beneath them?" When his Companions replied, "No," the Prophet said, "You shall see your Lord in that manner" (IK). In a similar account, he said, "Truly, you will see your Lord just as you see this moon!" (IK, Q). The "vision of God" to which these *aḥādīth* attest is taken by many as a matter of belief that no one can deny (IK), but a minority argue that this verse should be interpreted in light of 6:103, *Sight comprehends Him not,* when 6:103 is seen as definitive (*muḥkam*) and 75:23 as symbolic (*mutashābih;* Z; see 3:7c), thus indicating that the vision of God is not in fact attainable or that it is only metaphorical. According to some, the vision of God, which also means direct knowledge of God, is the highest Paradise. In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said, "When the people of the Garden enter the Garden, God says, 'Do you desire that I increase you in anything?' They say, 'Didst Thou not brighten our faces? Didst Thou not admit us to the Garden and save us from the Fire?' " Then the Prophet said, "Then God removes the veil, and they are given nothing more beloved to them than *gazing upon their Lord*" (Ā, IK). In this vein, al-Tustarī is reported to have said, "The reward for deeds is Paradise, and the reward for the realization of God's Oneness (*tawḥīd*) is the vision of God" (ST). In relating this realization to love,

(23) gazing upon their Lord. (24) And faces that Day shall be scowling, (25) knowing that a spine-crushing calamity will befall them. (26) Nay! But when it reaches the collarbones, (27) and it is said, "Who will [make him] ascend?" (28) And he knows for certain that it is the parting; (29) and the shank is intertwined with the shank. (30) Unto thy Lord that Day is the driving.

al-Tustarī is also reported to have said, "Whosoever has been slain by his love [for God], his recompense will be the vision of Him." While many take this verse and the *aḥādīth* cited above as a reference to the vision of God on the Day of Resurrection, in Paradise, or both, others maintain that for those of high spiritual attainment the vision of God can be achieved in both this life and the Hereafter (Aj). Yet it is not attainable save by gaining God's love and intimacy, which themselves can only be attained through knowledge (*maʿrifah*). Such love and knowledge can in turn only be attained by constantly reflecting upon God and remembering Him, which requires that the love of this world be erased from the heart (Aj). For those who can achieve this state, "they are immersed in witnessing His Beauty, and thus veiled to all that is other than Him" (Aj).

24–25 In Quranic usage, the face is often taken to indicate the true nature, or the essence, of someone. For similar descriptions of the faces of the disbelievers, see 3:106; 10:27; 27:90; 80:40–42; 88:2–7. Regarding the Face of God and the symbolism of "face" in general, see 28:88c; 55:26–27c.

26 *Nay* translates the emphatic particle *kallā*, which can also be read in the affirmative, meaning "truly" or "indeed." *It* refers to the soul, and its reaching the *collarbones* refers to the moment of death when the soul is about to leave the body (see also 56:83). When *kallā* is read in the negative, the verse indicates that at the moment of death one will be informed of the truth and will not be able to deny it. When *kallā* is read in the affirmative, the verse indicates there is no doubt that the soul will leave the body (IK).

27–28 These verses could be taken as a reference to the rising of the soul and thus to the angels of mercy or the angels of punishment that will remove the spirit from the body (Āl, Ṭ), as in 6:61–62: *He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, our messengers* (i.e., angels) *take him, and they neglect not their duty. Then they are returned unto God, their true Master.* Some maintain that v. 27 communicates the words of the angels of death meaning, "Who is it that will make him ascend?" (Z)—the angels of mercy in the case of believers or the angels of punishment in the case of disbelievers (Q). Alternately, they may be seen as referring to the body, thus mirroring the words of those around a dying person who say, "Who will cure him?" (IK, Q, Ṭ). In v. 28, *the parting* refers to the parting from all the things of this world (Ṭ) or the parting of the spirit from the body (Āl).

29 This verse has several interpretations: that one shank will be intertwined with the other when one is wrapped in one's funeral shroud (Āl, IK, JJ, Ṭ, Z); that the severity of entering the Hereafter is intertwined with the severity of leaving the life of this world (Āl, JJ, Ṭ, Z); that the last of the days of this world are intertwined with the first of the days of the next (IK, Ṭ); that the state of death is intertwined with the state of life; or that human beings are intertwined with one another so that people cannot move their own legs. For the idiomatic use of *shank*, see 68:42c.

30 According to some commentators, this verse refers to either the manner in which God drives the soul from the body at the moment of death or the manner in which God drives the soul toward the Final Judgment (JJ). Others say that it is a challenge, meaning, "Who will heal him?" (Q, Ṭ). Still others say that it indicates the return of the body to the earth, as in a *ḥadīth qudsī* where God is reported to say, "Return My servants to the earth, for verily, I have created them from it, I return them into it, and from it will I bring them forth another time" (IK).

(31) For he neither confirmed nor prayed, (32) but he denied and turned away, (33) then went to his people swaggering. (34) So nearer to you! And nearer! (35) Then nearer to you! And nearer! (36) Does man suppose that he will be left aimless? (37) Was he not a drop of semen emitted? (38) Then he was a blood clot; whereupon He created, then fashioned, (39) and made from him the pair, male and female. (40) Is not such a one able to give life to the dead?

31–32 *He* refers to Abū Jahl or ʿAdī ibn Rabīʿah (see 75:3c; Q). He did not confirm the revelation and the prophethood of Muhammad. Alternatively, "confirmed" (*ṣaddaqa*) can be understood to mean that he did not give charity (*ṣaddaqa mālahū*; Q, Z).

33 This verse is similar to 83:30–32, which says of those who would mock the Prophet: *And when they passed them, they would wink at one another. And when they returned to their people, they would return blithely. And when they saw them, they said, "Truly these are astray!"* (also see 2:14; 84:13–14).

34–35 These verses mean, "That to which you are averse is now nearer to you" (JJ), or the punishment is now nearer (Iṣ). According to some commentators, vv. 34–35 could also be rendered, "So woe to you! And woe! Then woe to you! And woe!" (Ṭs, Z). This is then interpreted by some as a direct address to Abū Jahl, one of the Prophet's staunchest adversaries, meaning, " 'Woe to you' for what you will witness on the Day of Badr [when Abū Jahl was slain in battle by the Muslims]. 'And woe' to you in the grave. 'Then woe to you' on the Day of Resurrection. 'And woe' to you in the Fire" (Ṭs). It can also be taken as a more general address to all those who disbelieve and swagger in arrogance (IK).

36 This verse asks, "Do people suppose that they would be left to their own devices without being obligated to follow a revealed religion and without being held accountable?" (JJ). *Left aimless* could also be understood to mean "neglected," in which case it refers to those who doubt they will be resurrected (IK).

37–40 This is one of several passages that cite the phases of life from gestation to adulthood as proof of God's Omnipotence and especially of His ability to resurrect; see also 18:37; 22:5–6c; 23:13–16; 35:11; 40:67; 76:2; 80:18–22. It is reported that when the Prophet recited, *Is not such a one able to give life to the dead?* he would say "Yea!" (JJ) and that he counseled others to do the same.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 76

# Man

## *al-Insān*

According to most scholars, *al-Insān* was revealed in Madinah (Q), although some maintain that all but v. 24 were revealed in Madinah (Bg, Ṭs), and others maintain that vv. 23–31 were revealed in Makkah (Q, Ṭs). A minority maintain that the entire *sūrah* was revealed in Makkah (Aj, Ṭs). The *sūrah* takes its title from the mention of *man* in the first verse. It is also commonly called, after its first two words, *Hal atā,* "Has There Not Come," and is sometimes known as *al-Dahr,* "Endless Time." Another name is *al-Abrār,* "The Pious," for its discussion of the rewards due to the pious in vv. 5–22. It is reported that the Prophet would often recite this *sūrah* along with *Sūrah* 32, *al-Sajdah,* during the early morning prayer (*fajr*) on Friday (IK).

According to most Shiite and some Sunni sources, vv. 5–22 were revealed in relation to the family of the Prophet: ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. The account related with slight variation by al-Ṭabrisī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Ālūsī, and others is that ᶜAli's sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were sick, and the Prophet and a group of followers came to visit them. They suggested that ᶜAlī make a vow to God in supplicating for their recovery. So ᶜAlī, Fāṭimah, and Fizzah, their house helper, vowed that if Ḥasan and Ḥusayn recovered, they would fast for three days (according to some, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn made the same vow). After a short while both of them recovered.

Therefore, the family fasted the first day. As they were in dire need of food, ᶜAlī borrowed some barley with which they would break the fast, and Fāṭimah ground one-third of it into flour and baked some bread. When they were preparing to break their fast that evening, an indigent person came to their door and said, "Peace be upon you, the Household of Muhammad. I am a needy Muslim; please give me some food. May God bestow upon you, in kind, from Divine Sustenance." All of them gave him their share. That night, they had only water. The following day they fasted again. Then an orphan came to the door. Once more, they forfeited their bread and ate nothing, only drinking water. The third day, they fasted again. This time a captive came to their house, and they repeated their charity.

On the fourth day, ʿAlī took Ḥasan and Ḥusayn with him to see the Prophet. When the Prophet observed them trembling with hunger, he said, "It grieves me to see you in this condition." Then he stood up and walked with them. When he arrived at their home, he found Fāṭimah praying. Her stomach was sunk into her backbone, and her eyes had become sunken too. The Prophet was greatly affected. At this moment Gabriel descended and said, "O Muhammad, receive this *sūrah*. God congratulates you for having such a family." And then Gabriel recited this *sūrah*.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Has there come upon man a span of time in which he was a thing unremembered? (2) Truly We created man from a drop of mixed fluid that We may test him, and We endowed him with hearing and seeing. (3) Truly We guided him upon the way, be he grateful or ungrateful. (4) We have surely prepared for the disbelievers chains, shackles, and a blazing flame. (5) Truly the

1 In both vv. 1 and 2, *man* (*insān*) refers to Adam, all of humanity (R), or both. As translated, the verse should be taken as a rhetorical question, either indicating that there has never been a time when human beings were not known to God (Qu) or emphasizing that there was indeed a time when *man* was a thing unknown, meaning nonexistent. The verse could also be translated, "There has come upon man," which is taken by most as a reference to the time when Adam was not yet fully formed (JJ, Q, R, Ṭs) or more generally to the time when humanity had not yet come into existence (R).

2 *A drop of mixed fluid* (cf. 16:4; 18:37; 22:5; 35:11; 36:77; 40:67; 53:46; 75:37; 80:19) refers to the mixing of the male and female fluids (IK). This is one of several verses that remind human beings of the base origins of their physical nature; see also 86:6–7c. *That We may test him* could also be read as a new sentence: "We will test him" (JJ). The gifts of hearing and sight are part of the test, as they may be used for obedience or disobedience (IK); those who do not use them properly *have eyes with which they see not, and they have ears with which they hear not* (7:179; also see 7:198; 10:43). In this vein, the verse may also indicate that the physical nature, that which comes *from a drop of mixed fluid,* is created for the purpose of being tested and tried. Regarding the manner in which human beings are tested, see commentary on 29:2–3; 67:2.

3 This verse is similar to 90:8–10: *Did We not make for him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips, and guide him upon the two highways?* (R). Both passages indicate that God provides guidance for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, and that each person is thus responsible for the state of his or her own soul. The guidance provided by God could be through the human intellect (R), the messengers that God sends (JJ), or the many signs in revelation, in the created order, and within the human being; see 41:53c. *Grateful or ungrateful* indicates being either happy or wretched (IK), or a believer or a disbeliever, as in 18:29: *It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve.*

4–5 These two verses express the disparate ends of those who are grateful (v. 5) and those who are ungrateful (v. 4) for the guidance God has provided. Regarding the chains and shackles that

pious drink of a cup mixed with camphor, (6) a fountain whereof drink the servants of God, while they make it gush forth abundantly. (7) They fulfill their vows and fear a day whose evil is widespread, (8) and give food, despite loving it, to the indigent, the orphan, and the captive: (9) "We feed you only for the

will be placed upon the disbelievers in the Hereafter, see 40:70–72c.

5–22 These verses are said to have been revealed about the family of the Prophet; see the introduction to this *sūrah*.

5–6 *The pious* translates *al-abrār* (sing. *barr*), which indicates something that is broad, ample, and expansive, thus connoting beneficence, magnanimity, and associated virtues. Regarding the meaning of *the pious* and *piety* (*birr*), see 2:44c. *Birr* can also be attributed to God, as in 52:28, *Truly He is the Righteous* (*al-Barr*), *the Merciful*, and as when one says, *Allāhu yabarru biʿibādihi*, meaning, "God is righteous unto His servant." Here *cup* refers to what the cup contains, the paradisal wine (JJ); see also 37:45–47; 78:34c. In medieval times, *camphor* was used widely for sweet and savory dishes. It is also thought to have cooling properties. According to some, this is the same wine *whose seal is musk* (83:26; Ṭ). That *they make it gush forth abundantly* indicates that *the servants of God* are able to partake of it as they will and that it flows wherever they wish (IK, R, Ṭ). From one perspective, while the *pious drink of a cup mixed with camphor, the servants of God* drink directly from a *fountain* that is pure and unmixed. Interpreted as a spiritual symbol, those who drink what is *mixed* are lovers of the Divine Attributes, while the pure spring is for lovers of the Divine Essence, whose love endures no matter which Attribute of God they experience (K).

7 In the context of the occasion of revelation provided in the *sūrah* introduction, *fulfill their vows* refers to the perseverance of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his family in continuing to fulfill their vow to fast three days even in the face of great hunger. Others interpret it as a reference to fulfilling the covenant made with God before the creation of the world (see 7:172c; K) or to being obedient toward God and fulfilling the obligations of religion (Ṭ).

8 *Despite loving it* can also be interpreted to mean "out of love for Him." Together the two interpretations indicate the manner in which this world is transcended by overcoming love for it and focusing love entirely upon God. In this vein, 3:92 states, *You will never attain piety till you spend from that which you love. And whatever you spend, truly God knows it.*

Regarding the feeding of orphans, see 2:83, 177, 215; 4:2–3, 8–10, 127; 6:152. According to a *ḥadīth*, "The indigent is not one who goes among the people asking them for a mouthful or two or a date or two; rather, the indigent is one who has not enough to satisfy his needs and whose condition is not known to others, that others may give him charity, and who does not beg of people." *The captive* refers to prisoners of war (IK, Ṭ). At this time, the Muslims did not have prisons in which to keep captives from among their adversaries. The Prophet thus distributed the captives among the Muslims of Madinah and instructed them to care for the captives. As resources were scarce for many in Madinah, some of them could not feed the captives who had been entrusted to their care and some of the captives were free to seek food from other sources. This verse thus encourages charity toward those non-Muslims, even those who may have opposed the Muslims (see also 2:271; 60:8).

9 The words spoken by *the pious* in vv. 9–10 are most likely said to themselves, but can also be understood as said out loud to those whom they feed. In Arabic "face" is understood as a reference to the true nature of a thing. *The Face of God* is thus seen as a reference to the Divine Essence or to the Divine Essence, Attributes, and Qualities (K), or that aspect of the Divine Reality that is turned to creation. To perform charitable acts *for the Face of God* indicates seeking only to please God out of love for God, rather than seeking a reward for oneself (K; for a discussion of the *Face of God*, see 28:88c; 55:26–27c). Others, however, maintain that there is a juxtaposition in these verses, indicating that they do seek recompense from God, but not from anyone other than God (IK), as in 2:272: *Whatever good you spend, it is for yourselves,*

Face of God. We desire from you no recompense or thanks. (10) Truly we fear from our Lord a grim, calamitous day." (11) So God has shielded them from the evil of that Day, bestowed upon them radiance and joy, (12) and rewarded them, for having been patient, with a Garden and with silk. (13) Therein they recline upon couches, seeing neither sun nor bitter cold. (14) Its shade shall be close above them, and its clusters shall be made to hang low. (15) And vessels of silver and goblets of crystal are brought round for them— (16) silvern crystal that they have measured out with due measure. (17) Therein they are given to drink of a cup mixed with ginger, (18) a spring therein named Salsabīl.

*when you spend only seeking the Face of God* (see also 30:38–39).

10 *Grim* translates *ʿabūs,* which literally means "frowning," and is understood to mean that the severity of this day causes the disbelievers to frown (Āl, Q). *Calamitous* translates *qamṭarīr,* which is interpreted to mean "long" (Āl, Q) and is also understood by many to indicate a more severe state of frowning than *ʿabūs* or to indicate that it enfolds evil upon evil (Āl).

11 According to some, *radiance* is what appears on the faces of the pious, while *joy* is in their hearts, as in 80:38–39: *Faces that Day shall be shining, radiant, laughing, joyous* (IK).

12 That human beings are rewarded for patience and constancy is a central Quranic theme. In this life, God provides *signs for all who are patient, thankful* (31:31; 34:19; 42:33) and *God is with the patient* (2:153, 249; 8:46), while in the Hereafter *those who are patient shall be paid their reward in full without reckoning* (39:10) and *none shall receive it save the patient* (28:80); see also 2:177; 3:120, 125; 11:11, 49, 115; 12:90; 13:22; 16:96; 29:59; 41:34–35. It is also reported that the angels greet the inhabitants of the Garden saying, *Peace be upon you because you were patient* (13:24; see also 25:75; 28:54).

13 *Bitter cold* translates *zamharīr,* which is understood to mean a cold icy wind and can also mean "the moon," thus meaning that the *Garden* will be bright without any sun or moon (JJ). In either understanding, there is an allusion to the temperate state of Paradise, where extremes are not felt on either end, as opposed to Hell, where there is both bitter cold and scorching heat. When *zamharīr* is understood as the moon, there is also an allusion to an eternal twilight or shade, in which everything radiates with a subtle beauty like that just after sunset or just before sunrise. Many also understand *zamharīr* to be a special state where sinful descendants of the Prophet, who are vouchsafed to be saved from the fires of Hell, will go in the Hereafter.

14 For the connotations of the Quranic use of *shade,* see 56:30c. Regarding the *clusters* of the Garden (see also 55:54; 69:23), it is reported that when the Prophet was upon his deathbed, he said to his Companions, "Verily, I saw the Garden and came upon a cluster of grapes. Had I taken it, you would have eaten of it so long as the world remained."

15–16 The goblets are made of silver that is transparent like crystal (JJ). *Measured out with due measure* (cf. 25:2) indicates that individuals will have measured for them exactly what each requires, neither more nor less (JJ).

17 *Ginger,* which translates *zanjabīl,* can be taken as a reference to the tuber that was considered a delicacy by the Arabs (Bḍ) and was used as both a medicine and a spice, though it is said that the ginger of Paradise does not resemble that of this world (Sh). *Zanjabīl* can also be understood as a proper name for one of the springs of Paradise from which drink *those brought nigh* (see 83:25–28; Sh).

18 According to some, in this context *named* means "described" (Ṭ). The precise meaning of *Salsabīl* is debated. While some understand it as a proper name, others take it to mean that the water flows well (Iṣ, Ṭ) or is easy to swallow and

(19) Immortal youths wait upon them; when thou seest them, thou wouldst think them scattered pearls. (20) And when thou lookest thither, thou wilt see bliss and a great kingdom. (21) Upon them are garments of fine green silk and rich brocade. They are adorned with silvern bracelets, and their Lord shall give them to drink of a drink most pure. (22) Truly this is a reward for you, and your endeavoring is held in gratitude. (23) Truly We have sent down the Quran upon thee as a revelation. (24) So be patient with thy Lord's judgment and obey neither sinner nor disbeliever among them. (25) And invoke the Name of thy Lord morning and evening, (26) prostrate unto Him during the night, and glorify

refreshing for the throat (K). Still others say that *Salsabīl* is a contraction of *sal* ("seek" or "request") and *sabīl* ("a way"), thus meaning "seek a way [to the Garden]" (Iṣ, R).

19 *Immortal* translates *mukhalladūn,* which can also mean "those who wear earrings"; see also 56:17. The youths will appear as *scattered pearls* because of their beauty and nobility (Ṭ).

20 *A great kingdom* is said to indicate one that does not cease to exist (Ṭs).

21 Regarding the *silk* and *brocade* (cf. 44:53) that adorn the inhabitants of Paradise, see 18:31c. Whereas the paradisal beverages mentioned in vv. 15–18 are served by *immortal youths,* here *their Lord shall give them to drink* directly with no intermediary. *Most pure* translates *ṭahūr,* an emphatic form employed to emphasize the contrast between the wine of this world and the wine of the Hereafter. Invoking another perspective, Maybudī writes: "Whoever has no wine of love today will not have the *drink most pure* tomorrow. Today they swallow the wine of love from the cup of gnosis; tomorrow they drink the *drink most pure* in the presence of the Forgiving King—today the wine of love in the paradise of gnosis, tomorrow the *drink most pure* in the paradise of Contentment (*riḍwān*)."

*Ṭahūr* can also be taken as an active participle, meaning "purifying." Thus some say it is a drink through which God removes vice from the heart (Sh). It is reported that the sixth Shiite Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, said of this drink, "It purifies them of all that is other than God" (Ṭs).

22 *This* refers to the *drink most pure* (v. 21), or to all of the rewards mentioned in the preceding verses, or to the bliss that derives from these rewards. *Endeavoring* refers to all the good deeds that one has done; that it is *held in gratitude* indicates that such deeds have been accepted by God, one of Whose Attributes is *Thankful* (see 2:158; 4:147; 35:30, 34; 42:23; IK, Sh, Ṭs).

23 This verse is understood as an indication of the gradual manner in which God revealed the Quran, that is, in periodic installments rather than all at once (JJ, Ṭs). Regarding the nature of the revelation and its stages, see the essay "The Islamic View of the Quran."

24 This verse is taken as counsel to the Prophet to be patient in the face of the opposition from ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah and al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, two leaders of the Quraysh, both of whom said to the Prophet, "Abandon this affair of yours" (JJ, Ṭs). *Sinner* and *disbeliever* can thus be understood both as a specific reference to these two men and as a more general reference to all sinners and disbelievers (JJ).

25–26 These verses enjoin mentioning the Name of God during the daily prayers (Aj, JJ, Ṭs) or remembering God at every moment (Aj). In the context of the previous verse, they can be understood as counsel not to be overly concerned with the tribulations of this world, but to remember God always, as in 15:97–98: *And certainly We know that thy breast is straitened because of what they say. So hymn the praise of thy Lord, and be among those who prostrate* (Aj). In this latter sense, many Sufis take v. 25 as an injunction to invoke the Supreme Divine Name, *Allāh* (Aj). *Glorify Him by night at length* enjoins the supererogatory practice of night vigil and prayer. For other

Him by night at length. (27) Truly they love the ephemeral and put a weighty day behind them. (28) We created them and made firm their frames; and whensoever We will, We shall exchange them for others like them. (29) Truly this is a reminder; so let him who will, take a way unto his Lord. (30) And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing, Wise. (31) He causes whomsoever He will to enter into His Mercy. And as for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment.

references to night vigil, see 11:114; 20:130; 21:20; 25:63–64; 50:40; 52:49; 73:2, 6, 20. Regarding its significance and historical development, see 73:1–2c; 73:20c.

27 As with its near analog, 75:20–21, this verse indicates the manner in which preoccupation with the things of this world distracts one from the Hereafter (IK), and from the remembrance of God, as in 17:18–19: *Whosoever would desire the ephemeral, We hasten for him therein whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire. Then We appointed Hell for him, wherein he shall burn, blameworthy, banished. And whosoever desires the Hereafter, and endeavors for it earnestly, and is a believer, it is they whose efforts shall be appreciated.*

28 This verse indicates either that God can replace any group of people with another (IK, R, Ṭs), as in 6:133, *If He will, He can remove you, and in your place appoint whomsoever He will to succeed you,* or that God can resurrect people in the Hereafter; see also 4:133; 14:19–20; 17:49–51; 35:16–17; 56:61.

29–30 These verses and a closely related passage in 81:28–29 present a notable contrast between human free will and Divine predeterminism. On the one hand, *Let him who will, take a way unto his Lord* could be understood to indicate that human beings are free to decide between right and wrong and to choose their own way (see also 18:29). Yet on the other hand, *You do not will but that God wills* (or "You do not will except as God wills") could be understood to indicate that the final determination is in God's Hands alone. A moderate position holds that there is neither absolute free will nor absolute determinism. God has willed that human beings have the ability to will, but could remove it any moment. God wills that human beings will, but does not necessarily determine the content of what they will, meaning that human beings have a limited range of freedom willed by God and that they are ultimately responsible for their own acts; for the extensive debates regarding the relationship between free will and determinism, see 54:49c.

29 Cf. 73:19. *This* can refer to this *sūrah* (Āl, IK, JJ, Ṭs), this particular group of verses (Āl), or the entire Quran, in which case it refers to the "message" (*risālah;* Ṭs). See 73:19c.

30 In other schools of recitation, *you do not will* is read "they do not will."

31 Here *His Mercy* is interpreted by many as a reference to the Garden (Ṭs), while others understand it to mean that God relents unto human beings so that they may die in a state of repentance, forgives their sins, and admits them to the Garden (Ṭ). In contrast, *the wrongdoers* are understood to be those who die without repenting (Ṭ). This verse can be seen as a continuation of the message in v. 3, in which God is said to have guided people *upon the way,* after which they may choose to be either grateful or ungrateful; God allows those who are grateful to *enter into His Mercy* and *has prepared . . . a painful punishment* for those who are ungrateful.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 77

# Those Sent Forth

## *al-Mursalāt*

*Al-Mursalāt* is an early Makkan *sūrah,* although some early commentators, such as Ibn ᶜAbbās and Qatādah, maintain that v. 48 is Madinan (Āl, Q). It takes its name from the mention of *those sent forth* in the first verse and is also known as *al-ᶜUrf* after the second word in the first verse, *ᶜurfan* (Āl), which can mean *in succession.* According to a *ḥadīth:* "While we were with the Messenger of God in a cave, the *sūrah By those sent forth* was revealed to him, and we received it directly from his mouth as soon as he had received the revelation. Suddenly a snake came out, and the Messenger of God said, 'Get it and kill it!' We ran to kill it, but it outstripped us. The Messenger of God said, 'It has escaped your evil, as you too have escaped its evil'" (Āl, Q).

After a series of oaths and reminders of the Last Day (vv. 1–6) and descriptions of its signs (vv. 8–14) is the first appearance of the phrase *Woe that Day to the deniers!* (v. 15), which thereafter serves as a refrain repeated ten times in the *sūrah.* The *sūrah* then affirms that the guilty of all generations will meet the same end (vv. 16–19) and points to the stages of gestation as a sign of God's Power (vv. 20–24), followed by a reference to the created order as a sign of God's Power and Mercy (vv. 25–28). It then addresses the disbelievers, ordering them toward that which they deny and warning them of the punishments such denial entails (vv. 29–40). This is subsequently contrasted to the rewards of *the reverent* and *the virtuous* (vv. 41–45). The *sūrah* concludes with a final address to the disbelievers and criticism of their failure to pray and to believe (vv. 46–50).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By those sent forth in succession! (2) By the storming tempests! (3) By the spreaders spreading! (4) By the discerners discerning! (5) And by those who bring forth the Reminder, (6) to excuse or to warn, (7) surely what you are promised will befall. (8) So when the stars are blotted out, (9) and when the sky is riven asunder, (10) when the mountains are scattered, (11) and when the messengers are slated, (12) for what day is it appointed? (13) For the Day of

1–5 Many interpret these first five verses as references to different types of angels (Āl, IK, Q), while al-Ṭabarī allows that v. 1 may refer to both the wind and the angels (Ṭ). Vv. 1–5 can also be understood as allusions to forms of knowledge and inspiration that God sends into the hearts of human beings.

1 In accord with the interpretation of vv. 2–3 as references to storms and violent winds, *those sent forth* is understood by many as a reference to the winds following one another in succession (JJ, Q, Ṭ), but it may also refer to the prophets and messengers who follow one another *in succession* (IK, Q).

2 *Storming tempests* means the wind (Ṭ).

3 *Spreaders* refers to the wind (IK, JJ, Ṭ), the rain (IK, Ṭ), or the angels who spread God's Blessings and revelations (Āl, Ṭ) or who spread their wings (Aj). Al-Ṭabarī allows that the verse does not specify one of these to the exclusion of others, as the wind spreads the clouds, the rain spreads over the earth, and the angels spread God's revealed books.

4 The *discerners* are the angels, who discriminate between truth and falsehood (Q, Ṭ), and between what is lawful and what is unlawful (Q), or the Quran, which does the same (JJ, Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī maintains that this verse can refer simultaneously to the angels, the Quran, and anything that distinguishes between truth and falsehood.

5 This verse refers to the angels who descend with the revelation, casting it upon the prophets and messengers in various human collectivities (JJ, Ṭ).

6 The revelation that the angels bring from God to creation serves to both *excuse,* here meaning provide absolution and forgiveness, and *warn* (IK, Ṭ).

7 This is the answer to the oaths made in vv. 1–6. When the images in vv. 1–6 are taken as references to angels who bring various messages, the present verse indicates that through these angels human beings have been provided a clear message about what will befall them on the Day of Judgment and in the Hereafter (Ṭ). For similar verses, see 6:134; 51:5.

8–9 Theses verses refer to the dissolution of the heavens at the end of time. The light of the stars fades (see also 81:2; 82:2), and *the sky* is *rent asunder* (73:18) and *opened as if it were gates* (78:19; see also 70:8; 84:1).

10 Elsewhere it is said that the Day of Judgment is a day when the mountains are made like *carded wool* (70:9; 101:5) or *heaps of shifting sand* (73:14); for other references to mountains in the Quran's apocalyptic descriptions, see 18:47; 19:90; 20:105–6; 27:88; 52:10; 56:5–6; 69:14; 78:20; 81:3.

11–12 *Slated* translates *uqqitat,* here indicating that the messengers are gathered together at an appointed moment, understood by most to be the Day of Resurrection (IK, Ṭ, Z). *Uqqitat* can also mean "postponed" (IK, Ṭ, Z), indicating the manner in which God does not punish humanity immediately, but grants them respite until an appointed time; see 3:178; 7:183–84; 13:32; 15:37–38; 22:44. Others understand *uqqitat* to mean "promised" (IK, Ṭ); in this vein, it is related to 39:69, which says that on the Day of

Division. (14) And what shall apprise thee of the Day of Division? (15) Woe that Day to the deniers! (16) Did We not destroy those of old, (17) then make those of later times follow them? (18) Thus do We deal with the guilty. (19) Woe that Day to the deniers! (20) Did We not create you from a base fluid, (21) then lodge it in a secure dwelling place (22) for a known measure? (23) Thus do We determine; what excellent determiners! (24) Woe that Day to the deniers! (25) Did We not make the earth a receptacle (26) for the living and the dead, (27) and place therein firm, soaring mountains and give you sweet water to drink? (28) Woe that Day to the deniers! (29) Away to that which you used to deny! (30) Away to a threefold shadow (31) that provides no shade, nor avails against

Judgment *the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forth* to witness for or against humanity. *For what day is it appointed?* can also be read "Until what day is it postponed?" In both senses it is a rhetorical question that is answered in the following verse.

13–14 *The Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:38; 78:17; see also 10:28; 30:14) is another name for the Day of Judgment, indicating the manner in which the believers and the disbelievers will be definitively divided from one another (Z) and that the division between true and false, good and evil, light and dark will be made clear.

15 This is the first occurrence of a refrain that is repeated ten times in this *sūrah*. Each instance can be taken as a repetition for emphasis in reference to those who deny the Resurrection (Ṭ) or those who deny both the Resurrection and God. The way the warning builds through repetition increases the sense of danger and urgency. Alternately, each can be viewed in context as a reference to one of the many things that disbelievers may deny (Q on v. 49).

16–19 *Those of old* refers to the disbelievers among peoples of earlier ages from the time of Adam until that of Muhammad (Q, Sh). Here *the guilty* refers to the disbelievers among the Quraysh (Q) or to all who are guilty (N, Sh). According to some, the first instance of *Woe that Day to the deniers!* (v. 15) warns of the punishment in the Hereafter, while the second instance (v. 19) warns of the punishment in this world (Sh).

20–24 The creation of the human being from *a base fluid* (cf. 32:8) is cited in several verses to remind people of their humble origins and as testimony to God's creative power and ability to resurrect human beings in the Hereafter; see commentary on 32:7–11. The *secure dwelling place* is a reference to the womb (IK, Ṭ), while *a known measure* refers to the phases of gestation outlined in 22:5 and 23:14. An argument implied here and elsewhere is that those who do not recognize the nature of their own creation deny God and are thus *a manifest adversary* (16:4; 36:77) to God and to themselves. This third occurrence of *Woe that Day* in v. 24 can be read in connection with v. 23 and thus as a warning regarding the manner in which God determines (Sh).

25–26 These verses are understood to be a reference to the earth as a place of shelter for the living and as a container for the bodies of the dead. Thus al-Shaʿbī is reported to have said, "Its interior is for your dead, and its surface is for your living" (IK).

27 In this context, the reference to both mountains and sweet water is understood to mean that God's creation of these is as wondrous as the Resurrection, were one to reflect (Q, Sh).

28 This fourth occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain can be seen as a warning to those who fail to be thankful for the blessings mentioned in vv. 25–27.

29–31 These verses can be understood as an address to the disbelievers by God or the angels

the flame. (32) Indeed, it throws up sparks like massive tree trunks, (33) as though they were yellow camels. (34) Woe that Day to the deniers! (35) That is the Day on which they speak not; (36) nor is permission granted them, that they might offer excuses. (37) Woe that Day to the deniers! (38) This is the Day of Division: "We have gathered you and those of old." (39) So if you have a scheme, then scheme against Me! (40) Woe that Day to the deniers! (41) Truly

in the Hereafter, instructing the disbelievers to enter the punishment of the Fire, which they had denied (Sh). The *threefold shadow* refers to the smoke from the Fire of Hell. As the Quranic use of shade implies protection from heat and a comfortable state (see 56:30c), this passage implies that, although a shadow would seem to provide "shade," this shadow will neither protect them nor comfort them in the Hereafter.

32–34 *Massive tree trunks* translates *qaṣr,* which can also mean, "huge castle." In either translation, it is implied that the flames are larger than those anyone could expect to see in this life. *Yellow camels* can be understood to mean that they are large and long as well as yellow (Z). But this particular usage can also be taken as a reference to "dark camels," who are called *yellow* (*ṣufr*), because there is a touch of yellow in their blackish hair (JJ, Sh). It is thus understood to mean that the Fire of Hell is pitch-black (Sh). In this way it has none of the positive properties associated with fire in this world. This fifth occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain in v. 34 can be seen more specifically as a reference to those who deny such attributes of the Fire (Sh).

35 On that day, people will not be asked about their deeds, since they will have already been recorded (17:71; 18:49; 50:17–18; 69:19–29; 82:11–12). People will not be given the opportunity to testify for themselves. Rather, *on that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn* (36:65); and *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do* (41:20).

36 As translated, this verse is understood to mean that the deniers are not permitted to speak, and when they seek to offer excuses, they admit instead their guilt (see 67:11). The second part of this verse could also be rendered "and they offer no excuses." In this second reading, the negation that applies to the first part of the verse, *nor is permission granted them* (*lā yu'dhanu lahum*) is read as applying to the second part as well, "they offer no excuses" (*ya'tadhirūn;* Q). From one perspective, people are unable to offer excuses because the reality of their deeds is completely manifest.

37 This sixth occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain can be taken as another reference to those who deny this Day (N).

38 For *the Day of Division,* see 77:13–14c. This verse refers to God's gathering every generation of humanity together on a single open and barren plain for the Day of Judgment (see 18:47c; 20:106; 79:14c).

39 This is one of several verses intended to show the folly of the disbelievers by challenging them to challenge God or to see what happens when they attempt to operate outside of the limits that God has established, as in 22:15: *Whosoever thinks that God will not help him in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to Heaven. Then let him sever it and see if his scheming removes that which enrages* (see also 55:33).

40 This seventh occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain can be seen as another reference to those who deny the Resurrection (N) or, in connection with the previous verse, as a reference to those who deny God's Power and thus seek to scheme against Him.

41 This verse is similar to 15:45. For the connotations of the Quranic use of *shade,* see 56:30c. *Springs* can be seen as a reference to the common motif that God will make the believers *enter Gardens with rivers running below* (3:195; 4:13, 57, 122; 5:12) and to the various types of springs and drinks mentioned in other *sūrahs* (e.g., 76:5–6, 17–18; 83:25–28; 88:12).

the reverent shall be amid shade and springs, (42) and fruits such as they desire. (43) "Eat and drink in enjoyment for that which you used to do." (44) Thus do We recompense the virtuous. (45) Woe that Day to the deniers! (46) "Eat and enjoy yourselves a little; truly you are guilty." (47) Woe that Day to the deniers! (48) And when it is said unto them, "Bow!" they bow not. (49) Woe that Day to the deniers! (50) So in what discourse after this will they believe?

42 Cf. 52:22; 56:21. That the fruits of the Garden are available *such as they desire* indicates that they are available whenever believers wish, in contrast to this world where the availability of food and drink is determined by external circumstances (JJ). Several other verses also refer to the fruits of Paradise that will always be at the disposal of the believers (e.g., 37:42; 38:61; 43:73); see 36:57c.

43 See commentary on the identical verse in 52:19.

44 Cf. 6:84; 12:22; 28:14; 37:80, 105, 110, 121, 131. See 29:69c; 37:80c.

45 In relation to the previous verse, this eighth occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain could be seen as a reference to those who fall into despair (Sh), as such despair indicates denial of the manifold reward of good deeds.

46 These words, which God addresses to the disbelievers, are ironic. They allude to the respite that God grants the disbelievers, though they think it good, as they are able to *enjoy . . . a little;* in fact, it lets them dig a deeper hole for themselves, as in 31:24: *We grant them enjoyment a little, then We compel them toward a grave punishment;* see also 3:178; 10:69–70; 15:3; 16:55; 26:205–7; 29:66; 30:34c.

47 This ninth occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain can be seen as a repetition of the previous occurrence (Sh) or as an indication that those who *enjoy . . . a little* with no thought to the consequences of their actions in effect deny that all they receive is from God.

48–49 The command to *bow* is understood as a command to perform the prayer, as bowing is a part of the canonical prayer. The Prophet is reported to have said, "There is no good in a religion that has no bowing and no prostration" (Āl, Q, Sh). V. 48 is said to have been revealed regarding some disbelievers who protested that the positions required for prayer were an insult (Q). Others say that this injunction refers to those who are called to prostrate on the Day of Judgment, but are not able to do so (Q, Sh; see 36:8c; 68:42c; 68:43c). In this vein, the tenth and final occurrence of the *sūrah*'s refrain in v. 49 would appear to indicate those who deny the commands and prohibitions of God (N, Sh), since the command to pray is considered foremost among the actions enjoined by God.

50 This verse asks, "So in what discourse other than this Quran will they believe?" It is similar to 45:6: *These are the signs of God that We recite unto thee in truth. So in what discourse after God and His signs do they believe?* Both verses can be understood to mean, "If they will not believe in revelation, then in what will they believe?" implying that those who reject revelation do not believe in anything real. Vv. 48 and 50 can be viewed as complementary; the first criticizes the disbelievers for failing to act in accord with the revelation, and the second, for failing to believe and understand in accord with the revelation.

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# 78

# The Tiding

## *al-Naba'*

*Al-Naba'*, a late Makkan *sūrah,* takes its name from the mention of *the Great Tiding* (*al-naba' al-ʿaẓīm*) in the second verse, which is understood by most as a reference to the Quran itself, or to the Day of Resurrection. It is also known as *al-Muʿṣirāt,* "The Rain Clouds," and as *al-Tasā'ul,* "The Questioning of One Another" (Āl). The first title comes from v. 14, and the second refers to the theme of the first verses, in which the disbelievers are said to question one another regarding the Resurrection or the revelation of the Quran or both. According to Ibn ʿAjībah, insofar as *the Great Tiding* refers to the Resurrection, this *sūrah* is connected to the previous *sūrah*'s discussion of the *Day of Division* (77:13–14, 38), which is also a reference to the Day of Resurrection. Insofar as *the Great Tiding* refers to the Quran, this *sūrah* follows directly upon the last verse of the previous *sūrah* (Aj).

This *sūrah* can be seen as comprising three sections. Vv. 1–5 discuss the nature of those who do not believe in certain aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's message. Given the content of the *sūrah,* it is most likely a reference to those who do not believe in the Resurrection. Rather than argue against their disbelief, vv. 6–16 point to all of those things that God has created as signs that should make the truth evident to those with intellects. Vv. 17–40 then discuss the advent of the Resurrection, referred to here as the *Day of Division* and as the *Moment Appointed,* and then the different ways in which the return to God will be experienced by believers and disbelievers when they are indeed divided.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) About what do they question one another? (2) About the Great Tiding, (3) regarding which they differ. (4) Nay, but they will know! (5) Then indeed they will know! (6) Did We not make the earth a resting place, (7) and the mountains stakes, (8) and create you in pairs, (9) and make your sleep repose,

1 *They* is interpreted to mean the Prophet's tribe, the Quraysh (Q, R, Ṭ), most of whose leaders rejected Muhammad and the Quran at the time of the revelation of this verse, though this particular reference is not understood to limit the more general implications of the *sūrah*.

2 *The Great Tiding* (*al-nabaʾ al-ʿaẓīm;* cf. 38:67) refers to the Resurrection; the Quran itself (Q, Ṭ), called the *Mighty Quran* (*al-qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm;* 15:87); or the Prophet Muhammad (R). The content of the *sūrah* best supports the reference to the Resurrection in general or to the Day of Resurrection, which is also referred to as *a tremendous day* (*yawm ʿāẓīm*) when considered in relation to the punishment received by disbelievers (see, e.g., 6:15; 19:37; 26:189; 83:5).

3 This verse is understood as an allusion to the distinction between two parties: those who accept and confirm the Quran and the Prophet and those who reject and deny them (Ṭ). Ashʿarite theologians, who oppose a metaphorical understanding of Resurrection, have viewed it as an allusion to the different degrees and modes of rejection and denial (Qu, R), since some believe in certain aspects of the message but not in others, and some believe in a spiritual resurrection but not in a bodily one.

4–5 *Nay,* translating the emphatic particle *kallā*, could alternately be rendered "truly" or "indeed," as it is in v. 5. If the two verses are both addressed to the disbelievers, the repetition can be seen as emphasis; they can also be viewed as addressed to two groups: the first to the disbelievers, the second to the believers (Q, R, Ṭ). When both are viewed as an address to disbelievers, v. 4 can be seen as a reference to knowing the truth of the Resurrection and v. 5 to knowing the truth of the punishment; or v. 4 can be seen as a reference to the punishment in this world and v. 5 to the punishment in the Hereafter (R). If addressed to the two groups, vv. 21–30 would correspond to what the disbelievers *will know,* and vv. 31–36 to what the believers *will know.*

6 Like 22:2 and 27:61, this verse indicates both that God has made all that is upon the earth subservient to human beings (see, e.g., 22:65; 31:20) and that He has placed guidance upon the earth, as in 43:10: *He it is Who made the earth a cradle for you and made paths for you therein, that haply you may be guided.*

7 Several verses refer to God's having made the mountains firm; see 21:30–31c. The mention of mountains here is also connected to the *resting place* in v. 6, for God *has made places of refuge for you in the mountains* (16:81) and in other verses mountains are referred to as places with dwellings and houses (see 7:74; 15:82; 26:149).

8 *Pairs* (*azwāj*) could be a reference to the male and female, as in 53:45: *And that He creates the two* (*zawjayn*)*—male and female,* which are said to be "mates" (*azwāj*) created *from a single soul* (4:1; 7:189; 39:6). In this sense, this verse follows upon v. 6, for human beings find rest and repose in their mates, as in 30:21: *And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you* (see also 7:189). The verse can also be seen as a reference to the creation of all things in pairs, as in 51:49, *And of all things We created pairs, that haply you may remember,* which is understood by some as a reference to the manner in which human beings can be said to know things through their opposites.

9 Sleep provides rest for the body and a break from external activity. Some relate this verse to 6:60, *He it is Who takes your souls by night,* in which the body is as if dead; for sleep as "a minor

(10) and make the night a garment, (11) and the day for livelihood? (12) And [did We not] build above you seven firmaments, (13) and make a radiant lamp, (14) and send down water pouring from the rain clouds, (15) that We might produce grain and plants thereby, (16) and luxuriant gardens? (17) Truly the Day of Division is a Moment Appointed, (18) a day when the trumpet is blown

death," see 6:60c; 39:42; and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

10 This verse can be seen as a continuation of v. 9, as *He it is Who made the night for you, that you might rest therein* (10:67), and *He has made the night for repose* (6:96). On the one hand, night as a *garment* implies that it is a protection and comfort. On the other hand, night allows the true nature of a person to manifest, as the cover of night facilitates the actions of those who incline toward wrongdoing. It also provides a stillness that facilitates devotion and vigil, as in 73:6: *Truly the vigil of the night is firmest in tread and most upright for speech*; for the importance of night vigil, see 11:114; 17:79; 20:130; 21:20; 25:63–64; 50:40; 52:49; 73:2, 6, 20; 76:26; 73:1–2c; 73:20c. In his *Makkan Openings* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*), Ibn ʿArabī mentions that the night is a cloak for "the people of the night" (*aṣḥāb al-layl*), because it covers them from others and creates a spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) for them.

11 When v. 9 is viewed in relation to 6:60, this verse can be viewed in relation to another phrase in 6:60, *by day He resurrects you*. Together vv. 9–11 indicate the cycles of rest and activity essential to the functioning of the created order. The alternation of night and day is referred to as an important sign in over two dozen verses; e.g., 24:44: *God alternates the night and the day. Truly in that is a lesson for those possessed of sight;* for vv. 9–11, cf. 25:47. For other verses that contrast night and day, see 27:86; 28:73; 40:61.

12 *Seven firmaments* is a reference to the *seven heavens* (2:29; 17:44; 23:17; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15). *Firmaments* translates *shidād*, which also means "strong, solid, and firm," thus implying that the heavens have no fissure and are not subject to the vicissitudes of this world (R, Ṭ). For the significance of the seven heavens, see 23:17c.

13 For v. 12–13, cf. 71:16. *Radiant lamp* is understood by most as a reference to the sun (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), although some interpret it as a reference to the Prophet Muhammad, as in 33:45–46, where he is said to have been sent *as a luminous lamp* (see also 25:61).

14 *Rain clouds,* translating *muʿṣirāt,* is read by some as "the winds" that bring the rain clouds (Q, R, Ṭ). A small minority read it as a reference to "the heavens" (Ṭ).

15–16 God remains the primary cause for all things. Therefore, it is not the rain that produces grain, plants and gardens, as some are inclined to believe; rather, it is God Himself who does so by means of rain, since God *made every living thing from water* (21:30; see also 24:25; 25:54).

17 Cf. 44:40. The Day of Resurrection is referred to here and elsewhere (e.g., 44:40; 77:13–14; 77:38) as *the Day of Division,* because it provides the ultimate distinction between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, light and dark. It is *a Moment Appointed* because it is guaranteed, and *God will not fail the tryst* (3:9; 13:31; 39:20). For *the Day of Division,* see 77:13–14; 77:38.

18 In 39:68 the Archangel Seraphiel is said to blow the trumpet twice: at the first blast, all of creation will swoon (see 69:13); at the second, all souls will rise from their graves and be gathered before God (see 50:20–21; 64:9). This verse may refer to the fact that the trumpet is blown twice or to the second blowing of the trumpet (see 39:68c). *Throngs* (*afwāj*) is taken by some to indicate that human communities will come in "groups" (*afwāj*), with each community gathered behind its prophet (see 17:71c). After all souls are gathered, they will be divided according to those who must be reckoned for their bad deeds and those who are rewarded for their good deeds. When asked about the *afwāj*, the Prophet said that on the Day of Resurrection his community

and you come forth in throngs, (19) and the sky is opened as if it were gates, (20) and the mountains are set in motion as if they were a mirage. (21) Truly Hell lies in ambush, (22) a place unto which the rebellious return (23) to tarry therein for ages. (24) They taste therein neither coolness nor drink, (25) save boiling liquid and a cold, murky fluid, (26) a fitting recompense. (27) Truly they anticipated not a reckoning, (28) and denied Our signs with utter denial.

(*ummah*) would be resurrected in ten *afwāj*, which he then enumerated.

19 Cf. 54:11: *So We opened the gates of the sky with pouring water.* The word translated *sky* and *Heaven* in these two verses is the same, *samā'*. Most interpret v. 19 as an allusion to the descent of the angels (IK, Q), as in 25:25, where it is referred to as *the Day when the sky is split open with clouds and the angels are sent down.* For a more extensive discussion of the opening of the *sky* or *Heaven,* see 39:73c.

20 Cf. 81:3. Several verses indicate that the mountains will be dispatched on the Day of Judgment, as in 27:88: *And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away like clouds—the work of God, Who perfects all things;* see also 18:47; 70:8–9; 73:14; 101:5.

21–22 Hell is the place to which those who rebel against the truth are sent. It will come upon them like an *ambush* when they die, because they had been oblivious to the truth in this world.

23 *For ages* (*aḥqāban*) indicates periods of time. The vast majority of commentators maintain that it indicates Hell will be eternal, with one period following after another endlessly. Others say it indicates that, although Hell is "endless" in relation to our understanding of time; it is of limited duration, limited "ages," in the absolute sense. The relativity of Hell in relation to the Absolute is alluded to in a famous *ḥadīth,* "On the Day of Judgment, those who deserve the Garden will enter the Garden, and those who deserve the Fire, the Fire. Thereupon God will say, 'Take out everyone in whose heart there was as much faith as a grain of a mustard seed' [see 4:40c]. Then they will be taken out already blackened and will be cast into the River of Life. Then they will sprout as an herb sprouts by the side of a stream. Do you not see how it comes out yellow and budding?"

24–25 *Therein* can be taken as a reference to *ages* or to Hell. The former implies that there will be *ages* in which they drink of nothing other than *boiling liquid* (*ḥamīm*) and *cold, murky fluid* (*ghassāq*), followed by *ages* in which they drink of other beverages or experience other forms of punishment. The second implies that they will drink of these forever. The *boiling liquid* (cf. 6:70; 10:4; 22:19; 37:67; 38:57; 40:72; 44:46, 48; 47:15; 56:42, 54; 88:5) indicates something that has reached its maximum temperature, but can also indicate severe, painful cold. The *cold, murky fluid* (cf. 10:4; 38:57) is said to be an unbearably cold liquid with an intolerable stench gathered from the pus, sweat, tears, and wounds of the people of Hell (IK). This verse and similar verses provide an interesting window onto the nature of Hell—it is characterized not just by fire and heat but by extremes at both ends of the spectrum of temperature and all of the tension such extremes entail, whereas the Garden is described as a place of perfect tranquility. Although in the garden there are all the wine, fruits, and pure companions one could want, there is no indulgence. Peace and joy lie in moderation; torture lies in the extremes.

26 It is a *fitting recompense* in that it is proportionate to the offense committed, for *the recompense of an evil is an evil like unto it* (42:40) and *God wrongs not His servants* (3:182; see also 10:44; 22:10).

27 As the disbelievers did not believe in the Resurrection and Divine Judgment, they did not anticipate the reckoning and did not fear it or seek to avoid it by accounting for their own actions (Q). Their recompense is therefore of their own doing, since it is they who *have wronged themselves* (3:117; 10:44; 16:118).

28 *Our signs* indicates all aspects of revelation. *With utter denial,* translating *kadhdhāb,*

(29) And everything have We recorded in a book. (30) So taste! For We shall not increase you in aught but punishment! (31) Truly the reverent shall have a place of triumph, (32) gardens and vineyards, (33) buxom maidens of like age, (34) and an overflowing cup. (35) They hear therein neither idle talk nor lying— (36) a recompense from thy Lord, a gift abounding— (37) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and whatsoever is between them, the Compassionate, Whom they have no power to address. (38) That Day the Spirit and

could also be rendered "as deniers" if read as *kudhdhāb* (Q, R, Z); or *kudhdhāb* could be read in the singular as a name of emphasis and thus rendered "as does a great denier."

29 This verse refers to the book in which all deeds are recorded by angels (see 86:4; commentary on 43:80; 50:17–18; 82:10–12) or to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Q). Since the disbelievers' transgressions are as described in vv. 27–28 and since God has recorded everything, theirs is *a fitting recompense* (v. 26); cf. 36:12. *In a book,* translating *kitāban,* could also be rendered "in writing" (Q, Ṭs).

30 *So taste* means, "*Taste the punishment* [see 3:106, 181; 4:56; 6:30; 7:39; 8:35, 50; 10:52; 22:22; 32:14, 20; 34:42; 46:34] that you have brought upon yourselves through your disbelief and your actions." According to a *ḥadīth,* "This verse is the most severe [verse] against the people of the Fire" (IK, R, Z). See also 17:97, which says of the punishment, *Every time it abates, We shall increase for them a blazing flame;* and 4:56, which promises that *as often as their skins are consumed, We shall replace them with other skins, that they may taste the punishment.*

31 For the Quranic understanding of *the reverent,* see 2:2c. Attaining "the Garden" is referred to as *the great triumph* in over a dozen verses; for the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

32 *Gardens* will surround believers on all sides.

33 Maidens with full breasts represent those who will be fully mature, but whose bodies will not suffer the vicissitudes of time. According to some commentaries, all men and women of Paradise will be thirty-three years old. For *of like age,* see 56:36–37c.

34 *Overflowing* translates *dihāq,* which has several interpretations: "continuously filled," "pure," or most commonly "completely filled" (IK, R). According to the early commentator al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 212/827), every use of "cup" in the Quran is a reference to paradisal wine (R); e.g., 37:45–47; 76:6.

35 Cf. 19:62; 56:25; 88:11. All they hear is *Peace* (19:62; 56:26), because that is the greeting of the Garden (see, e.g., 10:10; 14:23). *Idle talk* and *lying* can be seen to represent the concupiscent and devious tendencies, respectively, as manifested in speech, whereas true speech is pure peace.

36 *Abounding* translates *ḥisāb,* which could also mean "sufficient" (Z). When viewed in relation to v. 26, it could be rendered "appropriate" or "fitting" (R), indicating that the reverent receive what they have earned, as do the deniers.

37 Here *they* is understood by some as a reference to the disbelievers (Q), as in 36:65: *On that Day We shall seal their mouths.* Others say *they* refers to all created beings (R). Some say this verse does not indicate speech as such, but that *on the Day it comes, no soul shall speak, save by His Leave* (11:105; Q).

38 *The Spirit* (*al-rūḥ*) is open to many interpretations. Even the Quran does not give a definitive explanation, responding instead by saying, *They ask thee about the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little"* (17:85). As al-Ghazzālī writes, "'The Spirit' is found in the Quran with many meanings" (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn, K. al-ʿilm*). Here some say it refers to the Archangel Gabriel (IK, Q, R), as in 26:192–94, where he is referred to as *the Trustworthy Spirit* (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*). Others say that here *the Spirit* does not specify a particular angel, but the first

the angels stand in rows, none speaking, save one whom the Compassionate permits and who speaks aright. (39) That is the True Day. So let whosoever will, take a path of return unto his Lord. (40) Truly We have warned you of a punishment nigh, on a day when a man beholds what his hands have sent forth, and the disbeliever says, "Oh, would that I were dust!"

creature created by God (Q, R), which may or may not be the Archangel Gabriel. *The angels* refers to the most noble of angels, the protecting angels who are responsible for recording the deeds of each individual (see commentary on 82:10–12), or all angels. *In rows,* translating *ṣaffan,* could also mean "in a row." Some read the verse to mean that *the Spirit and the angels* stand in a single row; others take it to mean that *the Spirit* stands alone, while the angels stand in a row (Āl). In relation to 89:22, which refers to the angels coming *row upon row,* some read *ṣaffan* to mean that the angels stand in many rows (Āl, R). *Save one whom the Compassionate permits* is interpreted as a reference to those whom God permits to intercede on behalf of others, as in 2:255: *Who is there that may intercede with Him save by His Leave?* The referent to *who speaks aright* is then taken by many as those who intercede, since they will only be able to speak aright about those for whom they intercede (Āl, Q, R). Some maintain that this refers to the prophets (IK). Others say *who speaks aright* means those who say, "There is no god but God" (Q). Some maintain that the verse should be read, "save one whom the Compassionate permits. And he speaks aright," meaning that after permission has been granted, he cannot but speak aright.

39 It is *the True Day,* for it is the *Day* in which *there is no doubt* (3:9, 25; 4:87; 6:12; 42:7; 45:26). The *path of return to* the *Lord* is through belief and good deeds.

40 According to most, this entire verse points to disbelievers, for disbelievers will behold and dwell upon the evil of their deeds, whereas believers will experience the Forgiveness and Mercy of God. According to others, *a man beholds what his hands have sent forth* (see 75:13c; 82:5c) refers to believers, who will experience reward for their good deeds, in contrast to disbelievers, who will wish that they were nothing (R). *Oh, would that I were dust* could indicate that one wishes either to have never been born or to be back in the grave and not resurrected (IK, Q), as in 4:42: *On that Day those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger will wish that they were level with the earth, and they will conceal no account from God* (R). It can also be taken as an indication that those who took pride in their high station in this world will prefer that they had had a low station that had not made them prideful and insolent; see also 69:25–27. Many commentaries convey an account that links this verse to the resurrection of animals. Traditional Islamic teachings maintain that all animals will be resurrected. Then God will rectify all injustices between them, and according to many when the judgment between them is finished, He will say to them "Be dust," and they will all become dust. Upon witnessing this, disbelievers will prefer the fate of the animals to their own and say, *Oh, would that I were dust* (IK, Q, Ṭs, Ṭū).

A few commentators interpret *the disbeliever* as a reference to Satan, who, when he sees the rewards received by believing human beings, wishes that he too had been made of dust or clay, thus altering his previous evaluation: *I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay* (7:12; 38:76; Q, R, Ṭs). In some Shiite commentaries, the Arabic for *Oh, would that I were dust; yā laytanī kuntu turābān,* is read *yā laytanī kuntu turābiyyan,* that is, "Oh, would that I were a follower of Abū Turāb," meaning ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first Shiite Imam (Kā, Qm). This would then mean that on the Day of Resurrection all who were not among the followers of the twelve Shiite Imams would wish that they had been. In this sense Shiites may be inverting the pejorative name Turābiyyah ("the followers of Abū Turāb"), which some of their opponents gave to them, and wearing it as a badge of honor.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 79

# The Wresters

## *al-Nāziᶜāt*

A late Makkan *sūrah, al-Nāziᶜāt* was most likely revealed shortly before or after *Sūrah* 78, *al-Nabaʾ*. It takes its title from the first word of the *sūrah*. It is also known as *al-Sāhirah,* "The Wide Expanse," after the reference in v. 14 to the *wide expanse* upon which all human beings are said to be gathered on the Day of Resurrection, and as *al-Ṭāmmah,* "The Calamity," after the reference to the Day of Judgment as *the Great Calamity* in v. 34 (Āl).

The focus of this *sūrah* is upon the reality of the Day of Judgment, the Hour, and the Resurrection. Thus some say that it follows directly upon the first phrase of 78:40, *Truly we have warned you of a punishment nigh* (Aj). The first five verses present a series of oaths in which God swears by certain aspects of creation. According to commentators, when one makes an oath by a thing, it is to show its greatness or to express the magnitude of what is to follow in the *sūrah,* or both. It is said that God may swear an oath by anything He has created, but that it is not proper for human beings to swear by anything other than God. Vv. 6–14 recount the questions of those who do not believe in the Resurrection and reaffirm some of its attributes. The next section, vv. 15–26, is most likely the first account of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in the chronological order of revelation, likening Pharaoh's disbelief to that of the Makkan idolaters. Vv. 27–33 then cite the wonders of creation as evidence of God's ability to resurrect. The next section, vv. 34–41, returns to a description of the Day of Resurrection, contrasting the fate of the believers with that of the disbelievers. The last five verses respond to the disbelievers who chided the Prophet for not knowing when the Hour would come.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By those that wrest violently, (2) by those that draw out quickly, (3) by those that glide serenely, (4) by those that race to the fore, outstripping, (5) and by those that govern affairs! (6) On the Day when the quaker quakes, (7) and

1–5 Regarding the varying interpretations for these verses as referring to different types of angels, different modes of death, or different types and phases of stars and/or other celestial bodies, among other things, al-Ṭabarī says that they can be seen as a reference to all of these, for God is swearing by everything that exhibits the characteristics mentioned in these verses. Al-Rāzī advises that we cannot say any of the interpretations are what is meant by God, but that we can say they are possible. He adds another interpretation in which these verses represent five phases in the return of the heart from what is other than God to God: "*Those that wrest* (*al-nāziʿāt*) are the spirits that move toward (*tanziʿu ilā*) attachment to *the most unfailing handhold* [2:256; 31:22], or who are being wrested from the love of what is other than God. *Those that draw out quickly* (*al-nāshiṭāt nashṭ*) means that, after the return from bodily things, [the spirits] take to striving and assuming the character traits of God with utter zeal (*nishāṭ*) and great strength. *Those that glide serenely* is then that, after striving, [the spirits] 'glide' in the realm of sovereignty, such that they cross these oceans and swim therein. *Those that race to the fore, outstripping* is an allusion to the variegation of spirits in the degrees of their journeying unto God, and *those that govern affairs* is an allusion to the connection between the last levels of humanness and the first degrees of angelhood. So when the human spirits reach their farthest limit, which is the level of *outstripping,* they connect to the world of the angels, which is what is meant by *those that govern affairs.* So the first four are what is meant by *its oil would well-nigh shine forth* [24:35], and the fifth is the fire in His saying, *even if no fire had touched it* [24:35]."

1 *Those that wrest* are viewed by most as the angels who wrest the souls of disbelievers from the body (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z). They do so *violently* because the souls do not want to face the Judgment. Others see *those that wrest* as an allusion to the stars or to all celestial bodies (Q, Ṭ, Z).

2 This verse may be a reference to the angels who draw out the souls of believers who go willingly into the Hereafter (Q, Ṭ); though others say it could be another description of the difficulties confronted by disbelievers and hypocrites, because *nashiṭa,* here translated *draw out,* can also imply something that must be pulled out with great force (Q). Others say it refers to the stars as they travel from one horizon to the other; while according to others, vv. 1–2 refer to death itself (Q, Ṭ), where the soul's exit from the body is violent for some and gentle for others.

3 This verse is a reference to angels who descend with God's nourishment, or to the stars, or to ships that sail gently upon the sea (Ṭ). When taken as a reference to angels, *glide serenely* could also be rendered "descend in the early morning." Mujāhid viewed this as a third reference to death (R): v. 1 refers to the death of disbelievers; v. 2, to the death of believers; and v. 3, to the death of the elect among the believers.

4 This verse is a reference to either angels who race to Paradise with human souls, death, or the stars (Ṭ).

5 Most see this verse as a reference to the angels who have been charged with governing the affairs of this world (Q). Some say that it applies to all angels with such responsibilities, while others relate it to the responsibilities mentioned in vv. 1–4 (R); and others say it refers only to the Archangels Gabriel, Michael, Azrael, and Seraphiel (Q), each of whom is considered to be responsible for a particular domain. In another interpretation this verse is understood as a reference to the planets (Q), presumably in astrological terms.

6–7 Some maintain that *the quaker* and *the successor* refer to the first and second blasts of

the successor follows upon it, (8) hearts that Day shall tremble, (9) with eyes humbled. (10) They will say, "Are we to be restored as we were before? (11) What! When we have become decayed bones?" (12) They say, "This, then, would be a ruinous return!" (13) Yet it shall be but a single cry, (14) then, behold, they will be upon a wide expanse. (15) Hast thou heard tell of Moses, (16) when his Lord called out to him in the holy valley of Ṭuwā? (17) "Go unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled! (18) And say, 'Dost thou wish to be purified (19) and that I guide

the trumpet blown by the Archangel Seraphiel on the Day of Judgment (Q, R, Ṭ); see 39:68c; 78:18c. Some say *the quaker* refers to earth and the mountains, for it is *a day on which the earth and the mountains shake* (73:14), while *the successor* refers to Heaven and the planets (IK, R). Another opinion is that *the quaker* refers to the first "shaking" of the earth, and *the successor* to the second shaking when it is sundered and fades away (R). Others interpret *the quaker* as a reference to "the event" in which the earth quakes; and still others see it as a reference to the Hour (Q, Ṭ), which is said to "quake" (22:1). A minority interpret vv. 6–7 as an allusion to death itself and all that it entails (Q, Ṭ).

8 *Hearts* shall *tremble* with fear (Q, Ṭ), as in 40:18: *So warn them of the Day of the Imminent Event, when hearts will be in throats, choking in agony.* Al-Rāzī interprets the fact that *hearts* is here indefinite in the Arabic as an indication that not all hearts tremble, only those of the disbelievers.

9 Cf. 68:43; and 70:44: *Their eyes humbled, abasement shall overcome them.*

10–11 These verses contain a common objection made by those who do not believe in the Resurrection; cf. 17:49; and 17:98: *They say, "What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?"*

12 This verse is the response of those who deny the Resurrection. It is understood to mean that they know that if this were the case, they would be ruined (Q, R).

13 Judgment will come with *a single cry*; cf. 36:29; 36:49; 37:19; 38:15. See in particular 39:68, which maintains that there will be two cries of the trumpet. The present verse is then taken as a reference to the second cry, at which all human beings will be gathered. The reference to *a single cry* is understood by some to mean that the gathering will occur almost instantly, for as other verses say, *Our Command is naught but one, like the blinking of an eye* (54:50); and *The matter of the Hour is as the blinking of an eye, or nearer still* (16:77; IK).

14 *Wide expanse* is interpreted by some as a reference to the face of the earth (IK, Q). Others connect it to the *open plain* in 18:47 and the *barren plain* in 20:106 (IK), both of which are seen as allusions to the plain on which all of humanity will be gathered for the Day of Judgment. Still others believe that the *wide expanse* refers to a plain near Jerusalem, in the vicinity of Mt. Arīḥā, where some say the Resurrection will take place. *Sāhirah,* here translated *wide expanse,* could also mean that they are "awake" due to the intensity of their fear (R, Z).

15–25 For the full Quranic account of Moses, see 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 17:101–4; 20:9–97; 26:10–66; 27:7–14; 28:3–46; 40:23–45; 43:46–56; 44:17–31. This is most likely the first account of Moses in the chronological order of revelation. As it occurred early in the Makkan period, it would appear to assume some basic knowledge of the story of Moses among the Arabs. Here it is offered as an example for the Prophet and his followers of what will eventually become of unjust rulers, like those of Makkah.

16 Cf. 20:12. *Ṭuwā* is either a proper name for the valley said to lie just below Mt. Sinai, where Moses first heard the Voice of God (see 20:12–16), or a term derived from the verb *ṭawā/ṭayya,* "to roll up," meaning that the valley is wrapped in sanctity or that it is sanctified twice (Q, Ṭ).

17 Cf. 20:24, 43.

18–19 Just as the Prophet invited the tribe of Quraysh to Islam in a peaceful manner, Moses was instructed to first invite Pharaoh to follow

thee to thy Lord that thou mightest fear?'" (20) Then he showed him the greatest sign. (21) But he denied and disobeyed. (22) Then turned his back, moving swiftly. (23) Then he gathered and proclaimed, (24) and said, "I am your lord most high." (25) So God seized him with a punishment exemplary in the Hereafter and in this world. (26) Truly in that is a lesson for whosoever fears. (27) Are you more difficult to create or the sky that He has built? (28) He raised high its canopy and fashioned it, (29) darkened its night, and brought forth its day. (30) And after

God's Revelation, as in 20:44: *Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear.* It is a common Quranic theme that no community is punished for wrongdoing until it has been offered guidance, as indicated in 28:59: *And thy Lord never destroys towns until He sends a messenger to their mother city to recite unto them Our signs;* and 26:208: *And never did We destroy a town save that it had warners;* see also 6:131; 10:13; 15:4.

20 One account mentions *nine clear signs* (17:101), but does not state which is *the greatest sign*. Some say it is the staff that became a serpent (7:107; 20:66–17; 26:32, 44–45), the hand turned white (7:108; 26:33; 27:12), the parting of the sea (7:136; 10:90; 20:77–78; 26:63–66), or all of the miracles that Moses performed. For a comprehensive list of the "signs" associated with Moses, see 17:101c.

21 Even after Pharaoh's sorcerers acknowledged the superiority of Moses and the veracity of the signs with which he had been sent, Pharaoh continued to deny, considering the staff turned serpent and the white hand mere sorcery (see 7:111–26c).

22 Some say that this verse indicates that Pharaoh turned and fled when he saw *the greatest sign* or the staff turned serpent (R). Others say it indicates that, upon realizing the power of Moses' message, Pharaoh quickly moved to devise a plan against him (R).

23 Most say this verse indicates that Pharaoh gathered all the people to declare his sovereignty. Others relate this verse to 26:53: *Then Pharaoh sent marshalers to the cities,* in which case it refers to Pharaoh's summoning his people to pursue the Israelites.

24 According to several reports, Pharaoh first said, *O notables! I know of no god for you other than myself* (28:38), then *I am your lord most high* (R, Ṭ, Ṭs).

25 *A punishment exemplary* renders *nakāl,* which also indicates weakness and inability, evoking the sense that God rendered Pharaoh impotent in opposing Moses. As translated, this verse is a reference to punishment in this world and the next, and many interpret the this-worldly punishment as the plagues sent upon his people and their drowning in the sea (cf. 20:78–79; 7:135–37). Some read this verse as "the punishment of the last and the first," saying "the first" indicates the punishment for saying, *I know of no god for you other than myself,* and that "the last" is for saying, *I am your lord most high* (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs); others say "the first" is for denying Moses and "the last" is for saying, *I am your lord most high* (Q). In a well-known Sufi interpretation, Alāʾ al-Dawlā al-Simnānī (d. 787/1336) is said to have seen the soul of the famous Sufi martyr al-Ḥallāj in an exalted state. So he prayed to God, asking how it was that al-Ḥallāj's soul was in a high Paradise (*ʿIlliyyūn*), though he had said, "I am the Real" (*anā al-Ḥaqq*), yet Pharaoh's soul was in Hell because he had said, *I am your lord most high.* God answered that Pharaoh saw only himself and forgot God, while al-Ḥallāj saw only God and forgot himself.

27 God's ability to create, which some who opposed the Prophet did accept, is here cited as evidence that God would have no problem resurrecting human beings as He wills, as in 40:57: *Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind. But most of mankind know not;* and 36:81: *Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof?*

28–30 These verses describe additional dimensions of creation, which demonstrate that

that He spread out the earth. (31) From it He brought forth its water and its pastures, (32) and the mountains He set firm, (33) as sustenance for you and for your flocks. (34) So when the Great Calamity befalls— (35) a day when man shall remember that for which he endeavored, (36) and Hellfire is made visible for one who sees— (37) as for one who rebels (38) and prefers the life of this world, (39) truly Hellfire is the refuge. (40) As for one who fears standing before his Lord and forbids the soul from caprice, (41) truly the Garden is the

God can create and resurrect as He will. *Its canopy* indicates the highest level of the sky; *fashioned it* implies that it is whole with no fissures, cracks, or imperfections. For the perfection of the heavens, see 67:3–4c. *Its day* translates *ḍuḥāhā,* which could also mean "its light," "its morning brightness," as in 93:1, or *the morning,* as in v. 46. For the full range of meanings for *ḍuḥā,* see the introduction to *Sūrah* 93. The mention of the earth (v. 30) after the sky, night, and day indicates that the earth was created after the heavens had been established (Q).

31 *Its pastures* is interpreted by some as an allusion to all plant life and by others as an allusion to everything eaten by human beings and animals.

32 The firmness of the *mountains* is cited in many verses as a sign of God's Omnipotence; see 13:3; 15:19; 16:15; 21:31; 31:10; 41:10; 50:7; 77:27; 21:20–31c.

33 Cf. 80:32. God sustains all things and has made all things subservient to human beings (see 22:65; 31:20; 45:13). Human beings are thus God's vicegerents (see, e.g., 2:30; 6:165c; 35:39) and must remain thankful to God for sustenance, while sharing these resources with all of God's creatures.

34 *Calamity* translates *ṭāmmah,* which derives from the verb *ṭamma,* meaning "to be abundant" or "to rise over," as would a flood, implying that the *ṭāmmah* is the greatest of all tremendous events, because its overabundance encompasses all things. Some take *the Great Calamity* as a reference to the second cry of the trumpet (see 39:68c), at which all human beings and jinn are gathered; others take it as a reference to the Resurrection, because it surpasses and predominates over (*yaṭimmu*) all things (Q). It is also interpreted by some as a reference to the very moment when the people of Hell are led to Hell and the people of Paradise are led to Paradise. Some view the omission of a response to the conditional *when* (*idhā*) as an affirmation that what is to occur must occur (Q, Ṭs).

35 All people will remember the good and evil that they have done, for even if they have forgotten some of their deeds while in this world, their deeds have all been recorded, as in 58:6: *On the Day when God resurrects them all together, then informs them of that which they did. God has kept account of it while they have forgotten it* (see also 10:21; 34:3; 36:12; 43:80; 45:29; 78:29; 99:6–8).

36 *One who sees* is understood by some as a reference to the disbelievers and by others as a reference to all human beings (Q, R). Others argue that it could not refer to the disbelievers, because the realities of the Hereafter can only be seen by those who have eyes, and the eyes of the disbelievers are covered (see 2:7; R).

37–39 Al-Rāzī interprets *one who rebels* to indicate corruption of the intellect, for all who know God know their own insignificance and would thus not incline to rebellion and arrogance. *Prefers the life of this world* is then taken to indicate corruption in actions in accordance with the *ḥadīth* "The love of the world is the source of all error" (R). The two together are thus taken to indicate the greatest degree of corruption, the punishment for which is eternal. So *Hellfire is the refuge* for those who reach this level of corruption. Those who do not may still be punished, but Hellfire will not be their ultimate *refuge* (R). Many verses condemn those who prefer the life of this world over the life of the Hereafter, for *the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185; 57:20), *while the Hereafter is better and more enduring* (87:17; cf., e.g., 6:32; 9:38; 14:3).

40–41 Cf. 55:46: *And for one who fears standing before his Lord, there are two Gardens.*

refuge. (42) They ask thee about the Hour, "When shall it set in?" (43) What hast thou to do with mentioning it? (44) Unto thy Lord is [knowledge of] the end thereof. (45) Thou art but a warner for whosoever fears it. (46) The Day they see it, it will be as if they had tarried but an evening or the morning thereof.

*Maqāma rabbihi,* translated *standing before his Lord* here and in 55:46, could also be translated, "the station of his Lord." It indicates being aware of standing before God on the Day of Judgment and answering for all of one's deeds. Al-Rāzī sees this fear of *standing before his Lord* as the exact opposite of *one who rebelled* in v. 37, for just as rebellion implies ignorance, fear implies knowledge, as in 35:28: *Only those among His servants who know fear God.* In the same way, one who *forbids the soul from caprice* is the opposite of one who *prefers the life of this world,* for just as rebellion is seen as connected to love of the world, the fear of God is seen as leading the soul to perform acts of obedience and good deeds. From a Quranic perspective, it is caprice that leads astray; one follows either God and His Messenger or caprice. For a discussion of the significance of *caprice,* see 45:23c.

42 This verse is said to refer to the idolaters of Makkah, who did not ask in order to be informed, but only to mock (Āl, Q). *When shall it set in?* (cf. 7:187) derives from a nautical metaphor meaning, "When shall it berth?" Some take the use of this metaphor to imply that it is near at hand (Q).

43 This verse can be understood either as God's telling the Prophet that he is not to speak of that of which he does not know, or as a reference to those who contended that the Prophet had no business mentioning the Hour, its signs, the Resurrection, and other things, if he did not know when they were to transpire. The former interpretation is supported by a report from ᶜĀ'ishah that the Prophet wanted to ask God about the moment when the Hour would come, and God said to him that he was asking for knowledge of something he had no right to know.

44 Only God knows about the Hour, as in 7:187: *They question thee about the Hour, when it will set in. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with my Lord. None save He shall manifest it at its proper time. Heavy shall it weigh upon the heavens and the earth. It shall not come upon you but suddenly." They question thee as if thou knew it well. Say, "Knowledge thereof lies only with God, but most of mankind know not"* (cf. 30:34). Thus when the Prophet was asked about the Hour by the Archangel Gabriel, he responded, "Regarding that the one questioned knows no more than the questioner" (IK).

45 Cf. 36:11. The Prophet has no knowledge of the Hour and other aspects of the Unseen (see 38:69–70c), for he is only sent to warn (13:7; 22:49; 27:92; 29:50; 34:46; 35:23; 38:70; 46:9; 67:26). That prophets warn and bring glad tidings is reiterated throughout the Quran (see, e.g., 18:56), yet human beings often expect them to function as soothsayers or fortune-tellers. Thus in 46:9 the Prophet is instructed: *Say, "I am no innovation among the messengers, and I know not what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which has been revealed unto me, and I am naught but a clear warner."*

46 Cf. 10:45; 17:52; 20:103–4; 23:112–14; 30:55; 46:35. Most commentators say that this verse means that the time in the grave will seem short before the Day of Judgment, when all souls are gathered before God upon being resurrected. Others say the implication is that life on earth will seem as if it were only an hour in comparison to the experience of the Hereafter (IK, Q); see also 46:35 and the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran." In this instance, *morning* (*ḍuḥā*) is said to refer to the time period of the worldly life in the eyes of the people when they see the Hereafter (IK). For the broader meaning of *ḍuḥā,* see the introduction to *Sūrah* 93.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 80

# He Frowned

## *ᶜAbasa*

ᶜ*Abasa* is an early Makkan *sūrah* that takes its name from the first *sūrah*'s word. It is also known as *al-Ṣākhkhah,* "The Piercing Cry," in reference to v. 33, or as *al-Safarah,* "The Scribes," in reference to v. 15 (Āl). Some maintain that it is related to the previous *sūrah* by the manner in which the first ten verses reinforce the message of 79:45, *Thou art but a warner for whosoever fears it* (Āl), counseling the Prophet not to spend his time seeking to guide those who are indifferent, when there are those waiting who wish to be guided. These first ten verses refer to a famous incident in the early history of Islam. ᶜĀʾishah, the wife of the Prophet, reported that this *sūrah* was revealed about ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm, a blind man, who went to the Prophet and kept saying, "O Messenger of God, guide me," while the Prophet was speaking to the leaders of the idolaters. The Prophet frowned and kept avoiding him, turning to the others (IK, Q). The verses are then said to have been revealed as a rebuke to the Prophet for preaching to those who had no interest in God's message, while turning away from one who sought guidance.

ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm was among the first to embrace Islam. He is known for his devotion to the Prophet and the Quran. After the revelation of this *sūrah,* it is said that the Prophet would greet him by saying, "Welcome to him on whose account my Lord rebuked me" (Q). Ibn Umm Maktūm was one of the first two people to migrate to Madinah, where he taught the Quran to many people. Along with Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ al-Ḥabashī (d. ca. 20/642), Ibn Umm Maktūm would give the call to prayer (*adhān*) in Madinah. In later years, the Prophet would at times leave Madinah in his care when he left the city. It is also said that 4:95 was revealed regarding the particular case of Ibn Umm Maktūm, who was excused from going on military expeditions on account of his blindness. Nonetheless, he was not content with staying behind when an expedition was in progress and determined that no campaign should pass him by. He requested a role on the battlefield, saying, "Place me between two rows and give me the standard. I will carry it for you and protect it, for I am blind and cannot

run away." After the Battle of Qādisiyyah in 14/636, he was found dead on the battlefield still clutching the standard of the Muslims (Q).

After the verses addressing the case of Ibn Umm Maktūm (vv. 1–10), the *sūrah* alludes to a book written by the angels (vv. 11–16). It then transitions into a discussion of humanity's ingratitude (vv. 17–22), followed by enjoinders to recall the bounties provided by God (vv. 23–32) and concluding with a reminder of the disparate ends of believers and disbelievers on the Day of Judgment (vv. 33–42).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) He frowned and turned away, (2) because the blind man came to him. (3) And what would apprise thee? Perhaps he would purify himself, (4) or be reminded, such that the reminder might benefit him. (5) As for him who deems himself beyond need, (6) to him dost thou attend, (7) though thou art not answerable, should he not be purified. (8) But as for him who came to thee striving earnestly (9) while fearful, (10) from him thou art diverted. (11) Nay! Truly it is a reminder— (12) so let whosoever will, remember it—

1–10 For the occasion of revelation, see the introduction to the *sūrah*. The Prophet is here admonished for turning away from one who sought guidance to others whom he hoped to attract to Islam, since he was not responsible for making people accept religion, only for conveying God's message and guiding those who accepted it, as in 28:56: *Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will. And He knows best those who are rightly guided.* Other verses tell the Prophet to be patient and to not turn away from those who seek religion, such as 6:52: *And drive not away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face;* and 18:28: *Make thy soul patient with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face. Turn not thine eyes away from them, desiring the adornment of the life of this world, nor obeying one whose heart We have made heedless of the remembrance of Us and who follows his caprice and whose affair exceeds the bounds.*

*Beyond need* (v. 5) translates *man istaghnā*, which literally means "is self-sufficient" and connotes a view of oneself as "self-sufficient" vis-à-vis God. The fear mentioned in v. 9 is fear of God and the Day of Judgment.

11 Cf. 74:54. *It* can be taken as a reference to the Quran, this particular *sūrah*, or the exhortation to treat people equitably (IK, Ṭ). The verse also indicates that it is only incumbent upon the Prophet to convey God's message and remind others, not to sway those who oppose the message (see 88:21–24). For the Quran as Reminder, see 36:69c.

12 This verse could also be translated, "So let whomsoever He wills remember it," meaning that only those whom God wills will be receptive to the revelation and thus remember (Q), for as 11:114 says of the Quran, *This is a reminder for those who remember.* In either reading, *remember it* could also be rendered "remember Him," meaning "remember God" (IK). This latter reading may

(13) on pages honored, (14) exalted and purified, (15) in the hands of scribes, (16) noble and pious. (17) May man perish! How ungrateful is he! (18) From what thing did He create him? (19) From a drop He created him, then proportioned him, (20) then He made the way easy for him. (21) Then He caused him to die and buried him. (22) Then, when He willed, He resurrected him. (23) Nay! But

be more accurate, as the pronoun taken as a reference to the Quran or the *sūrah* in v. 11 is feminine, while the pronoun rendered "it" or "Him" in v. 12 is masculine.

13 According to some, *pages* refers only to the Quran. According to others, it refers to the books of all the prophets (Q) or to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Ṭ), which is said to be the source of all revelation. *Pages* translates *ṣuḥuf* in accordance with the first interpretation. *Ṣuḥuf* is also rendered *scriptures* in 53:36 and 87:18–19, where it refers to the revelations given to Abraham and Moses. They are *honored* or "ennobled" because of what they contain.

14 *Exalted* means "elevated" in the Eyes of God (Aj) and beyond all obscurity and contradiction (Q). *Purified* means free from any additions or deficiencies (IK) and protected from being assailed by disbelievers (Q), such that *None touch it, save those made pure* (56:79).

15–16 *Scribes* translates *safarah,* which can be understood as a reference to the attendant angels who "inscribe" (*safara*) the deeds of God's servants in books (*asfār;* see 43:80; 50:17–18; 82:10–12), or as a reference to the angels whom God has appointed as "mediators" (*sufarā'*) between Himself and His messengers (Q, Ṭ). A famous *ḥadīth* states, "One who recites the Quran proficiently and has memorized it is with the *scribes, noble and pious*" (IK). Some argue that here *scribes* should be "mediators" to indicate the function of mediating God's message that human beings can fulfill for other human beings (Q). *Safara* can also mean "to unveil"; thus some take it as an allusion to the Quran's making matters clear (Q). Others say that *the hands of scribes* refers to the reciters of the Quran (Ṭ).

17 *May man perish* translates *qutila al-insān,* which could also be rendered, "May man be cursed" (IK, Q). Here the phrase is said to refer to those who deny the truth without any supporting argument, but only because they lack knowledge of it and think it is far-fetched (IK). *Ungrateful* translates *afkara,* which indicates both ingratitude toward and disbelief in God (for the broader meaning of *kufr,* or "disbelief," see 2:85–86c). Thus this verse could also be read, "Man is accursed for what he disbelieves," or "Mankind is accursed; for what does he disbelieve?" (Q). According to some, this verse relates to a specific individual who had accepted Islam, but apostatized when *Sūrah* 53 was revealed; so God revealed this verse, meaning that he was accursed for disbelieving in the Quran after first believing (Q).

18–19 This is one of several passages in which the creation of the human being from a drop is cited as evidence of God's Omnipotence, as in 18:37: *Do you disbelieve in the One Who created you from dust, then from a drop, then fashioned you as a man?* See also 16:4; 40:67; 86:6–8.

20 From one perspective, this verse refers to the ease with which a baby comes forth from the mother's womb (IK, Q); from another, it refers to God's providing all people with guidance, as in 76:3: *Truly We guided him upon the way, be he grateful or ungrateful* (IK). Some interpret it as an indication that God has made it easy for everything to perform the function for which it was created, as in a famous *ḥadīth,* "Work, for that for which each person was created has been made easy for him" (Q).

21–22 These verses are related to several passages that speak of all the phases of human existence to rebuke those who do not believe in God; e.g., 2:28: *How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned?* . . .

23 *Nay!* is a rebuke to the disbelievers, who, when informed of the Resurrection, *will say, . . . "If I am returned unto my Lord, surely with Him shall I have that which is most beautiful"* (41:50;

he has not yet accomplished what He commanded him. (24) So let man consider his food, (25) that We pour down water in abundance; (26) then We split the earth in fissures, (27) and cause grains to grow therein, (28) and vines and herbs, (29) and olives and date palms, (30) and gardens densely planted, (31) and fruit and pastures, (32) as sustenance for you and for your flocks. (33) So when the Piercing Cry does come, (34) that Day when a man will flee from his brother, (35) and his mother and his father, (36) and his spouse and his children. (37) For every man that Day his affair shall suffice him. (38) Faces that Day shall be shining, radiant, (39) laughing, joyous. (40) And faces that Day shall be covered with dust, (41) overspread with darkness. (42) Those, they are the disbelievers, the profligates.

Q); or it is a rebuke to those who believe that they have accomplished what they were commanded, but, as they disbelieve in God and His Messenger, have not done so (Q). The emphatic particle *kallā* (*nay*) can also be read in the affirmative, in which case the verse would begin, "Truly, he has not..." (Q), and would not convey the same sense of rebuke.

24 *Consider his food* is taken by some to indicate another of the many signs upon which human beings should reflect in order to appreciate fully God's Power and Mercy (Q). Others say that it relates to reflecting upon the consumption and elimination of food, for that is an example of what becomes of the world (Q).

25 Water is mentioned as a symbol of God's Mercy in several verses and can also be taken as an allusion to all living things, for God *made every living thing from water* (21:30; see also 24:45; 25:54).

26 Vegetation comes through the *fissures,* splitting the earth. For other verses describing the manner in which God brings forth vegetation and revives the earth with water, see, e.g., 6:99; 29:63; 30:24; 31:10; 35:27; 39:21; 41:39.

27–32 These verses reflect the continuous Quranic emphasis on the benefits that God has provided through the natural world and the fact that reflecting upon them leads to a deeper understanding of God's wisdom, since *God created the heavens and the earth in truth* (14:19; see also 6:73), and *whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God* (59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1; cf. 57:1; 59:24); for the importance of the natural environment and the connection between creation and revelation, see 3:191c; 45:3c. *As sustenance for you and for your flocks* also appears in 79:33.

33 *The Piercing Cry* refers to the second blast from the trumpet of the Archangel Seraphiel, at which all human beings will be resurrected (Q; see 39:68c). It is said that it will almost deafen those who hear it (Bg, IK). Others say that *al-ṣākhkhah,* translated *the Piercing Cry,* is a proper name for the Day of Judgment (IK).

34–37 The terror of the Day of Judgment will be so severe that people will not be concerned with anything other than themselves. In 70:11–14 it is said that a man would go so far as *to ransom himself from the punishment of that Day at the price of his children, his spouse and his brother, his kin who had sheltered him, and all who are on the earth, that it might save him.* In a famous *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said, "People will be gathered barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised." To which a woman responded, "Will we look upon each other's nakedness?" He responded, "*For every man that Day his affair shall suffice him*" (IK, Q).

38–39 Cf. 75:22. These verses describe the hearts of believers, for "the face is the mirror of the heart" (Ṭb), which are then contrasted with the hearts of disbelievers in vv. 40–41. The faces of believers are *shining, radiant* from the joy they experience in their hearts and the glad tidings manifest on their faces (IK), because of the ablutions they performed in this life (Q, R),

their performance of night vigil (Q, R), or their relief from the burdens and attachments of this world (R). The believers are *joyous* when they receive their reward from God (Q). Related to the event that is said to have occasioned the revelation of this *sūrah* (see the introduction to the *sūrah*), these verses can be seen as a reference to the state of Ibn Umm Maktūm, while vv. 40–42 refer to the state of *him who deems himself beyond need* (v. 5).

40–42 *Covered with dust* indicates complete and utter humiliation. According to some, *the disbelievers, the profligates* indicates the same group; disbelief defines their thoughts, and profligacy their actions (Āl, Ṭb); the punishment for disbelief is *faces covered with dust,* and the punishment for profligacy is being *overspread with darkness* (Āl); cf. 75:24.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 81

# The Enfolding

## *al-Takwīr*

An early Makkan *sūrah, al-Takwīr* is most likely the seventh in the chronological order of revelation. It takes its name from the first verse, which refers to the enfolding of the sun as one of the signs of the Hour, and is also known by the title "When the Sun Is Enfolded" (Āl). Ibn ʿAjībah suggests that this *sūrah* is related to the previous one because it begins by describing the events that are related to the Last Day, the subject with which the previous *sūrah* ends. The *sūrah* can be viewed as having two sections, the first of which tells of the signs of the Hour and the Resurrection (vv. 1–14). These apocalyptic events are described in a manner that suggests an inversion of the apparent order of the created world. In this vein, a *ḥadīth* states, "Whosoever wishes to look at the Day of Judgment as if he is seeing it with his own eyes, let him read, *When the sun is enfolded, and when the stars fade away; when the mountains are set in motion, and when pregnant camels are abandoned*" (IK). The second section of the *sūrah* is a more elusive passage that discusses the revelation of the Quran through the Archangel Gabriel and its effect upon the human soul (vv. 15–29).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① When the sun is enfolded, ② and when the stars fade away; ③ when the mountains are set in motion, ④ and when pregnant camels are abandoned; ⑤ when the wild beasts are gathered, ⑥ and when the seas are made to swell over; ⑦ when the souls are coupled, ⑧ and when the female infant buried

1 *Enfolded* translates *kuwwirat,* which may be interpreted in various ways: it may mean that the sun is absorbed into the Divine Throne (Q), that the light of the sun is wiped out (IK, Q), or that one part of it will be folded into another and then it will be rolled up and thrown away (IK). In this vein a *ḥadīth* says, "The sun and the moon will be rolled up (*kuwwirat*) on the Day of Resurrection" (IK).

2 Cf. 77:8. *Fade away* translates *inkadarat,* which could also mean to spill out, as a container spills out when it is broken (IK, Q), or to fall upon the ground (Q).

3 Cf. 78:20. Elsewhere it is said that *mountains are scattered* (77:10), for the Day of Judgment is a day when *the mountains are as carded wool* (70:9; 101:5) or *like heaps of shifting sand* (73:14); see also 18:47; 19:90; 20:105–6; 27:88; 52:10; 56:5–6; 69:14.

4 *Pregnant camels* translates *ʿishār,* which is said to indicate the best type of camel when it has reached the tenth month of pregnancy (IK). Camels were central to Arabian livelihood, and a pregnant camel was doubly valuable. Abandoning a pregnant camel would thus have been a salient metaphor for the Arabs of the time, indicating that on the Day of Judgment people will be so preoccupied with their immediate state that they will have no concern for wealth, even their most precious property, or for the things of this world in general.

5 This verse is seen by most commentators as a reference to the gathering together of all created animals, other than jinn and human beings, after resurrection, even flies (IK, Q). It is said by many that God resurrects all of the animals and allows each of them to claim justice, so that those who had been wronged may retaliate against the offenders; then they all become dust (JJ, Q). For the resurrection of animals, see 6:38c. This verse could also be seen as another example of an apocalyptic inversion of the created order, since *wild beasts* (*wuḥush*) cannot be gathered in this world, but are gathered in the Hereafter.

6 Cf. 52:6. That the seas *are made to swell over* implies another apocalyptic inversion, in which the seas break the *barrier which they transgress not* (55:20), so that the sweet water mixes with the salty, becoming one (Q, R, Ṭ), and so that they burst forth (82:3), covering the earth or parts of it when the earth quakes. For the significance of the *two seas, one sweet, satisfying, the other salty, bitter* (25:53), see 25:53c; 35:12c; 55:19–20c. *Made to swell over* translates *sujjirat,* which could also mean "to be set on fire" and is treated in this way by several early commentators (IK, Q, Ṭ).

7 Some say that this verse means when the souls and bodies are joined together on the Day of Judgment (Q). Others maintain that it indicates that the souls of believers are *coupled* with *wide-eyed maidens,* as in 44:54 and 52:20, *And We shall wed them to wide-eyed maidens* (*coupled* and *wed* translate the same verb, *zawwaja*), while the souls of disbelievers and hypocrites are joined to satans, as in 43:36, *We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him.* Others maintain that it indicates souls being joined with like souls, as this is the *Day of Division* (e.g., 37:21), on which God sorts the righteous from the evil and believers from disbelievers (Q), and they are no longer mixed together as they are in this world. The last interpretation seems to be the most consistent, as a famous *ḥadīth* says of this verse, "Every man will be joined to every person

alive is asked ⑨ for what sin she was slain; ⑩ when the pages are spread, ⑪ and when Heaven is laid bare; ⑫ when Hellfire is kindled, ⑬ and when the Garden is brought nigh, ⑭ each soul shall know what it has made ready. ⑮ So I swear by those receding, ⑯ those that move and set, ⑰ by the night as it approaches, ⑱ and by the morning as it breathes! ⑲ Truly it is the speech of

who did as he did" (Āl, IK, Q). In making this connection several commentaries refer to *Sūrah* 56, which speaks of the division of human beings into three categories: *the companions of the left, the companions of the right,* and *the foremost;* see commentary on 56:7–10.

8–9 These verses allude to the pre-Islamic Arabian practice of burying newly born females alive. Although the verses specifically reproach those who engaged in this practice, they can also be read as indicating that all who have been wronged in this world will have the opportunity to demand justice of their oppressors and be vindicated in this life or the next.

10 *When the pages are spread* refers to the opening of the book in which people's deeds are recorded. Upon witnessing this life review, they will say, *"What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof." And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did* (18:49), since on the Day of Judgment no deed can be hidden. For the book in which deeds are recorded, see 17:71c; 18:49c; 50:17–18; 69:19–29; 82:11–12.

11 *Laid bare* translates *kushiṭat,* which could also mean "scraped off"; others interpret it to mean "rolled up," similar to 21:104: *That Day We shall roll up the sky like the rolling of scrolls for writings* (Q).

12 *Hellfire* will be *kindled* by the Anger of God and the sins of human beings (Q, R).

13 Those to whom *the Garden is brought nigh* are the believers who reverence God, as in 26:90: *And the Garden will be brought nigh unto the reverent.*

14 Every soul will know the good and evil it has done, for the pages of its book will be spread open (v. 10), and people will no longer be able to hide their sins with lies and obfuscations, since *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do* (41:20), and *they will say, "We bear witness against ourselves"* (6:130). A well-known *ḥadīth* says, "There is none among you, but that God will inform him of that which is between him and his two translators [i.e., the two angels who record his deeds; see 50:17–18c]" (Q).

15–16 For the implications of *I swear* (*lā uqsimu*) here, see 75:1–2c. *Those receding, those that move and set* is taken by most as a reference to the planets; some say all planets; others say Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, which (along with the sun and the moon) are visible to the naked eye and thus appear to recede during the day and reappear at night (IK, Q, R). It could also be seen as a reference to the planets having both forward and retrograde motion.

17 *Approaches* translates *ʿasʿasa,* which is among a class of Arabic words that can mean either one thing or its very opposite. *ʿAsʿasa* thus means both "to approach" and "to leave" (Āl, IK, R) and can refer to either the beginning or the end of the night (Āl, IK, Q, R, Ṭ), the latter being similar in meaning to 74:33. It could also be seen as a reference to both the end and the beginning (Āl).

18 The image of the *morning as it breathes* alludes to both the manner in which the morning appears to awaken from the night and the way its light expands and spreads like exhaled breath until it becomes day (Āl). If v. 17 is taken as the approach of night, this verse is interpreted to mean "by the morning as it rises" (IK), alluding to the beginning of the morning. When v. 17 is taken as the receding of the night, this verse is understood to indicate either the rising of the morning or the gradual illumination of the day.

19 This verse is the response to the oath by which God swears in vv. 15–18. *It* is a reference to

a noble messenger, (20) possessed of strength, before the Possessor of the Throne, of high rank, (21) obeyed, trustworthy withal. (22) Your companion is not possessed. (23) He surely saw him upon the clear horizon. (24) And he does not withhold grudgingly the Unseen. (25) Nor is it the speech of a satan outcast. (26) So where are you going? (27) It is naught but a reminder for the worlds, (28) for those of you who will to go straight. (29) And you do not will but that God, Lord of the worlds, wills.

the Quran. A *noble messenger* is taken by most as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel, though some take it as a reference to the Prophet (Q). The verse is repeated in 69:40.

20 If v. 19 is seen as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel, *possessed of strength* would be similar to *one of awesome power,* which describes Gabriel in 53:5 (Z). Gabriel's *strength* can be taken to mean his ability to withstand all forces from this earth, as he is said to have overcome the armies from the cities of Lot, or his steadfastness in being completely obedient to God from the beginning of creation until the end of time (Āl, Q). If v. 19 is understood as a reference to the Prophet, *possessed of strength* is taken to mean his ability to deliver God's message (Q). For *Possessor of the Throne,* see 17:42; 40:15; 85:15. God is also described as *Lord of the Throne* (9:129; 21:22; 23:86; 23:116; 27:26; 43:82), which is borne by angels (40:7; 69:17).

21 When vv. 19–20 are taken as a reference to Gabriel, *obeyed* refers to his position among other angels. When taken as a reference to the Prophet, it refers to the injunction for those who obey God to obey His Messenger (see 3:32; 4:59; 5:92; 24:54–56; 47:33; 64:12). *Trustworthy* translates *amīn,* which could also be rendered "faithful" or "secure," and is understood to mean that the Prophet is faithful to the revelation and message with which he has been entrusted, delivering it as instructed by God. *Al-Amīn,* "the Trustworthy," was one of the names by which the Prophet was known even before the advent of the revelation.

22–23 According to some, the Prophet had sought a vision of the Archangel Gabriel in his true form, and when he saw him upon the horizon with six hundred wings, he fell down prostrate, covering himself. So the idolaters of Makkah said that he was possessed by a jinn (*majnūn*) or that he was mad, and vv. 20–23 were revealed in response (Q). *The clear horizon* is understood by some as a specific reference to the east as the place where the sun rises (Q, R), or as a reference to 53:7, which says that Gabriel was *upon the highest horizon* during the Night Journey and Ascension (see 17:1c; introduction to *Sūrah* 53). The verse could also be rendered, "The one who makes clear saw him upon the horizon," a reading preferred by several scholars when v. 24 is read as describing the Prophet (Q).

24 Most take *he* in this verse as a reference to the Prophet; others as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel. In both cases it means that he teaches the Quran and the rulings (*aḥkām*) of God that he has been instructed to teach, withholding nothing. Many prefer an alternate reading, in which the word translated *withhold grudgingly, ḍanīn,* is read as *ẓanīn,* meaning "suspect, unreliable, or untrustworthy" (Āl, Q, R), meaning, "he is not unreliable with regard to the Unseen."

25 This verse is a response to those who are reported to have said that the Quran was inspired by Satan and that the Prophet was a sorcerer (R), an accusation made against other prophets as well (see 38:4–5; 51:52).

26 This verse asks essentially, "Where will you, who do not follow God and His Messenger, turn, for none guides but God?"

27–29 Cf. 76:29–31. As translated, v. 27 refers to the Quran. It could also be rendered as a reference to the Prophet Muhammad: "He is naught but a reminder," as in 88:21: *Thou art but a reminder.* But it most likely refers to the Quran, as the Quran and previous revelations are referred to as reminders in many verses (e.g., 6:90; 15:9;

16:44). That it is a reminder *for the worlds* is taken to indicate that it is a universal revelation for any people who desire guidance (Ṭb).

For whosoever wishes *to go straight,* the Quran and the Prophet will serve as a reminder, but for those who do not, *He misleads many by it* (i.e., the Quran; 2:26). These verses are taken to indicate that the act of traveling the straight path is dependent upon one's will and desire to do so (R). Yet none will to follow the straight path unless God wills that they will it, for the manifestation of desire within human beings is determined by God's Desire (Ṭb). From this perspective, one's will and desire to follow the path is a manifestation of God's Will and Desire within; for more on the relation between human choice and Divine determinism, see 54:49c.

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# 82

# The Cleaving Asunder

## *al-Infiṭār*

*Al-Infiṭār* is an early Makkan *sūrah* most likely revealed after *Sūrah* 79, *al-Nāziʿāt*. It takes its name from the verb in the first verse, one of the many dramatic descriptions of the cataclysmic alterations that will afflict the sky on the Day of Judgment. Like other *sūrah*s from this period, the beginning verses focus upon the events that will mark the Day of Judgment (vv. 1–5), which, as in the previous *sūrah,* are a series of apocalyptic inversions in which the normal order both in Heaven and on earth is turned inside out. This is followed by a reproach and warning of the Last Day (vv. 6–12). The final section (vv. 13–19) contrasts the bliss of the pious with the punishment of the profligate, indicating that in the end all shall know how they have in fact lived.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) When the sky is cleft asunder, (2) and when the stars are dispersed, (3) when the seas are burst forth, (4) and when graves are turned inside out, (5) then shall each soul know what it has sent forth and what it has left behind. (6) O mankind! What has deluded you with regard to your noble Lord, (7) Who created you, then fashioned you, then proportioned you, (8) assembling you in whatever form He willed? (9) Nay! But you deny religion. (10) And yet truly over you

1–2 The "cleaving" or splitting of *the sky* (see also 25:25; 55:37; 84:1), when it *is opened as if it were gates* (78:19) is considered one of the marks of the Day of Judgment (cf. 73:18). When the sky is cleaved, the stars will be *blotted out* (77:8) and *fade away* (81:2).

3–4 These verses move from signs of the Hour in the celestial realm to those on the earth. The seas . . . burst forth, breaking the *barrier which they transgress not* (55:20), mixing with one another and becoming one (Q, R, Ṭ), and *swell over* (81:6; cf. 52:6), covering the earth or parts of it when the earth quakes. For the significance of the *two seas, one sweet, satisfying, the other salty, bitter* (25:53), see 25:53c; 35:12c; 55:19–20c. The seas swell because of a great earthquake that also causes the earth to overturn and cast out all human beings and jinn (see 99:1–2), at which point they *emerge from the graves as if they were scattered locusts* (54:7).

5 Cf. 75:13. According to some, *what it has sent forth* indicates the good deeds done in obedience to God and observance of His Commands, and *what it has left behind* indicates those deeds that, although commanded, were left undone (Ṭ). Others say this verse indicates all the good and evil that individuals have *sent forth,* or done, in accord with which they will be judged, and all the good and evil that was *left behind,* that they could have done during this life, but did not (Ṭ). Al-Ṭabarī, however, maintains that a deed is not something that can be *left behind* unless it has actually been performed, so that *what it has left behind* indicates "a good or evil practice that one has established such that if another performs it he [the one who established it] has the same reward as the one who performed it or the same burden" (Ṭ).

6 Two things are said to delude human beings, the life of this world and Satan, *the Deluder;* see 31:33 and 35:5: *So let not the life of this world delude you; nor let the Deluder delude you concerning God.*

7 *Fashioned you* refers to the manner in which God has made all human parts and faculties sound and functional (R). *Proportioned you* translates *ʿaddalaka,* which could also be read *ʿadalaka,* meaning "turned you," implying that God turns people in any direction He wills. Both readings are viable, though the former is grammatically more appropriate when v. 8 is read as a continuation of v. 7 (R, Ṭ).

8 Some take this verse to indicate the manner in which God chooses a particular human form for each individual (Q, R, Ṭ). Others take this to mean that God can assemble human beings in the form of other animals (Q, R, Ṭ), presumably as punishment, as implied in 2:65: *Be you apes, outcast.* Vv. 7–8 can also be taken to imply the inner qualities rather than the outer form, thus referring to states of faith or disobedience (Qu, R) or states of felicity (*saʿādah*) or wretchedness (*shaqāwah*), which are commonly understood as referring to states of damnation and salvation, respectively, as in 11:105: *On the Day it comes, no soul shall speak, save by His Leave. Among them shall be the wretched and the felicitous.*

9 *Religion,* translating *dīn,* could also be rendered "judgment," as in vv. 15, 17, and 18; for the broader meaning of *dīn,* see the essay "The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions."

10 Cf. 86:4. *Guardians* refers to angels who preserve the record of all the deeds of human beings; see 43:80c; 50:17–18c. In accordance with

there are guardians, (11) noble, writing, (12) knowing what you do. (13) Truly the pious shall be in bliss; (14) and truly the profligate shall be in Hellfire, (15) burning therein on the Day of Judgment. (16) And they will not be absent from it. (17) And what will apprise thee of the Day of Judgment? (18) Then what will apprise thee of the Day of Judgment? (19) A day when no soul will avail another soul in any way, and the Command that Day is God's.

50:17, most maintain that each individual has two angels solely responsible for recording the deeds that he or she performs in this life.

11–12 The record the angels write is said to be the book of deeds that is given to each individual on the Day of Judgment; see 18:49c.

13 See commentary on the identical verse, 83:22. Regarding the meaning of *the pious* (*al-abrār*) and *piety* (*birr*), see 2:44c; 76:5–6c.

14–15 *Profligate* translates *fujjār* (sing. *fājir*), which could also be rendered "libertine." It derives from the verb *fajara,* meaning, "to break open," and implying that those who do evil break open what should be left closed.

16 Whereas previously the profligate had been oblivious, now they will see the reality of how they have lived (see 50:22), and they will not be able to escape its consequences.

17–18 These verses can be taken as an address directly to the Prophet, to all human beings, or to the disbelievers. Some propose that v. 17 is addressed to the pious and v. 18 to the profligate (R).

19 The Day of Judgment is *the Day when no friend will avail a friend in any way* (44:41), and *a day on which no parent will avail his child aught and no child will avail his parent aught* (31:33), meaning that no individual will have recourse to anything beyond the record of his own actions and intentions, or the state of his own soul; see also 2:48, 123. *And the Command that Day is God's* indicates that all intermediaries are then stripped of their power, and God alone is the direct actor. It also points to the fact that *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88), as God abides, while all else fades.

In another variant, this verse can be read as a continuation of the previous verse, in which case the question ends after the word "way."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 83

# Those Who Defraud

## *al-Muṭaffifīn*

*Al-Muṭaffifīn* is a late Makkan or early Madinan *sūrah,* or a combination of the two. The first four verses were reportedly revealed just after the Prophet's arrival in Madinah (Bg, IK, Ṭ); vv. 5–28 are then considered to have been revealed in Madinah; and the last eight verses were most likely the last verses of the Quran to be revealed in Makkah. Others maintain that all of the verses except the first four were revealed in Makkah.

The *sūrah* takes its name from the reference to *the defrauders* in v. 1. *Defrauders* renders *al-muṭaffifīn,* which is based upon the word *ṭafīf,* deriving from *ṭaff,* meaning "the very edge" of something. Something that is slight or insufficient is called *ṭafīf;* the term also indicates a measure that is not completely full, not up to the edge. *Muṭaffifīn* thus implies those who "skim" a tiny bit off the top and in this way shortchange others. More broadly, it indicates those who ask that their own rights be observed, but are not willing to recognize the rights of others, or those who see faults in others, but do not see them in themselves (Qu, R). Beginning with a condemnation of those who shortchange others (vv. 1–6), the *sūrah* then provides a contrast between the fate of the profligate (vv. 7–17) and the rewards of the pious (vv. 18–28) and concludes with a discussion of the fate of the sinners who mocked the Prophet and his followers (vv. 29–36).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Woe unto the defrauders, (2) who, when they take measure from people, demand [it] in full, (3) and when they measure for them or weigh for them, they stint. (4) Do they not think that they will be resurrected (5) unto a tremendous day— (6) a day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds? (7) Nay! Truly the book of the profligate is in Sijjīn. (8) And what will apprise thee of Sijjīn? (9) A book inscribed. (10) Woe that Day to

1–5 Ibn ʿAbbās said, "When the Prophet first moved to Madinah, its inhabitants were the worst kind of defrauders, and so God revealed, *Woe unto the defrauders, who, when they take measure from people, demand [it] in full.* After the revelation of this verse, they became honest in their weighing" (Q, Ṭ, W). According to Abū Hurayrah, these verses refer directly to a man who had two scales, one that he used when buying and another for selling (Q, Ṭs). It is reported that when these verses were revealed, the Prophet recited them to the citizens of Madinah and said, "Five for five." He was asked, "What is 'Five for five'?" He answered, "No people broke their covenant, but that God set their enemies over them. None judged by other than what God sent down, but that poverty spread among them. None fornicated, but that death spread among them. None defrauded, but that their crops failed and they were plagued by famine. No community refused to pay alms, but that God withheld rain from them" (Q, R). These verses can also be extended beyond their immediate context to imply that shame and suffering will befall anyone who intentionally falls short in any matter according to what has been ordained by God. With regard to prayer, it is reported that Ibn Masʿūd, a Companion of the Prophet and early Quranic commentator, said, "Prayer is a measure. Whosoever completes [its measure] God will complete [his reward] for him. And whosoever lightens (*ṭaffafa*) [its measure], you have heard what God has said regarding *al-muṭaffifīn* [the defrauders, lit. "those who lighten"]" (Ṭs).

In a non-canonical variant reading, both instances of "them" (*hum*) in v. 3 can be read as an affirmation of the subject rather than as a direct object; "And when they measure, or they weigh, they stint."

6 Several *aḥādīth* indicate the nature of standing before God. According to one, "The people will be submerged in perspiration according to their deeds, some up to their knees, some up to the waist, and some will have a bridle of perspiration," at which point the Prophet pointed toward his mouth (Q, Ṭs). Other narrations say, "People will stand in their perspiration up to the middle of their ears" (Bg, Q, R, Ṭ). Some say that this day is fifty thousand years; others that it is a thousand years; others say three hundred, one hundred, or forty (Q, R, Ṭ); see 22:47c.

7–8 *Sijjīn* is derived from *sijn,* meaning "prison" (R, Z). Some interpret *Sijjīn* as a reference to a place where disbelievers are held until the Day of Judgment; most say it refers to the lowest depths of Hellfire and relate the *ḥadīth:* "*Sijjīn* is the lowest of the seven earths" (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). Some relate it to the *lowest of the low* (95:5), unto which God is said to have cast *man,* and to the *narrow place* (25:13) into which the disbelievers are to be cast (IK). Others interpret it as a characterization of the book in which evil deeds are indelibly recorded (Q, Qu, R, Ṭs, Z).

9 *Inscribed* here means "sealed" (Q, R), as what is written cannot be decreased or erased (IK, Q, R). Others say it refers to the fact that good and bad deeds are written in the book (Qu). *Marqūm,* translated *inscribed,* derives from *raqm,* meaning

the deniers, (11) who deny the Day of Judgment, (12) which none deny save every sinful transgressor. (13) When Our signs are recited unto him, he says, "Fables of those of old!" (14) Nay! But that which they used to earn has covered their hearts with rust. (15) Nay! Surely on that Day they will be veiled from their Lord. (16) Then they will burn in Hellfire. (17) Then it is said unto them, "This is that which you used to deny." (18) Nay, truly the book of the pious is in ᶜIlliyyūn. (19) And what will apprise thee of ᶜIlliyyūn? (20) A book

"large, bold writing." It may thus imply clear, unambiguous, decisive inscriptions. Some say that this verse describes *Sijjīn* (R), but most agree that it describes *the book of the profligate,* not *Sijjīn* itself (Q, R, Ṭs, Z).

10 This verse is a refrain found throughout *Sūrah* 77 and in 52:11.

13 Cf. 68:15. *Fables of those of old* (cf. 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15) is an expression used in the Quran by disbelievers to deny its veracity.

14 Regarding this verse, a *ḥadīth* states, "Verily, when the servant commits a sin, a black spot appears in his heart. If he repents from it, his heart is polished clean. But if he increases [in sin], the spot will continue to increase. That is the statement of God, *Nay! But that which they used to earn has covered their hearts with rust*" (IK, Q). Some commentators say that this verse refers to inveterate sinners for whom sin upon sin has sealed their hearts from realizing the truth (Q, R), like one *surrounded by his sins* (2:81). According to the Prophet, the heart covered with rust must be "polished." As he says in a famous *ḥadīth,* "For everything there is a polish, and the polish for the heart is the remembrance of God. There is nothing more potent in saving a person from the Punishment of God than the remembrance of God." It was asked, "Not even striving (*jihād*) in the path of God?" Then he replied, "Not even if you were to continue striking with your sword until it breaks."

15 This verse may mean that they are veiled from God's Mercy and Magnanimity (*karāmah;* Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z) or that they are forbidden from seeing their Lord, for in Arabic one can say that one who is barred from seeing the king is "veiled" from him (R, Z). Many relate this to the belief that after the gathering of all human beings and jinn before God (see, e.g., 3:25; 4:87; 6:38, 128; 42:7; 64:9), the believers will see God, but the disbelievers will not (R). In this vein, the famous Persian Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī writes, "Everyone sees the Unseen in proportion to the clarity of his heart, and that depends upon how much he has polished it. Whoever has polished it more sees more—more Unseen forms become manifest to him"(*Mathnawī,* 4:2909–10).

17 Cf. 52:14.

18–19 *ᶜIlliyyūn* is an unusual plural whose singular form is disputed. It indicates high places, persons who sit in high places, or those who dwell in the high parts of mountains. Here it refers to something exalted by many degrees. Contrasted with *Sijjīn* in v. 7, it appears to refer to a place in Heaven in which good deeds are indelibly recorded. The fifth Shiite Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir, is reported to have said, "*Sijjīn* is the seventh earth, and *ᶜIlliyyūn* is the seventh heaven." Opinions differ. *ᶜIlliyyūn* is either in the seventh heaven below the Divine Throne or beyond the seven heavens to the right of the Throne (Q); it indicates heights without limit (Q) or refers to the *lote tree of the boundary* (53:14).

20 Most agree that this verse describes *the book of the righteous* (Q, R, Ṭs, Z). Some, however, say that it could describe *ᶜIlliyyūn* itself, in which case *kitāb,* or "book," would mean "writing" (*kitābah*), indicating that the writing of the deeds of the pious is in *ᶜIlliyyūn* and that it is a "writing inscribed" (R).

inscribed, (21) witnessed by those brought nigh. (22) Truly the pious shall be in bliss, (23) upon couches, gazing. (24) Thou dost recognize in their faces the splendor of bliss. (25) They are given to drink of pure wine sealed, (26) whose seal is musk—so for that let the strivers strive— (27) and whose mixture is of Tasnīm, (28) a spring whence drink those brought nigh. (29) Truly those who sinned did laugh at those who believed. (30) When they passed them, they would wink at

21 Some say that *those brought nigh* refers to the archangels, as in 4:172, in which case it refers to the angels who bear witness to the book of the pious (Q, R, Ṭs). Others say that *those brought nigh* refers to the elect among the pious, who are *the foremost* of *the foremost* (56:10–11). It could also refer to the archangels and *the foremost,* as both are *brought nigh.*

22 Cf. 82:13. Elsewhere *the reverent* and *those who believe and perform righteous deeds* are described as being in *Gardens of bliss* (see 5:65; 10:9; 22:56; 37:43; 52:17; 56:12); see also 9:21; 26:85; 31:8; 56:89; 68:34. Regarding the meaning of *the pious* (*al-abrār*) and *piety* (*birr*), see 2:44c.

23 Cf. 75:23; 88:13. The couches represent the state of the *soul at peace* (89:27), content with God, while God is content with it. The pious are *gazing* at the delights they are given in the Garden (Q, R, Ṭs), or at God Himself (Q, R), as in 75:22–23: *Faces that Day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord.* Some commentators say they gaze upon the punishment endured by their enemies (Q, R, Ṭs; see vv. 34–35), though this interpretation is not consonant with the sayings of the Prophet or with other passages of the Quran.

24 *Thou* can be read in a general sense as an address to any reader or listener or as a specific reference to the Prophet Muhammad. The verse is read by some in the passive voice, "The splendor of bliss can be recognized in their faces" (Q, R).

25 Those in Paradise drink the *pure wine* sanctioned by God. It may be the same as the wine in 37:46–47: *White, delicious to those who drink thereof. No headiness lies therein; nor are they intoxicated by it;* and 56:19: *Wherefrom they suffer neither headache nor stupefaction.* Some say that this *pure wine* is superior to the *rivers of wine* referred to in 47:15 (R).

26 *Seal* refers to either an actual seal of musk upon the wine (Ṭ, Ṭs) or the scent of musk, which appears when the end of the wine is reached (Q, R, Ṭ).

27–28 Most commentators agree that *Tasnīm* is the purest and noblest drink of Heaven (Ṭ). Some say that it flows from the Divine Throne into Paradise. *Tasnīm* is understood by some as a proper name with no specific meaning (R, Ṭ). Others propose that it derives from the verb *sannama,* "to raise," indicating that it raises or ennobles those who drink it (R). According to Ibn ʿAbbās, *Tasnīm* is what is alluded to in 32:17: *No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it as a recompense for that which they used to do* (R). Some say that *Tasnīm* is a spring whose waters are mixed with the *pure wine sealed* for the *companions of the right* (56:8, 27, 38, 90–91; 74:39; 90:18), but from which *those brought nigh* drink in its purest form (Ṭ). Similarly, others say *those brought nigh* drink of it unmixed, while all the other inhabitants of Paradise drink of it mixed (Ṭ). According to al-Rāzī, *Tasnīm* "is the knowledge of God and the delight of gazing upon the Face of God." So *those brought nigh* drink from none but *Tasnīm,* for they gaze upon none but God, whereas *the companions of the right* sometimes gaze upon the delights of the created (though paradisal) world and sometimes upon the Face of God, and thus drink a mixture (R). Some Sufi commentators have identified *Tasnīm* with the highest level of spiritual love (*maḥabbah*).

29–30 According to some, *those who sinned* refers to the leaders of the Quraysh, who used to laugh at and mock several of the more impoverished Muslims (Q, R); see also 23:109–10.

31 *Blithely* translates *fākihīn,* as it is read in most schools of Quranic recitation, though the

one another. (31) And when they returned to their people, they would return blithely. (32) And when they saw them, they would say, "Truly these are astray!" (33) though they were not sent as guardians over them. (34) So that Day those who believed shall laugh at the disbelievers, (35) upon couches, gazing. (36) Have the disbelievers been requited for that which they used to do?

most widespread school of recitation, Ḥafṣ, reads it as *fakihīn,* which translates as "conceited" or "proud."

32 The disbelievers deem the believers to be *astray* for following the Prophet.

33 This verse implies that the disbelievers are not fit to judge the actions of the believers (Ṭs). Some gloss *guardians* (*ḥāfiẓīn*) as "witnesses" (*shāhidīn*), meaning that they arrogate to themselves the ability to bear witness against the believers, but in the Hereafter it is the believers who will bear witness against them (Ṭs).

34 *That Day* is the Day of Resurrection.

35 In this context, the implication is that the believers are gazing upon the disbelievers and witnessing the punishment the disbelievers receive for having mocked them (Aj). It can thus be viewed as a contrast to v. 23, or alternatively as a reassertion of the same paradisal state. See 83:23c.

36 The answer to the question posed by this verse is yes and no. On the one hand, the disbelievers have been requited with punishment for the evil deeds they committed. On the other hand, they have not been requited for what only appear to be good deeds, since *they are those whose deeds have come to naught in this world and in the Hereafter* (3:22; see also 7:147; 18:104; 47:8–9). From a Quranic perspective, only those deeds that are accompanied by belief in God, His prophets, His revelations, and His angels can truly be called good or righteous. Thus the phrase *perform righteous deeds,* which occurs over fifty times in the Quran, is always accompanied by some mention of belief in God.

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# 84

# The Sundering

## *al-Inshiqāq*

Chronologically *al-Inshiqāq* most likely follows *Sūrah* 82, *al-Infiṭār,* making it one of the last *sūrah*s to be revealed in Makkah. It takes its name from the mention of the sky being ***rent asunder*** in the first verse and is also known as *Inshaqqat,* "Rent Asunder" (Āl). As a thematic thread, *Sūrah* 82 alludes to the guardian angels who write one's deeds in a book (82:10–12), *Sūrah* 83, *al-Muṭaffifīn,* contrasts the ***book of the profligate*** (83:7) with the ***book of the pious*** (83:18), and this *sūrah* contrasts the reactions of those who receive their book in the right hand (v. 7), with those who receive it from behind their backs (v. 10) on the Day of Resurrection.

The *sūrah* begins with allusions to events that will transpire on the Day of Judgment (vv. 1–5) and then contrasts those who will have a joyful reckoning with those who will not (vv. 6–15), followed by a series of oaths (vv. 16–18) that lead into a confirmation of the great disparity between the final ends of the believers and the disbelievers (vv. 19–25).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) When the sky is rent asunder, (2) and hearkens unto its Lord, as in truth it must; (3) and when the earth is stretched out, (4) and casts forth what is in it, emptying itself, (5) and hearkens unto its Lord, as in truth it must. (6) O mankind! Truly thou art laboring unto thy Lord laboriously, and shall meet Him! (7) As for one who is given his book in his right hand, (8) he will be reckoned with an easy reckoning (9) and will return to his people joyful. (10) But as for one who is given his book from behind his back, (11) he will cry out for destruction, (12) and will enter a Blaze. (13) Truly among his people he was joyful. (14) Truly he thought that he would never return. (15) Nay! Truly his Lord was watchful

1–2 *The sky . . . rent asunder* refers to the destruction of the world at the end of time (cf. 55:37; 77:9; 82:1–2); the sky *hearkens* unto God, because it cannot but obey its creator (IK, Q).

3 *When the earth is stretched out* means when all that is upon it is made flat (cf. 20:105–7). According to some, this is to prepare for the Day of Judgment, when all human beings will be gathered on a single plain (see 18:47; 20:106; 79:14).

4 This verse refers to the time when all of the graves are emptied and everyone is brought to Judgment (cf. 79:13–14; 99:2). Some say it means that all that was hidden within it becomes manifest.

5 Cf. vv. 1–2.

6 According to Ibn ʿAbbās, this verse means, "Whatever deed you do, you will meet God with it, whether it is good or bad" (IK); see commentary on 99:6–8. Maybudī understands it as an injunction to be mindful, since every moment is a step closer to God.

7 For the symbolic distinction between right and left, see 56:8–9c; for the meaning of the book in which one's deeds are recorded, see 18:49c; and for the symbolism of receiving the book in the right or left hand, see 17:71c; 69:19–29c. This verse and others (e.g., 56:27–46) display the universal identification of the right hand with goodness and light and the left hand (though not mentioned explicitly) with evil and darkness, like the Latin *sinister*, which means "on the left" and is the origin of the English "sinister."

8 The Prophet said, "Whosoever is reckoned on the Day of Resurrection will be punished." To which ʿĀʾishah responded, "But has God not said, *As for one who is given his book in his right hand, he will be reckoned with an easy reckoning*?" The Prophet replied, "That is not the Reckoning; rather, that is the presentation [of deeds]. Whosoever suffers the interrogation of the Reckoning on the Day of Resurrection will be punished" (IK, Q, Z).

9 *His people* (*ahlihi*) may refer to family if they were believers, a group of similar believers, or companions in Paradise (Z). According to 13:3; 40:8; and 43:70, the pious will enjoy the company of pious family members in the Hereafter.

10–12 To reconcile v. 10 with 69:25, which states that those who are reckoned are given their book in their *left hand*, the commentators say that in this instance the left hand will be tied behind the back (IK, Q, Ṭs, Z).

13–14 *Among his people he was joyful* refers to the life of this world; it represents the heedlessness of those who did not believe that they were laboring unto their Lord and would return to Him in the Resurrection and face the Reckoning on the Day of Judgment (cf. 83:31). Regarding this contrast, a *ḥadīth* says, "The world is the prison of the believer and the garden of the disbeliever" (R).

15 *Nay!* That is, they will in fact return. God has been aware of all their actions from the

of him. (16) So I swear by the twilight, (17) by the night and what it enshrouds, (18) and by the moon when full; (19) thou wilt surely journey from stage to stage. (20) So what ails them that they believe not, (21) and that when the Quran is recited unto them, they do not prostrate? (22) Nay! Those who disbelieve deny. (23) But God knows best what they conceal. (24) So give them glad tidings of a painful punishment, (25) save those who believe and perform righteous deeds; theirs shall be a reward unceasing.

moment He created them until the moment He resurrects them (Ṭs).

16 *Twilight* (*al-shafaq*) refers to the remaining redness and light of the sun after its setting at the beginning of the night until it is close to actual nighttime (IK) or the period between the setting of the sun and the last bit of light on the horizon (Q).

17 *Enshrouds* (*tasaqa*) conveys the notion of "gathering together (in one herd)" and points to the symbolic power of night, as it gathers all things together by encompassing them in darkness, just as all things will be brought back to God in the end.

18 *When full* (*ittasaqa*) derives from the same root as "enshroud" (*tasaqa*). In relation to v. 19, it can be seen as a reference to the manner in which all that exists waxes and wanes as it goes through various states and phases.

19 *From stage to stage* is understood by some to indicate the vagaries of human existence, in which we experience "ease after difficulty, difficulty after ease, wealth after poverty, poverty after wealth, health after sickness, and sickness after health" (IK, Q). Yet others say, "*From stage to stage:* weaned after he was breast-fed, and an old man after he was a young man" (IK). Others understand it as a reference to the many states of being from nonexistence to life to death, then to all posthumous states of being; some say it refers only to the posthumous states of being or merely to states of being on the Day of Resurrection (Q, R, Z; see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran"). It can also be seen as a reference to the exchange of states in which those who are lowly on the earth will be exalted in the Hereafter and those exalted on earth will be brought low (R). This verse is likely an address to the Prophet, as it is in the second-person singular, in which case it is seen as a reference to his moving in degrees of nearness to God (R); or as an allusion to the night of Ascension (*miʿrāj;* see 17:1c; My). In this vein, it is recorded that Ibn ʿAbbās said of this verse, "That concerns your Prophet."

20 As a continuation of v. 14, this verse asks, "Seeing as all things move through phases of existence whereby they return to God, how could human beings not discern the truth from these signs and not believe in the Resurrection and in God's Power over all things?" (Q, R).

21 Here the Quran is invoked as another sign of God, as if to say, "If they cannot read the signs of God in the created world, then they should at least be able to recognize the miracle of the Quran and the signs of God contained in it." According to some, *prostrate* (*yasjudūn*) refers to prayer. Others say it refers to humility. Most maintain that this is one of fifteen verses after which one prostrates when reciting the Quran; see 19:58c. Imam Mālik does not maintain that one is obligated to prostrate after reciting this verse, but other Mālikī jurists do (Q).

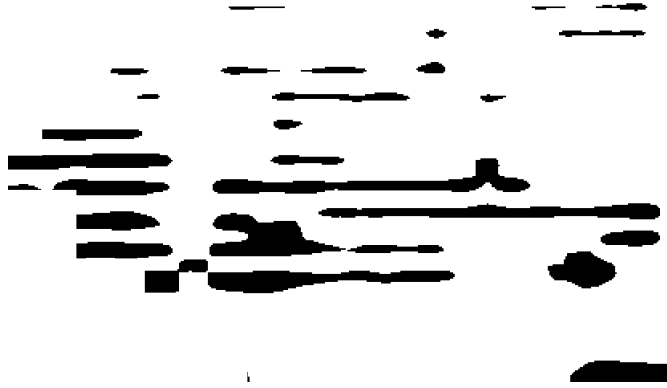
22 Some are inveterate; so no matter whether they see signs that appeal to intelligence or miracles such as the Quran, they will not believe.

23 What the disbelievers are concealing within their breasts and hearts is polytheism, whatever its form, and denial (R, Ṭs).

24 Although *glad tidings* usually indicates the good news of salvation that prophets bring, here as elsewhere (see 3:21; 4:138; 9:3, 34; 45:8), it is used with a sense of irony indicating that hypocrites and disbelievers will receive the *painful*

*punishment* that they seem to desire. Alternately *glad tidings* could be read as a reference to the following verse, thus indicating that the door of repentance remains open.

25 Cf. 41:8; 95:6. Some say this verse should read, "but those who believe . . ." to distinguish the fate of believers from that of disbelievers (Q, Z). Others say that it should be "save those who . . ." to distinguish the disbelievers who repent from those who do not (Q, R). For the meaning of *reward unceasing*, see 41:8c; 95:6c.



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# 85

# The Constellations

## *al-Burūj*

*Al-Burūj* is a Makkan *sūrah* said to have been revealed immediately after *Sūrah* 91, *al-Shams*. It takes its name from the mention in the first verse of the *burūj*, meaning "constellations" or "mansions." The Prophet is reported to have said of this *sūrah*, "Whosoever recites it, God will give reward for the good deeds ten times the number of all people gathered in Friday prayer and all people gathered on the Day of ʿArafah [the most important day of the *ḥajj* and the ninth day of the month of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah]."

The *sūrah* begins with a short series of oaths (vv. 1–3), followed by the story of the *inhabitants of the pit*, who are said to have persecuted the believers (vv. 4–10). Their destiny is then contrasted to that of the believers in v. 11, followed by a description of God's Omnipotence (vv. 12–20) and two oft recited verses that speak of the Quran as being *upon a Preserved Tablet* (vv. 21–22). It is reported that the Prophet would often recite this and the following *sūrah* as part of the two afternoon prayers.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the sky possessed of constellations, (2) by the Day promised, (3) and by the witness and the witnessed! (4) May they perish, the inhabitants of the pit, (5) the fire well fueled, (6) when they sat by it, (7) and were witness to what they did unto the believers, (8) and took vengeance on them for naught but that they believed in God, the Mighty, the Praised, (9) unto Whom belongs sovereignty over the

1 For *constellations* (*burūj*), see 25:61c. Here the *constellations* are considered to refer to the stars themselves (Q), the largest stars (R, Z), lofty towers in the sky, or to the traditional twelvefold division of the belt of the sky through which the planets, including the sun and the moon, pass (Aries, Taurus, etc.; Q, R, Ṭ, Z). Owing to a lexical relation to *tabarruj* ("to display one's beauty"), *possessed of constellations* (*dhāt al-burūj*) could also be read "beautiful in its creation" (Q).

2 *The Day* is the Day of Resurrection (Q, R, Ṭs, Z).

3 Most commentators interpret *witness* and *witnessed* as references to Friday and the Day of ʿArafah, respectively (Bg, Q, Ṭ). Some see the Prophet Muhammad as *the witness,* as in 2:143 and 22:78: *and that the Messenger may be a witness for you* (cf. 4:41; 33:45); and human beings as *the witnessed* (Bg, Q). Others interpret *witness* as a reference to the Prophet Muhammad and *witnessed* as a reference to the Islamic community (*ummah*), while others prefer the pairing of all of the Divine messengers and their respective communities, as the messengers will bear witness for or against their communities on the Day of Judgment (cf. 4:41; 5:117; Q). Another view sees *witness* as the Muslim community and *witnessed* as all other communities, as in 2:143: *Thus did we make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind* (cf. 22:78). Others say that *witness* is human beings and *witnessed* is God (Q). In another interpretation *witness* is human beings and *witnessed* the black stone in the Kaʿbah that pilgrims touch in bearing witness to their covenant with God (Q, Ṭs). Others take God to be *the witness,* as in 4:79: *God suffices as a Witness;* and 6:19: *Say, "What thing is greatest as testimony?" Say, "God is Witness between you and me"* (Q).

4–9 Many stories attempt to identify the *inhabitants of the pit.* Some take it as a reference to the people of Dhū Nuwās al-Yamānī, a Yemeni king who is said to have persecuted the Christians of Yemen in pre-Islamic times (IK). The most frequently cited account in the interpretation of this verse is a *ḥadīth* that relates the story of a king who was enraged that the people recognized God as their Lord and as a lord above him. After he killed a young boy who was foremost among them and the people refused to renounce their religion, he ordered that ditches be dug at the entrances to the roads. It was done, and fires were kindled in them. Then the king said, "Whoever abandons his religion, let him go, and whoever does not, cast him into the fire." So they set about casting people into the fire. Then a woman came with her son, and he said, "Be patient, mother, for truly you are following the truth" (Bg, IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs). Most say that the religion of those persecuted was Christianity; others say they were Magians (Ṭs); still others say it could refer to one of the messengers not mentioned in the Quran (Bg). Although these verses are believed to pertain to a particular historical incident, they present a universal condemnation of all who persecute believers of any faith.

4 Another reading is, "Slain were the inhabitants of the pit."

6 This verse refers to either the disbelievers sitting beside the fire while the believers burned in it (Bg, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs) or the believers, either those who were burning, and thus sitting "upon" it rather than "by" it, or the believers who were not burned

heavens and the earth; and God is Witness over all things. (10) Truly those who persecute believing men and believing women, then do not repent, theirs shall be the punishment of Hell, and theirs shall be the punishment of the burning. (11) Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be Gardens with rivers running below: that is the supreme triumph. (12) Truly thy Lord's assault is severe. (13) Truly it is He Who originates and brings back. (14) And He is the Forgiving, the Loving, (15) Possessor of the Throne, the Glorious, (16) Doer of whatsoever He will. (17) Hast thou heard tell of the hosts— (18) Pharaoh and Thamūd? (19) Yet those who disbelieve are in denial. (20) And God is behind them, All-Encompassing. (21) Nay, it is a glorious Quran, (22) upon a Preserved Tablet.

because they renounced their religion and then sat by witnessing the others burn (R).

7 This verse can refer to either the presence of the disbelievers at the burning of the believers or their bearing witness against themselves on the Day of Judgment, as in 24:24; 36:65; 41:20.

9 For *God is Witness over all things,* see also 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 33:55; 34:47; 41:53; 58:6.

10 This verse could apply only to *the inhabitants of the pit* or to all who persecute believers simply for their belief (R). *Hell* and *burning* may refer to two forms of punishment suffered by those who persecute believers, or to the contrast between the eternal punishment of Hell suffered by *the inhabitants of the pit* and the temporary punishment of burning they inflicted upon the believers (R). Some say *the punishment of Hell* is for their disbelieving and *the punishment of burning* is for persecuting others (Ṭs).

11 *The supreme triumph* (*al-fawz al-kabīr*) most likely refers to Paradise, similar to *the great triumph* (*al-fawz al-ʿazīm*), which commentators usually identify as a reference to *the Garden,* indicating that it is greater than any triumph one can attain in this world (Al). For the blessings of Paradise, see commentary on 5:119; 44:51–57.

12 Assault renders *baṭsh,* which indicates a sudden seizing by God, similar to 11:102: *Such is the seizing of thy Lord when He seizes the towns while they are doing wrong. Surely His seizing is painful, severe* (R). Some interpret this verse as the response to the oath begun in v. 1, with what lies between constituting an affirmation of the oath (Q).

13 God *originates and brings back,* that is, causes things to come into being and then to return to Him, thereby giving them a new life after their life on this earth.

15 For God as *Possessor of the Throne,* see 17:42; 40:15; 81:20. Elsewhere in the Quran God is described as *Lord of the Throne* (9:129; 21:22; 23:86; 23:116; 27:26; 43:82), which is borne by angels (40:7; 69:17). If *Glorious* is read in the nominative, it describes *Possessor;* if in the genitive, it describes *the Throne.*

16 Cf. 22:18: *Truly God does whatsoever He will.* One of the basic themes of the Quran is that God is Omnipotent and His Will is supreme, as in 5:17: *Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them. He creates whatsoever He will, and God is Powerful over all things* (cf. 24:45; 30:54).

17–18 *Hosts* here refers to earlier peoples who denied prophets and were vanquished. Pharaoh provides an older example from the Biblical tradition, and the Thamūd would have likely been a more resonant example for the Arabs. These examples show that the situation faced by the Muslims is the same as the one all believers face and that the Muslims, like those who were oppressed before them, will prevail (R), whether in this life or the next. For the Quranic account of

Pharaoh, see 7:103–41; 20:24–79. For the account of the Thamūd, a pre-Islamic northern Arabian tribe who rejected the Prophet Ṣāliḥ, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68.

20 Although He is "unseen," *God encompasses whatsoever they do* (4:108; 8:47) and is able to inflict upon the hosts of the disbelievers what He inflicted upon the hosts of Pharaoh, the Thamūd, and others (Q).

21–22 According to some, *glorious* (*majīd*) indicates the utmost in nobility, magnanimity, and grace (Q). Others say that it indicates the uncreatedness of the Quran (Q). In light of 15:9, *Truly it is We Who have sent down the Reminder, and surely We are its Preserver,* the present verses are understood to indicate that the Quran is guarded by God from any increase, decrease, distortion, or change (IK, Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs,).

Some say that the *Book concealed* (56:78) and the *Preserved Tablet* are the same (R). Others say that the *Preserved Tablet* refers to a book recited by the angels nigh unto God (Aj, Q, R), while others relate it to *the Mother of the Book* (3:7; 13:39; 43:4), said to be the source of all revelation, from which the Quran and all other revealed Books are derived (Q, Ṭs). Some commentators describe the *Tablet* (*lawḥ*) as one made of white pearls that is as high as the distance between Heaven and earth and as wide as the distance between the east and the west (JJ, Q, Ṭs). Others say that it is located to the right of God's Throne (Q, R, Ṭs). In keeping with the predominant theme of the *sūrah,* believers prevailing over persecution from disbelievers, al-Qushayrī relates the *Preserved Tablet* to 29:49, *Nay, it is but clear signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge,* indicating that the Quran is preserved in the hearts of true believers. For further discussion of the *Preserved Tablet,* see the essay "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy."

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 86

# What Comes by Night

## *al-Ṭāriq*

An early Makkan *sūrah, al-Ṭāriq* was most likely revealed after *Sūrah* 90, *al-Balad.* It takes its title from the mention in the first verse of *al-Ṭāriq,* a word that derives from the verb *ṭaraqa,* meaning "to pound." *Al-ṭāriq* is thus understood by some to indicate "the way," because the path is pounded by the feet that walk upon it. Since doors are closed at night, when people arrive at this time, they must pound on them to gain entry, thus *al-Ṭāriq* is also understood to mean *That which comes by night,* or "The Night Visitant." *Al-Ṭāriq* is also understood by some as a reference to the Morning Star. The *sūrah* begins with an oath by Heaven and the celestial bodies (vv. 1–3). It then calls upon human beings to reflect upon the soul and the humble origins of their physical nature and the fact that all are returning to God (vv. 4–10). An oath echoing that of vv. 1–3 (vv. 11–12) then leads into a final warning (vv. 13–17). It is reported that the Prophet would often recite this and the previous *sūrah* as part of the two afternoon prayers.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the sky and that which comes by night! (2) And what will apprise thee of that which comes by night? (3) It is the piercing star. (4) Over every soul there is a guardian. (5) So let man consider that from which he was created. (6) He was created from a gushing fluid, (7) issuing from between the loins and the pelvis. (8) Truly He is able to bring him back, (9) on the Day when secrets are tested, (10) whereat man has neither strength nor helper. (11) By the resurgent sky, (12) and by the furrowed earth! (13) Truly it is indeed a decisive Word.

1–2 *That which comes by night* refers to either a specific star or all heavenly bodies that appear at night and disappear during the day (Bq).

3 Most say the *piercing star* refers to the Pleiades. Others say that it is Saturn, Venus, or a meteor. A minority say that it can be any star that glitters (Āl). In each interpretation the star is called upon because it pierces the dark (Āl) and in this sense can be seen as an allusion to overcoming ignorance (Bq).

4 *A guardian* refers to the angels who are said to be tasked with recording the deeds of individual human beings (cf. 40:80; 50:18; 82:10–12) or to the angels who protect human beings at all times (cf. 6:61; 13:11), though the protection here may be specifically against the whispers of Satan and jinn referred to in 114:4–6.

5 Let those who deny the Resurrection reflect upon the manner in which God created them (Ṭ). This verse can also be understood as a call to recognize that for which the human being was created, as in 51:56: *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me.* In this vein, Maybudī writes: "God created a face fit for prostration, eyes fit for taking heed, a body fit for service, a heart fit for knowledge (*ʿirfān*), and a secret core fit for love. So *remember God's Blessing upon you* [2:231], for He adorned your tongues with the *shahādah,* your hearts with knowledge (*ʿirfān*) and joy, and your bodies with service and worship."

6–7 *Loins* (*ṣulb*) and *pelvis* (*tarāʾib*) are understood by some to refer to the respective parts of the man and the woman, whose sperm and egg form the fetus (Ṭ); others restrict them to the male (Ṭ, Ṭs), saying that *loins* and *pelvis* refer to the area from which a man's *fluid* gushes.

8 As in 19:67 and 22:5, here the Quran argues that if God is able to create human beings *from dust, then from a drop* (35:11), then He can surely resurrect them, as in 30:27: *He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back, and that is most easy for Him.* Many pre-Islamic Arabs accepted that God was the Creator, but did not accept that He could resurrect the dead (see 18:37; 19:67–73; 22:5–6c; 23:13–16; 35:11; 40:67; 76:2; 80:18–22).

9 *Secrets* refers to all that is hidden in the heart and mind and to all of one's deeds (Z). People's mouths, feet, hands (36:65), and even their skin (41:19–24) will bear witness to what they have done. It is related that Muʿādh ibn Jabal asked the Prophet, "What are these secrets for which the servants [i.e., human beings] will be tested in the Hereafter?" To which he replied, "Your secrets are your deeds, such as prayer, fasting, the alms, the minor ablution, the major ablution, and all other obligatory acts. All deeds are hidden secrets. For if a person wills, he says, 'I have prayed,' though he has not prayed. And if he wills, he says, 'I have made my ablution,' though he has not made his ablution. And this is God's Word (*qawl*), *on the Day when secrets are tested*" (Ṭs).

10 This verse echoes others in which God is spoken of as the sole helper or protector (see, e.g., 2:107, 120; 9:74, 116; 33:18, 65; 42:31; 48:22), and none shall avail another against God's Punishment (2:48, 123; 3:10, 116; 26:88; 31:33; 44:41).

11–12 These verses refer to the cycles of the seasons and the growing of vegetation as signs

(14) And it is not for amusement. (15) Truly they are devising a scheme, (16) and I, too, am devising a scheme. (17) So be gentle with the disbelievers; grant them respite for a while.

that God can resurrect as He wills, just as vv. 6–8 cited human beings' emergence from a base fluid. In reference to heaven, "resurgent" (*rajʿ*) refers to the rains that return periodically. Thus most interpret *the resurgent sky* as a reference to rain or to the clouds that bring rain (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs). Others interpret it as a reference to the continual return of the sun, the moon, and other celestial bodies (Ṭ). The *furrowed earth* is where the vegetation emerges.

13 *A decisive Word* refers to either the Quran or the Day of Judgment, both of which separate good from evil in a decisive manner. The Prophet said of the Quran, "It is a statement that separates right from wrong" (Āl). See 37:21; 44:40; 77:13, 38; 78:17, where the Day of Judgment is referred to as *the Day of Division* between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, light and dark.

15–16 Here the disbelievers among the Quraysh are likened to those who schemed against previous prophets, such as Joseph, Moses, and Hūd. But as 8:18 says, *God makes feeble the scheming of the disbelievers,* since *God is swifter in plotting* (10:21). And although God's *scheme is firm* (7:183; 68:45), those who are guilty *only plot against themselves, though they are unaware* (6:123). Thus 16:127 counsels the Prophet, *Grieve not on their account, nor be distressed by what they plot* (see also 52:46; 77:39).

17 *Grant them respite* indicates that one should not seek to hasten the Hour, as do the disbelievers (see 8:32; 42:18c), because God will deal with them in due time (see 31:24). Some say that the implication that God will deal with them refers to the Battle of Badr in 2/624, when the Makkans were defeated by the Muslims; others say that it refers to the Day of Resurrection, on which all will be judged (Ṭs). The verse can be seen as alluding to punishment in both this world and the Hereafter, but also to mercy insofar as God allows people time to repent.

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# 87

# The Most High

## *al-Aʿlā*

Opinions are divided as to whether *al-Aʿlā* is a Makkan or Madinan *sūrah,* but the majority maintain that it is early Makkan. It is often placed eighth in the chronological order of revelation, immediately after *Sūrah* 81, *al-Takwīr.* Some consider the first part of the *sūrah* to be Makkan and the last part to be Madinan, since it contains words about prayer and the *zakāh* (alms) in vv. 14–15, which, according to narrations from the family of the Prophet, refer to "the prayer and *zakāh* on the *ʿĪd al-fiṭr* [Feast of Breaking Fast]," which was not institutionalized until the Madinan period (Ṭb). Others say that it can still refer to these ritual practices, although it was revealed before them, and that the whole *sūrah* is Makkan (Bg).

The Prophet is said to have recommended reciting *Sūrah*s 87 and 88 for the evening prayer. These same *sūrah*s were often recited by the Prophet on both the *ʿĪd al-fiṭr,* marking the end of Ramadan, and the *ʿĪd al-aḍḥā,* marking the completion of the *ḥajj,* and during the Friday congregational prayer (IK). He is also said to have advised his followers to recite it while in prostration (Ṭs). In the Shiite tradition, it is related that, according to Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, if people knew what a blessing *al-Aʿlā* has, every person would recite it ten times each day, and one who recites it has, in essence, recited the Quran and the scriptures of Moses and Abraham.

The *sūrah* begins with glorification of God (vv. 1–5) and encouragement for the Prophet (vv. 6–9) followed by a contrast between those who heed the Quran and those who avoid it (vv. 10–15). It concludes with a sharp rebuke of those who prefer this world (vv. 16–17) and an affirmation of the connection between the Quran and previous revelations (vv. 18–19).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Most High, (2) Who created, then fashioned, (3) Who measured out, then guided, (4) and Who brought forth pasture, (5) then made it as blackened stubble. (6) We shall teach thee to recite, that thou wilt not forget, (7) save what God wills. Truly He knows that which is open and that which is hidden. (8) And We shall ease thy way unto ease.

1 Regarding the relationship between the different ways in which God is glorified in the Quran, see 64:1c. *The Most High* can be understood to modify *Lord* or *the Name,* though most prefer the former (R, Ṭ). When *Most High* modifies *Lord,* the verse is simply an injunction to glorify God. When it modifies *the Name,* the verse is understood to provide instruction regarding the manner in which one should glorify God, meaning that one should refrain from associating the Name of God with any other thing (R) or that one should praise God with the Names that God has revealed, as in 17:110: *Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate* (R). It is said that when *So glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Magnificent* (56:74) was revealed, the Prophet told his Companions, "Enact it when you bow [in prayer]," and when the present verse was revealed, he said, "Enact it when you prostrate" (Q, R). Muslims thus say "Glory be to God, the Magnificent" three times when bowing in prayer and the formula "Glory be to God, the Most High" three times when prostrating.

2–3 Here *created* refers to human beings in particular, to human beings and animals, or to all of creation (R). With regard to the first, God fashioned the first human being after breathing into him of His Spirit, leaving him without irregularities. Then He *measured out* his form and figure and bestowed the nourishment required for existence (Ṭs). *Measured out* renders *qaddara,* which can also be read *qadara,* meaning to have power or to determine, in which case the verse indicates that after God created and fashioned, He maintained direct power over all that He created (R).

Here guidance refers to the instinct God puts in all things to be able to seek the nourishment that He has already measured out for them or to the manner in which He guides people to His religion and to knowledge of His Unity by manifesting signs and clear proofs (Ṭs). The broader implication is that creation is as it should be, without imperfection or flaw (see 67:3–4c).

4–5 These verses allude to the manner in which God maintains power over the creation and destruction of all living things. *Pasture* renders *marʿā,* which refers to all forms of vegetation.

6 This verse is an assurance that God will grant revelation in due time and ensure the Prophet does not forget it. It is reported that when the Archangel Gabriel came, the Prophet would sometimes recite the beginning of the passage being revealed before Gabriel had finished, fearing that he might forget. So this verse was revealed (Bg, Ṭs). In 20:114 and 75:16–17, the Prophet is also counseled not to "hasten" the revelation.

7 The Prophet is counseled that if a verse has been forgotten, it is because God willed it, not because of a fault on the part of the Prophet (R). Muslims believe that God abrogated some verses and caused others to be "forgotten," but always replaced them with better verses. For a discussion of abrogation, see commentary on 2:106: *No sign do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but that We bring that which is better than it or like unto it;* and the essay "The Quran as Source of Islamic Law."

8 Some understand this verse as an allusion to the uncomplicated nature of the revealed law (JJ, R). See 2:185: *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you;* and 94:5–6. Others say that in light of vv. 6–7, this verse indicates that God will make it easy for the Prophet to memorize the Quran (R). Others interpret the verse as a reference to God's easing the way for believers to enter Paradise (R).

(9) So remind, should the reminder benefit, (10) he who fears will remember; (11) while the most wretched shall avoid it— (12) he who enters into the greatest Fire, (13) then neither dies therein nor lives. (14) He indeed prospers who is purified, (15) remembers the Name of his Lord and prays. (16) Nay, but you prefer the life of this world, (17) while the Hereafter is better and more enduring. (18) Truly this is in the scriptures of old, (19) the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

9 This verse implies that whether it is of benefit or not, all should be reminded of God's message (Bg), for all will be held accountable.

10–11 Those who are certain of the return to God and those who admit to it but are not certain of it are those who fear God (v. 10), while those who deny the return to God are the *most wretched* (v. 11; R). In relation to v. 9, these verses imply that the reminder only benefits those who fear God.

10 Cf. 50:45: *So remind, by the means of the Quran, those who fear My Threat.*

12–13 Cf. 20:74; 74:28–29. The "greatest" or "greater" Fire is that of the Hereafter, while the lesser fire is that of this world (JJ, R). Alternately, v. 12 alludes to different degrees of punishment, with *the greatest Fire* being that for which *the most wretched* are destined (R). In Arabic, to say that one neither lives nor dies is to indicate that one is suffering great trials (R); see 35:36.

14–15 According to some, *He indeed prospers who is purified* refers to purification from idolatry by professing God's Oneness. Others say that it refers to purification through good deeds, while still others say it refers specifically to the alms given on *ʿĪd al-fiṭr* (Bg, Ṭb, Ṭs). According to Shiite tradition, the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, stated that the order of the verses refers to the alms being given in the morning before the two cycles of the ʿĪd prayer.

Here *prayer* is taken by most as a reference to the five canonical prayers, and by some as a reference to the congregational prayer said on the morning of *ʿĪd al-fiṭr* (Bg). According to some, *remembers the Name of his Lord* refers to mentioning the Name of God in the *basmalah* at the beginning of each prayer (Ṭs); others emphasize that it means to remember with both heart and tongue, as remembering God with the tongue while being heedless of God in the heart has no benefit and no reward (Āl). These two verses can be taken together as referring to worshipping with all aspects of one's being by purifying the heart, remembering God with the tongue, and performing the actions commanded by God, the foremost of which is prayer (Āl).

16–17 According to some, *you* is here an address to the disbelievers, while others say that it refers to all of humanity. Regarding the relationship between this world and the Hereafter, a *ḥadīth* states, "The world is the prison of the believer and the garden of the disbeliever"; see 93:4c.

18–19 *This* refers to either the subjects mentioned in vv. 14–17 (Ṭs), the whole of this *sūrah* (Ṭ), or the entire Quran, as in 26:196: *It is indeed in the scriptures of those of old* (Āl). Although Judaism and Christianity do not ascribe a revealed book to Abraham, that Abraham had a particular scripture is implied in both the Quran and the *Ḥadīth*. When the Prophet was asked how many revealed books there were, he responded, "One hundred and four books. He sent down fifty scrolls to Seth, thirty scrolls to Idrīs, ten scrolls to Abraham, and ten scrolls [understood by some to be tablets (*alwāḥ*)] to Moses before the Torah. And He sent down the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Criterion [i.e., the Quran]" (Āl). This tradition has a slightly different narration in Shiite sources (Ṭs); some say the scrolls revealed to Abraham were twenty in number.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 88

# The Overwhelming Event

## *al-Ghāshiyah*

*Al-Ghāshiyah* was revealed in Makkah. It takes its name from the mention of *the overwhelming event* in the first verse, which most maintain refers to the Day of Resurrection. It can be seen as related to the previous *sūrah* insofar as it elaborates upon the dichotomy between the believers and the disbelievers discussed in 87:11–15. The *sūrah* begins with a vivid description of the torments suffered in the Fire (vv. 1–7), followed by a description of the blessings enjoyed in the Garden (vv. 8–16). It then calls people to witness the signs of God in His creation (vv. 17–20) and concludes by reminding the Prophet that he is only a warner and is not responsible for the final end of those who do not heed the call (vv. 21–26). It is reported that the Prophet would often recite this *sūrah* during the Friday congregational prayer along with the previous *sūrah* (Āl).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Hast thou heard tell of the overwhelming event? (2) Faces that Day shall be humbled, (3) toiling, weary, (4) entering a scorching Fire, (5) given drink from a boiling spring. (6) They will have no food, save a vile thorn (7) that neither nourishes nor avails against hunger. (8) Faces that Day shall be blessed, (9) contented by their endeavoring, (10) in a lofty Garden (11) wherein they hear no idle

1 The beginning of the verse can also be rendered, "Thou hast heard tell" (Āl). If understood as a question, it is rhetorical, for emphasis. In the context of this *sūrah, the overwhelming event* most likely refers to the Day of Resurrection, whose grandeur will overcome all of humanity (cf. 12:107; JJ). But it is also taken by some to mean that Hell will "cover" or "overwhelm" the people in layers (cf. 7:41; Āl) or that the Fire will overwhelm the faces of disbelievers (cf. 14:50; Ṭs).

2 Here, *humbled* means abased or humiliated (IK, JJ). Cf. 75:24. Unlike humility that one experiences in this world, this humility will reportedly be of no benefit to disbelievers (IK) since the door to repentance is open only in this world, not in the Hereafter.

3–4 *Toiling, weary* can be understood as a reference to their toil in the *scorching Fire*, which is said to be dragging chains and shackles, or to their toil in this world, which is for naught if done in opposition to God (Ṭs). Others see *toiling* as a reference to performing disobedient acts in this world and *weary* as a reference to suffering in the Fire (IK). *Taṣlā*, here rendered "entering," can also be read *Tuṣlā*, meaning, "made to enter."

5 *Boiling spring* refers to water at the highest possible heat (cf. 55:44; IK), a stark contrast to the *flowing spring* in v. 12.

6 *Vile thorn* translates *ḍarīᶜ*, which is the name given to the dry version of a bitter and thorny desert shrub called *shibrīq*. When dry, it is said to be so vile that no animal will eat it (Āl, Bg, Q, Ṭs). Some say that it designates a tree of the Fire (Q, Ṭ), similar to *Zaqqūm* in 37:62; 44:43; and 56:52. According to a *ḥadīth*, "*Ḍarīᶜ* is a thing in the Fire that resembles thorns. It is bitterer than aloes, more fetid than a putrid corpse, and more burning than fire. God has named the thing *ḍarīᶜ*" (Q). Some say *ḍarīᶜ* means "poison" (Ṭs). Others say that it derives from the verb *ḍaraᶜa*, meaning "to humble" or "to abase," because eating *ḍarīᶜ* is part of the humiliation and abasement for those in the Fire (Q, Ṭs). Most commentators agree that it is not the same as other things the disbelievers will be made to eat in Hell, such as *Zaqqūm* and *filth* (*ghislīn;* 69:36), but that these refer to the vegetation found in different levels of the Fire (Q).

7 It is related that in response to v. 6 the Arabs said, "Our camels are nourished by *ḍarīᶜ*," though it was actually *shibrīq*, the shrub before it dried. So this verse was revealed (Bg, Q, Ṭs).

8 For characteristics of faces in the Hereafter, see 75:22–23; 80:38; 83:24.

9 In contrast to those whose deeds bear no fruit in the Hereafter in v. 3, those referred to in this verse will realize and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

11 In Paradise there be will no vain discourse (IK); cf. 19:62; 56:25; 78:35. Here *they* is based upon reading the faces in v. 8 as the subject of the verb. It could also be understood as an address to the Prophet in the second person singular, "thou hearest no idle talk therein." In another variant, the verb is read in the passive

talk. (12) Therein lies a flowing spring. (13) Therein are raised couches, (14) goblets placed, (15) cushions arrayed, (16) and carpets spread. (17) Do they not consider the camels, how they are created; (18) the sky, how it is raised; (19) the mountains, how they are established; (20) and the earth, how it is spread? (21) So remind! Thou art but a reminder; (22) thou art not a warder over them. (23) But whosoever turns away and disbelieves, (24) God shall punish him with the greatest punishment. (25) Truly unto Us is their return, (26) then truly with Us lies their reckoning.

with *idle talk* as the subject, "no idle talk is heard therein."

12 *Spring* can be read as having a generic import indicating a multitude of springs in heaven (IK, Ṭs, Z).

13 These are the same as the embroidered couches mentioned in 56:15. Those seated upon such couches are said to have had all rancor removed from their breasts (cf. 15:47).

14 The mention of *goblets* in the Quran is taken as an allusion to the wine of Paradise, which they contain; see 56:18–19c; 78:34c.

17–20 Camels, mountains, sky, and earth would be the most predominate aspects of any desert journey in Arabia, indeed of desert life itself. These verses indicate that reflecting upon the signs of God in the created order should suffice to make one understand the truth.

17 Camels were central to desert livelihood, as they were easy to domesticate; could be eaten, milked, or used as beasts of burden; and could carry large loads for many days, surviving on little water and thorny desert brush (Bg, IK, Ṭs). The camel is thus seen in many commentaries and in Islamic literature in general as one of the supreme examples of God's Wisdom and Power. The reference to camels can also be understood as an allusion to the docile nature of camels, who despite their strength will yield to one who is leading them. In this sense, the verse could be read as chastising human beings for not yielding to the guidance of God in the manner that camels yield to their guides (ST).

18 Cf. 50:6.

19–20 The mountains being made firm is cited as evidence of God's Power and Mercy in several verses (13:3; 15:19; 16:15; 21:31; 27:61; 31:10; 41:10; 50:7; 79:32) and is often joined to a discussion of the earth being spread out in such a way that human beings derive many benefits from it.

21–26 The Prophet's mission is only to remind people of the truth. He will not be held responsible for the faith or disbelief of others, as in 13:40: *Thine is only to proclaim, and Ours is the Reckoning* (cf. 3:20; 5:92, 99; 16:35, 82; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12), and he does not have the ability to create faith in their hearts (IK). That judgment and reckoning lie with God alone is also mentioned in 6:52, 69; 13:40; 26:113.



# 89

# The Dawn

## *al-Fajr*

Most commentators consider *al-Fajr* to be an early Makkan *sūrah,* though some maintain that it is Madinan (Āl). Most likely the tenth *sūrah* in the chronological order of revelation, it takes its title from the first word of the *sūrah*. It follows upon the previous *sūrah* in that *Faces that Day shall be humbled, toiling, weary* (88:2–3) can be seen as applying to those for whom *thy Lord poured upon them the scourge of punishment* (v. 13), and *Faces that Day shall be blessed, contented by their endeavoring* (88:8–9) can be seen as applying to those to whom God says, *O thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting* (vv. 27–28). The *sūrah* begins with a series of oaths (vv. 1–4) followed by brief descriptions of the punishments that befell tyrannical regimes in the past (vv. 6–13). This transitions to a discussion of the human tendency to vacillate in the face of fortune or trial (vv. 14–16), a rebuke to those who are stingy (vv. 17–20), and a reminder of the Day of Judgment (vv. 21–26), culminating in an address to the souls of the believers, here referred to as the *soul at peace* (vv. 27–30).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the dawn, (2) by the ten nights, (3) by the even and the odd, (4) and by the night as it recedes! (5) Is there an oath therein for one who is mindful? (6) Hast thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with ᶜĀd, (7) Iram the pillared, (8) the like of which was never created in all the land, (9) Thamūd who

1–2 Some see these verses as a reference to the break of dawn at the beginning of Muḥarram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, and to its first ten nights. Others see them as a reference to the break of dawn at the Feast of Sacrifice at the end of the *ḥajj* and the first ten nights of the sacred month of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, the month of the *ḥajj* (see 2:196–97; 22:27–29). Others see them as a reference to the break of dawn during Ramadan and the last ten nights of Ramadan, the period during which the Quran is said to have first been revealed (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 97; R, Ṭs).

3 Commentators have given this verse up to thirty-six different interpretations (Ṭb). Some interpret *even* as a reference to all of creation, for as 78:6–8 says, *Did We not . . . create you in pairs,* and *odd* as a reference to God, Who is One without peer, hence odd (R, Ṭs). According to a saying attributed to the Prophet, this verse refers to the prayers, most of which have an even number of prayer cycles, and one of which, the sunset prayer (*maghrib*), has an odd number of cycles (R, Ṭs). Others say that *odd* refers to the Day of ᶜArafah, which is the ninth day of the *ḥajj,* and that *even* refers to either the eighth day, when the pilgrims travel to Mt. ᶜArafāt, or the tenth day, which is the Feast of Sacrifice (Ṭs). According to other interpretations, *the odd* refers to Adam, and *the even* to Eve (R, Ṭs); *the even* refers to Ṣafā and Marwah, between which the pilgrims pass during the pilgrimage, and *the odd* refers to the Kaᶜbah (Ṭs). One Shiite interpretation maintains that *the even* refers to ᶜAlī and Fāṭimah and *the odd* refers to the Prophet himself (Ṭs).

4 Most commentators interpret this verse as a reference to night in general (Q, R), in which case it is seen to indicate the Wisdom of God's measuring between night and day (R). Some say that it could be a specific reference to the night of the *ḥajj* when the pilgrims gather on the plain of Muzdalifah before moving to Minā (Q, R, Ṭs). Others say it could be seen as a reference to the *Night of Power* (see 97:1–2; Q).

5 *One who is mindful* (*dhī ḥijr*) is derived from the verb *ḥajara,* meaning "to prevent" or "to prohibit." *Ḥijr* is thus understood to indicate the intellect, because it prevents one from falling into error and confusion (R, Z). *Ḥijr* can also be taken to imply self-control (*ḥilm;* Ṭ).

6 For the account of the ᶜĀd, a pre-Islamic southern Arabian tribe who rejected the Prophet Hūd, see 7:65–72; 11:50–60; 41:15–16; 54:18–21.

7–8 *Iram* is believed to refer to either a particular people or the city of the ᶜĀd. Several sources cite the Arabian legend that this city was built by Shaddād, the son of ᶜĀd, with gold and silver and trees full of jewels. Some say ᶜĀd was a son of ᶜAwṣ, the son of Iram, the son of Sham, the son of Noah, and since the name of the ancestor of a tribe was used for the tribe, the tribe of ᶜĀd was also called Iram (Z). Iram is then taken as a reference to *ᶜĀd the Former* (53:50), while ᶜĀd the Latter were simply referred to as ᶜĀd. According to this interpretation, *pillared* refers to the tall stature of the people. If taken as a reference to a city where they lived, *pillared* refers to the architecture of their city. *Pillared* can also be seen as a reference to the quality of their stature, as in Arabic to say individuals are *rafīᶜ al-ᶜimād,* literally "with raised pillar," means that they are of a noble stature.

9 For the account of the Thamūd, a pre-Islamic northern Arabian tribe who rejected the Prophet Ṣāliḥ, see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31.

hollowed the rocks in the valley, (10) and Pharaoh of the tent poles, (11) who tyrannized the land (12) and increased corruption therein? (13) So thy Lord poured upon them the scourge of punishment. (14) Truly thy Lord lies in ambush. (15) As for man, whenever his Lord tests him, then honors him and blesses him, he says, "My Lord has honored me." (16) And as for whenever He tries him and straitens his provision, he says, "My Lord has abased me." (17) Nay, but you honor not the orphan, (18) nor urge you the feeding of the

10 For the possible meanings of *tent poles* (*awtād*) in relation to Pharaoh, see 38:12c.

11–12 These verses refer to all three groups mentioned in vv. 6–10.

13 *Poured* indicates the continuous nature of the punishment that is realized in this life and the next. *Scourge* translates *sawṭ*, which indicates something that is mixed in various ways. Thus it also means a "whip," which is woven of various materials. Here it indicates either the nature of the punishment in which blood and flesh are said to be mixed together or to the various punishments that afflicted the three peoples (Q, R): *a howling, raging wind* for the tribe of ʿĀd (69:6; cf. 41:16; 51:41; 54:19), an "overwhelming" earthquake for the tribe of Thamūd (69:5; cf. 7:78), and the drowning of Pharaoh and his host (2:50; 7:136c; 8:54; 10:90; 17:102–3; 28:40; 43:55; 44:23–24; 51:40).

14 Nothing escapes God, for He is ever watchful, hearing what people say in public and private, seeing what they do publicly and privately, and rewarding or punishing them accordingly (Q; cf. 78:21). The point is that no matter what respite God may allow for tyrants to work corruption, they will be punished for it in due time, as in 3:178; 7:182–83; 22:48.

15–16 Cf. 22:11; 23:55–56; 30:36; 41:51. Human beings are inclined to think that wealth and status are marks of true worth or signs of one's standing with God, forgetting that God *outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12; see 34:39c) and that *surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you* (49:13). Al-Rāzī connects the present verses to 30:7: *They know some outward aspect of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless;* and to 22:11: *And among mankind some worship God upon a brink: if good befalls him, he is content thereby, but if a trial befalls him, he is turned over upon his face.* The implication is that human beings forget the balance between the things of this world and those of the next. What appears to be a benefit in this world may in fact be a detriment in the next, and one who appears abased here may in fact be honored in the Hereafter, and vice-versa. With regard to the balance between this world and the next, the more people incline to the sensory things of this world, the more difficult will be their passage from it (R). According to a *ḥadīth qudsī*, "God says, 'Truly I do not honor one whom I have honored with worldly abundance; and I do not abase one whom I have abased with paucity thereof. I only honor one whom I have honored with obedience unto Me; and I only abase one whom I have abased with disobedience unto Me'" (Q).

17–20 *Nay* is a rebuke to those who make the errors implied in vv. 15–16 (Q, R). The accusation that they *devour inheritance* and do not *honor the orphan* alludes to the abuse of the inheritance bequeathed to orphans, a point that is addressed in 2:220; 4:2–3, 8–10, 127; 6:152 (cf. 107:1–3). Some read all of these verses in the third-person plural rather than the second-person plural (Q, Ṭ). Either reading is accepted. Following upon vv. 15–16, the implication of vv. 17–20 is that failure to appreciate the true nature of God's honoring and abasing leads people to act inequitably toward those who are less privileged (Ṭs).

18 There is disagreement about how *urge you* should be read. It can be read in two ways in

indigent. (19) You devour inheritance with rapacious devouring, (20) and love wealth with abounding love. (21) Nay, but when the earth is ground up, grinding upon grinding, (22) and your Lord comes with the angels, row upon row; (23) and Hell is brought forth that Day—that Day man will remember; yet whence will that remembrance avail him? (24) He will say, "Would that I had sent forth for my life!" (25) That Day none punishes as He punishes, (26) and none binds as He binds. (27) O thou soul at peace! (28) Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting. (29) Enter among My servants. (30) Enter My Garden.

the second-person plural: transitive, *taḥuḍḍūna,* meaning "nor urge you," or reflexive, *taḥāḍḍūna,* meaning "nor urge you one another." And it can be read two ways in the third-person plural: transitive, *yaḥuḍḍūna,* meaning "nor do they urge," or reflexive, *yuḥāḍḍūna,* meaning "nor do they urge one another" (Q, Ṭ). When read in the third person, it is seen as applying to those mentioned in vv. 15–16 (cf. 69:34).

19 This verse means that people consume whatever they can find without knowing or questioning whether it is permitted (*ḥalāl*) or forbidden (*ḥarām;* Ṭ). Here it implies that they consume both their own share of an inheritance and that of others (Ṭ).

20 Cf. 102:1–2; 104:1–3.

21 *Nay* is a response to those who commit the sins mentioned in vv. 17–20. *Ground up* implies that all things have been destroyed and reduced to sand, as if by a great earthquake (Q, R; cf. 20:105–7; 56:5; 69:14; 79:6–7). According to some this grinding will prepare the plain on which all human beings and jinn will then be gathered for the Reckoning on the Day of Judgment (IK, Ṭ; see 18:47c; 20:106; 79:14c).

22 As God is not considered to have a body or be a "thing" that can be said to be in a particular place or to move from one place to another, some commentators read this verse as an allusion to God's Power, Decree, or Command (Q, R). Others say that it indicates God's Presence, because true knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of God will come on that Day, even if some had denied God before it (R, Ṭs). It is said that the angels will be lined up like Muslims in prayer (Ṭs). Others say the angels will descend from every heaven forming lines around the believers (R; cf. 78:38).

23–24 With regard to *Hell . . . brought forth,* a *ḥadīth* says, "Hellfire will be brought forth that Day and it will have seventy thousand leashes, and each leash will have seventy thousand angels pulling it" (IK, Q). These verses indicate that people will remember how they conducted themselves in this world, but there will be no opportunity for repentance or to make up for lost time. Most commentators say *Would that I had sent forth for my life* means, "Would that I had sent forth good deeds that would save me from the Fire" (Q, R). Yet even believers will have some regret, since as a *ḥadīth* says, "There is no time wherein the son of Adam does not remember God, but that it will be a source of regret for him on the Day of Judgment."

25–26 Ultimately, God will be the only one who punishes anyone on the Day of Judgment, meaning that there is no punishment like the punishment inflicted on that Day. The binding alludes to the chains and shackles mentioned in 13:5; 34:33; 36:8; 40:71; 76:4. Others read, "He punishes none with his punishment, and He binds none with his binding" (Āl, Qu, R), meaning that God will not punish anyone with the punishment of another or that God will not punish anyone as severely as He punishes the disbelievers (Qu). This interpretation could be general, meaning that no one suffers the punishment or binding due another, since *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38; Āl, R, Z). It could also be specific, applying to a particular individual (Āl, Q, Z) or to Satan (Āl).

27–30 It is said that these verses are an address from the angels to human beings (Āl, Q, R, Sy) or directly from God Himself (Āl, R), delivered either at the moment of death, when the soul leaves the body, or on the Day of Resurrection (Q, R, Ṭs). They play an important role in Muslim piety, as they are often recited in eulogies for the dead and are seen by Sufis and others as a reference to the true nature of the soul when it is purified of all defilements.

27 The *soul at peace* is said to be the soul that has certainty (Q, Qu, R); this is the meaning of Abraham's request to God in 2:260, *So that my heart may be at peace* (R). The *soul at peace* is also said to possess true knowledge, or gnosis (*maʿrifah;* Qu, R). Elsewhere the soul is said to be *at peace in the remembrance of God* (13:28; Q, Qu, R). From one perspective, the degree of remembrance is in accord with the strength of certainty (Āl), both of which are in accord with the degree of peace. Others speak of the soul so illuminated by the heart that all blameworthy character traits have been removed and all praiseworthy character traits are manifest (Jurjānī, *al-Taʿrīfāt,* 239). It is reported that Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. 29/649), one of the leading authorities on the Quran among the Prophet's Companions, read this verse as "O thou soul secure (*āminah*), at peace" (Q, R), implying the soul that is not fazed by fear or sorrow (Aj, R), unlike those described in vv. 15–16.

The soul is said to have three levels: the *soul at peace* (v. 27), which is in command of its lusts and desires and has attained certainty; *the blaming soul* (75:2), which strives to overcome its lusts and desires; and *the soul* that *commands to evil* (12:53), which is at the mercy of its lusts and desires; see 75:1–2c; 12:53c. The *soul at peace* is said to be "that which issues from the light of the first [Divine] Address, through which it was brought into being out of nonexistence by the light of pretemporality (*nūr al-qidam*) and it is at peace with the Real [i.e., God], with His Address, and in union with Him (*wa bi wiṣālihi*). Then its Lord calls it to its first origin (*maʿdin*), wherein it inclines, from the first to the last, toward nothing other than witnessing God, content with God through God and content in the Presence of God" (Aj).

28 That the soul returns to its Lord is understood to imply that it was with its Lord in the Garden before creation (R). Many interpret this verse to mean *content* with the reward of God and *contenting* to God for having performed good deeds (Q, R). Others understand it as an indication that one is content with everything that God has decreed for all matters. Still others take it as an indication that the soul returns to the Divine Essence in a state of complete contentment (Aj, K), in which case, *content, contenting* could be read as two different levels of contentment: the first is the contentment experienced from God through God, and the second, the contentment experienced when standing before God (Aj). Some emphasize that there can be no contentment with God until God is content with souls, as in 5:119; 9:100; 58:22; and 98:8: *God being content with them and they being content with Him* (K). Contentment is seen by some as one of the most important virtues; it has been described as "the greatest gate of God and the paradise of this world" (Qu, *Risālah*).

29–30 *Among My servants* means among the righteous servants, as in the supplication of Solomon in 27:19: *My Lord, . . . cause me to enter, through Thy Mercy, among Thy righteous servants!* (Aj; cf. 29:9). In this sense it is read as an address to the spiritual elect (K). Some read, "Enter into My servants," meaning their bodies, thus alluding to spirits returning to bodies for the bodily resurrection (Q, R, Sy, Ṭs). Some say it can mean both at the same time (Āl). According to several *aḥādīth,* the Hereafter has progressive levels with lower and higher gardens. Thus, while most take *My Garden* as an allusion to Paradise in general, some take it as an allusion to the highest Garden, the Garden of the Divine Essence, in the very Presence of God (K); see the essay "Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in the Quran."

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 90

# The Land

## *al-Balad*

Most commentators consider *al-Balad* to be from the early Makkan period, although al-Suyūṭī and others maintain that it was revealed immediately after *Sūrah* 50, *Qāf,* in the middle of the Makkan period. A minority maintain that it is Madinan, or that all but the first four verses are Madinan (Āl). The *sūrah* takes its title from the mention of *this land* in the first verse. It begins with two oaths that lead into a discussion of the human condition (vv. 1–4). It then reproaches human beings for failing to realize the nature of their condition and failing to put their faculties and possessions to proper use (vv. 5–11), followed by instruction as to how they should act (vv. 12–17), and concluding with a contrast between *the companions of the right* and *the companions of the left* (vv. 18–20).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Nay, I swear by this land, (2) while thou art free in this land; (3) and [by] the begetter, and that which he begat! (4) Truly We created man in travail. (5) Does he suppose that none will ever have power over him? (6) He says,

1 Some read this verse without *Nay,* interpreting that the article *lā* as one of emphasis rather than negation (Q). When read as an article of negation, it can be seen as a rebuke to those who are of the disposition criticized in vv. 5–11 (Q) or as a rebuke to the Quraysh (IK). *Land,* translating *balad,* can refer to Arabia, though a majority read it as "city," referring to Makkah (Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z), and a minority say it refers to Madinah (Q). *Balad* can also be read in a more general manner as a reference to the earth.

2 Most interpret this verse to mean that the Prophet is free to act as he deems best in Makkah (IK, Q, R, Ṭ). In this sense, it is seen as a direct response to the conquest of Makkah in 8/630 or, if revealed during the Makkan period, as a premonition of the conquest, in which a few members of the Quraysh were slain. Even in pre-Islamic times, Makkah was considered sacrosanct and fighting there was prohibited. That the Muslim armies spilled blood there during the conquest was thus seen as a grave violation. It is reported that the Prophet said, "Truly God made Makkah sacred on the day that He created the heavens and the earth. Therefore, it is sacred until the Hour is come [i.e., the end of time]. And it was not made lawful (*tuḥalla*) to any before me and will not be made lawful to any after me; and it was only made lawful to me for one hour of a day" (IK, Q, R, Ṭs). Others say that this verse refers to God giving the Prophet free passage through Makkah, even if the Quraysh did not (Ṭs), for, as the Quraysh were the keepers of the Kaʿbah, it was a disgrace for them to not allow someone, let alone one of God's messengers, access to it. The verse could also be read, "And thou art present in the land," alluding to the fact that this land has been honored by God with the presence of His Messenger (R).

3 *The begetter, and that which he begat* means Adam and his progeny, or every begetter and every begotten (Q, R, Ṭ, Ṭs), thus all of humanity from its beginning to its end. Or the phrase can be seen as a reference to Abraham and Ishmael (R, Ṭs) or to Ishmael and his progeny (Q), both linking it to *this land* because of Abraham's association with Makkah and because Ishmael was seen as the father of the Arabs; see 2:126c. Another metaphorical interpretation states that *the begetter* is the Prophet and *that which he begat* is his community (Q). Some also read it as an allusion to the Prophet's descent from Abraham (ST).

4 Many commentators relate this verse to the interpretation attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, "Enduring the hardships of the world in life and the severities of the Hereafter" (IK, Q, Ṭs). Others relate it to 46:15, *His mother carried him in travail and bore him in travail,* and see it as a reference to the hardships of this world: from birth, to weaning, to earning a living, to growing old, to facing death (IK, R), for in life there is naught but toil and trial (R). Others see it as a reference to the trials of death, the grave, and the Day of Judgment (R). *Travail* translates *kabad,* which can also mean "erect" or "upright." When read this way, this verse is sometimes interpreted as a reference to man being the only creature that walks upright upon two legs (Ṭ).

5–6 V. 5 asks, "Does man not think that he will be held accountable for all his actions?" In context, the implication is that those who are deluded by their own wealth do not realize that God *outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will* (13:26; 17:30; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39) and can remove their wealth at any moment. It also implies both that people will be taken to account for how they have spent their wealth and that they are responsible for the manner in which wealth is obtained, no matter how philanthropic they may be. Some have said that v. 6 refers to Ḥarith ibn ʿĀmir, who, when the Prophet advised

"I have squandered vast wealth!" (7) Does he suppose that no one sees him? (8) Did We not make for him two eyes, (9) a tongue, and two lips, (10) and guide him upon the two highways? (11) Yet he has not assailed the steep pass. (12) And what will apprise thee of the steep pass? (13) [It is] the freeing of a slave, (14) or

him to pay money for the atonement of a sin, objected, "My money has gone to atonements and payments since the day I entered the religion of Muhammad" (Q, Ṭs), thus implying that he did not understand the spiritual value of his expenditures and thought he had squandered his wealth.

7 This verse asks, "Do people think that God will not ask how they obtained their wealth and how they spent it?" (R, Ṭ). Some say this refers to a specific individual who claimed to have spent money for Islam, though he had not spent anything (R, Ṭs). A *ḥadīth* says, "The servant does not move forward on the Day of Resurrection until he has been asked about three things: about his years, how he passed them; about his wealth, from what he acquired it and on what he spent it; and about his knowledge, what he did with it" (Āl); a Shiite version adds a fourth, "and about his love for the People of the Household [i.e., the family of the Prophet]" (Ṭs).

8–9 The implication is that one who is able to make these subtle instruments from which human beings derive great benefit would certainly be able to know every deed and hold human beings accountable for what they have done with these instruments.

10 *The two highways* are interpreted to be those of good and evil, as in a well-known *ḥadīth*, "O people! There are only two highways: the highway of good and the highway of evil. Make not the highway of evil more beloved to you than the highway of good" (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). Some commentators relate this to 76:3: *Truly We guided him upon the way, be he grateful or ungrateful* (IK, R).

11–12 *Assail* translates *iqtaḥama*, meaning to do something with great intensity (R, Z) or to throw oneself into something without consideration of the consequences (Āl, Q). The implication is that those who contribute money for religious purposes, but then regret it, saying, *I have squandered vast wealth* (v. 6), or those who have failed to engage fully in similar religious duties have not achieved the full measure of sincerity—have not fully embarked upon the highway of good—and are not thankful for the great blessings God has provided, such as those mentioned in vv. 8–9. Thus al-Zamakhsharī glosses v. 11 with 3:117: *The parable of what they spend in this life of the world is that of a frigid wind that strikes the tillage of a people who have wronged themselves, destroying it. God wrongs them not, but themselves do they wrong.* In this interpretation, *the steep pass* is a metaphorical reference to distributing wealth in the manner mentioned in vv. 13–17 and accomplishing meritorious deeds. It is thus likened to "striving" (*mujāhadah*) for God (Q, R), as in a famous saying attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, "*The steep pass* of God is severe; it is the human being's striving against his soul, his caprice, and his enemy, Satan" (Q, R). Some view *the steep pass* as an allusion to one or several of the obstacles that disbelievers will encounter in the Hereafter (Q, R, Ṭ). Given what follows in vv. 13–17, many read v. 12 to mean, "What will apprise thee of assailing the steep pass?" (Q). Al-Tustarī likens assailing *the steep pass* to attaining spiritual knowledge (*maʿrifah*), which can only be done through the power and strength of God by which one frees the soul of desire (ST).

13 A *ḥadīth* states, "Whoever releases a believing slave (*raqabah*), he will be his ransom from the Fire" (Q, Ṭ). There is a debate as to which is more praiseworthy, charity (*ṣadaqah*) or the manumission of a slave. Some point to the placement of this verse before the following verses as an indication that manumission is superior (Q, R). This verse can also imply that one should free one's own neck (*raqabah*) through repentance (Bg, Ṭs) or by performing the acts of worship by which one attains Paradise, since that is considered to be the greatest freedom (R).

14 This verse points to the fact that giving one's wealth is more difficult in times of need, though of greater benefit. Thus al-Rāzī glosses this verse with 2:177; and 76:8: *And give food,*

giving food at a time of famine (15) to an orphan near of kin, (16) or an indigent, clinging to the dust, (17) while being one of those who believe and exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to compassion. (18) Those are the companions of the right. (19) And those who disbelieve in Our signs, they are the companions of the left. (20) Upon them is a Fire enclosed.

*despite loving it, to the indigent, the orphan, and the captive.*

15 This verse constitutes two meritorious acts, as one should be generous toward orphans and toward relatives (Q, R). Most maintain that *orphan* (*yatīm*) indicates one whose father has passed away; while some maintain it is both parents (R).

16 An indigent is one who has no home other than the dust (Q, Ṭ).

17 One does not *assail the steep pass* by simply performing the deeds mentioned in vv. 13–16; one must do so on the basis of belief in God, the requisite condition for God's acceptance of such deeds, as in 9:54: *And naught prevented their spending from being accepted from them, save that they disbelieved in God and in His Messenger, and only come to the prayer lazily, and only spend reluctantly* (Q). Exhorting to *patience* (cf. 103:3) pertains to encouraging one another in maintaining religious practice in the face of difficulties and opposition, and exhorting to *compassion* pertains to encouraging one another toward mercy unto God's creatures (R). As a famous *ḥadīth* states, "The merciful are those unto whom the Merciful is merciful. Be merciful unto those on earth, and He who is in Heaven will be merciful unto you."

18–19 For *the companions of the right,* who are said to be in Paradise, see 56:27–40, and for *the companions of the left,* who are said to be in the Fire, see 56:41–46. For the symbolic distinction between right and left, also see 17:71; 18:49; 56:8–9; 69:19–28; 84:7.

20 Cf. 104:8–9. *Enclosed* here means locked, for the doors of Hell have been locked upon the disbelievers so that they cannot leave; none of their distress will be lifted from them, and no spirit will enter upon them (R, Ṭs). *Enclosed* translates *mu'sadah,* which can also mean "covered over."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 91

# The Sun

## *al-Shams*

*Al-Shams* is an early Makkan *sūrah* thought by most to have been revealed shortly after *Sūrah* 97, *al-Qadr.* It takes its name from the first oath that God takes in the *sūrah: By the sun.* The first ten verses emphasize the physical and spiritual polarity inherent in creation and the power of the Creator over it; the first eight do so through a series of oaths, the next two (vv. 9–10) by reflecting upon the human soul as it is situated between iniquity and purity. In this sense, the *sūrah* follows upon the previous *sūrah,* which distinguishes between *the two highways* (Āl; 90:10), and those of the left and those of the right. The last five verses focus on the story of the northern Arabian tribe Thamūd as an example of what befalls those who reject God's messengers and disobey them, thus preferring iniquity to purity. That the story of the Thamūd is discussed here and in 54:23–31, two early revelations, and then expanded in later Madinan *sūrah*s (7:73–80; 11:61–69) indicates that it was well known to the Arabs.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the sun and its morning brightness; (2) by the moon when following it; (3) by the day when disclosing it; (4) by the night when enshrouding it; (5) by the sky and the One Who established it; (6) by the earth and the One Who spread it; (7) by the soul and the One Who fashioned it (8) and inspired it as

1 For the meaning of *ḍuḥāhā,* here translated *its morning brightness,* see the introduction to *Sūrah* 93.

2 This verse can be read as an allusion to the moon's receiving its light from the sun (IK, Q, R) or to the new crescent moon, which at the start of each lunar month is visible above the horizon near where the sun sets and itself sets soon thereafter (IK, Q). It could also be seen as an allusion to the differing orbits of the moon and the sun, which can be used to measure the passage of time; see 36:40c.

3 Cf. 92:2. *It* can be taken as a reference to the sun (Q, Ṭ) or to the world or the earth (Q). *It* can also be seen as a reference to "the darkness" (Ṭ), in which case the verse would read "by the day when dispersing it." From a spiritual perspective, this verse can be read as an allusion to the light of faith extinguishing the darkness of ignorance (ST).

4 This verse refers to the night enshrouding the sun (Q, Ṭ) or enshrouding the world (Q); cf. 92:1. From a spiritual perspective, it can be read as an allusion to sins, persistence in which covers the light of faith (ST).

5–7 According to some, *the One Who* in these three verses is not appropriate, since God could not swear upon Himself (R). They would thus read "that which" in place of *the One Who.* Or the three verses could be read, "its being established" (v. 5), "its being spread" (v. 6), and "its fashioning" (v. 7; Q, R, Ṭ), the reading preferred by al-Qurṭubī.

5–6 Cf. 51:47–48: *And the sky We established with might; truly We make vast! And the earth We laid out—what excellent spreaders!* V. 6 is taken by some to mean, "What He created in it," and by others to mean that He proportioned it (IK).

7 *The One Who fashioned it* means the One Who created the soul sound and well proportioned, as it was in the original primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), as indicated in 30:30: *Set thy face to religion as a* ḥanīf, *in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind* (IK). Here *the soul* can be taken as an allusion to the soul of Adam, or the souls of all human beings. As such, it is a call to meditate upon the true nature of the human being, since God *created man in the most beautiful stature* (95:4; cf. 40:64: My). The invocation of the soul in the midst of this series of polarities implies that the soul has an inherent duality, as becomes clear in the following verses and in 79:37–41. This duality is seen by many in the pair *the soul at peace* (89:27), which is in control of its lusts and desires and has attained certainty, and *the soul* that *commands to evil* (12:53); an intermediate station between the two is *the blaming soul* (75:2); see 75:1–2c; 89:27c.

8 As translated, this verse indicates that God taught the soul the nature of evil and good and set the course for which it should follow. Thus some relate it to 90:8–10: *Did We not . . . guide him upon the two highways?* (Q, Sh). It could also be rendered, "He placed its iniquity and its reverence within it" (IK). In both translations it can be taken as a reference to God's instillation of the knowledge of good and evil in every human soul, even before various prophetic revelations. As other verses indicate (e.g., 75:14–15; 81:14; 82:4–5), every soul is intrinsically aware of good and evil, right and wrong, its relation to God, and the covenant to which it attested (see 7:172).

These verses can also be read as an indication that God decrees all things for each human being, the reading preferred by most Ashᶜarite

to what makes it iniquitous or reverent! (9) Indeed, he prospers who purifies it. (10) And indeed he fails who obscures it. (11) Thamūd denied in their rebelliousness, (12) when the most wretched of them was dispatched. (13) Then the messenger of God said to them, "[This is] the she-camel of God; give her drink!" (14) But they denied him, then hamstrung her. So their Lord crushed them for their sin, then leveled it; (15) for He fears not the consequence thereof.

theologians. Regarding this interpretation, it is reported that a man asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God! Do you consider the actions of mankind and their struggles to be something ordained (*qaḍā'*) for them and coming to pass from a previous measuring out (*qadar*), or something written for them only after the Message came to them from their Prophet, when there will be a clear proof against them?" To which he replied, "Rather, it is ordained for them." So the man said, "Then what is the point of our actions?" The Prophet replied, "Whosoever God created for one of the two positions [Paradise or Hell], He makes it easy for him [to attain]. The proof of that is in the Book of God: *By the soul and the One Who fashioned it and inspired it as to what makes it iniquitous or reverent*" (IK). It is also reported that when reciting this *sūrah,* the Prophet would stop at this verse and pray, "O God! Give my soul its reverence. Thou art its Protector and Master, and the best to purify it" (IK, Q).

9–10 These two verses have served as the inspiration for extensive literature on the "purification of the soul" (*tazkiyyat al-nafs*), which some argue is the entire purpose of the Quran. Most take v. 9 to be the beginning of the answer to the oaths taken in vv. 1–7 (Bg, Sh); others say that the answer has been omitted from the text and is only implied (Sh). The text speaks of those who cleanse the soul of lowly and despicable character traits (IK) and, conversely, those who dull the soul by neglecting it through heedlessness and disobedience (IK). According to some of the earliest commentators, these two verses could also be read with God as the subject, meaning, "He whose soul God purifies has indeed prospered, and he whose soul God obscures has indeed failed" (IK, Q, Ṭ). The ambiguity of the subject can also be seen as an allusion to the cooperation between God and human beings, who work together to purify the soul, for, on the one hand, *Whosoever purifies himself purifies himself only for his own soul* (35:18), and on the other, *You do not will but that God wills* (76:30); thus 4:49 states, *Rather, it is God Who purifies whomsoever He will* (cf. 24:21). Nonetheless, there is a subtle reciprocity in every step one takes toward God, for as 13:11 proclaims: *Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves.* The literal meaning of *purify* (*zakkā*) is "to grow," and according to most the literal meaning of *obscure* (*dassa*) is "to bury" (Sh, Z). These verses could thus be translated, "He prospers who grows it, and he fails who buries it." V. 9 thus indicates those who make the soul grow through purification, while v. 10 indicates those whose souls are buried in reprehensible acts.

11–14 The tribe of Thamūd is cited as an example of those who "obscure" the soul through disobedience. They were a pre-Islamic northern Arabian tribe who rejected the Prophet Ṣāliḥ; see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 54:23–31. It is said that after Ṣāliḥ made it clear to them that a particular she-camel that God had brought forth from a rock was a sign of God and exhorted them to justice and the distribution of water ordained by God, their leader proceeded to hamstring the she-camel and leave her for dead (54:23–30). For the *she-camel of God,* see 7:73c. For *give her drink,* see 26:155c. According to some commentators, they had agreed that the she-camel would drink one day and the other animals would drink the next, and the people killed the she-camel because they did not like this arrangement (see 54:27–29).

It is recorded that the Prophet said that the *most wretched* of previous generations (*al-awwalīn*) are those who hamstrung the she-camel (IK, Q). Some interpret *hamstrung her* (*'aqqarūhā*) as "slaughtered her"; see 7:77–78c. *Crushed them*

(*damdama ʿalayhim*) indicates the most severe of punishments that came upon them suddenly, annihilating them and covering them entirely. *Leveled it* translates *sawwāhā,* which has a broad range of meaning; as translated it indicates that God razed their city or that he leveled the earth over them. It could also be rendered, "He distributed it equally," meaning that God distributed the same punishment upon every member of the tribe (IK, Q). The verb *sawwā* is also translated *fashioned* in v. 7 and in relation to the creation of human beings in 18:37; 32:9; 75:38; 82:7. The use of *sawwā* in this context, in relation to both the creation of human beings in v. 7 and their destruction in v. 14, indicates, on the one hand, that God can destroy human beings as easily as He created them and, on the other, that God's Punishment is part of the continuing process through which God fashions the human soul.

15 This verse means that God does not fear the consequences of destroying a people like the tribe of Thamūd (IK, Q). It is thus a warning to the tribe of Quraysh that God has no need of them and could wipe them out just as easily as He did the tribe of Thamūd. It could also be rendered, "And he did not fear its outcome," in which case the subject is either *the most wretched* (v. 12), who hamstrung the she-camel and did not fear the outcome of his actions because of his heedlessness (Q), or the Prophet Ṣāliḥ, who did not fear the outcome because he had fulfilled his duty by transmitting God's message and was spared their punishment (Q).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 92

# The Night

## *al-Layl*

*Al-Layl* is an early Makkan *sūrah,* often considered the ninth in the chronological order of revelation. Some maintain that it is from the Madinan period, while others see it as part Makkan and part Madinan (Āl). Like the previous *sūrah,* it takes its name from the first oath that God takes in the *sūrah.* Similar to the first ten verses of the preceding *sūrah,* the first three verses of this *sūrah* focus upon the polarity inherent to the created order. The central theme is one found in many of the shorter *sūrahs,* that human beings have diverse ends. The remainder of the *sūrah* then emphasizes the disparity between those who perform good deeds and those who perform evil deeds and the opposite ends to which these courses lead.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the night as it enshrouds; (2) by the day as it discloses; (3) by Him Who created the male and the female, (4) truly your endeavors are diverse! (5) As for one who gives and is reverent, (6) and attests to what is most beautiful, (7) We shall ease his way unto ease. (8) And as for one who is miserly and deems

1 Cf. 91:2. The omitted direct object can be seen as an allusion to the world, the earth, the day (cf. 13:3), or all of creation (Q).

2 Cf. 91:3. This is one of several passages where an oath is taken by the alternation of night and day (see also 74:32–34; 81:17–18; 84:16–17; 89:1–4; 91:1–4; 93:1–2).

3 Another reading is, "By the creation of the male and female" (Q, Sh). As with 91:5–7, some maintain this second reading is more appropriate, because God would not swear upon Himself. The creation of human beings *in pairs* is also presented as containing symbolic meaning in 78:8, and 53:45 states, *He creates the two* (*zawjayn*)*—male and female,* which are said to be *mates* (*azwāj*) created *from a single soul* (4:1; 7:189; 39:6). The reference to the male and female can be seen as an allusion to the outward polarity of created forms, while the remainder of the *sūrah* refers to the inner spiritual polarity between those who reverence the truth and those who deny it. In this context, it can also be read as an indication that the final ends of both males and females are not determined by their gender, but by the degree of their reverence, as in 49:13: *O mankind! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you.*

4 In this context "endeavoring" (*saʿy*) can be taken as a synonym for doing or acting (*ʿamal*), implying that people work for either redemption or perdition and that there is no in-between (Sh).

5–10 ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib related that the Prophet said, "There is no one among you except that his place is registered in either the Garden or the Fire!" Someone asked, "O Messenger of God, then what of works?" He said, "Perform works; everyone is eased unto that for which he was created," and then he recited vv. 5–10 (IK). Citing the last part of this *ḥadīth,* al-Zamakhsharī says that the meaning is, "We will make it amiable to him and grant him success until obedience [to God] becomes the easiest and simplest of things for him, as in His saying, *Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for submission* [6:125]."

5 *Gives* is understood by most to mean giving in charity, but can also indicate giving God His proper due (Sh).

6 *What is most beautiful* (*al-ḥusnā*), here and in v. 9, is taken by most to mean "There is no god but God" (Sh) or simply belief in God (Z), so that either of these is what is being attested to or denied; others see it as a reference to Paradise, which is referred to as *the most beautiful reward* in 3:148 and 3:195 (IK, Sh, Z). But it can also be seen as a reference to God Himself, for, as several verses attest, *Unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names* (17:110; 20:8; 59:24; cf. 7:180).

7 Cf. 87:8. As 2:185 states, *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you.* Nonetheless, ease in one's affairs derives from reverence, as in 65:4: *And whosoever reverences God, He will appoint ease for his affair.*

8 Cf. 96:6–7. *Beyond need* literally means "self-sufficient," but *beyond need* better conveys the negative connotation of viewing oneself as "self-sufficient" vis-à-vis God. Being *miserly* toward those below one's station and having the illusion of self-sufficiency in relation to what is above is an inversion of the proper balance between Heaven and earth or God and human beings, in which people must be obedient to God and generous toward others.

himself beyond need, (9) and denies what is most beautiful, (10) We shall ease his way unto hardship; (11) and his wealth shall not avail him when he perishes. (12) Truly Ours it is to give guidance, (13) and truly unto Us belong the Hereafter and this world. (14) Thus have I warned you of a raging Fire, (15) which none shall enter, save the most wretched, (16) who denies and turns away. (17) And the most reverent shall be removed from it, (18) who gives his wealth to purify, (19) not recompensing any for a favor thereby; (20) save for seeking the Face of his Lord, the Most High, (21) and surely he shall be content.

9 *What is most beautiful* here can mean the reward of the Garden, the reality of the Garden itself, the Reality of God, or all three; see also 92:6c.

10 Just as there is reciprocity when turning to God in repentance, so too there is reciprocity when turning away from God in disobedience. *Hardship* is glossed by many with "evil" (Sh). This can be taken to imply that when people disbelieve and commit evil deeds, God opens the way for them to commit further evil and it becomes increasingly difficult to turn back, as implied by the diverse nature of good and evil deeds alluded to in v. 4.

11 Alternately, "What will his wealth avail him when he perishes?" *Perishes* can be taken to mean when he dies or when he enters the Fire (IK, Ṭ).

12 Some understand this verse to mean, "We will explain what is lawful and what is prohibited" (IK, Q, Ṭ). Others take it to indicate that one who travels the path of guidance will reach God in the Hereafter (IK). It can also be likened to other verses that explain that it is God's place to guide and no one else's, as in 16:9: *And it is for God to show the way* (IK, Q).

13 Cf. 53:25: *Yet unto God belong the Hereafter and this world.* Some commentators see this verse as a reference to the reward of the Hereafter and this world, as in 4:134: *Whosoever desires the reward of this world, with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter* (Q), in which case, one could also see it as an allusion to the punishment of this world and the Hereafter, as in 79:25: *So God seized him with a punishment exemplary in the Hereafter and in this world.* Others see this verse as an indication that everything is God's and He does with it as He wills (Sh).

14 Elsewhere Hell is described as a *crushing Fire* (104:4–5).

15–21 Several commentators say that the whole of this *sūrah* was revealed in reference to a Muslim of Madinah who had a palm tree, a branch of which was bent toward the house of a poor man who had a large family. Sometimes the owner of the palm tree would collect the fruit and, if by chance some dates fell in the poor man's yard and his children picked them up, the owner would come and snatch them away from their hands and even from their mouths. The poor man complained to the Prophet, who then asked the owner of the tree if he would give him the tree in question in return for a palm tree in Paradise. The man declined, pleading that the dates of that tree, among all his numerous trees, were so delicate that he could not give up the tree. Another man heard what the Prophet had promised the owner and said, "O Messenger of God! Would you promise the same to me, were I to obtain the palm tree from the owner and give it to you?" The Prophet said, "Yes." Whereupon he went to the owner of the palm tree and asked whether he wanted to sell it. The owner demanded forty palm trees, a sum he thought no one would pay. Though the buyer was astonished and told him that it was exorbitant, after a short pause he agreed to give him forty palm trees. Afterwards, he presented the palm tree to the Prophet, who then gave it to the poor man and his children. Vv. 15–16 refer to the man who refused to exchange his date palm for the promise of a tree in Paradise, while

vv. 18–21 refer to the man who purchased the tree and gave it as charity (Q, Ṭs). If, however, this is an early Makkan *sūrah,* as some maintain, then the story would most likely not refer to such an incident, but would be a more general condemnation of those who did not accept Muhammad as a prophet.

18 The implication is that one purifies both oneself and one's wealth when one gives charity in the Name of God. *To purify* translates *tazakkā,* which is etymologically related to the Quranic word for alms, *zakāh.* Some believe that the whole of this *sūrah* is related to the story of the date palm mentioned in the previous comment, but others say that vv. 18–21 were revealed about the first Caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, who used to buy weak slaves and then free them. When his father asked him, "Why do you not buy slaves who can defend you?" Abū Bakr responded, "It is not my defense that I seek," and so vv. 17–21 were revealed extolling his generosity (IK, Q, W).

19–21 One account of the revelation of these verses states that, upon embracing Islam, Bilāl, who was a slave of one ʿAbd Allāh ibn Judan, proceeded to the idols of the Kaʿbah and defecated on them. The idolaters complained to his master about what Bilāl had done and so he gave them Bilāl along with one hundred camels to be sacrificed to their gods. The idolaters took Bilāl and tortured him in the scorching desert. All he said while being tortured was "One! One!" as a testimony to the Oneness of God. The Prophet came upon this and said to him, "The One will save you!" He then informed Abū Bakr, saying, "Bilāl is being tortured for the sake of God!" Abū Bakr took with him a pound of gold and bought Bilāl. The idolaters said, "Abū Bakr did what he did only because he is obliged to Bilāl for a favor," and so God revealed vv. 19–21 (W). Bilāl later became the first to lead the call to prayer (*ʿadhān*) and one of the Prophet's personal treasurers.

19 This verse literally reads, "no one having with him any favor to be repaid." In both translations the implication is that one is neither recompensing others for favors done in the past, nor expecting recompense from anyone in the future for what one does at present, but spending in charity only out of desire to do God's Will.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 93

# The Morning Brightness

## *al-Ḍuḥā*

*Al-Ḍuḥā* is an early Makkan *sūrah,* considered by many commentators to be fourth (others say seventh) in the chronological order of revelation and perhaps the first *sūrah* to be revealed in full at one time. Other commentators maintain that the first *sūrah, al-Fātiḥah,* was the first *sūrah* to be revealed in full.

The title, *al-Ḍuḥā,* is here translated as "The Morning Brightness" based upon the most common understanding of *al-ḍuḥā* as a reference to the light of the rising sun, but it can also refer to the period from daybreak until noon, as in 79:46, where it is translated *morning.* Others take *al-ḍuḥā* as a reference to the light of the sun or to the whole day, because it is illuminated by the sun (IK, Q, R). It can also be seen as a reference to the whole of creation, which is made visible through the light of the sun (Q). *Al-ḍuḥā* is also the name for one of the supererogatory prayers performed in the late morning hours.

According to several commentators, the Prophet had not received a revelation for some time (some say twelve days, others forty, and others fifty), and one of the idolaters said to him, "O Muhammad, it seems to me that your satan has forsaken you"; so God sent down this *sūrah* to reassure him (Bg, Q, Ṭ). Others say that it was in response to several idolaters saying, "Surely Muhammad's lord has forsaken him and despised him" (Bg, Ṭ). In another account, the Prophet became sick and could not offer his supererogatory night vigil (*tahajjud*) for two or three nights. Then Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb, the wife of Abū Lahab, whose punishment is described in *Sūrah* 111, *al-Masad,* came and said, "O Muhammad! I think that your satan has forsaken you, for I have not seen him with you for two or three nights!" And then God revealed vv. 1–3.

The main theme of the *sūrah* is consolation of the Prophet. It begins with an assertion that God would not abandon the Prophet (vv. 1–3), then reminds him of God's Favor toward him (vv. 6–8), and ends with an exhortation to care for the downtrodden and to preach God's message (vv. 9–11).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the morning brightness, (2) and by the night when still! (3) Thy Lord has not forsaken thee; nor does He despise. (4) And the Hereafter shall be better for thee than this life. (5) And surely thy Lord shall give unto thee, and thou shalt be content. (6) Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter, (7) find thee astray

1–2 In addition to some interpretations given in the introduction, *the morning brightness* (*al-ḍuḥā*) is understood here as a specific reference to the morning (*ḍuḥā*) on which God spoke to Moses, and *the night* as a specific reference to the Night Journey and Ascension (see 17:1c; introduction to *Sūrah* 53; Q, Sh); others say *al-ḍuḥā* refers to the hour at which the sorcerers who opposed Moses recognized the truth of his message and fell prostrate (see 20:59; Sh). According to al-Shawkānī, when *al-ḍuḥā* precedes the mention of night, as in this context, it refers to the entire day. It is also said that *al-ḍuḥā* is the light of the Garden and *the night* is the darkness of the Fire (Sh), for the Fire of Hell is said to be without light; or that *al-ḍuḥā* is the light within the hearts of those who know God (*al-ʿārifūn*) and that *the night* is the blackness of the hearts of the disbelievers. *When still* is said to refer to the darkness as it extends over the day (Sh). V, 2 is also interpreted to mean, "The night as it approaches" or "The night as it leaves" (Sh, Ṭ).

3 See the introduction to this *sūrah*. This verse constitutes what is known as the response to the oath. Although most interpret the second-person singular (thee) to be the implied direct object of *despise*, it is not present in the Arabic text. It could thus be taken as a general statement that it is not in God's Nature to despise.

4 This verse literally reads, "And the last shall be better for thee than the first." Throughout the Quran the Abode of the Hereafter is considered better for human beings than the abode of this world (see also 16:30, 41; 28:60, 79–80; 29:64; 40:39; 42:36; 43:35; 57:20–21; 87:16–17). As 13:26 maintains, *Compared to the Hereafter, the life of the world is but [fleeting] enjoyment.* The Quran thus criticizes those *who have purchased the world at the price of the Hereafter* (2:86; cf. 4:74). It is reported that when the Prophet was given the choice between remaining in this life until the end of time and then going to Paradise or moving on to the Hereafter, he chose being with God over life in this world (IK).

5–8 Regarding the revelation of these verses, Ibn ʿAbbās reported that the Prophet said, "I have asked my Lord for something I wish I had not asked for. I said, 'O my Lord! There were prophets before me, to some of whom you had subjugated the wind, [and he mentioned Solomon, son of David,] and some of whom could bring the dead back to life, [and he mentioned Jesus son of Mary,] and some of whom . . .' God responded by saying, 'Did I not find thee an orphan and shelter thee?' I said, 'Indeed, O my Lord.' God said, 'Did I not find thee astray and guide thee?' I said, 'Indeed, O my Lord.' God said, 'Did I not find thee in need and enrich thee?' I said, 'Indeed, O my Lord.' God said, 'Have I not caused thy breast to expand and lifted from thee thy burden? [see 94:1–2].' I said, 'Indeed, O my Lord.' " (Q, Sh, W).

6 The Prophet was orphaned at an early age. His father, ʿAbd Allāh, died while his mother, Āminah, was pregnant with him, and his mother died when he was six years old. After this he was under the guardianship of his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, until he died when the Prophet was eight years old. Then his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, took responsibility for him and continued to protect him, assist him, and even restrain the people from harming him when he began to declare the message of the Quran. He also found great refuge in his marriage to Khadījah, who was his most ardent supporter when the revelations first began.

7 This verse can be taken as reference to God's teaching Muhammad his true nature as

and guide, (8) find thee in need and enrich? (9) So as for the orphan, scorn not. (10) And as for one who requests, repel not. (11) And as for the blessing of thy Lord, proclaim!

a messenger of God (Bg). Some understand this verse literally to mean that Muhammad had been astray and that God guided him to belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) and the reality of prophethood (*nubuwwah;* Bg). This reading is supported by verses such as 12:3: *We recount unto thee the most beautiful of stories by Our having revealed unto thee this Quran, though before it thou wert among the heedless.* For others, this verse means that the Prophet had strayed in the sense that he did not follow a revealed law or rite (*sharīᶜah*), as none was known to his people, but not that he had strayed from belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). It can also be read as implying that, although he believed in the Oneness of God, he had no scripture and no direct guidance until the Quran was revealed. This reading is supported by 42:52: *Thus have We revealed unto thee a Spirit from Our Command. Thou knewest not what scripture was, nor faith. But We made it a light whereby We guide whomsoever We will among Our servants.* Some try to avoid the implication that the Prophet could have been astray in any religious or spiritual sense and read this verse as a reference to a time when the Prophet was lost in the streets of Makkah and God sent the Archangel Gabriel to guide him (Bg). Still others see it as a reference to a time when the Prophet was on a journey, his mount strayed from the road, and Gabriel came to set him back on the right course (Bg).

8 Some understand this verse as a reference to the Prophet's enrichment through the wealth of his first wife, Khadījah (Bg). Others say it refers to the true wealth, which is spiritual contentment (see 58:22; 89:27–28; 98:8), as in a famous *ḥadīth,* "Wealth comes not from abundance of goods; rather, wealth is the wealth of the soul" (Bg).

9 On one level, this verse serves as a reminder from God that the Prophet should remember his own state as an orphan. On another level, it is an admonition to all of the Quraysh, because they were known to take the wealth of orphans and abuse their rights (Bg); see 89:17; 107:1–2c. In the Madinan revelations, many instructions are given to *uphold justice for the orphans* (4:127), and Muslims are enjoined, *Approach not the orphan's property, save in the best manner* (6:152; 17:34); see commentary on 4:2, 3, 6, 10. In this regard a famous *ḥadīth* says, "The best house among the Muslims is a house in which an orphan has been treated well. And the worst house among the Muslims is a house in which an orphan has been treated poorly." Then the Prophet pointed with his middle finger and his index finger and said, "I and the caretaker (*kāfil*) of an orphan are like this in the Garden" (Bg, Q), meaning that those who care for orphans will attain a high station and know the Prophet in Paradise.

10 An exhortation for mercy and kindness toward beggars in general, this verse is seen by most commentators as a specific reference to the beggar who comes to the door, who should either be fed or turned away gently without rebuke (Bg). It is also interpreted as an exhortation to share knowledge of the religion with anyone who seeks it (Bg, IK).

11 This verse is a command to the Prophet meaning, "Spread that with which God has blessed thee through thanks and praise" (Q). *The blessing of thy Lord* can refer to the Quran itself (Bg, Q, Sh), the gift of prophethood (*nubuwwah;* Bg, Q, Sh), the blessing of guidance after the mention of being astray (v. 7; Sh), or any blessing God has bestowed upon a person (Bg, Q). In this regard, the Prophet is reported to have said during a sermon, "Whosoever does not give thanks for that which is little is not thanked for that which is much. And whosever does not thank people does not thank God, and proclaiming [God's] blessings is thanks, while abandoning it [i.e., proclaiming God's Blessings] is disbelief (*kufr*)" (Bg, IK, Q, Sh, Sy). It is said that when this *sūrah* was revealed, the Prophet was joyous, proclaimed, "God is great (*Allāhu akbar*)," and counseled his followers to do the same whenever they read this *sūrah* (Bg, Q).

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# 94

# Expansion

## *al-Sharḥ*

*Al-Sharḥ* is considered by most commentators to be a Makkan *sūrah,* most likely revealed immediately after the preceding one. Ibn ᶜAbbās is reported to have said that it is Madinan, but this is a minority opinion. Some say only vv. 5–6 were revealed in Madinah (Āl). It takes its name from the reference to the expansion of the breast for religion in the first verse.

Some maintain that *Sūrahs* 93 and 94 were originally one *sūrah,* as the Companions of the Prophet would recite them together in a single prayer cycle (*rakᶜah*) without indicating any separation by citing the *basmalah* in between them (Ṭs; see 1:1c). Linguistically 94:1 follows the same pattern as 93:6, *Did He not find thee . . .,* which is also implied in 93:7–8.

Thematically both *sūrahs* speak of the bounties that God has provided the Prophet Muhammad as relief for the difficulties that beset him; those in *Sūrah* 93 pertain more to external necessities, and those in *Sūrah* 94 pertain more to spiritual relief. The *sūrah* begins with another reminder of the blessings that God has bestowed upon the Prophet (vv. 1–4). This is followed by reassurance (vv. 5–6) and the command to exert oneself and turn to God (vv. 7–8).

# In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Did We not expand for thee thy breast, (2) and lift from thee thy burden
(3) that weighed heavily upon thy back? (4) And did We not elevate thy renown?
(5) For truly with hardship comes ease! (6) Truly with hardship comes ease!
(7) So when thou art free, exert thyself; (8) and let thy desire be for thy Lord.

1 The expansion of the breast relates to ease, especially in matters pertaining to religion, and is thus considered a characteristic of those who are rightly guided. This is particularly evident in the famous prayer of Moses when he received the call to prophethood: *My Lord! Expand for me my breast! Make my affair easy for me, and untie a knot from my tongue, that they may understand my speech* (20:25–28). In contrast, the constriction or contraction of the breast is seen as a characteristic of those who are astray, as in 6:125: *Whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for submission. And whomsoever He wishes to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were climbing to the sky.* Those who are rightly guided can also experience straitening of the breast through trials and hardship. In this vein the verse can be seen as an allusion to God's providing the Prophet with the patience and forbearance necessary to bear the insults of his enemies (Ṭs), as in 15:97: *And certainly We know that thy breast is straitened because of what they say.* This verse has also been seen as an allusion to the manner in which God expanded the Prophet's breast and made his heart a container for the wisdom of the revelation (Ṭ) or for prophethood and knowledge (Ṭs). According to some, this verse refers to the relief that came to the Prophet's breast after a period of solitude on Mt. Ḥirāʾ. According to others, it refers to the end of a period in which the revelation was said to have been interrupted (see introduction to *Sūrah* 93). Still others read it as a reference to an episode in the Prophet's youth when two angels opened his breast and removed a dark clot that is said to represent the root of malice and envy within the soul (Bḍ).

2 This verse is seen by many commentators as an allusion to the Prophet's being forgiven all sins (Ṭ), as in 48:1–2: *Truly We have granted thee a manifest victory, that God may forgive thee thy sins that went before and that which is to come, and complete His Blessing upon thee, and guide thee upon a straight path* (IK, Sh).

3 *Weighed heavily* (*anqaḍa*) implies something pushing down so hard that one's back makes a sound (Bḍ). Some say this verse refers to God's lightening the burden of prophethood (Sh). Vv. 2–3 can also be seen as a reference to the lifting of the burden of ignorance and confusion, said to have afflicted Arabia, through the revelation of God's edicts and decrees (Bḍ).

4 The Prophet's renown was elevated when he was given the title "Messenger of God" (a title connected with the Name of God) and placed in the testimony of faith, "I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (Bḍ, Q, Sh), versions of which are recited in the call to prayer and in the greeting recited silently at the end of each prayer cycle (IK, Ṭ). The Prophet's title is also closely connected to the Name of God in other verses of the Quran (e.g., 4:13, 59; 9:26). The strongest indicator of the Prophet's great renown is in 33:56: *Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!* According to some it is such blessings to which v. 4 refers (Sh). Others say that this verse refers to the mention of the Prophet Muhammad in previous scriptures (Sh).

5–6 These verses can be read as indicating that enduring hardship with patience results in ease in this life and the Hereafter. A well-known *ḥadīth* states, "One instance of hardship (*ʿusr*) will never overcome two instances of ease (*yusrayn*)" (Āl, IK, Q, Sh, Sy). Also see, 65:7: *God tasks no soul beyond that which He has given it.*

*God will bring ease after hardship;* and 2:185: *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you.*

7 Or, "So when thou art relieved [of thy burden], toil," meaning that after completing the obligatory devotions, one should supplicate the Lord and perform supererogatory devotions (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭ), or when free from worldly affairs, one should pray (Ṭ). Or, "So when thou art devoted [to God], exert thyself," meaning that one should always seek to deepen one's prayers. Or, "So when thou art spent, toil," meaning one should never cease to strive in the way of God and cease to exert oneself more to do God's Will. It can also be taken to mean, "When thou art free from striving against thine enemies, exert thyself in worshipping the Lord" (Bḍ, Sh, Ṭ).

8 This verse is understood to mean, "Do not desire this world—let your desire be for God alone" (Ṭ). On the one hand, this is an exhortation to prayer; on the other, it is an exhortation to pray only to God and to do good deeds only to please God.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 95

# The Fig

## *al-Tīn*

A Makkan *sūrah, al-Tīn* was most likely revealed in the early part of the middle Makkan period, shortly after *Sūrah* 85, *al-Burūj,* although some maintain that it is Madinan (Āl). It takes its name from the mention of *the fig* in the first verse. The main theme is found in vv. 4–6, which are among the most famous verses in the Quran. They speak to the human condition, which originated as the most exalted of creation, but can fall to *the lowest of the low* (v. 5) when human beings fail to live in accord with their true nature, a message similar to that of 103:2–3: *Truly mankind is in loss, save those who believe, perform righteous deeds, exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience.* According to an oft cited *ḥadīth,* the Prophet said, "Whosoever among you recites *By the fig and the olive* through to *is not God the most just of judges* and says, 'Indeed' (*balā*), I am among the witnesses unto that" (Āl, Q, Z).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the fig and the olive, (2) by Mount Sinai, (3) and by this land made safe! (4) Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature, (5) then We cast him to the lowest of the low, (6) save those who believe and perform righteous deeds; for theirs shall be a reward unceasing. (7) What then will make thee deny religion? (8) Is not God the most just of judges?

1 For most commentators, *the fig and the olive* refer to the fruits of the earth, by which God swears due to the blessing and benefits contained in them (Bg, Sh, Ṭb). For others they have a symbolic value: *the fig* symbolizes the mosque (meaning place of prostration, as there would not have been a building for that purpose at the time of the revelation) in Damascus, which may be a reference to the "mosque" of Noah, where the Ark landed on Mt. Jūdī (see 11:44c), and *the olive* symbolizes "the Holy House," that is, the "mosque" in Jerusalem (IK, Sh, Ṭ); or *the fig* refers to the mount on which Damascus is built, and *the olive,* the mount on which Jerusalem is built (Q, Ṭb); others say that they refer to the cities themselves (Q). Another interpretation takes *the fig* as a reference to the "mosque" of the *Companions of the Cave* (18:9) and *the olive* as a reference to the "mosque" in Jerusalem (Q), while yet another sees them as two mountains in the Levant (Q). Others say that *the fig* refers to *the leaves of the Garden* (7:22), with which Adam and Eve covered themselves, and *the olive* refers to the *blessed olive tree* in 24:35 (Q). This last interpretation could be seen as a symbolic foreshadowing of vv. 4–6 in that fig leaves allude to what is lowest in human beings, since they were used to cover their private parts, while the *blessed olive tree* is seen by many as the symbolic source of the human "light of understanding" or "intellect"; see 24:35c.

2 According to most commentators, *Mount Sinai* is also referred to by name in 23:20 and simply as *the Mount* (*al-Ṭūr*) in eight other verses (2:63, 93; 4:154; 19:52; 20:80; 28:29, 46; 52:1, though others say such verses do not necessarily refer to Mount Sinai; see 23:20c). It is also sworn by in 52:1. In 23:20 *saynāʾ* is used for "Sinai," but here the word is *sīnīn,* which some say is actually taken from the Ethiopic for "beautiful" and in this context means "the blessed beautiful Mount" (Q, Sh, Ṭ). Others say that it means every mountain upon which there are fruit-bearing trees (Q, Sh).

3 In pre-Islamic Arabia Makkah was a refuge in which no fighting was allowed (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 105); hence it was a secure land, or a *land made safe;* cf. 29:67: *Or have they not considered that We have made a secure sanctuary while people are snatched away all around them?* Some say that *the fig and the olive* (v. 1) is a reference to Jerusalem, where Jesus was sent, *Mount Sinai* is a reference to the place where God spoke to Moses, and *this land made safe* is a reference to the place where the Prophet Muhammad was sent (IK).

4 This verse begins the response to the oath taken in vv. 1–3. It is one of the most emphatic affirmations of humanity's exalted status, before which the angels were ordered, *Prostrate unto Adam* (2:34; 7:11; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116). Although the human being is made of clay, God declares in 38:72, *I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit.* Here *man* is taken to mean all of humanity, male and female, believer and disbeliever alike. *Taqwīm,* translated *stature,* is a verbal noun from the verb *qawwama,* "to raise, shape, form, or arrange." Here it is taken to indicate something that has become what it truly ought to be by achieving harmony and balance (R). An indication of this stature is that the human being stands upright while every other creature is created *with his face stooped down* (67:22; Āl, Q, R, Sh, Ṭ). Yet *the most beautiful stature* is not taken as a reference simply to the human physical form, since the physical is also a symbol of "inner comportment," as human beings are "the best of God's

creation both outwardly and inwardly" (Q), as expressed in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī,* "Truly God created Adam in His image" (Āl, Q, Sh; cf. Genesis 1:27). This *ḥadīth* is understood to mean that human beings are created with such attributes as life, knowledge, power, will, speech, hearing, and sight (the qualities most often used in Islamic theology to describe God), which are in fact Divine Attributes that God has caused to be reflected in human beings (Q). Human beings are able to manifest all of the Divine Names and Qualities, whereas all other created beings are only able to manifest a limited range of the Divine Names and Qualities (see 2:31c). "For this reason the philosophers say that [man] is a microcosm, since all that makes up created entities is gathered within him" (Q). Verses such as 30:8 and 51:21 can be seen as a call to human beings to reflect upon their exalted status and live in accord with it. When vv. 1–3 are taken as a reference to the locations of revelation, that human beings are created *in the most beautiful stature* can be seen as a reference to that aspect of their nature that is receptive to revelation.

5 With regard to the outward human form, this verse can be seen as a reference to old age, when faculties are diminished, sometimes to the point of decrepitude (IK, Q, R, Ṭ), similar to 36:68: *And whomsoever We give long life, We cause him to regress in creation* (see also 16:70). With regard to the inner reality, it can be taken as a reference to human beings falling below their true nature and consequently being cast into the Fire (Āl, IK, Q, R, Ṭ); such people are the lowest of creation for failing to fulfill the requirements of being created *in the most beautiful stature* (Āl). In this vein, *the lowest of the low* can be understood as a reference to the state of disbelievers, of whom 7:179 says, *Such as these are like cattle. Nay, they are even further astray,* or as a reference to the place in which they will be cast (Āl).

According to some, *the lowest of the low* should be read "the lowest, lowly," with "lowly" (*sāfilīn*) referring to the state of abasement experienced by those who are cast down and implying that their own condition has condemned them.

6 This verse makes it more likely that the preceding verse refers to the inner reality of human beings. *A reward unceasing* (cf. 41:8; 68:3; 84:25) is one that is never decreased or cut off in this life or the next (R). Regarding this world, it is said to refer to the fact that if people maintain religious practice, they continue to receive reward for required acts of worship even when sickness renders them unable to perform them or travel causes them to shorten prayers or break the fast (Āl, Q), as is permitted under Islamic Law. Regarding the next world, it refers to the bounties of Heaven.

7 As translated, this verse is a question posed to those who deny the revelation, the Resurrection, and other aspects of religion. It may also be addressing belief in the Prophet specifically, as if to say, "Who would deny thee, O Messenger, after the appearance of these proofs of religion" (Q, R, Ṭ), though this reading is considered grammatically problematic by some (Āl). The verse also indicates amazement that anyone could witness human beings coming from a drop (see 16:4; 18:37; 22:5; 35:11; 36:77; 40:67; 53:46; 75:37; 76:2; 80:19) and rising to *the most beautiful stature,* yet still deny the Resurrection (Āl, Q, R).

8 Cf. 6:57: *Judgment belongs to God alone; He relates the Truth, and He is the best of deciders;* 11:45. God is also referred to as *the best* (or *most just*) *of judges* (7:87; 10:109; 12:80). In relation to the preceding verses, the implication is that human beings differ, because some leave the state of *the most beautiful stature* and descend to *the lowest of the low,* while others remain in *the most beautiful stature,* and it is only logical that they would differ in recompense according to God's *most just* judgment (Ṭb). As the Prophet is commanded to say in another verse, *God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein you used to differ* (22:69). This is in reference to the great difference between believers and disbelievers, and the good and the wicked indicated in several verses (e.g., 5:100; 6:51; 13:16; 32:18–22; 35:19–22; 38:28; 39:9; 40:58; 59:20).

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# 96

# The Blood Clot

## *al-ʿAlaq*

*Al-ʿAlaq* is an early Makkan *sūrah*. The first five verses are considered by most to be the first verses of the Quran to be revealed; the remaining verses were revealed later in the Makkan period when opposition to the revelation arose among the leaders of the Quraysh. This initial revelation is said to have taken place during the last third of the month of Ramadan, in 610 of the Christian era, twelve years before the migration to Madinah (*hijrah*) in 622, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

According to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, "The first thing that began happening with the Messenger of God from the revelation were dreams he would see in his sleep that would come true. He would not see any dream except that it would come to be, like the break of day in the morning. Then seclusion became beloved to him. So he used to go to the cave of [Mount] Ḥirāʾ and devote himself to worship there for a number of nights, and would bring provisions. Then he would return to [his wife] Khadījah and replenish his provisions for a similar number of nights. This continued until the revelation suddenly came to him while he was in the cave of Ḥirāʾ.

"The Archangel [Gabriel] came to him while he was in the cave and said, 'Recite!' The Messenger of God said, 'I replied, "I am not a reciter."' Then he said, 'So he seized me and pressed me until I could no longer bear it. Then he released me and said, "Recite!" So I replied, "I am not a reciter." Then he pressed me a second time until I could no longer bear it. Then he released me and said, "Recite!" So I replied, "I am not a reciter." Then he pressed me a third time until I could no longer bear it. Then he released me and said, *"Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created"* until he reached *that which he knew not.*'

"Then he [the Prophet] returned with those verses and with his heart trembling until he reached Khadījah and said, 'Cover me, cover me.' So they wrapped him up until his fear went away. Then he said to Khadījah, 'What is wrong with me?' and told her what had happened and said, 'I fear for my soul.' She replied, 'Never! By God, God will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your relatives, you speak the truth, you help the poor and the

destitute, you serve your guests generously, and you help the deserving who are afflicted by misfortune.'

"She then accompanied him to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who, during the period of ignorance in pre-Islamic Arabia, had become a Christian and used to write the scriptures in Arabic. He would write from the Gospel in Hebrew as much as God willed for him to write. He was then an old man and had lost his eyesight. Khadījah said to him, 'O my cousin! Listen to the story of your nephew.' Waraqah asked, 'O my nephew! What have you seen?' The Messenger of God described what he saw. Waraqah said, 'This is the *Nāmūs* [from the Greek *nomos,* indicating a revealed law] that God sent to Moses. I wish I were young and could live until the time when your people will drive you out.' The Messenger of God said, 'Will they drive me out?' Waraqah replied, 'Yes, no man has come with something similar to what you have brought but that he was treated with hostility and enmity; and if I should remain alive till that day, then I would firmly support you'" (Bg, IK, Q). The *sūrah* begins with an injunction to recite (vv. 1–5) followed by an admonition of mankind in general (vv. 6–8) and a more specific admonition of those who prevent others from practicing religion (vv. 9–16). It concludes with a challenge to those who call upon what is other than God to protect them (vv. 17–19).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

① Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created, ② created man from a blood clot. ③ Recite! Thy Lord is most noble, ④ Who taught by the Pen, ⑤ taught man that which he knew not. ⑥ Nay, truly man is rebellious ⑦ in that he

1–5 For the account of the revelation of these verses, see the introduction to this *sūrah*. These verses begin by discussing creation; the first mention of creation in v. 1 can be taken as a reference to the fact that God creates all that exists from nothing (Aj). The passage then moves to the creation of the human being, who is honored and ennobled through knowledge, the faculty that distinguished Adam from the angels (IK). The creation of the human being and knowledge are related in the first revelation, because human beings are created for knowledge of God and His creation, and God teaches Adam and thus all humanity the names of all things (2:31) before commanding, providing laws, and judging. According to some, the mention of recitation precedes that of writing because, although both are means of conveying knowledge, there could be speech without writing, but not writing without speech (IK). Thus although *recite* could also be translated "read," *recite* is the better option because the Prophet was not given something to read and is reported to have been "unlettered" (see 62:2c).

2 Several verses refer to different periods of gestation as a sign of God's creative power. The *blood clot* appears to be the third stage in the most extensive Quranic account of gestation: *O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed* (22:5). For the stages that follow the clot, see 23:14; 40:67c; 75:38. Vv. 1–2 can also be seen as a commentary on 95:4–5, where *created* in v. 1 refers to creating *man in the most beautiful stature* (95:4) and v. 2 refers to casting *him to the lowest of the low* (95:5).

3 Or, "Recite, for thy Lord is most noble." In pre-Islamic Arabia nobility or magnanimity (*karāmah*) was considered the highest of all virtues, implying an unblemished pedigree, all virtuous character traits, and unbounded generosity; see 49:13c. In accord with the third quality, this verse could also be understood to mean, "Recite, for thy Lord is most generous," for He blesses human beings with the greatest of blessings (Aj), creation and revelation. In pre-Islamic poetry, *karīm*, meaning "noble" or "generous," was said of people, but not of God. The Quranic usage of the term thus introduced an aspect of God hitherto unknown to the pagan Arabs.

4–5 That God teaches human beings and brings them *out of darkness into light* (14:1, 5; 33:43; 57:9; cf. Isaiah 42:16; 1 Peter 2:9) is the extension and continuation of His unbounded generosity. Some say that pens are of three principal types: the first, corresponding to the Logos or Intellect, is the one that God commanded to write all that would be until the Day of Resurrection; the second are those with which the angels record the deeds of human beings (see commentary on 18:49; 82:10–12); and the third are those with which human beings write (Q). According to some, *man* indicates Adam, of whom 2:31 says, *and He taught Adam the names, all of them* (Q). Others say that it indicates the Prophet Muhammad, as in 4:113: *God has sent down unto thee the Book and Wisdom, and has taught thee what thou knewest not; God's Bounty toward thee is great indeed* (Q). But here most commentators take *taught man* to mean that this verse refers to the manner in which God teaches all human beings, not only prophets. God's teaching *by the Pen* can also be seen as an allusion to the Divine Intellect inscribing knowledge upon the tablet of the human soul. For more on the symbolism of the pen, see 68:1c.

6–19 These verses were reportedly revealed several years after vv. 1–5 in reference to Abū Jahl, the leader of the Quraysh, who rejected the

deems himself beyond need. (8) Truly unto thy Lord is the return. (9) Hast thou seen him who prohibits (10) a slave when he prays? (11) Hast thou seen if he does so out of guidance, (12) or to enjoin reverence? (13) Hast thou seen if he denied and turned away? (14) Does he not know that God sees? (15) Nay, but if he ceases not, We shall surely seize him by the forelock— (16) a lying, iniquitous forelock. (17) So let him call his cohorts. (18) We shall call the guards of Hell. (19) Nay! Obey him not! But prostrate and draw nigh.

prophethood of Muhammad and tried to hinder the practice of Islam (Aj, IK, Q).

6 The use of the emphatic particle *nay* (*kallā*) here implies that despite the great blessings of creation and of knowledge, people deny them and are unthankful for them; thus they are disbelievers and rebels (Aj). In this context, *rebellious* can thus be seen as an allusion to those who rebel against what God teaches.

7 *Beyond need* is literally "self-sufficient," but *beyond need* better conveys the negative connotation of viewing oneself as "self-sufficient" vis-à-vis God. Such self-sufficiency can then be seen as the root of all rebelliousness (Aj).

8 The return to God is among the most central themes of the Quran; see commentary on 2:156: *Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return.*

9–10 These verses are usually understood as a direct reference to Abū Jahl's preventing the Prophet from praying at the Kaʿbah (Aj, IK, Q).

11–14 These verses are taken as a rebuke to Abū Jahl (IK, Q), meaning, "Do you have the capacity to judge whether the Prophet is guided?" This particular referent does not, however, contravene the general castigation of all who question the veracity of the Prophet and the Quran. Although some take vv. 13–14 as a continuation of the admonishment in vv. 11–12, in which case *he* continues to refer to the Prophet, others see the referent as Abū Jahl (Q).

15–16 These verses are taken by most as an answer to v. 14, meaning that Abū Jahl did not know that God sees. Thus Abū Jahl would not cease to attempt to prohibit the Prophet from praying. The application is nonetheless general, as in 55:41: *The guilty shall be known by their marks; and they shall be seized by the forelocks and by the feet.* From a Quranic perspective, *there is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock* (11:56).

17–18 *Cohorts* is seen by most as a reference to the other members of the Quraysh who supported Abū Jahl. According to Ibn ʿAbbās, the Prophet was praying when Abū Jahl came to him and said, "Did we not warn you about this?" The Prophet went to him and reproached him. Abū Jahl retaliated by saying, "Indeed, you know very well that there is no one in Makkah who has more guards than me," and as a response God revealed vv. 17–18. Ibn ʿAbbās is said to have commented, "By God, had he called, God would have sent the guards of Hell against him" (Aj, IK, Q).

19 *Nay* is either another rebuke to Abū Jahl or an address directly to the Prophet and his followers indicating that they should pay no heed to Abū Jahl and his threats, and persist in prostrating to God. *Obey him not* is echoed in 68:8: *So obey not the deniers.* More generally, these verses can be taken as an indication that people should not heed any who deny religion or the efficacy of prayer and should continue to *prostrate and draw nigh* through prayer, for that is the means by which one draws closer to God. According to a *ḥadīth,* "The closest that a servant can be to his Lord is when he is prostrating" (IK, Q; for the spiritual significance of prostration, see 32:15c; 19:58c).

This verse is one of fifteen verses after the recitation of which one is enjoined to prostrate; see 19:58c.

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# 97

# Power

## *al-Qadr*

An early Makkan *sūrah, al-Qadr* is believed to have been revealed after *Sūrah* 80, *ʿAbasa*. The *sūrah* is famous for its declaration regarding the Night of Power (*Laylaṭ al-Qadr*), during which the Quran was first revealed. This is universally believed to have occurred during the month of Ramadan, as stated in 2:185: *The month of Ramadan is that wherein the Quran was sent down as guidance to mankind, as clear proofs of guidance, and as the Criterion.* Muslims maintain that the Night of Power comes again every year. Many reports say that the Night of Power occurs during the last ten nights of Ramadan (IK, Ṭs). On the basis of another *ḥadīth,* most maintain that it occurs on one of the odd-numbered of these last ten nights: "Look for the Night of Power in the last ten nights of Ramadan, on the night when nine or seven or five nights remain out of the last ten nights of Ramadan."

The Prophet himself would usually practice spiritual retreat (*iʿtikāf*) during the last ten days of Ramadan, abstaining from conjugal relations, fasting, and praying throughout the night, and he advised his followers to do so as well. According to another *ḥadīth,* "Whoever stands [in prayer] during the Night of Power out of belief and seeking reward, his previous sins are forgiven" (IK). The Prophet advised that during this night one should pray, "My God, truly Thou art a pardoner who loves pardoning; so pardon me" (Āl).

This *sūrah* can be understood as forming a pair with the following *sūrah* in that the first discusses the conveyance of the revelation and the second focuses upon the importance of acting in accord with it.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Truly We sent it down in the Night of Power. (2) And what shall apprise thee of the Night of Power? (3) The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. (4) The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. (5) Peace it is until the break of dawn.

1–2 *It* refers to the Quran. According to several commentators, these verses indicate that the Quran was revealed in its entirety at once (Bḍ, IK, Q, Ṭ, Ṭs). This is understood to be the first stage of revelation from the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22) to the lowest heaven, that of this world (Bg, Ṭ, Ṭs), or more specifically to the House of Might (*bayt al-ʿizzah*), which is in the lowest heaven (IK, Sh); see also 44:3–5c. The second stage of revelation is then understood to have occurred gradually over a twenty-three-year period from 610 to 632. For a discussion of the second stage of revelation, see 17:106c; 25:32c. There are over forty interpretations of what is meant by *the Night of Power* (Sh). According to Mujāhid, it is "the night of *ḥukm,*" "the night of judgment/decree" (Sh), meaning that on this night God decrees (*qaddara*) all things for the following year (Sh, Ṭs), or meaning God's Decree for the whole of creation, or both. Others do not see a necessary relation to God's Decree, saying that this night is so named to convey its honor and greatness (Ṭs). Others say that the name relates to the power of acts of obedience and worship performed during it, which have "a great power and a tremendous reward" (see the introduction to the *sūrah;* Sh, Ṭs). The rhetorical question in v. 2 is an emphatic expression of the utter holiness of this night, implying that true knowledge of it is beyond human understanding and belongs only to God (Sh).

3 The merit for acts of worship performed during this night is greater than that for those performed during a thousand other months (R, Sh, Ṭ). Here and in other verses (e.g., 22:47; 32:5), *a thousand* need not be taken literally, but as emphasis. According to some, the meaning of *a thousand months* is "all time" (Sh).

4 Cf. 44:3–4. On this night the angels descend to bless and bring peace to the believers, although many *aḥādīth* affirm that this function is not restricted to this night, but only more effulgent in it. Most interpret *the Spirit* as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel, who is the angel of revelation (IK, Sh, Ṭ); others say it is a reference to a type of angel, those who are the most noble of them (Sh), which some say are the angels *at the lote tree of the boundary* (see 53:14–15c; Āl, R); others say this verse refers to a special group of angels whose only function is to descend on this night (Aj, Āl, Sh); still others say *the Spirit* refers to another archangel. It can also be seen as a reference to God's Mercy (*raḥmah;* Aj, Āl, Sh); also see the discussion of "Spirit" (*rūḥ*) in 78:38c. *Therein* (*fīhā*) could also be taken to mean "among them," meaning that *the Spirit* descends with the angels (Āl). *By the leave of their Lord* is interpreted by some to mean "by the Command of their Lord" (Sh), as in 19:64, where the angels say, *We descend not, save by the Command of thy Lord* (R). *With every command,* or "with every decree," has many interpretations. The most prevalent is that it means on account of everything that God has ordained (*qaḍā*) for the following year (Bḍ, Sh, Ṭ); see 44:3–5c. An alternate reading of this verse is *min kulli imriʾin,* meaning, "for every human being" (Bḍ, Sh, Ṭ).

5 Many say this verse refers to greetings of *peace* that the angels bestow upon those who spend this night in prayer (IK, R, Sh). Others say it indicates that this night itself is naught but peace (Bḍ, Sh), which is interpreted to mean that there is no evil in this night whatsoever (Āl, IK, R). Some say it indicates that there is peace in everything that God decrees or ordains for the following year during this night (Āl). It can also be seen as conveying the pregnant quietude that precedes the emergence of the Divine Word in the human world and by analogy the stillness of heart required for the true remembrance of God.

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# 98

# The Clear Proof

## *al-Bayyinah*

Many commentators take *al-Bayyinah* to be a Madinan *sūrah* (Āl, IK, Sh), although others claim that it is more widely known as a Makkan *sūrah* (Aj, Sh). It takes its name from the mention of *the clear proof* (*al-bayyinah*) in the first verse, a word used throughout the Quran as a reference to the content and function of revelation. This *sūrah* is also known by the first two words, *lam yakun,* "They Will Not" (when standing alone), and as *al-Qiyāmah,* "The Resurrection," among other titles (Āl).

*Bayyinah* derives from the verb *bayyana,* meaning "to make or to become clear, evident, manifest, plain, or apparent," as in 2:219: *Thus does God make clear unto you the signs, that haply you may reflect* (cf. 2:266); and 3:118: *We have indeed made clear the signs for you, were you to understand* (cf. 2:187, 242; 3:103; 4:176; 5:89; 24:58–59, 61). Both the Prophet Muhammad (16:64) and Jesus (43:63) are described as "making clear." And in 2:159–60 those who "make clear" are distinguished from those who conceal what has been revealed to them.

In the Quran, clarity and exposition of truths are attributes of God's revelations and the teachings of God's prophets. To follow *a clear proof* is to follow the way of truth, as in 47:14: *Is one who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord like one whose evil deeds are made to seem fair unto him, and like those who follow their caprices?* In this way, all revelation is presented as *a clear proof.* As 57:25 states: *We have indeed sent Our messengers with clear proofs* (cf. 5:32). Other verses present Moses (2:87, 92; 7:105), Jesus (2:87, 253; 5:110; 43:63; 61:6), and other prophets as having come *with clear proofs.* Here, as in most instances, *clear proof* is employed to demonstrate the stark contrast between those who follow a *clear proof* and those who do not.

The *sūrah* begins with an assertion that those who disbelieve will continue to oppose the Prophet until a clear proof comes to them (vv. 1–5), and the last three verses (vv. 6–8) contrast the fate of the disbelievers with that of the believers.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters will not desist until the clear proof comes unto them, (2) a messenger from God reciting scriptures purified, (3) wherein are books upright. (4) Those who were given the Book did not become divided until after the clear proof had come unto

1 Some commentators consider this verse to be among the most difficult verses of the Quran (Sh, W). According to most commentators, *those who disbelieve among the People of the Book* refers to disbelievers among both Jews and Christians (Bḍ, IK, Q, Sh), though some say it refers only to the Jews of Madinah (Q). Most read this verse to mean that disbelievers will not leave their disbelief until *the clear proof* of revelation has come to them (Q, R, Sh, Z). Others say that it could mean that they will not be punished or destroyed until the proof of revelation has been brought to them (Sh); in which case *the idolaters will not desist* could be translated "the idolaters will not be abandoned," meaning that God will send them *the clear proof* and they will then be rewarded or punished based upon their acceptance or rejection of it. This interpretation accords with many passages confirming that God will not punish any for wrong belief until they have been presented with the truth and then rejected it, as in 17:15: *And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger* (see 79:18–19c). In this vein, the verse can be seen as a specific reference to disbelief in the prophethood of Muhammad (Q), not necessarily to disbelief in God. Most interpret *the clear proof* as a reference to the Quran (Q, R, Sh), as in 6:57: *Truly I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, and you have denied Him.* Others take *clear proof* as a reference to the Prophet Muhammad (Q, R, Sh). But it can also be seen as a reference to the phenomena of revelation and thus to the books and prophets sent to all communities, since the dozens of references to *clear proof(s)* throughout the Quran are used in relation to many different prophets and the books with which they were sent (see the introduction to this *sūrah*). In this interpretation, disbelievers among *the People of the Book* refers to those who are said to have altered the scriptures that had been sent to them through previous prophets; see 2:75c; 3:78c.

2 The majority of commentators interpret *scriptures purified* as a reference to the Quran and *a messenger* as a reference to Muhammad (Bg, IK, Q, Ṭ). *Messenger* can, however, also be read as a reference to the Archangel Gabriel (Bḍ), and both terms could be seen as references to the messengers and revelations that each community has been sent, since, as several verses attest, *there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them* (35:24). *Scriptures purified* can also be read as a reference to the *Preserved Tablet* (85:22; Sh), from which all revelation is said to descend; see 85:22c; 97:1–2c.

3 *Books upright* indicates that they are free from errors and mistakes because they are from God (IK, Sh), distinguishing between truth and falsehood with *no crookedness therein* (18:1; R), since they are *on pages honored, exalted and purified* (80:13–14; Q); see also 85:21–22.

4 This verse is similar to 45:17: *And We gave them clear proofs from the Command. And they differed not till after knowledge had come unto them, out of envy among themselves* (cf. 2:213; 3:19, 105; 10:93; 23:53; 43:63–65). Given this tendency among human beings, 3:105 counsels, *Be not like those who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them.* From one perspective, this means that people had been unified in their disbelief, but that after the clear proofs of revelation came, *they differed: among them were those who believed, and among them were those who disbelieved* (2:253). Others claim that it alludes to those among the People of the Book who believed that a messenger would come, but, when the Prophet Muhammad was sent, denied his prophethood, as in 2:89: *And when there came to them a Book from God, confirming that which*

them. (5) They were not commanded but to worship God, devoting religion entirely to Him, as *ḥanīf*s, and to perform the prayer, and to give the alms—that is the upright religion. (6) Truly the disbelievers among the People of the Book and the idolaters are in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein; it is they who are the worst of creation. (7) Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, it is they who are the best of creation. (8) Their reward is with their Lord—Gardens of Eden with rivers running below, abiding therein forever, God content with them and they content with Him. That is for whosoever fears his Lord.

*they had with them—and aforetime they used to ask for victory over those who disbelieve—so when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it* (R). Others see this verse as a reference to the corruption of pure revelation by previous religious communities, who argued with one another and divided into different sects (*firqah;* IK), as in 11:110; 27:76; and 41:45. In this vein they cite a famous *ḥadīth,* "Verily, the Jews differed until they became seventy-one sects. And verily, the Christians differed until they became seventy-two sects. And this community [i.e., the Muslim community] will divide into seventy-three sects, and all of them will be in the Fire except one." The Prophet was then asked, "Who are they, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "[Those who follow] what I and my Companions follow" (IK, Q).

5 The first phrase is understood to mean that those who came before were only ordered to do that which was enjoined upon them in order to worship God (Sh, Z), and is taken to imply that they sought other objectives and mixed other practices and beliefs into the pure religion that God had sent them (Ṭ). *Devoting . . . entirely* translates *mukhliṣ,* which implies making something pure and doing something with complete sincerity. It can be taken to mean both that they purify the religion for God, meaning their practice and understanding of the religion, and that they purify themselves (Sh). *Ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafāʾ*) derives from the verb *ḥanifa,* meaning "to incline." It is employed in the Quran to indicate one who inclines away from idolatry and toward belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). Abraham is thus described as a *ḥanīf* in several verses (2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:79, 161; 16:120, 123). And in 10:105, the Prophet is enjoined, *Set thy face toward the religion as a* ḥanīf, *and be thou not among the idolaters;* see also 22:31; 30:30. For the meaning of *ḥanīf,* see 2:135c. *Alms* translates *zakāh,* which is the technical term for the Muslim mandatory alms (see 2:277c), but is also used to indicate the alms mandated for previous religious communities (see 2:43, 83, 177, 277; 4:77, 162; 7:156; 19:31, 55; 21:73; 22:41; 24:37), and at other times for all forms of charitable giving. The root meaning of *zakāh* is purification, implying that giving wealth purifies both the giver and the wealth. In this context, *zakāh* can be more broadly conceived as all acts of kindness toward the poor and needy (IK), especially if this is a Makkan *sūrah* revealed before the formal institutionalization of the alms.

*The upright religion* is seen by some as a reference to the religion of Abraham and his followers, the religion that was taught in the *scriptures purified* (v. 2). For the meaning of *the upright religion,* see 30:30c. In this context some understand it as a direct reference to the religion with which the Prophet Muhammad was sent (Ṭ), while others see it as a more general reference to all those who follow what has been revealed to them through a prophet.

6–8 That human beings can be both *the best of creation* and *the worst of creation* testifies to their unique place in the cosmos, as in 95:4–5: *Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature, then We cast him to the lowest of the low.* On the one hand, human beings are favored above all else, as in 17:70: *We have indeed honored the Children of Adam, and We carry them over land and sea, and provide them with good things, and*

*We have favored them above many We have created.* On the other hand, when they do not live up to their potential, they are below all else, as in 25:44: *Truly they are but as cattle. Nay, they are further astray from the way.* Vv. 6–7 can also be taken as a reference to those who are the worst or the best of the age in which they live, as in 2:47, which addresses the Children of Israel, *Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and that I favored you above the worlds* (Q). According to both Shiite and Sunni sources, the Prophet said to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib regarding *the best of creation,* "That is you and your partisans (*shīʿah*) on the Day of Resurrection, *content, contenting* [89:28]" (Kā, Sh, Sy).

The combination of *the best of creation* and the mutual contentment mentioned in v. 8 indicates that human beings have an illustrious station (IK). Based upon these and other verses, some scholars have argued that believing and righteous human beings are better than the angels (Āl, IK). Others see an allusion to believers as the best among the created beings in this world. Regarding the latter, the Prophet is reported to have said to some Companions, "Shall I not inform you of *the best of creation*?" They said, "Of course, O Messenger of God!" He replied, "A man who takes the reins of his horse in the way of God, and whenever there is a cry from the enemy, he mounts it. Shall I not inform you of *the best of creation*?" They said, "Of course, O Messenger of God!" He said, "A man who has a flock of sheep, and he establishes the prayer and gives alms. Shall I not inform you of *the worst of creation*?" They said, "Of course." He said, "The person who is asked for the sake of God (*biʾ Llāh*), yet does not give for His sake" (IK, Sh). According to another *ḥadīth,* "The believer is more noble in the Eyes of God than some of His angels" (Q).

8 For *God content with them and they content with Him,* see also 5:119; 9:100; 58:22c; 89:28c. According to some, the Garden of Contentment (*jannat al-riḍwān*) is the second highest level of Paradise, just below the Garden of the Essence (*jannat al-dhāt*).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 99

# The Earthquake

## *al-Zalzalah*

*Al-Zalzalah* is believed to be either a late Makkan *sūrah* or a Madinan *sūrah* revealed in 623, soon after the Prophet's emigration in 622 (Āl). It takes its name from the reference to the shaking of the earth in the first verse. The first five verses provide a powerful and extended discussion of the quaking of the earth, which is said to be one of the events of the Day of Judgment to which reference or allusion is made in many other verses. The last three verses convey details regarding the Final Judgment, in which every good and evil deed will be weighed.

According to a *ḥadīth,* "A man came to the Messenger of God and said, 'Teach me what to recite, O Messenger of God!' The Prophet said, 'Recite three from those [that begin] with the letters *Alif, Lām, Rā* [i.e., *Sūrah*s 10–12, 14–15].' The man then said to him, 'I have become old in age, my heart has hardened, and my tongue has become harsh.' The Prophet said, 'Then recite from those [that begin] with the letters *Ḥā, Mīm* [i.e., *Sūrah*s 40–46].' The man said the same thing that he had said before; so the Prophet said, 'Recite three from the *Musabbiḥāt* [i.e., *sūrah*s whose first verse mentions the glorification of God by all of creation: 57, 59, 61, 62, 64].' The man again said the same thing that he had said before. Then the man said, 'Rather, give me something to recite that comprises [all of these], O Messenger of God.' So the Prophet told him to recite, *When the earth is shaken with her shaking.* Then when he [the Prophet] finished reciting the *sūrah* to him, the man said, 'By Him Who has sent you with the truth as a Prophet, I shall never add anything else to it.' Then the man turned away and left, and the Prophet said, 'The little man has prospered; the little man has prospered'" (IK).

According to a saying attributed to Ibn ᶜAbbās, "*When [the earth] is shaken* is equal to half of the Quran" (Āl, Q, Sy). In other words, if the Quran is divided into the edicts regarding the Hereafter and those regarding this world, this *sūrah* would comprise in summary fashion all of those edicts that pertain to the Hereafter (Āl).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) When the earth is shaken with her shaking, (2) and the earth yields up her burdens, (3) and man says, "What ails her?" (4) That Day she shall convey her chronicles; (5) for thy Lord inspired her. (6) That Day mankind shall issue forth upon diverse paths to witness their deeds. (7) So whosoever does a mote's weight of good shall see it. (8) And whosoever does a mote's weight of evil shall see it.

1 The *shaking* of the earth is considered to be one of the signs of the Hour (cf. 19:90; 27:88; 56:4–6; 69:14; 73:14; 89:21). Many other verses also refer to the distress that human beings will experience when the world comes to an end (e.g., 22:1–2).

2 This verse is similar to 84:3–4: *And when the earth is stretched out, and casts forth what is in it, emptying itself* (cf. 54:7; 101:4). A *ḥadīth* says of this event, "The earth will throw out the pieces of its liver [i.e., its contents]. Gold and silver will come out like columns. A murderer will come and say, 'I killed for this!' The one who broke the ties of kinship will say, 'For this I severed the ties of kinship!' The thief will say, 'For this I had my hands amputated!' Then they will leave it there, and no one will take anything from it" (IK).

3 This verse can be seen as a reference to all human beings who are alive when this event occurs or only to the disbelievers (Bḍ, Q, Sh). With regard to the latter, the believers know that the world is ephemeral, whereas the disbelievers will be astonished when it fades away.

4 The earth will speak of what its inhabitants did while upon it. It is reported that the Prophet said, "Verily, *her chronicles* means that she will testify against every male and female servant, about what they did upon her surface. She will say that he did such and such on such and such a day. So this is *her chronicles*" (IK).

5 The earth is *inspired* or instructed to *convey* all of the deeds performed by those who dwelled upon her.

6 *Upon diverse paths* translates *ashtātan*, implying that people's ends will diverge greatly and thus alluding to the contrast between those destined for Heaven and those destined for Hell. *Ashtātan* could also be taken to imply that they are dispersed and scattered, as in 101:4: *A day wherein mankind shall be like scattered moths* (see also 54:7). Though on the Day of Judgment people are said to stand in groups according to their particular religious communities (see 16:84, 89; 28:75; 36:69), every person will be resurrected alone and stand in judgment alone, with none of the things people rely upon in this life or thought they might be able to rely upon in the Hereafter. See 6:94: *And [God will say], "Now you have come unto Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and you have left behind that which We had bestowed upon you. We see not with you your intercessors—those whom you claimed were partners [unto God]. Now the bond between you has been severed, and that which you once claimed has forsaken you."*

7–8 Cf. 34:3: *Not a mote's weight evades Him in the heavens or on earth, nor smaller than that, nor larger, but that it is in a clear Book* (cf. 10:61; 54:52–53). According to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, one of the earliest Quran commentators, "These two verses were revealed about two men. One of them deemed it unworthy to give beggars one date, a small piece of bread, or one walnut, saying to himself, 'Such things are nothing. We only get rewarded when we give away something that we love.' The other man used to belittle minor sins such as small lies, backbiting, and looking at that which is unlawful, saying to himself, 'No onus is upon me because of engaging in this, for God only threatens those who commit major sins with

Hellfire.' And so God revealed these two verses, encouraging people to perform even small acts of goodness, since they add up in the end, and cautioning them against even small sins, since they add up in the end" (W). There are many *aḥādīth* that reinforce this message, among them, "Fear the Fire, even if by giving half a date in charity, and even if by saying a single word of good" (IK). The Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah is reported to have said, "He used to say, 'O ʿĀʾishah! Beware of the sins that are belittled, for indeed they will be taken account of by God' " (IK). That everything will be recorded *in a book* or *in a clear book* is reiterated in several verses (6:59; 10:61; 11:6; 20:52; 22:70; 27:75; 34:3; 35:11; 57:22; 78:29). Sometimes this record is understood as a reference to all deeds and at other times as a reference to all that exists. For a discussion of the book in which the deeds of human beings are recorded, see 18:49c and 69:19–29.

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# 100

# The Chargers

## *al-ʿĀdiyāt*

Most commentators maintain that *al-ʿĀdiyāt* was revealed in the early Makkan period, most likely soon after *Sūrah* 101, *al-Qāriʿah*. Others maintain that it was revealed in the beginning of the Madinan period (Āl, Ṭs). The case for Makkan attribution is supported by its similarity in style to other Makkan *sūrah*s, while the case for Madinan attribution is supported by some interpretations of the subject matter.

The *sūrah* takes its name from the mention of the *chargers* in the first verse. There are several different accounts regarding the occasion of revelation. In the first, it is reported that the Prophet sent a military expedition under the command of al-Mundhir ibn ʿAmr al-Anṣārī to a clan of Banū Kinānah. When news of the expedition was delayed, the hypocrites said, "They have all been killed," and so God gave news about this expedition and revealed *By the panting chargers,* meaning the horses of that expedition (Ṭs). Others have said that the verses refer to the Battle of Badr, but according to an account attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib there were only two horses at Badr; the rest of the mounts were camels. Another account attributed to ʿAlī sees these oaths as depictions of that portion of the *ḥajj* pilgrimage in which the pilgrims rush on their mounts from Mt. ʿArafat to Muzdalifah and on to Minā.

The *sūrah* begins with five oaths by various forms of charging horses (vv. 1–5). The next three verses (vv. 6–8) discuss the state of human beings and their ingratitude toward God, while the last three verses (vv. 9–11) warn that God is aware of all things and that on the Day of Judgment one will have to answer for what lies within one's breast.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the panting chargers, (2) by the strikers of sparks, (3) by the raiders at dawn, (4) raising thereby a trail of dust, (5) penetrating to the center altogether! (6) Truly man is ungrateful to his Lord, (7) and truly he is a witness to that, (8) and truly he is fierce in his love for good things. (9) Does he not know that when what lies within graves is turned inside out, (10) and what lies within breasts is made known— (11) truly on that Day their Lord shall be aware of them?

1–5 According to al-Bayḍāwī, the oaths in these verses can also be seen as an allusion to "charging souls" who, when something of the light of holiness appears unto them, convey it to others, strike the sparks of spiritual knowledge (*al-maʿārif*), raid caprice and bad habits, raise desire for God, and finally penetrate altogether into the midst of those who are in ʿIlliyyūn, considered by some to be the highest Garden of Paradise (see 83:18–19).

1 The various occasions of revelation reported imply that this verse refers to either horses in battle or camels on the pilgrimage (Bḍ), but it can be seen as applying to both, as each is understood as fulfilling a function considered worthy of being sworn upon by God.

2 The striking of hooves on rocks causes *sparks* to fly (IK).

3–4 The camels that rush from Mashʿar to Minā do so at dawn on the Day of Sacrifice, the last day of the *ḥajj* (see 2:196–200).

5 This verse alludes to the manner in which the horses penetrated to the center of the enemy troops (Bḍ) or to the rush of camels from Mashʿar to Minā.

6 This verse constitutes the response to the oaths in the first five verses. *Kanūd,* here translated *ungrateful,* indicates a land where nothing grows or a person who is petty and miserly.

7 *He* can be read as a reference to either God or human beings (Bḍ, IK, Ṭs). God as Witness is attested in many other verses (3:98; 4:33; 5:117; 22:17; 33:55; 58:6; 85:9). As to the latter, it can be taken to imply either that human beings are aware of their sins in this life or that they will be aware of them on the Day of Judgment, as in 67:11: *Thus do they admit their sin* (see also 35:37; 42:35). Other verses attest that on the Day of Judgment people will be made to testify against themselves (6:30; 24:24; 36:65; 41:20); see 36:65c.

8 Most commentators equate *good things* with wealth, but the term can also be seen as a more general reference to all things of this world for which human beings have excessive love at the expense of loving God and the blessings of the Hereafter, as in 3:14: *Made to seem fair unto mankind is the love of passions, among them women, children, hoarded heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle, and tillage. Those are the enjoyment of the life of this world. And God, with Him is the beautiful return.*

9 All human beings will be resurrected (see also 82:3–4; 84:3–4; 99:2c). The image of graves being turned inside out is another example of apocalyptic inversion (see, e.g., 81:1–6; 82:1–4) that evokes the idea of all one's past being resurrected for judgment (cf. 35:22; 60:13).

10–11 On the Day of Resurrection the good will be clearly distinguished from the bad (Sh), and the true nature of all actions and hearts will be known. The Day of Judgment is thus referred to in 86:9 as *the Day when secrets are tested,* for on this day everyone's true nature will become known. As dozens of verses attest, God is at all times aware of all that human beings do (e.g., 2:134, 221; 3:153, 180; 17:30; 24:30; 27:88; 57:11) and

of *what lies within breasts* (cf. 3:119, 154; 5:7; 8:43; 11:5; 31:23; 35:38; 39:7; 42:24; 57:6; 64:4; 67:13). The specific reference to God's Awareness on the Day of Judgment in this verse can thus be understood as an indication that on this day human beings will themselves become cognizant of the fact of God's ever present awareness and will no longer be able to deceive themselves or deny the intentions that lay behind their actions. In other verses, the disbelievers even bear witness that they deserve Hellfire (see 39:71; 67:11).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 101

## The Calamity

## *al-Qāriᶜah*

*Al-Qāriᶜah* is a Makkan *sūrah,* most likely revealed just after *Sūrah* 106, *Quraysh.* It takes its name from the mention of *the calamity* in the first three verses, which according to some is one of the names of the Day of Judgment. The first five verses provide a vivid description of the destruction of the earth on the Day of Judgment. The last six verses (vv. 6–11) contrast the recompense of *one whose scales are heavy* with good deeds to *one whose scales are light.*

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) The calamity. (2) What is the calamity? (3) And what shall apprise thee of the calamity? (4) A day wherein mankind shall be like scattered moths, (5) and the mountains shall be like carded wool. (6) As for one whose scales are heavy, (7) he shall enjoy a life contenting. (8) And as for one whose scales are light, (9) an abyss shall be his mother. (10) And what shall apprise thee of her? (11) It is a raging fire.

1–3 *Calamity* translates *qāriʿah,* which comes from the verb *qaraʿa,* meaning, "to beat or strike something so that it makes a deafening sound." The repetition of the question in vv. 2–3 (which is similar to 69:2–3) is meant to emphasize that the true nature of the calamity, which is thought to be the Day of Judgment, is difficult if not impossible to comprehend. Thus the following verses do not define *the calamity,* but describe some of its marks.

4 *Like scattered moths* indicates that human beings will be bewildered, running to and fro with no direction, as if they were *drunk, though drunk they will not be* (22:2). This is similar to 54:7: *With their eyes humbled they emerge from the graves as if they were scattered locusts* (cf. 99:6), though 54:7 refers to the Resurrection, while the present verse most likely refers to the end of time. As the present verse is in the accusative in Arabic, there is an implied word before the sentence, which could be a command to the Prophet, such as "Mention" (*udhkur;* Āl), or a verb following upon the previous verse, such as "strike" (*qaraʿa;* Z), meaning, "It strikes on a day when . . ."

5 Cf. 70:9. Several verses speak of mountains made firm (e.g., 13:3; 16:15; 21:31; 41:10) as one of the signs of God. But on the Day of Judgment, *the mountains are set in motion* (81:3), *scattered* (77:10), and are *like heaps of shifting sand* (73:14); see also 18:47; 19:90; 20:105–6; 27:88; 52:10; 56:5–6c; 69:14.

6–9 Cf. 7:8; 23:102. *Scales* are *heavy* with good deeds. *Mawāzīn,* here translated *scales* is the plural of *mīzān,* which elsewhere is translated *balance* (6:152; 7:85; 11:84–85; 42:17; 55:7–9; 57:25). *Balance* (*mīzān*) is employed in the Quran to indicate revelation itself and the establishment of a just order that accords with what has been revealed (see 57:25c), whereas *scales* (*mawāzīn*) is employed in relation to the measuring of one's deeds on the Day of Resurrection (see 21:47). The plural, *scales,* speaks to how each individual will experience the weighing of his or her deeds, but according to most, it is in fact one scale, hence one *balance,* in which all deeds are weighed (Āl). From a Quranic perspective, *the good deed and the evil deed are not equal* (41:34), and *good deeds remove those that are evil* (11:114). Good deeds thus significantly outweigh evil deeds, as in 6:160: *Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof; but whosoever brings an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the like thereof.* But it is the character and intention behind deeds that establish their true weight. Regarding character, a *ḥadīth* states, "There is nothing placed in the Balance that is heavier than goodness of character (*ḥusn al-khuluq*)." Regarding intention, another *ḥadīth* states, "Deeds are only in accord with their intentions. And every person has only what he intended." From one perspective, although all deeds will be weighed, it is nonetheless through God's Mercy that salvation occurs, for God is not bound by human actions. As a *ḥadīth* states, "None of you will enter Paradise by his deeds." Someone asked, "Not even you, O Messenger of God?" He said, "Not even me, save that God shelter me with His Mercy." For *he shall enjoy*ʿ*a*

*life contenting,* cf. 69:21. For *one whose scales are light,* cf. 7:9; 23:103.

*Mother* translates *umm,* which derives from the verb *amma,* meaning, "to betake oneself to" or "direct one's course to." In this context it indicates that those who do not perform good deeds direct themselves to the *abyss* of Hell. In this sense it is similar to verses that speak of those who *wrong themselves* (e.g., 3:117; 7:177; 9:70; 10:44; 16:33, 118) and to those verses that refer to Hell and the Fire as the *refuge* of the disbelievers (e.g., 3:162, 197; 9:73; 13:18).

11 This verse is taken to mean that the Fire has reached the greatest heat possible (Sh) and that, when viewed in relation to this Fire, no other fire is truly *raging* (R).

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# 102

# Vying for Increase

## *al-Takāthur*

Most maintain that *al-Takāthur* is a Makkan *sūrah,* believed to follow *Sūrah* 108, *al-Kawthar,* in the chronological order of revelation, while a minority maintain that it is a Madinan *sūrah* (Ṭs). It takes its name from the mention of *takāthur* (*vying for increase*) in the first verse and was reportedly called "The *Sūrah* of the Grave" by some Companions of the Prophet (Āl).

According to the most well attested occasion of revelation, this *sūrah* was revealed about two clans of the Quraysh, Banū ʿAbd Manāf and Banū Sahm, who heaped abuses upon each other, leading them to count the respective chiefs, leaders, and members of each clan in order to see which one of them had more. The Banū ʿAbd Manāf said, "We have more leaders, chiefs, and members!" The Banū Sahm said the same. When it appeared that the Banū ʿAbd Manāf had more members, they said, "Let us also count the dead among us." They visited the graveyards, counted the dead, and concluded that the Banū Sahm had more, for they were greater in number in the pre-Islamic period (Q, W). Others say that these verses are a reference to the People of the Book or specifically to the Jews of Madinah (Q, Ṭs).

The first two verses speak of the delusion of accumulating worldly goods, which is referenced throughout the Quran (e.g., 3:14; 9:24), while the remaining verses (vv. 3–8) promise that those who persist in such behavior will know Hellfire with certainty.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Vying for increase distracts you, (2) till you visit the graves. (3) Nay! Soon you will know. (4) Indeed! Soon you will know. (5) Nay! If you knew with the knowledge of certainty, (6) you would surely see Hellfire. (7) Then you would surely see it with the eye of certainty. (8) Then surely you will be questioned that Day about the blessing.

1 *Vying for increase* in worldly gains *distracts* people from obedience to God and remembering the Hereafter (Q, Ṭs). "Distraction" (*lahw*) indicates an amusement, something that keeps people from achieving their real goals (Āl, Iṣ). In this vein, the Quran advises, *Let not the life of this world delude you* (31:33; 35:5; see also 45:35). *Vying for increase* translates *takāthur,* which implies both competing and boasting. It can pertain to anything that people seek for the gratification of their egos rather than for God's sake. According to a saying attributed to the Prophet, it means gathering wealth without right, withholding it from those to whom it rightfully belongs, and hoarding it (Q). It is reported that a Companion of the Prophet came upon him while he was reciting, *Vying for increase distracts you,* and the Prophet said, "The son of Adam says, 'My wealth! My wealth!' But do you get anything from your wealth except what you have eaten and finished, or what you have clothed yourself with and worn out, or what you have given as charity or spent?" (IK, Q, Ṭs). Another *ḥadīth* states, "If the son of Adam had a valley of gold, he would wish for it to be two valleys" (IK, Q).

2 This verse can be interpreted according to the first occasion of revelation mentioned in the *sūrah* introduction or as implying that people will continue to be distracted and not repent before they die (Q, Ṭs). Regarding the first interpretation, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is reported to have said, "How neglectful are these visitors and how difficult is the affair. They took no lesson from something that was full of lessons, but took lessons from far-off places. Do they boast about the dead bodies of their forefathers, or do they regard the number of dead people as grounds for feeling boastful of their numbers? They want to revive bodies that have become spiritless and moments that have passed that are more appropriate as lessons than as sources of pride and that are more suitable as a source of humility than of honor" (*Nahj al-balāghah,* Sermon No. 221).

3–4 This verse means that people will know at the moment of death. The repetition in these verses can be viewed as emphasizing that people cannot evade the outcome of their actions (Āl, Q, Ṭs) and that in the Hereafter they will know the real value of the things they prized when on earth. The repetition can also be taken as a reference to the punishment realized in the grave (v. 3) and then to the punishment realized after the Final Resurrection (v. 4; Āl, Q, Ṭs). According to some, the first is addressed to disbelievers and the second to believers (IK, Q). The emphatic particle *kallā* can indicate either negation or affirmation; it is thus rendered *Nay* in v. 3 and v. 5 and *indeed* in v. 4, though it could also be rendered *nay* for each or *indeed* for each (Q).

5–7 These verses can be taken to mean that if people knew now as they will know then, *vying for increase* (v. 1) would not distract them (IK, Q), and they would turn to God at every moment (Aj) rather than to the world.

5 The answer to the conditional phrase *if you knew* is dropped for rhetorical emphasis. Some say the implied answer is "then vying for increase would not distract you" (R); others say it is intentionally vague to let people wonder at the consequences and realize the gravity of their condition (R). *The knowledge of certainty* can be interpreted to mean "the knowledge of that which is certain"

(Sh), meaning the Resurrection (Ṭ). It is also interpreted by many to mean *the truth of certainty* (56:95). Most Sufis see *the knowledge of certainty, the eye of certainty* (v. 7), and *the truth of certainty* as three levels of spiritual development. In this respect *the knowledge of certainty* can be likened to knowledge obtained through hearing about something, *the eye of certainty* can refer to knowledge obtained by seeing or touching something, and *the truth of certainty* can refer to sapiential knowledge obtained by tasting, or experiencing something directly. In his *Makkan Openings,* Ibn ᶜArabī says that *the truth of certainty* is what is obtained through knowledge of the direct cause, *the eye of certainty* is what is provided by witnessing and spiritual unveiling, and *the knowledge of certainty* is what is provided by an indication (*dalīl*) in which there are no obscurities (*Futuḥāt,* II 132. 27–29). Basing his words on the famous saying "He who knows himself knows his Lord," he further states that "one who witnesses himself witnesses his Lord and thereby moves from the certainty of knowledge to the certainty of the eye; then when he returns to his body, he returns to the certainty of truth from the certainty of the eye, not to the certainty of knowledge" (*Futuḥāt,* III 390.1–3; cf. 2:42; 3:71).

6–7 These verses can be understood as repetition for emphasis, similar to vv. 3–4; or v. 6 can be taken as an indication that people will see Hellfire before entering it and v. 7 as an indication that they will know it with certainty when they enter into it (Āl, Q, Ṭs).

8 People will be questioned about what they have done with the blessings that God bestowed upon them while on earth (IK, Ṭs), as in 17:36: *Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account* (Sh). In this vein the Prophet is reported to have said to some of his Companions after they had found food for which they had left their homes in the middle of the night, "By Him in Whose Hand lies my soul, you shall be questioned about this blessing on the Day of Resurrection. Hunger brought you out of your homes, and you did not return before this blessing came to you." Some say this verse means people will be questioned about the Prophet, since he is considered the greatest blessing sent by God (Ṭs). According to some this verse is addressed only to the disbelievers; according to others it is addressed to all those who are responsible for their actions (*al-mukallafūn*). When viewed as addressed only to the disbelievers, it can be seen as a reference to 67:8, where they are asked by the keepers of Hell, *Did not a warner come unto you?* It can also be seen as an indication that human beings will be asked which are the true blessings: the delights of this world or those of the Hereafter (K).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 103

# The Declining Day

## *al-ʿAṣr*

A Makkan *sūrah, al-ʿAṣr* most likely follows *Sūrah* 94, *al-Sharḥ,* in the chronological order of revelation. It takes its title from the first word, *al-ʿaṣr,* which can be understood to mean the late afternoon (hence the translation *declining day*), the last hour of the afternoon, the entire afternoon, the later afternoon prayer, or a period of time in the sense of an epoch. It is said that whenever two Companions of the Prophet would meet they would not part company until one of them had recited *al-ʿAṣr* in its entirety and one of them had given greetings of peace to the other (IK). When viewed in relation to the previous *sūrah,* ʿ*aṣr* can be understood as a reference to time in general, meaning that *vying for increase* (102:1) prevents people from spending their time in the most beneficial manner and that the blessing of time is that for which people *will be questioned* (102:8). From one perspective, these three short verses contain the entire message of the Quran, namely, that human beings are in loss unless they turn to God. In this vein, the famous legal scholar al-Shāfiʿī is reported to have said, "Were the people to ponder this *sūrah,* it would suffice them" (IK).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) By the declining day, (2) truly mankind is in loss, (3) save those who believe, perform righteous deeds, exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience.

1 For the possible meanings of *the declining day* (*al-ʿaṣr*), see the introduction to this *sūrah*. Linguistically, *ʿaṣr* derives from the verb *ʿaṣara*, meaning "to squeeze," and thus relates to time that is declining or fading quickly. Among those possible meanings, many judge the most likely to be the *ʿaṣr* prayer (Bd, Q, Z), which is considered to be the prayer referred to as *the middlemost prayer* in 2:238, though that verse is also interpreted in many different ways. Some also say the term in this verse refers to the "era (*ʿaṣr*) of the Prophet because of its bounty (*faḍl*) through the renewal of prophethood in it" (Q). In this vein, this *sūrah* can be seen as pertaining to both the life of the individual and that of the human species; according to traditional Islamic belief, the fall of humanity continues as the historical cycle unfolds, and each generation is a degree below the generation before it.

2 Vv. 2–3 are the response to the oath in v. 1 and are similar in meaning to 95:5–6: *Then We cast him to the lowest of the low, save those who believe and perform righteous deeds; for theirs shall be a reward unceasing.* The term *mankind* can be seen as a reference to disbelievers (Bg, Q) or to humanity in general (Q). Seen in light of the reference to *the declining day,* it can also be taken as a reference to humanity during the latter days of the historical cycle. According to 35:39, *the disbelief of the disbelievers increases them in naught but loss.* The Quranic understanding of *loss* pertains to *losing this world and the Hereafter* (22:11). The losers are thus those who lose what they value most in this life, although not necessarily purely material things, and in the next life, as in 39:15: *Truly the losers are those who lose their souls and their families on the Day of Resurrection. Yea! That is the manifest loss.* From a spiritual perspective, *loss* can also be seen as a reference to losing faith and attachment to God. When *ʿaṣr* is understood as a reference to time, v. 2 indicates that people who do not use their time properly are in a constant state of loss.

3 In this context, *truth* can mean God (Q), the Quran (Bg, Q, Ṭs), or faith and professing Divine Unity (Bg, Ṭs); it can also mean that at the moment of death one says to those one leaves behind, *and die not except in submission* (3:102; Ṭs). Elsewhere believers are commanded, *Be patient, vie in patience* (3:200). Exhorting to patience (cf. 90:17) can be interpreted as encouraging one another in maintaining religious practice in the face of difficulties and opposition (R). The exhortation to truth and patience can thus be seen as an exhortation paralleling that between belief in God and performing righteous deeds (Sh) and, by extension, between all that one must know (discerning truth from falsehood) and all that one must do (maintaining the practices and principles of religion, no matter the obstacles). In this sense, this verse reflects the manner in which *righteous deeds* are believed to arise from and are always conjoined with faith and belief in God. In a broader sense, the *sūrah* emphasizes the two virtues of clinging to the truth and being patient in a world that has been spiritually darkened in general and at times full of spiritual crisis for a human being in particular.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 104

# The Slanderer

## *al-Humazah*

*Al-Humazah* is an early Makkan *sūrah,* most likely revealed after *Sūrah* 75, *al-Qiyāmah.* It takes its title from the condemnation of *every slandering backbiter* in the first line. It was reportedly revealed regarding a man by the name of al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq (Q, Z), who was known to slander people both to their faces and behind their backs. According to others it was revealed in relation to al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah (Q, Ṭ, Z), one of the leaders of the Quraysh who was openly hostile toward the Prophet, slandering him to his face and in his absence. Others say that it is a general condemnation, not one revealed in relation to any specific person or instance (Ṭ), although it is permissible to view something revealed in relation to a specific instance as having a general application (Z). Like several other Quranic passages, the nine verses of this *sūrah* focus upon the torment that awaits one who spends the life of this world hoarding wealth.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Woe unto every slandering backbiter (2) who amasses wealth and tallies it, (3) supposing that his wealth makes him immortal. (4) Nay! He shall surely be cast into the crushing Fire. (5) And what shall apprise thee of the crushing Fire? (6) The Fire of God, ignited, (7) which engulfs hearts. (8) Truly it is enclosed upon them (9) in pillars outstretched.

1 *Woe* translates *wayl,* which indicates that punishment or destruction will befall them (Sh), and is taken by some as the name of a valley in Hell (Ṭ), in which case the verse could be rendered, "[The valley of] *Wayl* is for every slandering backbiter" (see 2:79c). According to Mujāhid, *humazah,* here translated *slandering,* refers to harm done to others with one's hands and eyes, while *lumazah,* here translated *backbiter,* refers to harm done with one's tongue (IK). According to others, *humazah* indicates any form of calumny, while *lumazah* indicates verbal reproach and accusation (Ṭ). Yet others maintain the opposite, stating that *lumazah* literally means to eat the flesh of others (Ṭ; regarding backbiting, see 49:12). Despite the different interpretations, all point to the moral decrepitude of those who slander others whether in public or in private. It can also be taken as a more general rebuke to any who are more concerned with the faults of others than with their own (Aj).

2–3 For a similar statement see 70:18. The punishment for those who hoard is most vividly described in 9:34–35: *[As for] those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, give them glad tidings of a painful punishment, on the Day when it will be heated in the Fire of Hell, and their foreheads, their sides, and their backs will be branded with it. "This is what you hoarded up for yourselves; so taste that which you hoarded."*

4–6 *The crushing Fire* (*al-ḥuṭamah*) is one of the descriptive names of Hell indicating that it crushes everything that enters it. It derives from the verb *ḥaṭama,* meaning "to break, shatter, smash, or crush."

7 *Hearts* translates *afʾidah,* which is said to indicate the very center of the heart, the subtlest faculty of the human being, which feels pain and suffering most severely (Z). This verse indicates both that the fire touches the very core of one's being, thus consuming all that one is, and that it is more painful than any burning experienced in this world.

8–9 These verses are taken by most as an allusion to the closing of the doors of Hell upon the disbelievers, as in 90:20: *Upon them is a Fire enclosed. Enclosed* translates *muʾṣadah,* which can also mean "covered." The *pillars* are the pillars of the Fire, similar to 18:29: *Verily We have prepared for the wrongdoers a Fire whose canopies will encompass them* (Qu). V. 9 could also be translated, "as pillars outstretched."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 105

# The Elephant

## *al-Fīl*

*Al-Fīl* is an early Makkan *sūrah* believed to have been revealed after *Sūrah* 109, *al-Kāfirūn*. It takes its title from the discussion of the *masters of the elephant,* whose destruction it relates. It is said that Abrahah, an Abyssinian general who ruled Yemen, had built a church in Sanᶜāʾ in order to divert pilgrims from the Kaᶜbah in Makkah. But when the pilgrims did not abandon their worship at the Kaᶜbah, Abrahah sent an army against Makkah in the year 570, the same year in which the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have been born. According to some, a few members of the Quraysh had either defiled or burned down Abrahah's church. Along with the largest army that had ever been assembled in Arabia, Abrahah sent an elephant, which he intended to use to pull down the Kaᶜbah. God, however, protected the Quraysh and the Kaᶜbah by sending against them a swarm of birds that pelted them with stones.

Many interpret *Sūrahs* 105 and 106 together as a warning to the Quraysh that they were not protected because of their status, as they were given to believe, but because God wished to protect the Kaᶜbah and to make way for the coming of His final Messenger (IK). It is said that the Prophet Muhammad invoked the memory of this event during his conquest of Makkah, saying, "Verily, God restrained the elephant from Makkah and has given His Messenger and the believers authority over it. And He has returned its sanctity (*ḥurmah*) to it today just as its sanctity was yesterday; so let those who are present inform those who are absent" (IK).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Hast thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with the masters of the elephant? (2) Did He not make their scheming go astray, (3) and send against them birds in swarms, (4) pelting them with stones of baked clay, (5) such that He made them like devoured husks?

1–2 Though *elephant* appears here in the singular, some say that Abrahah had eight or twelve elephants with his army (IK). According to the earliest histories, when commanded to approach Makkah, the elephant knelt and would not be moved, despite being beaten by the army. When turned in any other direction, it would rise and walk, but when turned toward Makkah, it would again kneel and refuse to move (IK; Ibn Isḥāq). The linguistic structure of the verse indicates that the story was well known to the Arabs. They are thus being asked how it is that, knowing the story of how God protected the Kaʿbah, they do not derive the proper lessons from it and believe in God (Sh). That God made Abrahah's scheming go astray alludes to the manner in which God allowed them to plan the entire expedition and carry it out to their own demise, since from a Quranic perspective *God is the best of plotters* (3:54; 8:30), and *the scheming of the disbelievers is naught but astray* (40:25).

3–4 *Swarms* here translates *abābīl,* which is interpreted to mean "in groups," "in successive groups," "many," or "coming upon them from every direction" (IK, Ṭ). According to most authorities, God sent birds from the sea, such as swallows and herons, each carrying three stones the size of chickpeas or lentils, one in each claw and one in the beak (IK, Ṭ). Every soldier that was hit by one was destroyed, though not all met this fate. They did not die instantly. Some are said to have lingered for many days as they tried to make their way back to Yemen (IK). According to some, *sijjīl,* here translated *stones of baked clay,* is a contraction of two Persian words, *sang* (*sanj* in Arabic), meaning "stones," and *jīl,* meaning "clay" (IK).

5 *Devoured husks* renders *ʿāṣfⁱⁿ maʾkūl,* which indicates the remains of leaves eaten by animals. The whole of the *sūrah* thus likens what was the greatest army known in the recent history of Arabia to one of the most insignificant of things known to the Arabs.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 106

# Quraysh

## *Quraysh*

*Quraysh* is a Makkan *sūrah* that takes its name from the mention of the Prophet's tribe in the first line. According to several commentators, Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb's manuscript of the Quran had *al-Fīl* and *Quraysh* together as one *sūrah* (Bg, Z). Ibn Ḥajar al-ᶜAsqalānī (d. 852/1448) regards Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb's version as evidence that this is the proper reading (*Fatḥ al-Bārī*). According to al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is said to have recited the two *sūrah*s as one when leading prayer. Ibn Kathīr and others argue that, although the two are connected in meaning, they are to be considered separate *sūrah*s.

The first two verses of this *sūrah* remind the Quraysh of the blessing they have received in God's having preserved them and provided them with means for prosperity. Vv. 3–4 provide the central theme, that one should worship God, since all prosperity and protection come from Him.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) For the secure passage of the Quraysh, (2) their secure passage in the journey of winter and of summer; (3) so let them worship the Lord of this house, (4) Who relieved them of hunger and made them safe from fear.

1–2 Reading this verse as a continuation of the previous *sūrah,* it can be understood as an allusion to God's saving the Quraysh from the elephant of Abrahah (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 105). *Secure passage* translates *īlāf,* which comes from a root (*ʾ-l-f*) indicating that one is familiar with something or resorts to it habitually. It came to be connected with *secure passage* when *īlāf* and the related word *ilf* were used as names for the grants of security that the Quraysh reportedly received from the surrounding powers: Byzantium, Persia, Abyssinia, and Yemen. In the winter the Quraysh would travel to Yemen, where they purchased spices and other commodities coming from India. Then in the summer they carried these to Syria, where they sold them and purchased agricultural products. According to some this verse is an allusion to the respect the Quraysh received as keepers of the Kaʿbah, which compelled other tribes to grant them safe passage and thus contributed to their wealth (IK). In this vein, it is related to 29:67: *Or have they not considered that We have made a secure sanctuary while people are snatched away all around them? Do they believe in that which is false? And are they ungrateful for God's Blessing?*

3–4 *This house* means the Kaʿbah. These verses implore the Quraysh to acknowledge that it is not through anything of their own doing or through the idols they worship that they have been made safe, but through Divine Protection alone. In the overall context of the Quran, these verses allude to the fate that will befall those who reject the Prophet Muhammad. The best example of this theme is 16:112–13: *God sets forth a parable: a town secure and at peace, its provision coming unto it abundantly from every side. Yet, it was ungrateful for the blessings of God; so God let it taste the garment of hunger and fear for that which they had wrought. A messenger from among themselves had surely come unto them, but they denied him. And so the punishment seized them while they were wrongdoers* (see also Abraham's prayer in 2:126).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 107

# Small Kindnesses

## *al-Māᶜūn*

Most commentators maintain that *al-Māᶜūn* is an early Makkan *sūrah,* most likely revealed after *Sūrah* 102, *al-Takāthur,* although some maintain that vv. 4–7 were revealed in Madinah. Given that all of its verses treat heedlessness and hypocrisy in the performance of religious obligations, including specifically prayer (vv. 4–5), the entire *sūrah* may be from the Madinan period, as it was not until political advantages could be gained by following the Prophet that hypocrisy became an issue for the early Muslim community (see commentary on 63:1–8). Nonetheless, hypocrisy in religion was not seen as limited to Muslims alone. The *sūrah* takes its name from the word *māᶜūn* in the last verse, which in its widest sense indicates any act of kindness, charity, or assistance.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Hast thou seen the one who denies religion? (2) That is the one who drives away the orphan, (3) and does not urge feeding the indigent. (4) So woe unto the praying (5) who are heedless of their prayers, (6) those who strive to be seen, (7) yet refuse small kindnesses.

1–2 There are two opinions regarding the referent of *the one*. Muqātil and al-Kalbī said, "This *sūrah* was revealed about al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil al-Sahmī" (W). Conversely, Ibn Jurayj said, "Abū Sufyān was in the habit of slaughtering two camels every week. On one occasion, an orphan came to him asking him for something. Abū Sufyān responded by hitting him with a stick. So God revealed, *Hast thou seen the one who denies religion? That is the one who drives away the orphan*" (R, W). Even if it was first recorded in reference to a specific individual, it still has a general implication. *Religion* here translates *dīn,* and denying *religion* implies denial of all aspects of the message that was sent through the Prophet. *Dīn* could also mean "judgment" and relate to the denial of the Resurrection and other events of the Afterlife. When vv. 2–7 are viewed in relation to v. 1, the implication is that denying *dīn,* whether it be *religion* or judgment, is the root of all other sins and transgressions (R).

Cf. v. 2 with 89:17–19. The accusation of driving away the orphan also alludes to the habit of devouring the inheritances of orphans that is addressed in 2:220; 4:2–3, 8–10, 127; 6:152.

3 Cf. 89:17–18; 69:34. If v. 2 can be seen as a reference to all that *one who denies religion* does in opposing the proper moral order, v. 3 can be seen as a reference to all that one does not do. This verse could also be rendered, "And does not encourage giving the food of the indigent," implying that the food being withheld from the indigent is actually something to which the indigent have a right, for the believer is one *in whose wealth is an acknowledged due for the beggar and the deprived* (70:24–25; cf. 51:19). On the one hand, the present verse admonishes those who do not themselves feed the indigent. On the other, it admonishes those who implore others not to do so and who are therefore not only stingy with their own money, but encourage stinginess in others. This is related to 36:47, where those who do not wish to feed the needy offer a pseudo-theological excuse for not doing so, saying, *Are we to feed those whom, if God willed, He would feed?*

4–5 For the possible meanings of *woe* (*wayl*), see 2:79c; 104:1c. These verses could be seen as a reference to the prayer of the disbelievers, about which another verse says, *Their prayer at the House is naught but whistling and clapping. So taste the punishment for having disbelieved!* (8:35). Nonetheless, the majority of commentators interpret them as a reference to those who, because of their heedlessness, receive no benefit from their prayers when they perform them and fear no retribution when they do not (Q) or to the hypocrites, who pray in public, but not in private (IK, Ṭ). These verses can also be taken to indicate those who fail to perform their prayers at the proper time or who do not complete the required bows and prostrations (IK, Q), or interpreted as applying to those who perform all of the prayers properly, but fail to do so with humility, contemplation, and remembrance of God. A *ḥadīth* states, "This is the prayer of the hypocrite. He sits watching the sun until it is between the two horns of Satan [i.e., just above the horizon]. Then he stands and pecks out four [prayer cycles] in which he remembers God but little" (IK). Regarding the implications of neglecting prayers, see 19:59c.

6 *Those who strive to be seen* are the hypocrites, of whom the Quran says, *When they perform the prayer, they perform it idly and to be seen of men, and they remember God but little* (4:142), which

is to say that they do not perform prayer out of worship, but only to increase their reputation, as opposed to those *who are constant in their prayers* (70:23) and those *who are mindful of their prayers* (70:34). For the Quranic treatment of hypocrisy and dissimilitude, see 63:1–8.

7 This verse is understood to indicate those who perform their devotions well but do not act kindly toward others (IK). *Small kindnesses* translates *māʿūn* in accord with a widespread interpretation that sees it as an allusion to utensils or tools that people would share and lend to one another, such as a pickax, a pot, a bucket, or other items of this nature (IK, Q, Ṭ). It can also be seen as an allusion to anything in which there is benefit (Q). Many take *refuse small kindnesses* to indicate refusal to pay the obligatory *zakāh* (Q, Ṭ); others say that *māʿūn* means property (*māl*) in general in the Qurayshī dialect (Q, Ṭ); and others say the verse means to refuse guests. According to all of these interpretations, the verse indicates the stinginess exhibited by hypocrites, who *only come to the prayer lazily, and only spend reluctantly* (9:54).

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 108

# Abundant Good

## *al-Kawthar*

Most commentators maintain that *al-Kawthar* is an early Makkan *sūrah,* but some exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr, take a report from Anas ibn Mālik that this verse was revealed "while the Messenger was among us in the Mosque" as an indication that it was revealed in Madinah at the Prophet's Mosque. If this is an authentic report, then it is most likely from the Madinan period, as Anas ibn Mālik did not meet the Prophet until after the Prophet's migration to Madinah. The shortest *sūrah* of the Quran, it takes its name from the mention of *abundant good* (*kawthar*) in the first verse, a reference to the blessings of Heaven that is subject to various interpretations.

According to al-Wāḥidī this *sūrah* was revealed in response to a specific incident: "Whenever the Messenger of God was mentioned, al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil al-Sahmī would say, 'Leave him be. He is just a man without posterity; he has no offspring [alluding to the fact that the Prophet's son ʿAbd Allāh had died as a child]. Were he to die, no one would mention him again, and you would be rid of him.' And so God revealed from *Truly We have bestowed abundant good upon thee* to the end of the *sūrah*" (IK, W).

According to another account, Anas ibn Mālik said, "While we were with the Messenger of God in the Mosque, he dozed off into a slumber. Then he lifted his head, smiling. We said, 'O Messenger of God! What has caused you to laugh?' He replied, 'Verily, a *sūrah* was revealed unto me.'" Then he recited the *sūrah* and said, "Do you know what *Kawthar* is? It is a river that my Lord has promised me, and it has abundant goodness. It is a pool to which my community (*ummah*) will be brought on the Day of Judgment. Its containers are as numerous as the stars in the sky" (IK, Q).

# In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Truly We have bestowed abundant good upon thee. (2) So pray to thy Lord and sacrifice. (3) Truly thine enemy shall be the one without posterity.

1 *Abundant good* translates *kawthar,* which derives from *kathīr,* meaning "much," "abundant," or "copious"; it is used to indicate something that is abundant in number, measure, weight, or quality, and there are at least sixteen different opinions regarding its meaning in this context (Q). The most widespread opinions regard it as a proper name referring to a river or pool in the Garden. Some Muslims will thus use the phrase "sitting by *Kawthar*" as a reference to being in Paradise. Other opinions relate *abundant good* to the gift of prophecy, the Quran (Q, Ṭs), or various aspects of Islam, such as the daily prayers, the two testimonies (*shahādatayn*), "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God," or the light within the breast that guides one to religion (Q). Some commentators take *abundant good* as a reference to the abundance of the Prophet's progeny (Ṭs). The association with a river in Paradise finds the strongest support in the *Ḥadīth* literature (Q). In a widespread account, Anas ibn Mālik said, "When the Prophet was made to ascend to the heavens, he said [after his return], 'I came upon a river the banks of which were made of tents of hollow pearls. I asked Gabriel, "What is this river?" He replied, "This is *Kawthar*" ' " (IK). According to another account, "*Kawthar* is a river in the Garden whose banks are of gold, and it flows over pearls and rubies. Its scent is finer than musk, and its water is sweeter than honey and whiter than milk" (IK, Q). Another account joins the river to the other gifts bestowed upon the Prophet. It is related that Abū Bishr mentioned, "Saʿīd ibn Jubayr said that Ibn ʿAbbās said regarding *Kawthar,* 'That is the good that God has bestowed upon His Messenger.' I said to Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, 'But the people claim that it is a river in the Garden.' Saʿīd said, 'The river in the Garden is part of the good that God has bestowed upon His Messenger' " (IK; for references to the river or pool in the *Ḥadīth* literature, see the introduction to the *sūrah*). Al-Ṭabarsī notes that all these sayings are particular aspects of the whole, which is the *abundant good* in the two abodes: Heaven and this world.

2 Most interpret *so pray* as a command to perform the obligatory prayers (Q). As it is connected to the command to sacrifice, others say it indicates the prayer of the Feast of Sacrifice (*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*), which is part of the rites of the *ḥajj* and comes at its end (Q). In accordance with this verse and a well-known *ḥadīth,* most maintain that the prayer must precede the sacrifice in order for the sacrifice to be accepted (IA, Q). *And sacrifice* translates *waʾnḥar,* which could also mean, "and raise your hands." In this interpretation it is taken as a reference to the practice of raising the hands to the ears during prayer (Ṭs). All schools of law agree that this should be done at the opening of the canonical prayer while saying, "God is greatest" (*Allāhu akbar*), marking the entry into the sacred rite. According to the Mālikī and Ḥanafī schools of law, the hands should only be raised in this fashion at the opening of the prayer (IA, Q); some other schools maintain that it should be done at the opening, when bowing, and when prostrating (Q).

3 *The one without posterity* translates *abtar,* which can be used to refer to anything whose effects do not produce any good (Q, Ṭ). *Abtar* was used by Arabs to refer to one whose sons had died, but who still had daughters (Q). At the time at which this *sūrah* was most likely revealed, the Prophet had sired two sons, Qāsim and ʿAbd Allāh, both of whom died while toddlers. He later had a third son, Ibrāhīm, who also died as a toddler. It is reported that whenever the Prophet was mentioned in the presence of al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil, he would say, "Leave him, for indeed he is a man who is cut off, having no descendants. So when he dies, he will not be remembered." So God revealed this *sūrah* in response (IK, Ṭ). A less ac-

cepted account of the revelation reads *abtar* as a reference to being "cut off" from one's tribe. According to Ibn ᶜAbbās, Kaᶜb ibn Ashraf, the leader of one of the Jewish tribes of Madinah, came to Makkah and the Quraysh said to him, "You are the leader of the people. What do you think about this worthless man who is cut off (*abtar*) from his people? He claims that he is better than us, while we are the people of the sanctuary, the people of custodianship over the Kaᶜbah, and the people who supply water to the pilgrims." And Kaᶜb replied, "You are better than him." So God revealed this *sūrah* in response (IK, Q); for other verses connected to this incident, see 4:51–52 and commentary. In either interpretation, it indicates the importance of loving the Prophet and the dire consequences of hating him as well as the idea that true posterity or legacy lies in belief and deeds, not children, for the Day of Judgment is *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 109

## The Disbelievers

### *al-Kāfirūn*

*Al-Kāfirūn* is an early Makkan *sūrah* believed to have been revealed shortly after *Sūrah* 107, *al-Māʿūn*. It takes its name from the fact that the whole of the *sūrah* is presented as a direct address to the disbelievers. It is said to have been revealed in response to a proposal from the leaders of Makkah, who approached the Prophet and said, "Muhammad, come let us worship what you worship, and you worship what we worship. We will come together in this matter. If what you worship is better than what we worship, we shall take a share of it, and if what we worship is better than what you worship, you shall take a share of it." He replied, "God forbid that I associate anything with Him," and so God revealed from *Say, "O disbelievers!"* up to the end of the *sūrah*. The Prophet then went to the Sacred Sanctuary, which was full of people, and recited to them the *sūrah*. It was at that point that they despaired of leading him away from his religion (Q).

Many *aḥādīth* claim that it is "one-fourth of the Quran" (IK, Q, Sy) and that the Prophet would often recite this *sūrah* along with *Sūrah* 112, *al-Ikhlāṣ*, in his supererogatory prayers before the obligatory morning prayer and after the obligatory sunset prayer (IK, Sy).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Say, "O disbelievers! (2) I worship not what you worship; (3) nor are you worshippers of what I worship; (4) nor am I a worshipper of what you worship; (5) nor are you worshippers of what I worship. (6) Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion."

1 Though the circumstances of revelation indicate that *disbelievers* refers specifically to the leaders of the Quraysh (see the introduction to the *sūrah*), it can also be understood as applying to all disbelievers (IK).

2–5 According to some, the repetition in these verses is for emphasis (Q). Others say that the repetition serves to negate the repeated propositions from the leaders of the Quraysh that the Prophet mix his religion with theirs (Q; see also 39:64c). Another opinion is that the different statements refer to the present and the future, as if to say, "I do not now worship what you worship; nor are you now worshippers of what I worship; nor will I ever be a worshipper of what you worship; nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship." Still others say, *Nor am I a worshipper of what you worship* negates the past (Q), meaning, "Nor have I ever worshipped what you worship."

6 This verse is similar to 28:55, which says of the believers, *And when they hear idle talk, they turn away therefrom and say, "Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds. Peace be upon you! We do not seek out the ignorant"* (cf. 10:41). On the one hand, this verse is a criticism, but on the other, it implies that believers should not argue with disbelievers, but simply leave them to their own devices, for God will deal with them accordingly. Thus in 68:44–45 God commands the believers: *So leave Me with those who deny this discourse. We shall lead them on little by little, whence they know not. And I shall grant them respite; truly My scheme is firm;* and in 86:17: *So be gentle with the disbelievers; grant them respite for a while.*

According to some this verse was abrogated by the Sword Verse (Q), which commands, *Slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer and give the alms, then let them go their way* (9:5). Others say the entire *sūrah* was abrogated. Still others say that the verse is not abrogated, because it is only a report (*khabar*), not a command (Q), and according to most scholars abrogation only applies to commands. But the two verses are not necessarily contradictory: the Sword Verse may be considered to deal with a political question, whereas this *sūrah* addresses a theological question.

*Religion* can be taken either to mean the religion of Islam with all of its rites and creeds or to imply, "You shall have the reward of your religion, and I shall have the reward of my religion" (Ṭs), indicating that the end of each will not be the same. Insofar as *dīn,* here translated *religion,* can also mean "judgment," this verse can also indicate, "You will have your judgment, and I shall have mine."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 110

# Help

## *al-Naṣr*

The majority of exegetes agree that *al-Naṣr* is a late Madinan *sūrah*. It is most likely the last *sūrah* to have been revealed in its entirety, although a few verses from *al-Baqarah* (*Sūrah* 2), *al-Nisāʾ* (*Sūrah* 4), *al-Tawbah* (*Sūrah* 9), and perhaps *al-Māʾidah* (*Sūrah* 5) are believed to have been revealed after it. Some maintain that this *sūrah* was revealed at the plain of Minā, which lies between Mt. ʿArafat and Makkah, on the tenth of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, during the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage (Āl), the day after 5:3 had been revealed, while others argue that it was revealed just before 5:3 (Q). Still others maintain that it was revealed in Madinah after the Prophet had returned from the Farewell Pilgrimage. The majority of those who maintain that it was revealed in Madinah and those who maintain that it was revealed during the Farewell Pilgrimage agree that 2:281 was revealed after it; some say that 4:176 and 9:128 were revealed in the interval between *al-Naṣr* and 2:281, while others maintain that only 2:281 was revealed after *al-Naṣr* (Q).

A minority maintain that this *sūrah* was revealed after the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah in 6/628 (Ṭb). According to al-Wāḥidī, it was revealed when the Prophet left for the Battle of Ḥunayn in 8/630. The Prophet lived for only two years after this battle. Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have said, "When the Messenger of God returned from the battle of Ḥunayn and God revealed *When God's Help and Victory come,* he said, 'O ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib! O Fāṭimah! God's Help and Victory have come. I have seen people entering the religion of God in throngs. I therefore hymn the praises of my Lord and seek forgiveness of Him, for He is Ever Relenting.'" According to Ibn ʿAbbās, through this *sūrah* the Prophet was informed that his death was near. For this reason, Ibn Masʿūd has said that it is called "The Farewell *Sūrah*" (Āl).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) When God's Help and Victory come (2) and you see mankind entering God's religion in throngs, (3) hymn the praise of thy Lord, and seek forgiveness from Him. Truly He is Ever Relenting.

1 Many commentators read this verse in the past tense, in which case *Victory* is taken as an allusion to the conquest of Makkah in 8/630 (Āl, Q, Qu, Ṭ; which some Muslims believe was foreshadowed in Deuteronomy 33:2 and Song of Solomon 5:10). Others read it as an allusion to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah in 6/628 (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 48; Āl). When read in the future tense, this verse is seen by many as an allusion to the conquests by which Islam spread beyond the borders of Arabia after the death of the Prophet (Āl, Q). It also has a continuous meaning, as attaining Paradise is the final victory. In this vein, al-Baqlī writes, "The *Victory* (*fatḥ*) is the opening (*infitāḥ*) of the doors of arrival and the unveiling of the lights of Beauty and Majesty."

2 Some say that *mankind* indicates the Arabs in general; others say it indicates a large group from Yemen who had recently accepted Islam (Āl). When the *sūrah* is taken as a reference to the conquest of Makkah, it denotes the many tribes that had been reluctant to enter Islam as long as the Prophet's own city remained beyond his dominion. Then when it was conquered, this final obstacle was removed and they entered Islam *in throngs*. Before the conquest, people had entered one or two at a time, sometimes a few more, but afterwards tribes from all regions of Arabia entered en masse (Sh).

3 According to some, the meaning of *hymn the praise* in this verse is "pray" (Q). This may follow from the fact that Muslims, following the wont of the Prophet, recite various formulas of praise and glory during both the bowing and the prostrations of prayer, formulas such as "Glory be to Thee, O God, our Lord, and praise unto Thee, our Lord. O God, forgive me" (Q). In general, the verb *sabbaḥa,* translated throughout as *glorify* or *glorifies* (e.g., 57:1; 59:1; 61:1; 62:1), when combined with *ḥamd* ("praise") as *hymn the praise* (lit. "glorify the praise"; cf. 15:98; 20:130; 32:15; 40:7, 55; 42:5; 50:39; 52:48), indicates the recognition that God is beyond all that anyone can attribute to Him (see 57:1c). The Divine Name "the Relenting" is also coupled with the Merciful in several verses (see 2:37, 54, 128, 160; 4:16, 64; 9:104, 118; 49:12). God is portrayed as relenting unto human beings throughout human history, beginning with Adam and Eve (see 2:37c), and every revelation can be seen as a form of God's relenting. The word for human repentance and for Divine relenting are the same in Arabic (*tawbah;* verbal form *tāba/yatūbu*). It thus represents a subtle reciprocity between Divine action and human action, as in 5:39: *But whosoever repents* (*tāba*) *after his wrongdoing, and makes amends, God will relent* (*yatūbu*) *unto him.* Though human beings can play some role in seeking their own forgiveness, ultimately it is God Who must first turn to human beings, as in 9:118: *Then He relented unto them, that they might repent;* see 2:37c and the essay "Translating the Quran."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 111

## The Palm Fiber

### *al-Masad*

*Al-Masad* is believed to be among the earliest Makkan *sūrah*s. It takes its name from the last word, which is said to refer to a specific form of punishment in Hell (see 111:5c). It is also known as *al-Lahab,* meaning "The Flame" (IK). It is said to have been revealed in response to the Prophet's uncle ᶜAbd al-ᶜUzzā ibn ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib, known by the nickname Abū Lahab, "The Father of Flame," because of his bright red complexion. One day the Prophet climbed one of the hills just outside of Makkah and yelled, "Come to me!" the way one would call if an enemy were approaching. All the Quraysh gathered around and said, "What ails you?" He replied, "Were I to tell you that the enemy is going to attack you in the morning or in the evening, would you not believe me?" They said, "Yes, for we have not found you telling anything other than the truth." He said, "In that case, I am a warner sent to you against a tremendous punishment." Abū Lahab responded, "May your hands perish this day. Is this why you have summoned all of us here?" Then God revealed the five verses of this *sūrah* (IK).

Many say this revelation occurred immediately after the revelation of 26:214: *And warn thy tribe, thy nearest kin.* The five short verses all describe the form of punishment that Abū Lahab and his wife suffer in Hell.

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) May the hands of Abū Lahab perish, and may he perish! (2) His wealth avails him not, nor what he has earned. (3) He shall enter a blazing Fire. (4) And his wife, carrier of firewood, (5) upon her neck is a rope of palm fiber.

1 Abū Lahab was the wealthiest of the Prophet's uncles and one of the Qurayshī leaders who most opposed the Prophet and persecuted his followers. "May [his] hands perish" is an idiomatic expression meaning, "May his power perish and all that he possesses." Abū Lahab did not go forth to the Battle of Badr, but is reported to have died soon thereafter from a festering wound inflicted by his sister-in-law Umm al-Faḍl in retaliation for his abuse of one of her slaves who had become Muslim.

2 *What he has earned,* or "what he has committed," is interpreted by many to mean his children (IK, Q, Ṭ). This verse is said to be a response to Abū Lahab's remark, "Even if what my nephew says is true, I will ransom myself . . . with my wealth and my children" (IK).

3–4 Abū Lahab's wife, Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb, was said to support fully his position and to have mocked the Prophet when he was ill and unable to offer supererogatory prayers, saying, "O Muhammad! I think that your satan has forsaken you" (see the introduction to *Sūrah* 93). Therefore, just as she aided him in defying God's Messenger, part of her punishment is to aid him in Hell, carrying the firewood that will feed the flames of his punishment. As she was among the leading women of the Umayyad clan, to carry firewood would also imply that she was now doing the work of those in a lower station. In a variant reading, v. 4 can be read, "And his wife is a carrier of firewood," or "is carrying firewood."

5 The *palm fiber* indicates a rope of palm fiber that has been put upon her neck in Hell and set aflame. This is said to be in retribution for her vow to sell a precious necklace in order to spend the proceeds on a campaign against the Prophet. Others say that it refers to an iron chain or heavy iron necklace that will be placed upon her neck in Hell.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

# 112

## Sincerity

## *al-Ikhlāṣ*

Most commentators say that *al-Ikhlāṣ* is from the early Makkan period, although some allow that it may be from the Madinan period (Āl, Ṭs, Z). This is one of only two *sūrahs* that do not take its name from something mentioned within it. The title, *al-Ikhlāṣ,* instead describes its content, as it denotes a combination of sincerity, devotion, and purity and can also indicate being saved (*khalaṣa*).

This *sūrah* has been known by at least twenty different epithets (R), among them "The Absolver" (*al-Barāʾah*), because anyone who recites it with sincerity is absolved of the practice of idolatry (Āl, R); "The One That Casts Away" (*al-Munaffirah*), because it casts Satan away from one who recites it (Āl, R); "Deliverance" (*al-Najāh*), because it delivers one from ascribing likeness (*tashbīh*) unto God (Āl, R); "Recognition" (*al-Maʿrifah*), because true knowledge of God can only be obtained by recognizing the truth of what this *sūrah* contains (Āl); "The Reminder" (*al-Mudhakkirah*), because it reminds one of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) in a pure and simple form (Āl); and "The Light of the Quran" (*Nūr al-Qurʾān*), because of a *ḥadīth* that says, "Everything has a light, and the light of the Quran is *al-Ikhlāṣ*" (Āl, R).

Regarding the occasion of revelation, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb relates that the idolaters asked the Prophet, "What is the lineage of your Lord?" and so God revealed this *sūrah,* which begins, *Say, "He, God, is One, God, the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself."* The Eternally Sufficient unto Himself is He Who *begets not; nor was He begotten,* for anyone who is begotten will certainly die, and it is only for those who die that one can speak of a lineage. According to other accounts, this *sūrah* was revealed in response to a group of Jews who asked the Prophet for "the lineage of His Lord" (R, Ṭ, Ṭs). A third perspective says that it was revealed in relation to a similar question posed by a group of Christians (R).

A *ḥadīth qudsī* echoes the words of vv. 2–4 of the *sūrah:* "God said, 'The son of Adam tells a lie against Me, though he has not the right to do so. He abuses me, though he has not the right to do so. As for his telling a lie against Me, it is

his saying that I will not re-create him as I created him for the first time. In fact, the first creation was no easier for Me than a new creation. As for his abusing Me, it is his saying that God has begotten children, while I am the One, the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself; I beget not, nor was I begotten, and none is like unto Me."

According to many early authorities, the Prophet said that this *sūrah* is "equivalent to one-third of the whole Quran" (Āl, IK, Q, R, Ṭs), which is understood by some to mean that the message regarding the Oneness of God is one-third of the Quran's message. It has been reported on the authority of the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah that the Prophet would recite *al-Ikhlāṣ* and the two immediately following it, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās,* together while breathing into his palms, and then rub them over himself every night. The three together are thus understood to provide protection.

This *sūrah* is second only to *Sūrah* 1, *al-Fātiḥah,* in Muslim devotional life and is often recited in both canonical and supererogatory prayers as well as supplications (*duʿāʾ*). According to some, it is closely connected to *Sūrah* 109, *al-Kāfirūn,* as the two together are said to constitute the complete expression of Divine Unity: *al-Kāfirūn* provides a firm denial of all falsehood, and *al-Ikhlāṣ* provides a complete affirmation of all truth (Āl). Thus the two *sūrahs* are known together as "The Two Cures" (*al-Muqashqishatān*) and are often recited together, especially in the two cycles of the morning prayer (*fajr*), the morning supererogatory prayer (*ḍuḥā*), and the supererogatory prayer after the sunset prayer (Āl). *Al-Ikhlāṣ* is also usually the first *sūrah* that one memorizes after the *Fātiḥah.* In summarizing the merits and the centrality of this *sūrah,* al-Rāzī writes, "The entire Quran is an oyster, and the pearl is His statement *Say, 'He, God, is One.'*"

# In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Say, "He, God, is One, (2) God, the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself. (3) He begets not; nor was He begotten. (4) And none is like unto Him."

1 Some of the Companions of the Prophet are said to have read this *sūrah* without reciting *Say* (*qul*) at the beginning. While most retain it, those who omit it argue that it is not possible for the Prophet to have been unaware of God's Oneness; thus he would not have needed to be instructed in this fashion (Āl, R). This verse can also be read, "Say, 'He is God, One.'" Many commentators distinguish between the meaning of *aḥad* ("One"), which is used in this verse, and *wāḥid* ("One"), which is known as one of the Divine Names, as in *the One, the Paramount* (12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 38:65; 39:4; 40:16), and which some early Muslims are said to have recited in this verse rather than *aḥad* (Ṭ, Z). The most widely held interpretation is that *wāḥid* is a numerical one to which another number can be added, while *aḥad* denotes an Absolute Oneness that is unique and cannot take a second or be divided (Ṭs). Some view *aḥad* and *wāḥid* as synonyms (Āl, R). Others say that *aḥad* indicates negation, as when one says *mā raʾaytu aḥad* ("I did not see anyone"), while *wāḥid* indicates affirmation, as when one says *raʾaytu rajul wāḥid* ("I saw one man"; R, Ṭs). Both names denote oneness, but whereas *aḥad* conveys an "internal oneness," something that is one unto itself, *wāḥid* conveys an "external oneness," something that is one in relation to others. *Aḥad* is thus seen by many as conveying a higher degree of Divine Oneness without any consideration of its relation to the multiplicity of creation, while *wāḥid* is seen as conveying the Oneness of the Divine Being in relation to the multiplicity of Divine Attributes and of creation (K).

As Muslims meditated upon the relationship between the One God and the multiplicity of creation that God brings forth, the opening words of this *sūrah* came to be employed to identify different aspects of Divine Oneness. According to some commentators, *He* (*huwa*) designates God in and of Himself, the undifferentiated Divine Self or Essence (Kā, R). *Huwa* would thus be the greatest Name of God (*al-ism al-aʿẓam;* Ṭs), and one of the most effective formulas for calling upon Divine aid would be *yā huwa yā man lā huwa illā huwa,* "O He. O the One other than Whom there is no He" (Ṭs), or "O He. O the One Who is He, other than Whom there is no god" (Āl). For al-Rāzī *huwa* indicates a degree of Divinity above that designated by the Name *Allāh,* when *Allāh* is understood to indicate God in relation to the multiplicity that the Divine Essence or Self brings forth. For others, *huwa* indicates the Essence qua Essence beyond consideration of Its Attributes, and *Allāh* indicates "the Essence with the totality of the Attributes" (K). This, however, is not a difference in degree of Divinity, but in inner dimensions. According to al-Rāzī, *Allāh* can also be seen as conveying the totality of positive Divine Attributes (e.g., Creator, Knower, Powerful), and *aḥad* can be seen as conveying the totality of negative Divine Attributes (e.g., without body, substance, or accident); the two together, *Allāh aḥad* ("God, One"), thus communicate the complete understanding of God. In this context, the Name *Allāh* is sometimes referred to as the "Gathering Name" (*al-ism al-jāmiʿ*), because all of the other Divine Names and Attributes are in principle gathered within it.

2 *Eternally Sufficient unto Himself* translates the Divine Name *al-Ṣamad,* which occurs in the Quran only this once and is applied only to God. Its lexical, nontheological meaning indicates something solid and impenetrable or simply "not hollow" (AḤ, Q, R, Ṭ). In this regard, some take *al-Ṣamad* to indicate something that is beyond all comprehension (My). Theologically *al-Ṣamad* is interpreted by some as an allusion to the Primary or Initial Cause of all things, an eternally self-sufficient independent Being Who continues

to exist after His creation has ceased to exist, "the One Who has always been and will always be" (Ṭs). According to al-Zamakhsharī, in this context, *'Al-Ṣamad* is a verb taking the meaning of the passive participle, the One to Whom one betakes oneself (*man ṣumida ilayhi*) when one seeks Him (*idhā qaṣadahu*). And He is the Master Who is Sought (*al-sayyid al-maṣmūd*) in [all] needs. The meaning then is, 'He is God of Whom you are aware and Whom you affirm as the Creator of the heavens and of the earth, and as your Creator. And He is the One (*al-Wāḥid*) unified in Divinity, in which none shares. And He is the One Whom all that is created seeks (*yaṣmudu*); none are independent of Him, though He is independent of them.' " The enigmatic nature of *al-Ṣamad* has led to many interpretations, most of which are different formulations confirming that God is the Master and ontological Source of all things and that all things are dependent upon Him, while He is independent of all things.

3 This verse was read by some as two verses (Āl, Ṭs). It denies categorically any form of Divine progeny and is thus seen by the vast majority of Muslims as repudiating any and all such claims. Although this verse is interpreted as denying that Jesus is the "Son of God" (see 4:171; 9:30; 19:35, 91–92), it should be noted that the Christian notion of sonship is not the same as that held by the pagan Arabs, who are criticized in other verses for ascribing offspring to God (usually daughters), as in 16:57: *And they assign unto God daughters* (see also 6:100; 43:16). Attempts to link this verse to discussions of Christianity are thus somewhat tenuous, and it is best understood in relation to the possible occasions of revelation mentioned in the *sūrah* introduction and to the Quranic critique of the pagan Arab notions of Divine procreation, as in 37:149–53: *So ask them, does your Lord have daughters while they have sons? Or did We create the angels female, while they were witnesses? Behold! It is of their own perversion that they say, "God has begotten," while truly they are liars. Has He chosen daughters over sons?* (see also 39:2–3; 52:39). Such notions are distinct from the Christian understanding of Divine sonship in that the meaning of "son" in the phrase "Son of God" employed in the Christian creed is very different from the meaning of "son" in the Quran. For Christianity, the term "Son of God" refers to Jesus as the pretemporal, uncreated Word of God that is begotten of the Father before time. For the pagan Arabs, however, the progeny of God had a distinctly temporal and physical connotation; see 4:171c.

4 This verse underscores the previous verses by emphasizing that God is not only One, but also unique. As created things can be described by attributes such as living, seeing, and hearing, by which God is also described, the meaning here is that nothing bears any likeness or equality with God's Essence or Self (Aj, Sh), as in 42:11: *Naught is like unto Him.* Nonetheless, nothing can exist independently of God. With regard to the Divine Essence, God is absolutely transcendent, for *all things perish, save His Face* (28:88). Yet with regard to the manner in which God manifests in the world (see 57:4c), He is immanent, for *wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God* (2:115); for the manner in which God is both near and far, similar and dissimilar, or transcendent and immanent, see 2:115c; 24:35c; 41:53c; 50:16c. According to Mujāhid, this verse means that God does not have a spouse (IK), as in 6:100–101: *They make the jinn partners with God, though He created them, and falsely attribute sons and daughters to Him, without any knowledge. . . . How should He have a child when He has no consort, and He created all things?* (see also 16:57; 43:16). It is also taken as a refutation of the pre-Islamic Arabs, who had ascribed jinn as partners to God, as in 37:158: *They have made kinship between Him and the jinn—yet the jinn know that they will surely be arraigned.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# 113

# The Daybreak

## *al-Falaq*

Most commentators believe that *Sūrah*s 113 and 114 were revealed during the Makkan period, although some believe that they were revealed in Madinah (IK, R); still others leave the question open due to lack of conclusive evidence (Bḍ, Bg, Z). *Al-Falaq* takes its name from *the daybreak,* by which the Prophet is told to swear in the first verse.

Among those who maintain that *Sūrah*s 113 and 114 are Makkan, many say they were revealed in relation to an incident in which the Prophet was stricken with an illness as a result of a spell put upon him by a sorceress, a practitioner of black magic. The Archangel Gabriel is said to have told him the location of a knotted string upon which the sorceress had whispered her spell and then revealed these two *sūrah*s as a means of undoing the spell. The Prophet sent ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to obtain the string and whisper over it these eleven verses, which would undo the eleven-knot spell (Q). Together, the two *sūrah*s are known as *al-Muᶜawwidhatān,* "The Two Protectors," and are used by Muslims to this day for protection from many evils, including the evil eye and the casting of spells.

According to the early accounts, there was some debate among the Companions of the Prophet as to whether these *sūrah*s were part of the Quran or were a special supplication that the Prophet had been given by God apart from the Quran. Regarding this opinion Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh said, "I asked Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, 'O Abū al-Mundhir! Your brother Ibn Masᶜūd said so-and-so [i.e., "The Two Protectors"] do not belong to the Quran.' Ubayy said, 'I asked God's Messenger about them, and he said, "They have been revealed to me, and I have recited them [as a part of the Quran]."' Then Ubayy added, 'So we say [of these verses] what God's Messenger has said.'"

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak (2) from the evil of what He has created, (3) from the evil of darkness when it enshrouds, (4) from the evil of those who blow upon knots, (5) and from the evil of the envier when he envies."

1 *Daybreak* translates *falaq,* which indicates "the light of dawn" or "the rising dawn" (Sh). The root verb *falaqa* means "to cleave." In this context it indicates the manner in which the night appears to be cleaved from the day (Sh). Hence God is described as the *Cleaver of the dawn* in 6:96. *Falaq* can also be used metaphorically to indicate "the emergence of truth after uncertainty" (*Tāj al-ᶜarūs*). Hence this verse can be read as indicating that God is the source of all true understanding, such that to seek refuge in Him is to seek refuge in truth from falsehood, as in 17:81: *Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing.* For a discussion of the Quranic symbolism of light, see 24:35c. *Falaq* is also taken by some as a name of Hell, a prison in Hell, or one of the trees or mountains in the Fire (Q, Sh, Ṭ).

2 This verse can be understood as a reference to Satan and his ilk or to Hellfire; it may also be a general reference to all that is evil (Q) or to all the evil that is committed or manifested by those whom God has created (Z). It can also be understood as a reference to creation itself, which acts as a veil that both hides the Creator and reveals His Qualities and Attributes.

3 Most interpret this verse as a reference to the darkening of the night, but some take the verb *waqaba,* here translated *enshrouds,* as a reference to the cooling of the night (Q). In both interpretations, refuge is sought because it is the time when those inclined to evil spread mischief and corruption, as in 4:81 and 4:108, which speak of those who *conspire by night* (Q). In the present verse, *darkness* translates *ghāsiq,* which is also interpreted as a reference to the moon, based upon a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet looked to the moon and said to his wife, "O ᶜĀʾishah, seek refuge in God from this, for this is *al-ghāsiq* when it sets (*waqaba*)" (Q). A minority say that the verse refers to "the Pleiades when it sets," because of the disease and pestilence believed to become prevalent during the period when this luminous star cluster declines (Q).

4 *Those who blow upon knots* (*al-naffāthāt*) refers specifically to those engaged in the practice of tying knots in a string and whispering incantations over them (see the introduction to the *sūrah*), but can also be taken to indicate all those who engage in black magic. Though the noun is in the feminine plural, it is not necessarily limited to women, but may indicate human beings in general (R, Z). In this sense it could be understood as a reference to general evil as practiced in this specific case by the women who blow on knots.

5 According to some, the refuge sought in this verse is freedom from the effects of envy. In this vein, the Umayyad Caliph ᶜUmar ibn ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz (r. 717–20) is reported to have said, "I cannot think of any wrongdoer more likely to be wronged than one who envies another" (Z). From one perspective, envy is the root of all evils, as the first sin to be committed in the celestial realm was Satan's envy of Adam (see 2:34–36; 7:11–13) and the first sin to be committed on earth was Cain's envy of Abel (see 5:27–31; Q). It is thus said that those who envy the favor bestowed upon others oppose the blessings of God (Q).



# 114

# Mankind

## *al-Nās*

For some issues relating to *al-Nās,* see the introduction to *Sūrah* 113. Like the previous *sūrah,* this *sūrah* takes its name from what the Prophet is told to swear by in the first verse, in this case *mankind.* Together these two *sūrahs* are known as *al-Muʿawwidhatān,* "The Two Protectors," since their recitation together is thought to provide protection from all manner of evil and misfortune. Regarding the exalted status of the two *sūrahs*, the Prophet said, "God has sent verses down upon me of which none has seen their like: *Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak'* to the end of the *sūrah* and, *Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind'* to the end of the *sūrah*" (Q).

## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

(1) Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, (2) the King of mankind, (3) the God of mankind, (4) from the evil of the stealthy whisperer, (5) who whispers into the breasts of mankind, (6) from jinn and mankind."

1–3 These three verses are seen as an indication that, in order to find true refuge from Satan, people must recognize the complete sovereignty of God, that He is the only One to be worshipped and the only One upon Whom they can call for help, unlike those who take others *as lords apart from God* (9:31; Sh). From a Quranic perspective, it is by forgetting that God is the Lord, King or Sovereign, and *God of mankind* that human beings arrogate self-sufficiency to themselves, as when Pharaoh declares, *I am your lord most high* (79:24), *Is not the sovereignty of Egypt mine* (43:51), and *I know of no god for you other than myself* (28:38). Thus it is as if human beings are here being ordered to seek refuge from the illusion of self-sufficiency that is the root of all sin through acknowledging their complete dependence on God by saying, "Oh my Lord! Oh my King! Oh my God!" (R).

4 Satan is here described as *the stealthy whisperer* because he withdraws from the heart whenever one remembers God and whispers to it whenever one is heedless of God (Bg, R, Sh). Technically whispering (*waswasah*) refers to something said quietly and repeatedly. Here it is taken to indicate all manner of temptation. The first sin of Adam and Eve was to listen to the whispers of Satan (7:20). Elsewhere Satan is described as *the Deluder* (31:33; 35:5); he seduces (47:25), causes people to forget (6:68; 12:42; 18:63; 58:19) or to slip (3:155), makes what is evil seem fair (6:43; 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38), desires to lead astray (4:60), and incites to evil (12:100). He is thus described in many verses as *a manifest enemy* (e.g., 2:168, 208; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53).

5 Here it is Satan *who whispers into the breasts of mankind,* but elsewhere it is the soul that is described as whispering (50:16), prompting to evil (5:30; 20:96), and seducing (12:18). However, the reference here is not to the soul as such, but to the passionate soul, or *the soul* that *commands to evil* (*al-nafs al-ammārah bi'l-sū'*; 12:53), regarding which a famous *ḥadīth* says, "Truly Satan flows in the blood of the son of Adam" (Q). From one perspective, it is Satan who suggests, tempts, prompts, and whispers, and the passionate soul then follows the caprices that arise rather than the commands of God. From another perspective, only *the soul* that *commands to evil* has this propensity. In this vein, 43:36 says, *And whosoever turns blindly away from the remembrance of the Compassionate, We assign to him a satan who is then a companion unto him* (see also 7:27); regarding *the soul* that *commands to evil,* see 12:53c; 75:1–2c; 89:27c.

6 This verse refers to what whispers into the souls of *jinn and mankind,* or to the jinn who whisper into the souls of people and to people who heed the advice of their own whispering soul rather than the Guidance of God and thus fail to take God as their Lord, King, and God. It can also be seen as a reference to both the jinn and people who whisper into souls (Q, R), since there are said to be *satans from among mankind and jinn* (6:112). It may also indicate what whispers into the "breasts" of both the *jinn and mankind,* for although *nās* (here translated *mankind*) is usually taken as a reference to human beings, there is a *ḥadīth* stating that there was a "people" (*nās*) among the jinn, in the same way that the word *rijāl,* which usually designates human men, is also used in reference to *individuals* (*rijāl*) *among the jinn* in 72:6 (R, Sh). Vv. 5–6 also have the meaning of seeking refuge from the one *who whispers into the breasts of mankind* and seeking refuge from the *jinn* and from *mankind* (Sh).

# ESSAYS

# HOW TO READ THE QURAN

Ingrid Mattson

The reading of scripture can be intimidating. At the very least, we know that the sacred texts of each of the world's major religions are revered by millions of people. Authored books—novels, poetry, and plays—might also have coteries of passionate readers, but scriptural communities are invested more deeply and comprehensively in the meaning they ascribe to their texts than the most devoted readers of any secular book. When we open scripture, we realize we are entering a universe of meaning fraught with spiritual, emotional, historical, and even political dimensions. Knowing this, some might be tempted to stay away from such contested territory. But we also know that those who have not as yet delved into sacred texts will encounter new and challenging experiences through which they will grow, that travel and adventure beyond familiar territory are enriching, and that knowledge is the best antidote to fear and uncertainty.

All those who embark upon reading the Quran—Muslims and non-Muslims, religious and secular people—can learn something about the world and about themselves through engagement with it. Those who will learn the most are those who are prepared to explore three contexts that will allow them to go beyond a "naive" reading. The first is the context in which the Quran was revealed and has been transmitted, interpreted, and read over the centuries. The second is the reader's own personal context—that is, one's own background, assumptions, and prejudices, which will inevitably affect the "lens" through which one reads the text. What are you, the reader, bringing to the Quran as you open it now, perhaps for the first time or perhaps after many years of reading? And the third context is an understanding of the inner meaning of revealed terms.

Those who are new to the Quran surely realize that they cannot without preparation encounter this text "objectively," even if they intend to adopt a laudable openness to learning about it. Moreover, today Islam and Muslims are too much in the news of the contemporary world and too enmeshed in world history for literate non-Muslims, even in the West, to be without at least a vague opinion about this religion and its followers. Before you approach the Quran, then, review what you "know" about Islam and Muslims and what the source of this knowledge is. Consider that your information might have originated with a prejudicial or deficient source. At least considering this possibility might help you identify potential cognitive and emotional barriers to having an authentic encounter with the Quran.

It is not only non-Muslims influenced by negative news about Islam and Muslims who will have to overcome assumptions and acquired biases about the Quran in order to be able to read it with an open mind. If you are a Muslim, you too have a cultural context and formative experiences that have shaped your understanding of the Quran. Indeed, some born into Muslim families and communities might have a more difficult time opening their hearts fully to the Quranic message than new readers, because they have been taught to understand verses in a particular narrow, sectarian way. This is not to say that this is the experience of most Muslims. Certainly, many Muslim parents, teachers, and religious leaders preach and teach a love for the Quran that allows for a continuing, engaged, and dynamic reading throughout one's life. But this is not true for everyone.

It is important for all readers to examine their assumptions about the way the Quran *should* be read and understand the ways it is interpreted by those who believe it is God's Word. It is true that Muslims believe that the original Arabic-language Quran is a record of the precise words enunciated by the Prophet Muhammad as he received them from God through the Archangel Gabriel. Many people express this Islamic theological belief by saying, "Muslims believe the Quran is the verbatim Word of God." This is true. At the same time, this does not mean that the Quran is supposed to be read literally, if that means denying the historical meaning of terms and expressions, ignoring the social context of particular rulings, or neglecting its symbolic and inner meanings. To research the linguistic and historical dimensions of the Quran or to seek its inner meaning is not a modern innovation; rather, these kinds of interpretation began with the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions and continue today. Readers of the Quran must shed the notion that a literalist reading of the Quran is somehow more authentic or pious than an informed interpretation. Ironically, the minority of Muslims who apply a narrow "fundamentalist" hermeneutic to the Quran find as their allies a small group of anti-Muslim bigots who similarly take verses out of context to prove their hateful assertions.

Believers in scriptures other than the Quran will need to be careful not to automatically apply their hermeneutical traditions to the Quran, but some Muslim readers also need to explore the possibility that what they have been taught about the way the Quran should be interpreted might not be in accord with the understanding of many other Muslims. When you read other essays in this *Study Quran* about traditional exegesis or various approaches to deriving law, spiritual practices, or spiritual understandings from the Quran, you might be surprised by what you read. You may have been taught to relate to the Quran in a particular manner, for example, by using it as a proof text, that is, proving a particular legal judgment by citing a singular verse. Alternately, you may have been taught to minimize the import of verses with detailed legal content while prioritizing verses articulating general spiritual principles, such as *There is no coercion in religion* (2:256). Are these approaches to the Quran contradictory? If not, how have they been reconciled?

Take seriously your responsibility to identify the method you currently use for reading the Quran and evaluate this approach in light of the new knowledge you gain from the rich scholarly, spiritual, and juridical traditions of exegesis. Mature believers take upon themselves the responsibility for evaluating to the best of their ability what they have learned and accept those scholars' opinions that are the most convincing, not simply the most expedient or convenient. Nonbelievers can also learn much by being open to the diverse traditional interpretations of the sacred scripture of Islam.

## *What Kind of Book Is the Quran?*

In the world of modern publishing, books can look deceptively uniform. Most books are designed to be portable and manageable and to fit on a standard bookshelf. They are hardcover or paperback and mostly in rectangular form. The front cover displays the author and title; the back cover usually gives some information about the book's contents. If a book deviates from these norms, for example, by having an octagonal shape or being excessively large or small, it is probably an art book or a children's story; in any case, the appearance of a book can send a useful message about the unusual or challenging contents of the book. We might be better prepared to tackle the difficult style of James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* if their contents did not lie behind deceptively banal dime-store covers, but, rather, were edged in molting felt or encrusted with broken glass.

Today, publications of scripture often display some gilding on the title or on the edges of the pages. In a bookstore filled with dramatic cover art and design, this fact does not do much in itself to prepare us for an encounter with a radically different kind of text. We need to prepare ourselves, then, as we embark upon a reading of scripture, to engage with a different kind of book; we must open ourselves to being surprised, inspired, disturbed, and sometimes confused by the words and ideas we encounter. All scriptures, including the Quran, draw on themes, images, symbols, language, and literary styles that were not wholly unfamiliar to their initial audiences—that is, to the historical peoples who initially received and then transmitted the sacred words. But we are far away in time from those people who first heard or read the various books of the Bible or the Quran, and we need to understand something about those people and their societies, language, and worldview if we are to avoid misinterpreting much of the language and style of these holy texts. Even the category of "scripture" implies a uniformity of style among the world's sacred texts that is far from being the case. As we approach the Quran, then, we need to take this book on its own terms and embrace its unique style and arrangement.

A distinctive aspect of the Quran is its assertion of its own identity as both an oral revelation and a written text. The Quran calls itself *al-Qurʾān* ("The Recitation"), a

term that signifies an oral revelation, as well as a "book" (*kitāb*), a term that signifies a written revealed text. The verses most scholars believe to be the earliest revealed to the Prophet Muhammad include commands to *recite* (*iqraʾ*) *in the Name of thy Lord* and describe God as having *taught* humanity *by the Pen* (96:1–4). Other early verses tell believers to "chant" (*rattil*) the Quran at a measured pace and to "recite" as much of the Quran at a time as is easy and practical. The Quran itself, therefore, indicates that it is a book that should be recited as well as read.

What we see when we open a copy of the Quran is that it is divided into 114 *sūrah*s. The best translation of the word *sūrah* is probably "division" or "section," although it is usually translated "chapter." The latter can be especially misleading, because it sets up in the minds of some the expectation that the *sūrah*s of the Quran are organized systematically according to certain thematic or expository principles, which is not outwardly the case. Rather, with the exception of *al-Fātiḥah* ("The Opening"), the *sūrah*s are organized roughly according to length, with the longest at the beginning of the book and the shortest at the end. The second *sūrah,* "The Cow," has 286 verses (*āyāt*), while the last *sūrah,* "Mankind," has 6 verses. The verses themselves vary significantly in length; the shortest verses consist of only two words, while the longest verses are more than a hundred words.

The Quran is arranged in this distinctive manner because the Prophet Muhammad did not "compose" the Quran and then teach it to his community. Rather, the Quran is a collection of the revelations the Prophet Muhammad received from God from the inception of his call to prophethood at age forty until his death at age sixty-three. It is as though the Prophet Muhammad had a mental notebook whose blank pages he filled in with the revelations he received over the twenty-three years of his prophetic calling. As long as the Prophet was alive, new verses were revealed and inserted before, after, or in between existing verses within any *sūrah* according to the instructions the Prophet received from the Source of the revelation. For this reason, the Quran cannot be arranged chronologically, because some *sūrah*s contain verses revealed later than other verses.

It was only the death of the Prophet that cut off any possibility of further revelations to be added to the Quran. At this point it was the responsibility of his Companions to preserve the revealed text. Muslims believe that the order of the verses within each *sūrah* was fixed by the revelation itself, while the order of the *sūrah*s relative to one another in the written Quran (known as the *muṣḥaf*) was determined by the Companions on the basis of the instructions the Prophet Muhammad received from the Archangel Gabriel. The arrangement according to length was also in accordance with the order given by the Prophet and reflected in the way in which the Prophet himself generally recited the *sūrah*s as well as his practice of beginning the canonical prayer with *al-Fātiḥah* and then reciting longer *sūrah*s before the shorter ones. Muslims believe that the order of the *sūrah*s of the Quran is Divinely revealed and that any written Quran must retain this original ordering. There are in fact no variations

in the order of the *sūrah*s in any text of the Quran throughout the Islamic world. At the same time, Muslims are permitted to read or recite from any place in the Quran for worship or learning.

## *Stylistic Harmony in the Quran*

The content of the Quranic revelations is as varied as the diversity of the worldly and transcendent concerns of humanity. Just as individuals are rarely concerned with only one aspect of their life at any time, but are constantly shifting their attention from one concern to another—from marital relations, to finances, to anxiety about a child's defiance, to, on another level, spiritual pain or difficulty in making a moral decision—the Quran rarely focuses for an extended period on only one concern. Further, the Quran addresses both individuals and communities, and these communities changed internally and in relation to each other even over the course of the more than two decades during which the Quran was revealed. This multiplicity of audiences and topics that the Quran addresses, sometimes in quick succession with little "filler" to separate the units of meaning, can be disorienting to someone expecting a straightforward, linear narrative.

Readers of the Quran, therefore, need to be mentally and emotionally agile, ready to be moved quickly in a new direction. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, a class of Muslim scholars arose who combed through the Quran collecting and organizing verses that pertained to specific subjects, such as legal issues, theological matters, stories about the prophets, descriptions of how to pray, and directly spiritual and metaphysical teachings. Each of their books was carefully composed to allow readers to learn about the Quranic perspective on a particular topic. But the Quran itself, the source of these books, resists such a rigid imposition of external structure. Readers of the Quran, like each one of us in our daily lives, must be prepared to quickly shift attention to a new concern at any moment.

This is not to say that the Quran lacks overall unity or coherence. In fact, it possesses a remarkable inner unity and coherence. Unlike the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, whose various books were composed or collected by many people at different times, the Quran is the collection of revelations to only one man, the Prophet Muhammad, over a relatively short period of time. Thus, although the Quran addresses different topics in the various styles most fitting to convey the knowledge being imparted—parables woven through stories of the prophets, straight prose for legal injunctions, lyrical passages for praising God—it is all expressed in the same eloquent Arabic language.

In this respect, the Quran assumes great importance as *recitation*. The beauty of the language of the Quran has always deeply moved Arabs and even non-Arab Muslims from the time of its revelation and has been a topic of extensive study by scholars over the centuries. That the Quran employs apropos vocabulary and concise but powerful turns of phrase is something that necessarily escapes readers not familiar with

Arabic, but the power of its recitation resulting from the spiritual presence contained in it transcends the world of those who know Arabic. The Quran's use of rhyme and rhythm and other techniques to create aural harmony can be evident to anyone listening to its recitation.

It is probably easiest for new readers of the Quran to identify these techniques by first listening to the shorter *sūrah*s near the end of the Quran; or a number of well-known passages from the longer *sūrah*s, such as the Pedestal Verse (*āyat al-kursī;* 2:255) or the Light Verse (*āyat al-nūr;* 24:35); or the *sūrah*s *al-Raḥmān,* "The Compassionate" (55), *Yā Sīn,* "Yā Sīn" (36), or *al-Wāqiᶜah,* "The Event" (56). Here we find successive verses ending in various kinds of rhymes. For example, in *al-Māᶜūn,* "Small Kindnesses" (107), the verses follow two imperfect rhyming patterns in which the first four verses end in *-īn* (*dīn, yatīm, miskīn, muṣallīn*) and the final three verses end in *-ūn* (*sāhūn, yurāᵓūn, māᶜūn;* here the rhyming is even more sophisticated, as we note the consistent *ā* followed by a glottal sound before the final rhyming syllable). Similar blocks of various kinds of rhymes are also found in some of the longer *sūrah*s, where, in addition to creating aural harmony, they often signify a shift in semantic focus or emphasis.

Readers of the Quran need to pay attention not only to the way verses end, but to their beginnings as well. In recitation, rhythm and continuity in *sūrah*s is frequently established by the sentence connectors that begin the verses: interjections, interrogatories, conjunctions, or other short words that often rhyme. For example, in *al-Balad,* "The Land" (90), the first five verses begin with words sharing a similar sound: *lā* ("verily"), *wa* ("and"), *wa* ("and"), *laqad* ("indeed"), and *a* (an interrogatory); the rest of the *sūrah* continues in a similar fashion. Readers who do not know Arabic will probably need to listen to the recitation a few times in order to notice the pleasing rhythm created by these connectors, as they are less obvious than the effect created by the rhymed endings of verses.

All *sūrah*s of the Quran (except one) are preceded by the invocation *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful* (*bi'smi'Llāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*). Many *sūrah*s also conclude with a verse that includes a supplication, doxology, or exhortation such as *Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,* or *Glory be to God,* or *Truly God is with the virtuous* (e.g., 1:2; 23:91; 29:69). The sacred Attributes or Names of God often serve an epitomizing function at the end of *sūrah*s or at the end of a group of related verses in longer *sūrah*s. Examples of the way these Names of God are referenced include: *Truly God is the Forgiving, the Merciful* (*al-Ghafūr, al-Raḥīm;* 42:5); *He is the Hearing, the Knowing* (*al-Samīᶜ, al-ᶜAlīm;* 2:137); and *He is the Wise, the Aware* (*al-Ḥakīm, al-Khabīr;* 6:18). The Divine Names create both semantic and aural harmony, as many of the Names rhyme or are assonant. It is recommended that those new to the Quran read the last three verses of *al-Ḥashr,* "The Gathering" (59), which list a number of the Divine Names; this will make it easier to identify the Names later when they appear in other *sūrah*s. Beginners are also advised to read

short sections at each sitting, not great numbers of pages at a time as if they were reading a novel or an ordinary nonfiction book.

## *Unifying Themes of the Quran*

It is perhaps helpful, before beginning a reading of the Quran, to be familiar with some of its major themes, many of which are addressed from multiple perspectives throughout the scripture. Although the Quran addresses many diverse topics, it most commonly describes itself as a book of guidance (*hidāyah*). In fact, one of the traditional names of the Quran is *al-Hudā,* "The Guide." All topics addressed in the Quran are ultimately linked to this goal of guiding people toward God. Spiritually, the Quran addresses our need for knowledge about God—to know that He is One, the Creator and Ruler of the universe—as well as our need to learn how to show our gratitude and obedience to God through prayer, other acts of worship, and other human actions that are to be carried out according to Divine injunctions.

With a few exceptions, most of the Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries did not believe in life after death. Belief in the immortality of the soul, Resurrection, and an ultimate accounting of each soul before God is therefore identified and emphasized throughout the Quran, along with belief in God, as a necessary component of faith for all true religions. For example, after mentioning Christians, Jews, and Sabeans, the Quran says, *Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve* (5:69). In order to guide humanity to do what is right and prepare for this accounting, the Quran entices human beings with descriptions of Paradise and the ultimate bliss of being in the Divine Presence, while warning them about the consequences of evil acts by describing in very vivid terms the pain and despair of those whose actions lead to Hellfire.

The Quran does not teach that people should be detached from worldly affairs in order to attain this spiritual state. Rather, it is opposed to otherworldliness. It is by struggling to do what is right and good in our lives on this earth that we develop our spiritual depth and awareness. It is for this reason that the Quran addresses our closest and sometimes most contentious relationships—with family, neighbors, and business partners—emphasizing the need for integrity and honesty. The Quran also addresses the stresses that can emerge within the faith community. *Al-Ḥujurāt,* "The Private Apartments" (*Sūrah* 49), for example, discusses the corrosive effects of gossip, backbiting, and social marginalizing and emphasizes the need for a sense of community among Muslims.

The Quran stresses both the individual moral responsibility of adults (e.g., *None shall bear the burden of another;* 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38) and the need for individuals to work collectively to establish communities and cultures where such morality is nurtured. The Quran calls upon people to work together to implement the teachings of the prophets throughout the ages that foster ethical and righteous living.

Those acquainted with the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Gospels will meet many familiar figures in the Quran. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, Mary, John the Baptist, Jesus, and many other prophets and righteous guides appear throughout the Quran. Christians and Jews think of these men and women as "Biblical" figures, and it can be jarring to them to read their stories, which sometimes differ from those in the Bible, in the Quran.

What is important to understand is that the Biblical stories themselves drew upon a much older oral tradition that did not disappear when the various books of the Bible were written. The pre-Islamic Arabs, for example, were well aware that they were descendants of Abraham through his son Ismāʿīl (Ishmael) and his mother, Hājar (Hagar). Further, the history of the prophets was known not just through written and oral literature, but through the existence of holy sites throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the Near East. The burial place of Abraham, the baptism site of Jesus, Mt. Sinai, Jerusalem, and the Kaʿbah in Makkah—all these sites and many others served as epicenters of religious education and formation, often across parochial boundaries. Readers of the Quran who realize that the Biblical figures had a much richer and wider presence among Near Eastern monotheists outside the Bible will perhaps be better prepared to encounter new perspectives and previously unknown stories about them. But such readers must also remember that, for Muslims, accounts of earlier prophets are not based on stories that were prevalent in Arabia, but on Divine Revelation about these prophets and are therefore completely independent of historical sources.

## *Muhammad: Messenger of God and Bringer of the Quran*

The Quran stresses the important role of Muhammad as *Messenger*—the one who transmitted the message from God to humanity. The Prophet was a perfect receptor of the Word of God, which he transmitted faithfully without adding or subtracting anything of his own. Moreover, he was also the person most familiar with the Quran and interpreted it according to the needs of his community as well as for later generations of Muslims. In fact, he can be said to be the first commentator on the Quran.

After the Prophet died, his sayings (*aḥādīth*) were assembled in various collections, which differ in some matters, but are in agreement concerning the authenticity of the vast majority of the sayings. This body of literature, the *Ḥadīth,* traditionally accepted as canonical by both the Sunni and Shiite communities, has been revered over the ages as a key for the elucidation of the meaning of the Quran, sources of Law after the Quran, and along with the Quran the source of everything Islamic. Over the ages scholars of *Ḥadīth* have discussed and sometimes disputed the meaning of certain sayings and actions of the Prophet; some distinguish between those of enduring religious and spiritual significance to Muslims and those that were related to passing social or political situations. In any case, the study of *Ḥadīth* became a

major Islamic science, and this body of literature plays a very important role in the understanding of the Quran.

All Muslims agree that the context of the initial revelation to the Prophet Muhammad is of great significance. Much traditional Quranic interpretation in fact involves an examination of the linguistic, social, moral, and political context of the initial conditions of the revelation of a particular verse or set of verses of the Quran, or what is called *sha'n* (or *asbāb*) *al-nuzūl* of the Quran, in addition to an analysis of the relationship of various Quranic verses to each other. The primary teachings of Islam found in the Quran—witnessing to the reality that is God, the dependence of creation upon Him, and belief that human beings will answer to God for their actions on the Day of Judgment—are clear and need little explanation. But to ignore the conditions of the Prophet's community when verses treating such topics as gender relations, religious diversity, and political authority were revealed is to risk misunderstanding the Quran. For this reason, one must not be hasty in drawing conclusions about legal judgments and other norms on the basis of a surface reading of a few verses from the Quran. As is explained in the essay "The Quran as Source of Islamic Law," the Quran is a source of law; it is not a book of law. Even apparently unambiguous declarations might, in fact, be limited in application or scope.

## *How the Quran Is Read in Muslim Societies*

Quranic literacy varies widely in Muslim societies and does not necessarily correlate with general literacy and educational achievement. Quranic education formed the foundation of literacy in traditional Muslim societies, but modernity has severed that connection in many places, although this is not true everywhere. Muslims should acquire four skills in order to employ the Quran themselves in religious and moral life and derive benefit from it as a source of guidance. The first skill is the ability to read the Arabic script, since the original language of the Quran is Arabic. The beginning of religious education for most Muslim children and for non-Arab converts has always been to learn the Arabic alphabet and then how to string the letters together to sound out words and sentences.

The second skill is learning Quranic Arabic well enough to be able to understand the meaning of the words and sentences. For Arabic-speaking children, an understanding of the meaning of the words comes at first as a consequence of their general knowledge of the Arabic language, which is then supplemented by their teachers. The majority of Muslims throughout history, however, have not been Arabs, although most Muslim peoples, like the Persians, the Turks, the Indian Muslims, and the Malays, adopted the Arabic script for their various languages. To understand the Quran, non-Arab Muslims need extra preparatory education consisting of either learning basic Arabic vocabulary and grammar or having access to translations in their native language. For both Arabs and non-Arabs, a scholarly grasp of the Quran requires years of advanced

study—and non-Arabs have excelled in this alongside Arabs since the early days of Islamic civilization. In fact, most classical works of Arabic grammar were written by Persians.

The third skill, which helps a great deal in grasping the spiritual presence of the text, is the ability to recite the Quran in a proper manner. Parts of the Quran are recited orally in the daily ritual prayers that all Muslims are required to perform; so every Muslim needs some basic recitation skills. The art of *tajwīd* ("good" or "beautiful" recitation) includes pronouncing the letters correctly, knowing which sounds should be elided, emphasized, or elongated, and using the proper tone. Proper recitation should be melodic, so that it is pleasant to hear, but not musical in the usual sense of the word, lest the recitation turn into a performance of personal artistry. Apart from their own recitation, most Muslims experience the Quran through hearing its recitation by accomplished reciters, who can be found throughout the Islamic world in non-Arab countries as well as in Arab ones. In fact, many of the best reciters are not Arabs, and some reciters are men and others women. Also, accomplished scholars of the Quran, not all of whom are reciters, can be found in every Islamic country.

The fourth skill, which makes a person intimate with the Quran, is memorization of at least a few verses and *sūrah*s. In each ritual prayer, the first *sūrah, al-Fātiḥah* ("The Opening"), must be recited, followed by a *sūrah* or group of verses chosen by the worshipper. These portions of the Quran are not recited from the text; so they need to be memorized. Someone who memorizes the complete Quran is known as a *ḥāfiẓ,* a "memorizer" or "preserver" of the Quran. Implicit in this title is the understanding that the *ḥāfiẓ* not only acquires personal spiritual benefits by knowing by heart the Word of God, but also benefits society by serving as a vessel for the preservation and propagation of the Sacred Text.

Muslims have taught these skills for experiencing the Quran through a variety of ways, according to the means and abilities of each community. Institutions for religious education in which Quranic studies are pursued run the gamut from one-room neighborhood schools for small children (*kuttāb*s) to enormous seminaries (usually known as *madrasah*s) serving an often cosmopolitan student body. For most of Islamic civilization, learning to read and recite the Quran was the beginning of education and an incentive to literacy.

The Quran is also widely read and recited outside of ritual prayers by ordinary Muslims across the world. Some try to read a small portion of the Quran each day, while others might devote time to reading particular *sūrah*s on Fridays, the holiest day of the week, but also on special occasions such as religious holidays, weddings, and funerals. Quranic recitation is especially intense during the month of Ramadan, the time when the Quran was first revealed. It was probably to facilitate the reading of the whole Quran during this month that scribes first inserted marks in the text to make clear the division of the Quran into thirty parts (*ajzāʾ*). In this way, someone wanting to complete a reading of the Quran in one month can read one part, or *juzʾ*, each day.

The Quran describes itself as a *blessed Book* (6:92), and even gatherings with an apparently nonreligious purpose are often opened with Quranic recitation in order to bless the event. Muslims believe that the Quran is the Word of God, and God is always present, saying of the human being in one verse, *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* (50:16). Bringing the Quran into a space or occasion is a way to be reminded of that Divine Presence. The Arabic word for a "verse" of the Quran (*āyah*) literally means "sign" or "portent," a term often also used in the Quran to refer to phenomena in the world of creation and also within human beings that function as signs pointing to the Creator. This is one of the reasons Islamic ritual spaces, such as mosques, are embellished with Quranic calligraphy along with decorative patterns derived from those found in nature. Both the "beautiful script" (the literal meaning of "calligraphy") and the beautiful recitation (*tajwīd*) of the Quran remind those gathered for happy or mournful occasions of God's Mercy, Beauty, Power, and Presence.

## *Where to Begin If the Quran Is New to You*

Probably the biggest mistake new readers of the Quran make is to try to read it from "beginning to end." As explained previously, there is no need to read the Quran this way, because in their totality the *sūrahs* are ordered neither topically nor chronologically. More problematically, those who first encounter the Quran by way of the *sūrahs* at the beginning (except for *al-Fātiḥah*) are likely to become quickly overwhelmed by their length and difficult legal and historical content.

It is perhaps a better strategy to first encounter the Quran the same way the Prophet Muhammad's community received the revelations, that is, with the first *sūrahs* revealed in Makkah. These *sūrahs* are short, comprising anywhere from a few to a few dozen verses. By reading (and perhaps listening to) a small selection of these *sūrahs*, one can become accustomed to the style and rhythm of the language and the overwhelming content of their message. Just as important, these *sūrahs* focus for the most part on the fundamental, universal, and enduring spiritual message of the Quran: the affirmation that there is only one God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, Who holds human beings accountable for their actions.

One might begin, then, by reading the last two sections of the Quran (i.e., parts 29 and 30, beginning with *Sūrah* 67) and reflecting on the themes and lessons found there. In an age of speed-reading and skimming, in which we are taught to quickly "find the basic point" in a text, it is necessary to consciously slow down when reading the Quran. One needs to take time to reflect upon every word and phrase and also upon one's own reactions and instincts as one encounters verses that address the deepest existential concerns of humanity.

After spending some time with the early revelations and other passages mentioned above, new readers can move on to other sections of the Quran. As one encounters legal content, references to particular historical individuals or communities, and

relationships between various social groups (e.g., men and women, or nomads and the Madinans), it becomes more important to consult the commentaries, scholarly notes, and essays explaining their context and implications.

Aside from having diverse religious orientations or worldviews, readers of the Quran differ in their mental makeup, spiritual and intellectual aptitudes, interests, and passions. The person who is passionate about environmental protection will naturally pay close attention to Quranic verses related to the value of creation, nature as a locus of God's Wisdom and Mercy, and the rights of animal communities, while the ardent advocate of women's rights will hone in on verses related to gender relations. Muslims believe that one of the basic features of the Quran is its multiplicity of messages addressing the whole gamut of human conditions and circumstances. There is certainly nothing wrong with using an index or search engine to find verses related to one topic or another. Indeed, in trying to understand the meaning of any particular verse, scholars of the Quran usually first look within the Quran itself to see if there are other verses related to the same topic (referred to as "*tafsīr* of the Quran by the Quran," for which see the essay "Quranic Commentaries"). Nevertheless, there are a few precautions to be noted in this regard.

First, we should never reduce the Quran to its articulations about particular issues or aspects of human life. The Quran is more than a sum of its parts. As discussed, the total "linguistic field" created by the Quran is an essential part of its message; an index of topics the Quran addresses misses this point. Just as an anatomy book lists and describes all the individual parts and systems that comprise a human body but tells us nothing about the experience of being human, a list of issues the Quran addresses tells us nothing about what it means for believers to have the living Word of God present in the world.

Second, readers must always keep in mind that the Quran is concerned with all the aspects of human life and humanity's relationship with the Divine; therefore, it does not separate temporal and eternal concerns. The purpose of the revelation is to show how we should live in the world of created things in a way that ensures an enduring and at the same time positive connection with God in this life and the next. The Quran's passionate call for justice in human relationships combined with mercy is intimately related to its generous invitation to every person to enjoy eternity in the presence of the Divine.

This message presents a particular challenge for readers of the Quran who deny a Transcendent Reality or a Divine Creator. Certainly some of the ethical pronouncements in the Quran might still have some resonance for these readers. Nonbelievers, however, often see the notion of giving up certain activities, being generous to the needy, or disciplining oneself through worship for the sake of a deeper relationship with God through reductionist eyes as being devoid of spiritual significance. An example of reductionist thinking is when one, upon encountering Quranic verses instructing men and women to restrict their sexual activity to marriage, concludes that

religious language is being "used" here as a mechanism of social control. One of the many points this kind of reader misses in this case is how intimacy itself can be enhanced and made even more fulfilling when it has a spiritual dimension. If nonbelievers cannot relate to the transcendental aspect of apparently worldly concerns of the Quran, they might at least be able to analogize other spheres of human experience where individuals exercise discipline and make sacrifices for what they consider a higher good.

## *Respecting the Quran*

It is appropriate, perhaps, to close this introduction to reading the Quran by discussing briefly the respect Muslims accord to the physical text of the Quran, the *muṣḥaf,* as well as the sound of its recitation, which often moves believers to tears. We should recall that in premodern societies, books of scripture were not as easily available as they are today, and they were not treated like other books. Whether it was the Bible, the Torah, or the Quran, scriptures were approached with awe. The ontological distinctness of scriptures from other books (i.e., the fact that they are a different *kind* of book in their very being) was signaled by their being placed on high lecterns, lovingly guarded in special locked cabinets, or wrapped in distinctive coverings.

Muslims today continue to demonstrate their respect for the contents of the Quran by treating any written manifestation of it with deference. Symbolic acts of respect, such as handling papers with Quranic verses written upon them with special care and refraining from placing the *muṣḥaf* on the floor, are widespread. Islamic Law directs Muslims to touch the *muṣḥaf* only when in a state of ritual purity (56:77–79). This is achieved by performing ablutions before handling the Quran in accordance with Quranic directives and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad. Sufis add that one must be also inwardly pure in order to be able to "touch" the inner meaning of the Sacred Text. Although these rules do not strictly apply to translations of the Quran or to nontextual copies of the *muṣḥaf,* such as electronic books, a general attitude of respect for any reproduction of the contents of the Quran is recommended and widely practiced throughout the Islamic world.

Today, anyone can own a copy of the Quran, in its original language or in translation. In most respects, this is a positive development, for it allows more widespread knowledge of the Quran and communication about its message among diverse peoples across the world. Indeed, the Quran directs its message mostly to "humanity" and to "believers"—not only to Muslims—so it is fitting that it is accessible to all who wish to hear or read it.

Yet Muslims sometimes have ambivalent feelings about this easy availability of the Quran today. On the one hand, most Muslims want what they consider to be the Word of the living God available to all people. On the other hand, the painful reality is that some hateful people now have a greater ability to deliberately desecrate the

Quran to hurt and vilify Muslims. It is to prevent the desecration of the Quran, in fact, that premodern scholars generally advised Muslims not to carry the Quran into hostile territory.

The hard division between "Muslim" and "non-Muslim" lands does not reflect the religious diversity found in most nation-states today (if it ever did), so this medieval legal opinion is now moot. Instead, Muslims usually collaborate with other peoples of faith to cultivate an ethic of mutual respect for religious symbols, artifacts, and sacred texts. Although some nations have laws restricting "hate speech" toward religious communities or grant special protection to religious books and symbols, the need for robust laws protecting freedom of speech in many countries, especially in the West, prevents such restrictions from being widely adopted especially as far as Islam is concerned, and in any case no law is effective without an underlying ethic that is broadly supported. Inculcating values of kindness, mutual respect, and neighborliness in our diverse communities is the best way to prevent religious differences from being used to harm one another, and this begins and ends with respect for the sacred scriptures and religious beliefs and practices of others.

# THE QURAN IN TRANSLATION

Joseph Lumbard

Although the Quran was sent down as "an Arabic recitation,"[1] the vast majority of Muslims do not believe that its language is of this world. Rather, "it is as though the poverty-stricken coagulation which is the language of mortal man were under the formidable pressure of the Heavenly Word broken into a thousand fragments."[2] The Quran itself alludes to this awesome power: *Had We made this Quran descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God. These are the parables We set forth for mankind, that haply they may reflect* (59:21). From this perspective, translating the Quran into any language is a daunting task, for it entails conveying the absolute and infinite by means of the relative and finite.

Reflecting upon the inimitability of the Quran has led many to conclude that the nature of Quranic Arabic is among the greatest miracles of Islam. To those who say it is a human fabrication, the text says, *Then bring a* sūrah *like it . . . if you are truthful* (10:38). Another verse asserts that all of humanity could not produce its like: *Surely if mankind and jinn banded together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not bring the like thereof, even if they supported one another* (17:88). Those who have endeavored to translate the Quran realize this truth most acutely. As A. J. Arberry states in the introduction to *The Koran Interpreted,* "The rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Koran are so characteristic, so powerful, so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendour of the original."[3] And in his introduction to *The Glorious Quran,* Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall states, "The Quran cannot be translated. That is the belief of the traditional Sheykhs and of the present writer."[4]

1. 12:2; 20:113; 39:28; 42:7; 43:3.
2. Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam,* trans. D. M. Matheson (London: Mandala, 1989), 44.
3. A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 1:24.
4. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Glorious Quran* (Chicago: Kazi, 1994), iii.

## *Arabic Syntax*

At the center of this Quranic inimitability is its continual thematic and linguistic alternation, which many scholars of the Arabic language consider to be among the Quran's "remarkable and exquisite subtleties."[5] Through such alternation the Quran comes across as both static and dynamic, retaining the quality of the spoken word and the medium of the written. Such linguistic alternations (*iltifāt*) can be difficult to translate, since they defy or transcend the norms of human speech.[6] *Iltifāt* has been recognized as an attribute of eloquence (*balāghah*) in all forms of Arabic. But it figures far more prominently in the Quran than in poetry or prose. Its most common form is the alternation between persons: from third to first, first to third, third to second, or second to third. An example can be found in 14:13: *So their Lord revealed unto them, "We shall surely destroy the wrongdoers."* The shift in the Divine Voice from third-person singular to first-person plural brings the reality of Divine Justice into immediate relief: many people believe they face a distant reckoning from a transcendent Lord, though He is in fact immanently present and His Justice is immediate. In other verses this same technique brings into focus the omnipresence of God's guiding Mercy. In this way the syntactical structure of many verses is believed to pull even the recalcitrant soul toward God by engendering the awareness that no matter how far a human being may be from God, God is *nearer to him than his jugular vein* (50:16).

The best-known instance of *iltifāt* is found in the opening *sūrah* of the Quran:

> *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help. Guide us upon the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray.*

The first four verses (first two sentences) speak of God as a transcendent third person, whereas the next verses bring God into an immediate relationship with human beings. This sudden shift from Divine Transcendence to Divine Immanence is even more dramatic in Arabic. Although something of this and the many other instances of *iltifāt* can be rendered in translation, even those who have mastered both languages have yet to render them in a manner that fully captures the dramatic effect this sudden shift in the original Arabic can have on readers or listeners.

5. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Jāmiʿ al-kabīr fī ṣināʿāt al-manẓūm min al-kalām waʾl-manthūr,* ed. M. Jawād and J. Saʿūd (Iraq: n.p., 1956), 98.

6. The most comprehensive examination of *iltifāt* in any European language is that of Muhammad Abdel Haleem in *Understanding the Quran: Themes and Style* (London: Tauris, 1999), 184–210.

## *Grammatical Structure*

The *iltifāt,* or alternation between tenses or persons, can be difficult for those reading a translation, but there are other difficulties as well. Foremost among these are the many grammatical structures in the Quran that are open to multiple interpretations that cannot be rendered in translation. A famous example is 21:107, which is translated by A. J. Arberry as follows: "We have not sent thee, save as a mercy unto all beings."[7] Muhammad Abdel Haleem renders it: "It was only as a mercy that We sent you [the Prophet] to all people."[8] In this volume it is translated, *And We sent thee not, save as a mercy unto the worlds,* but it could also be rendered, "We did not send thee, save out of mercy for the worlds." These four variations reflect the manner in which the Arabic word *raḥmah,* "mercy," can be interpreted as modifying either the pronoun "you" or the verb "to send." Both are valid grammatical readings, but the Arabic of the text allows readers to understand both that the sending of the Prophet was done out of mercy and that he himself is a mercy. Yet the translator must choose to limit the polyvalent Arabic text to a single meaning or render a dual translation that would convey both meanings. In such instances translation not only inhibits the language of the Quran, but also limits the multiple theological implications of the verse.

The polyvalence of Quranic Arabic can also be found in the possible referents for a single pronoun, a problem often discussed in the exegetical tradition. For example, the most common translation of 2:177 is roughly as follows:

> It is not piety to turn your faces to the east and the west. Rather, piety is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and who gives wealth, *despite loving it,* to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, the traveler, beggars . . . (emphasis added)

This translation follows the predominant interpretation. The third-person masculine pronoun, which is rendered "it" in the preceding translation can, however, be interpreted as referring to God rather than to wealth. In which case it would be translated:

> It is not piety to turn your faces to the east and the west. Rather, piety is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and who gives wealth, *out of love for God,* to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, the traveler, beggars . . . (emphasis added)

7. Arberry, *Koran Interpreted,* 2:26.

8. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 208. Abdel Haleem adds a translation closer to that of Arberry in a note: "We sent you [the Prophet] only as a mercy to all people."

The two translations differ in whether one reads the third-person singular pronoun in the Arabic phrase *ʿalā ḥubbihi* (indicated by italics in each translation) as a reference to wealth or to God. Both readings are viable in the Arabic. In this way the Quranic text opens onto two directions, implying that one must give both despite the love of worldly wealth and out of love for God. Yet the translator into any European language must choose one option or provide a prolix translation that compromises the flow of the original. Not only do most such translations limit readers to a single interpretation; they also veil the manner in which the Quran, through the subtle placement of a single pronoun, alludes to the fact that true piety requires both love of God and overcoming attachment to the things of this world.

## *Quranic Terms*

In addition to the syntactical and grammatical obstacles mentioned above, the translator of the Quran into any European language faces the challenge of finding equivalent words for central Quranic concepts. As the Quran is part of the Abrahamic tradition and presents itself as a continuation of the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospels, many concepts are similar. But other concepts are very different in nature. For example, both Christianity and Islam stress the importance of repentance. The word that conveys this concept in Arabic is *tawbah* and the verbal form is *tāba/yatūbu,* the literal meaning of which is "to turn"; thus when one repents one is said to turn unto God, or *tāba ila'Llāh.* But this phrase also indicates that one has returned from sin to God, or sinfulness to godliness, which relates to the Quranic conception of the human being as inherently good, rather than stained by "original sin."

The human side of *tawbah* can still be partially conveyed by the word "repentance." However, the Quran also refers to God as having *tawbah* toward human beings, and there is no way to convey this reciprocity with a single word in English. Such reciprocity is evident in many verses, such as 5:39: *Whosoever repents* (*tāba*) *after his wrongdoing, and makes amends, God will relent* (*yatūbu*) *unto him.* In fact, the verb *tāba/yatūbu* refers to God more often than it does to human beings, since from a Quranic perspective it is only when God turns or relents to human beings that they are able to truly turn to Him in sincere repentance. Hence one of the Divine Names is *al-Tawwāb,* "the Turner" or "the Relenting." The principiality of God's *tawbah* is seen in 9:118, a literal translation of which reads, "Then He turned to them, that they would turn to Him. Truly God is the Turner, the Merciful." One can see that translating God as "the Turner" fails to convey exactly what is meant and robs this central Quranic concept of its subtle majesty. Following the lead of previous translations, the translation in this volume reads: *Then He relented unto them, that they might repent. Truly God is Relenting, Merciful.* This comes closer to the original meaning, but still sacrifices the reciprocity that grabs readers or listeners in Arabic and provides a visceral awareness of the key Quranic concept that

our ability to turn to God in repentance is entirely contingent upon God's turning to us with mercy and forgiveness.

The inadequacy of English equivalents for Arabic words may be most evident in the word *dīn,* usually translated "religion." The etymology of "religion" is very different from that of *dīn*. The two words thus convey different concepts. The etymology of "religion" has been debated for centuries. Some maintain, as did Cicero, that it comes from *relegere,* meaning, "to treat carefully." Others follow the fourth-century Christian apologist Lactantius, who maintains that it derives from *religare,* "to bind." As Lactantius writes, "We are tied to God and bound to Him (*religati*) by the bond of piety, and it is from this, and not, as Cicero holds, from careful consideration (*relegendo*), that religion has received its name."[9] Although the interpretation of Lactantius has prevailed in Christian circles, neither derivation is adequate for rendering *dīn*.

The Arabic root for *dīn* comes from the verb *dāna/yadīnu,* which means both "to owe a debt" and "to be obedient" or "to follow."[10] With regard to the former, *dīn* indicates that human beings are in debt to God, to Whom they owe their entire existence. In relation to the latter, it connotes that human beings should submit to God's Power.[11] Thus 9:29, *wa lā yadīnūna dīn al-ḥaqq,* is only partially translated when Pickthall renders it, "and [they] follow not the religion of truth," since it also implies that they "pay not the true debt." Likewise, 3:19 loses part of its meaning when translated, "Truly the religion (*dīn*) with God is Islam." On one hand, it implies that the debt (*dīn*) to God is submission (*islām*). On the other, it implies that obedience (*dīn*) to God is submission (*islām*). All three meanings are fully present in the Arabic, but cannot all be rendered in a single English translation.[12] Thus, although the Arabic word *dīn* and the English word "religion" both connote piety and voluntary submission to the Will of God, they do so in different ways that have affected the overall interpretation of the word within each religious universe.

## *Conclusion*

From an Islamic perspective, the subtleties of Quranic Arabic and its sudden thematic shifts lead to much consternation when read as the composition of mortals. It is thus believed that they can only be fully understood when read as the Discourse of the

9. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes,* 4.28.

10. Some scholars have proposed that *dīn* is a loanword borrowed from the Persian word *den,* meaning "systemic religion." However, the variety of uses of *dīn* and words from the same root in the Quran and pre-Islamic poetry demonstrates that it has variegated meanings that are not all captured by the Persian word *den*.

11. For a full discussion of the meaning of *dīn* in the Quran, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran* (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1987), chap. 8.

12. The situation is further complicated by the way *dīn* is used in pre-Quranic poetry, where it implies "wont" or "custom." Thus one could say, "He followed the custom (*dīn*) of his people."

Eternal—the Divine Word being seen as pure substance and not as mere accident. From one perspective, it is in fact by assuming the appearance of accident that this substance is able to draw the soul out of accident and return it to pure substance. This understanding is best expressed by the philosopher Frithjof Schuon, who writes:

> The Quran is, like the world, at the same time one and multiple. The world is a multiplicity which disperses and divides; the Quran is a multiplicity which draws together and leads to Unity. The multiplicity of the holy Book—the diversity of its words, sentences, pictures, and stories—fills the soul and then absorbs it and imperceptibly transposes it into the climate of serenity and immutability by a sort of divine "cunning." The soul, which is accustomed to the flux of phenomena, yields to this flux without resistance; it lives in phenomena and is by them divided and dispersed—even more than that, it actually becomes what it thinks and does. The revealed Discourse has the virtue that it accepts this tendency while at the same time reversing the movement thanks to the celestial nature of the content and the language, so that the fishes of the soul swim without distrust and with their habitual rhythm into the divine net.[13]

Such subtle transformations can be found in every dimension of the Quran, from its rapid transition between themes and topics, to the grammatical and syntactical nuances, only a few of which have been mentioned here. They are all woven into a sublime mosaic that, from an Islamic perspective, cannot be fully rendered into a language other than the sacred language of Arabic, chosen by God. As such, Muslims maintain that the Quran will always defy any attempt to be conveyed by that which is relative, for it is meant to transmute the dispersion of fragmented human souls such that the relative comes to be a reflection of the Absolute.

From this perspective, the Quran cannot be translated on the linguistic plane. The only true translation of the Quran possible is of an existential order: only those who have assimilated the revelation or immersed themselves in its teachings so thoroughly that its meanings speak through their thoughts, words, and deeds can be said to represent an effective translation of the Noble Book. For Muslims of all sects and creeds, this is in fact the way of the Prophet Muhammad, for when asked about his character, his wife responded, "The character of God's Prophet was the Quran."[14]

13. Schuon, *Understanding Islam,* 50.

14. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb ṣalāt al-musāfirīn* (*Book of the Prayer of Travelers*), *ḥadīth* 18; al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan, Kitāb qiyām al-layl* (*Book of the Night Vigil*), *ḥadīth* 2.

# THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF THE QURAN

Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami

According to the traditional Islamic understanding of the revelation of the Quran, Muhammad was a monotheist (*ḥanīf*) even before being chosen as a prophet. He believed in the One God of Whom the prophet Abraham had spoken before him and, like his ancestor, Muhammad never worshipped idols. He was also a contemplative who would withdraw from time to time to a cave called al-Ḥirāʾ on Jabal al-Nūr ("Mountain of Light"), a hill near Makkah, to meditate and be alone with God. On one of these occasions, when Muhammad was forty years old, the Archangel Gabriel (Jabraʾīl or Jibrīl) appeared to him and commanded him to recite (or read), to which Muhammad responded that he could not do so as he was unlettered (*ummī*). But the Archangel insisted, and the Prophet repeated his response. This exchange continued until Gabriel revealed to him the very first verses of the Quran:

> *Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created, created man from a blood clot. Recite! Thy Lord is most noble, Who taught by the Pen, taught man that which he knew not.* (96:1–5)

These verses mark the first descent (*tanzīl*) or revelation (*waḥy*) to the Prophet. During the next twenty-three years, until shortly before his death, the Quran was continuously revealed to him bit by bit, often in response to existent circumstances and conditions. According to one of the most important transmitters of Prophetic traditions, or *Ḥadīth,* Ibn ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 68/687), the entire Quran was made to descend by God in one night to the lowest Heaven and then revealed on earth in stages that He determined.[1]

## *The Revelation*

Certain events can be described to, but not fully comprehended by, those who have had no experience of them, such as describing colors to a blind person. Similarly, the advent of revelation and its reception by a prophet are outside the realm of the ordinary experience of human beings. To understand this phenomenon we have to have

1. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 1:117.

faith and depend solely on authentic reports from the Prophet and those trustworthy individuals who witnessed him. These include:

> Once the Prophet was asked, "O Messenger of God, how does the revelation come to thee?" He replied, "Sometimes it comes like the ringing of a bell, and that is the hardest on me; then it leaves me, and I retain what it said. And sometimes the angel approaches me in human form and speaks to me, and I retain what he said."[2]
>
> ᶜĀʾishah related, "Verily, once before leaving him I saw the Prophet when the revelation descended upon him on a day that was severely cold. And behold, his brow was streaming with sweat."[3]
>
> Yaᶜlā once told ᶜUmar of his desire to observe the Prophet while he was receiving revelation (*waḥy*). At the next opportunity ᶜUmar called out to him, and he witnessed the Prophet "with his face red, breathing with a snore. Then the Prophet appeared relieved [of that burden]."[4]
>
> Zayd stated, "Ibn Umm Maktūm came to the Prophet while he was dictating to me the verse, *Those who stay behind among the believers . . . and those who strive in the way of God with their goods and lives are not equal* (4:95). On hearing the verse, Ibn Umm Maktūm said, "O Prophet of God, had I the means I would most certainly have participated in *jihād*." He was a blind man, but added, "So God revealed *except for the disadvantaged* to the Prophet while his thigh was on mine, and it became so heavy that I feared my thigh would break."[5]

The Prophet never possessed any control over when or where the revelation would take place or what it would say. This is evident from numerous incidents. Once some people slandered his wife ᶜĀʾishah, accusing her of adultery. The Prophet received no immediate revelation, and in fact he suffered for a full month before God declared her to be innocent in 24:16.

## THE PROPHET'S ROLES WITH REGARD TO THE QURAN

The Quran mentions in many places that the Prophet will *recite* (from the root *t-l-w*) the revelation to the people (2:129, 151; 3:164; 22:30; 29:45), alluding to his role in disseminating the revelation throughout the community. However, recitation is accompanied by teaching, which was part of Abraham's supplication to God interpreted by Muslims to refer to the coming of the Prophet Muhammad:

2. Al-Bukhārī 1.2 (no. 2); Mālik 15.4 (no. 479).
3. Al-Bukhārī 1.2 (no. 2); Mālik 15.4 (no. 479).
4. Al-Bukhārī 25.17 (no. 1561), 64.58 (no. 4373), 66.2 (no. 5036); Muslim 16.1 (no. 2857).
5. Al-Bukhārī 56.31 (no. 2869).

> *Our Lord, raise up in their midst a messenger from among them, who will recite Thy signs to them, and will teach them the Book and Wisdom, and purify them.* (2:129)

The Prophet's duties toward the revelation (*waḥy*) he received were many. Not only was he the instrument for the reception of the Divine message; he was also to supervise the proper compilation of the revealed verses, provide the necessary explanations, encourage community-wide dissemination of the revelation, and teach his Companions in light of Quranic injunctions. Just like the message itself, the order of the compilation of the verses and the content of each *sūrah* came from God, not from the Prophet or scribes, and it was his duty to see them faithfully represented. And so after he memorized what was revealed to him, the recitation of the verses to the Companions, the compilation of the verses, the explanation of the meaning of the verses, and the education of the early Muslims became the Prophet's prime objectives throughout his prophethood, duties he discharged with tremendous resolve, sanctioned, guided, and protected in his efforts by God. As for explanation of the revelation, the literature of the Prophet's *Sunnah* (or the *Ḥadīth*) as a whole constitutes his elucidation of the Quran and his incorporation of its teachings into practical everyday life.[6] The *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet constitute in fact the first commentary on the Quran.

To continually refresh the Prophet's memory, the Archangel Gabriel would visit him specifically for that purpose on many occasions every year. To quote some *aḥādīth* and reports of some of the Companions:

> The Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah said, "The Prophet informed me secretly, 'Gabriel used to recite the Quran to me and I to him once a year, but this year he has recited the entire Quran with me twice. I do not think but that my death is approaching.'"[7]

> Ibn ʿAbbās reported that the Prophet would meet with Gabriel every night during the month of Ramadan, till the end of the month, each reciting [the Quran] to the other.[8]

> Abū Hurayrah said that the Prophet and Gabriel would recite the Quran to each other once every year, during Ramadan, but that in the year of his death they recited it twice.[9]

6. It is beyond the scope of this article to cover *Ḥadīth* literature, which easily encompasses hundreds of volumes. Interested readers may consult specialized books on the subject. See, e.g., M. M. Azami, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature* (Indianapolis: Islamic Teaching Center, 1977).

7. Al-Bukhārī 61.26 (no. 3667), 66.7, 79.43 (no. 6359); Muslim 45.15 (nos. 6467–68).

8. Al-Bukhārī 1.5 (no. 6), 30.7 (no. 1936), 59.6 (no. 3256), 61.24 (no. 3594), 66.7 (no. 5048); Muslim 44.12 (no. 6149).

9. Al-Bukhārī 66.7 (no. 5049).

## TEACHING THE QURAN

There are no indications that the Prophet ever learned to write, and it is generally believed that he remained unlettered throughout his life. He nevertheless maintained the importance of the skill of writing, whose instruction, in one *ḥadīth,* is described as the duty of a father toward his son.[10] He ordered the literate and the illiterate to cooperate with one another in teaching the Quran and spared no effort in encouraging the community to learn the Word of God. The following reports confirm this fact:

> ᶜUthmān ibn ᶜAffān reports that the Prophet said, "The best among you is the one who learns the Quran and teaches it."[11]
>
> According to Ibn Masᶜūd, the Prophet remarked, "If anyone recites a letter from the Book of God, then he will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed attains a tenfold reward. I do not say that *alif lām mīm* are one letter, but that *alif* is a letter, *lām* is a letter, and *mīm* is a letter."[12]
>
> Among the immediate rewards for learning the Quran was the privilege of leading fellow Muslims in prayer as an imam, a crucial function, especially in the early days of Islam.[13]
>
> ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb states that the Prophet said, "With this Book God exalts some people and lowers others."[14]
>
> ᶜAbd Allāh ibn ᶜAmr reports these words from the Prophet: "The one who was devoted to the Quran will be told [on the Day of Judgment] to recite and ascend, and to recite with the same care he practiced while he was in this world, for he will reach his abode [in Heaven] with the last verse he recites."[15]

Most of the Quran was revealed in Makkah, and ᶜAlī, Ibn Masᶜūd,[16] Khabbāb,[17] and other notables from among the Prophet's Companions were already engaged in teaching the Quran during this period. After the migration to Madinah, many more joined their ranks as teachers, and some were even dispatched for that purpose outside

10. Al-Kattānī, *al-Tarātīb al-idāriyyah,* 2:239, quoting *al-Durr al-manthūr,* Abū Nuᶜaym, and al-Daylamī.

11. Al-Bukhārī 66.21 (nos. 5079–80).

12. Al-Tirmidhī 41.16 (no. 3158).

13. Al-Tirmidhī 2.62 (no. 235); Abū Dāʾūd 2.61 (no. 582).

14. Muslim 7.47 (no. 1934).

15. Abū Dāwūd 8.20 (no. 1466); al-Tirmidhī 41.18 (no. 3162).

16. Ibn Masᶜūd was one of the first Companions to teach the Quran in Makkah. See Ibn Saᶜd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 3/1:107.

17. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat,* 1–2:343–46.

Madinah, for example, Muᶜādh ibn Jabal, who was sent to Yemen, and Abū ᶜUbaydah, who was sent to Najrān.[18]

## *Collection and Recording of the Quran*

We have evidence that verses were recorded even during the hardships the Muslims suffered at the hands of the Quraysh. The following famous incident illustrates this point. ᶜUmar, prior to his conversion to Islam, drew his sword intending to cause harm at a gathering of the Prophet and about forty followers. One of the Companions tried to dissuade ᶜUmar by telling him that his own sister and her husband had followed Muhammad in his new religion. Hearing this news, ᶜUmar headed to his brother-in-law's house, where Khabbāb was reciting the *sūrah Ṭā Hā* from a parchment. When ᶜUmar's sister heard his voice, she hid the parchment between her thighs, but, when discovered, she refused to let ᶜUmar so much as touch the parchment until he had cleansed himself.[19] This narration reveals that verses were kept in written form even during this early period. As for ᶜUmar, his angry quest that day ended in his embracing Islam.

According to Ibn ᶜAbbās, verses revealed in Makkah were recorded in Makkah.[20] During the Madinan period, approximately sixty-five Companions functioned as scribes for the Prophet at one time or another.[21] Upon the descent of revelation, the Prophet would regularly call for one of his scribes to write down the latest revealed verses.[22] Often this was Zayd ibn Thābit, whose proximity to the Prophet's Mosque granted him this most golden of opportunities.[23] Shiite sources insist that ᶜAlī also often carried out this task. There is also evidence of proofreading after dictation; once the verses were recorded, the scribe would read them back to the Prophet to ensure that no scribal errors had crept in.[24] Given the large number of scribes and the Prophet's custom of having new verses recorded, we can assume that the entire Quran was available in written form during the Prophet's lifetime, a fact corroborated in numerous traditional sources.

### ORDER OF THE VERSES

If an editor were to change someone else's book, say, by rearranging the words or changing the sequence of the sentences, it would be very easy to shift the entire meaning of

18. Khalīfah ibn Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*; Ibn Saᶜd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 3/2:299.

19. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat*, 1–2:343–46.

20. Ibn al-Ḍurays, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, p. 33.

21. For a full list of names, see M. M. al-Azami, *Kuttāb al-nabī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1974). The entire book is devoted to this subject.

22. Abī ᶜUbayd, *Faḍāʾil*, p. 280. See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, 9:22.

23. Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *al-Maṣāḥif*, p. 3; see also al-Bukhārī 66.4.

24. Al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-kuttāb*, p. 165.

the work. We can in fact no longer attribute this new product to the original author, as only the author is entitled to change the material if the rightful claim of authorship is to be preserved. So it is with the Book of God, for He is the sole Author and He alone can arrange the material within His book. We read:

> *Surely it is for Us to gather it and to recite it. So when We recite it, follow its recitation. Then surely it is for Us to explain it.* (75:17–19)

According to Muslim belief, God Himself sanctioned the Prophet's arrangement of the verses and their explanation, making them authoritative. Only the Prophet, through Divine Guidance, was qualified to arrange the verses in the order in which they appear in the Quran that we now possess. Whenever revelation occurred, the Prophet asked his scribe to place the new verses in a particular position,[25] and no Muslim from any part of the Islamic world has subsequently claimed the right to organize the Book of God in any other way.

We have a wealth of evidence indicating that the verses in the *sūrah*s have always existed in the arrangements that are to be found in the manuscripts of the Quran that we have. ʿUthmān ibn Abi'l-ʿĀṣ reports that he was sitting with the Prophet when the latter fixed his gaze upon a definite point and then said that the Archangel Gabriel had expressly asked him to place 16:90 in that particular position within that particular *sūrah*.[26] A similar narration exists for 2:281, according to many the last verse revealed to the Prophet.[27] But the clearest evidence of all is the history of the recitation of the *sūrah*s during the five daily prayers. A public recital of verses in unison cannot occur if the sequence of verses is in dispute, and no incident indicating such a problem is known to have taken place.

Although the order of the verses is the same for Sunnis and Shiites and both groups maintain that the order was determined through Divine Guidance and not by later generations, the numbering differs. In the copies of the Quran found in the Sunni world, the *basmalah,* that is, *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,* is not counted as the first verse except for the first *sūrah, al-Fātiḥah.* It is the verse after the *basmalah* that is considered the first verse of most of the remaining *sūrah*s. In the copies of the Quran commonly found in the Shiite world, the *basmalah* is counted as the first verse and therefore each following verse is one number higher than that same verse in Sunni copies. (*Sūrah* 9, *al-Tawbah,* does not begin with the *basmalah,* so enumeration of the verses of that *sūrah* is the same for both segments of the Islamic community.)

Finally, the few variant readings of certain words are found in both Sunni and Shiite copies of the Quran and cannot be used as factors to distinguish the actual

25. Al-Tirmidhī 43.10 (no. 3366). See also Aḥmad 1.3 (nos. 406, 506).
26. Aḥmad 6.142 (no. 18200).
27. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār,* p. 176.

text of the Quran accepted by Sunnis from that accepted by Shiites. Except for the inclusion or exclusion of the *basmalah* in the enumeration of the verses, there is no difference at all between the text of the Quran accepted as the verbatim revelation of the Word of God by Sunnis and Shiites alike.[28]

## ORDER OF THE *SŪRAHS*

The unique format of the Quran allows each *sūrah* to function as an autonomous unit. There are no chronologies or narratives that span multiple *sūrah*s, although there are a few cases, such as *Sūrah*s 8 and 9, where the ideas expressed continue from one *sūrah* to the next. Each *sūrah* stands as an independent unit even if the meaning of this or that verse in a particular *sūrah* is clarified in another *sūrah* with similar verses. This fact is the basis for commenting on the Quran through the text of the Quran, a method used in some well-known commentaries.

Because of their independence, it is possible and permissible to change the order of the *sūrah*s for recitation or study. Scholars agree unanimously that it is not necessary to follow the *sūrah* order in the Quran in prayer, recitation, teaching, or memorization.[29] The Prophet himself once recited *Sūrah*s 2, 4, and 3 (in that order) in a single *rak*ᶜ*ah,* or prayer cycle.[30] The same is true regarding partial *muṣḥaf*s, or "copies." It is permissible to copy selected *sūrah*s in whatever order one chooses, akin to the traveler who prefers to take along a few photocopied pages rather than hauling a whole guidebook in the suitcase. There are many examples of partial *muṣḥaf*s. In the Salar Jung Museum, in Hyderabad, India, an eleventh/seventeenth-century manuscript has the following order of *sūrah*s: 36, 48, 55, 56, 62, 67, 75, 76, 78, 93, 94, 72, 97, and 99–114. Another from the late thirteenth/nineteenth century has the order 36, 48, 78, 56, 67, 55, and 73.[31]

Nevertheless, the possibility of studying, reciting, or memorizing the *sūrah*s of the Quran in the order one wishes does not mean that the actual existing order of the 114 *sūrah*s is based on humanly contrived convention or that the written order can be changed. It is universally accepted by traditional Muslim scholars that, just as Gabriel

28. It should also be mentioned that Shiite copies of the Quran have become more standardized and the discrepancy in numbering is seen less often now. Moreover, there is very close but not universal agreement as to the exact number of verses in the Quran. This disagreement pertains not to the text itself, but to how the text is divided. For example, some scholars say that *al-Baqarah* has 285 verses, while others say 286 or 287 verses, and this variation exists for other *sūrah*s as well.

29. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār,* 167.

30. Muslim 7.27 (no. 1850).

31. Muhammad Nizamud-Din and Muhammad Ashraf, *A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Salar Jung Collection* (Hyderabad: Published by order of the Committee, 1957–); Muhammad Ashraf, *A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Salar Jung Museum and Library,* vol. 2, *Concerning 367 Mss. [of] the Glorious Qurʾan, Its Parts and Fragments* (Hyderabad, 1962), 166–234. There are over thirty examples of partial *muṣḥaf*s in this catalog alone. More examples are found in other libraries around the world.

directed the Prophet to place a particular verse or set of verses in a particular *sūrah,* the Archangel also instructed the Prophet in the ordering of the *sūrah*s. Muslims hold that, although the whole of the written Quran was not bound in a single volume during the lifetime of the Prophet, the order followed in the ᶜUthmānī *Muṣḥaf* and later copies of the Quran is based on the instructions of the Prophet himself. It is he who ordered *al-Fātiḥah* to be placed at the beginning of the Quran, followed by *al-Baqarah,* the longest *sūrah* of the Quran, then *Āl ᶜImrān,* and so on.

The ordering of the *sūrah*s is not chronological; that is, it is not based on the date of the descent of a *sūrah,* so that those revealed earlier come before those revealed later. But the order of the *sūrah*s is not accidental or without its own inner logic either. After *al-Fātiḥah,* longer *sūrah*s usually precede shorter ones, although this general quantitative rule is not absolute. In any case the ordering of the *sūrah*s is part of the Divinely ordained structure of the Quran.[32]

## *Compilation of the Quran*

It can therefore be asserted categorically that, although the Prophet pursued all possible measures to preserve the Quran, he did not have all the *sūrah*s bound into a single master volume during his lifetime; he had, however, given instructions about their order. Zayd ibn Thābit stated, "The Prophet was taken [from this life] and the Quran had not yet been collected into a [bound] book."[33]

### COMPILATION DURING ABŪ BAKR'S ERA

Following the Prophet's death in 11/632, Abū Bakr was chosen by the majority of Companions as the leader of the burgeoning Muslim community. Upon the Prophet's passing, incidents of separatism flared up here and there. Chief among them was the claim of Musaylimah the Liar, whose stronghold was in the Yamāmah region in central Arabia and whose forces exceeded forty thousand. When the Muslim army marched against them in battle, the Muslims were victorious, but suffered heavy losses. Many Companions were martyred, and yet Musaylimah was only one of eleven leaders who had openly proclaimed some form of opposition. ᶜUmar feared that with Yamāmah and all other ongoing theaters of war, the community of the *ḥuffāẓ* (those who had memorized the Quran by heart) would soon be wiped

32. Certain more esoteric sciences dealing with the mysteries of the Quran, such as *jafr,* the science that treats the numerical symbolism of the letters of the Arabic alphabet (like gematria in the Kabbalistic sciences dealing with the Torah), reveal the significance of the existing order and numbering of the *sūrah*s in relation to their content and to each other. A clear indication of this matter is found in Ibn ᶜArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* ("The Makkan Illuminations"), a main section of which has 114 chapters, each related to a particular *sūrah* and following their order in the Quran, but in reverse.

33. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī,* 9:12. Note the use in this report of the word "collected" rather than "written."

out.[34] He therefore counseled the Caliph, Abū Bakr, to take the initiative and begin collecting the text of the Quran.

Once he became of the same mind as ʿUmar, Abū Bakr entrusted this momentous task to Zayd ibn Thābit, to whom he remarked, "You are young and intelligent. You used to record the revelations for the Prophet, and we know of nothing that would discredit you."[35] And with this pronouncement, Abū Bakr put his seal of approval upon Zayd's qualifications: he was young (in his early twenties) and therefore full of vitality and energy, literate, and intelligent (i.e., he possessed the necessary competence for the task), and he had prior experience in recording the revelations. In addition, Zayd had been one of the fortunate few to attend the Archangel Gabriel's recitations of the Quran with the Prophet during the month of Ramadan.

*Abū Bakr's Instructions to Zayd*

The Quranic injunction to write down the terms of business transactions and have them witnessed by two people (2:282) became the basis for the method followed by Zayd. Abū Bakr instructed Zayd to sit at the entrance to the mosque in Madinah and to record only those verses of the Quran brought to him that were validated by two witnesses. Very soon the project blossomed into a true community effort. Though the focus was on primary written sources recorded on parchment, animal skin and bones, wooden planks, and such, the writings were not only verified against each other, but also against the memories of those who had learned the verses directly from the Prophet. Zayd applied the same stringent conditions for acceptance whether the source was written or based on human memory, and in either case he always insisted on two witnesses.[36] In any case human memory was only used to reinforce the written word, not to substitute for it. According to the *Ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1448), Abū Bakr had authorized Zayd to record only what was available in written form. That is why Zayd abstained from including the last two verses of *Sūrah* 9 until he came upon them in written form even though he and his fellow Companions could recall them perfectly well from memory.[37]

This procedure shows that nothing was taken for granted, not even Zayd's own recording and memorization of the revealed verses, and that everything required corroboration. Once complete, the compiled Quran, called the *Ṣuḥuf,* was saved in the "state archives" under the Caliph's custodianship.[38] On his deathbed Abū Bakr entrusted this text to his successor, ʿUmar, whose reign witnessed the blossoming of schools for the memorization of the Quran in Arabia as well as in the Fertile Crescent

34. One author compiled a list of 118 *ḥuffāẓ* from the six to seven hundred martyrs killed in the Battle of Yamāmah. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān,* 1:50.

35. Al-Bukhārī 66.3 (no. 5037).

36. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī,* 9:14.

37. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī,* 9:13.

38. Al-Bukhārī 66.3 (no. 5037).

area. Toward the end of 23/644 Caliph ᶜUmar was fatally stabbed by a slave, but, before passing away, he handed over the *Ṣuḥuf* to his daughter Ḥafṣah, who was a widow of the Prophet.

*Zayd's Methodology in Compiling the Quran*

The typical procedure in collating manuscripts is to compare different copies of the same work. Of course not all copies are equal. In modern times the German orientalist Gotthelf Bergsträsser set out a few important rules[39] for this kind of scholarship:

1. Older copes are usually more reliable than newer ones.
2. Copies that were revised and corrected by the scribe through comparison with the mother manuscript are superior to those that lack this step.
3. If the original is extant, any copy made from it has no significance.[40]

For those who consider modern methods of scholarship sacrosanct, it is of some interest to note that the same benchmarks set by leading fourteenth/twentieth-century orientalists were applied by Zayd fourteen centuries ago in compiling the Quran. The Prophet's time in Madinah had been one of intense scribal activity, and many Companions possessed verses that were copied from the parchments, wooden planks, and other materials of friends and relatives.[41] Zayd, however, limited himself to those writings that were transcribed under the Prophet's supervision (rule 3), thereby guaranteeing the greatest possible accuracy. Zayd had memorized the Quran and inscribed much of it while seated before the Prophet; his memory and writings could only be compared with material of the same status, not with second- or thirdhand reports and copies.

## COMPILATION DURING ᶜUTHMĀN'S ERA

During the reign of ᶜUthmān (24–36/644–56), the third Caliph, Muslims were engaged in battles in the expanses of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the north. The fighting forces hailed from various tribes and provinces, each with its own dialect, and the resulting regional differences over the pronunciation of the Quran caused some friction within the ranks. Eyeing these tensions firsthand, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān warned ᶜUthmān, "O Caliph, take this *ummah* (community) in hand before they differ about their Book like the Christians and Jews."[42] In an assembly ᶜUthmān sought

39. Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Uṣūl naqd al-nuṣūṣ wa-nashr al-kutub* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, Markaz Taḥqīq al-Turāth, 1969), 14–20.

40. This rule was also confirmed in Régis Blachère and Jean Sauvaget, *Règles pour éditions et traductions de textes arabes* (Paris: Société édition "Les Belles lettres," 1945).

41. In fact, Companions who were unable to write often appeared at the doorway to the Prophet's Mosque looking for volunteers to write for them. See al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-kubrā*, 6:16.

42. Al-Bukhārī 66.3 (no. 5038).

the people's advice, and when asked for his own view, his solution was simple and clear: "I see that we should provide the people with a single *muṣḥaf,* so that there is neither division nor discord." All those in the assembly applauded his idea.[43]

There are two accounts of the way ᶜUthmān proceeded with this task. According to the first version, ᶜUthmān made copies based exclusively on the *Ṣuḥuf* kept in Ḥafṣah's custody.[44] According to the second version, ᶜUthmān authorized a fresh compilation using primary sources and then double-checked it against the *Ṣuḥuf.*[45] In either case the *Ṣuḥuf* played the major role in the new compilation, which came to be called the *Muṣḥaf.*

Al-Barāᵓ reports the first version of the story:

> So ᶜUthmān sent Ḥafṣah a message stating, "Send us the *Ṣuḥuf* so that we may make perfect copies and then return the *Ṣuḥuf* back to you." Ḥafṣah sent it to ᶜUthmān, who ordered Zayd ibn Thābit, ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, Saᶜīd ibn al-ᶜĀṣ, and ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām to make duplicate copies. He told the three Qurayshī men, "Should you disagree with Zayd ibn Thābit on any point regarding the Quran, write it in the dialect of the Quraysh, as the Quran was revealed in their tongue." They did so, and after they had prepared several copies ᶜUthmān returned the *Ṣuḥuf* to Ḥafṣah.[46]

Ibn Ḥajar comments on the Caliph's choice of the Qurayshī dialect: since all Arabic dialects would be of equal difficulty for non-Arabs who desire to read the Quran, the most favorable choice is the Qurayshī dialect, because that is the dialect in which the revelation (*waḥy*) was revealed.[47]

### SANCTIONING OF THE *MUṢḤAF*

The definitive copy of the *Muṣḥaf* was read to the Companions in ᶜUthmān's presence.[48] When the final recitation was over, ᶜUthmān dispatched certified duplicate copies to be made for distribution throughout the provinces of the Islamic state. People were also encouraged to make duplicate copies of the *Muṣḥaf* for their own personal use. Yet, after this process was over there remained the unfinished task of taking out of circulation other existing copies. There was now no need for the numerous fragments of the Quran in public circulation, so with unanimous consent

43. Ibn Abī Dāᵓūd, *al-Maṣāḥif,* p. 22.

44. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maᶜrifah, AH 1379), 9:16 (no. 4987).

45. Ibn Saᶜd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 3/2:62.

46. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī,* 9:11, no. 4987; Ibn Abī Dāᵓūd, *al-Maṣāḥif,* pp. 19–20; Abū ᶜUbayd, *al-Faḍāᵓil,* p. 282.

47. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī,* 9:27.

48. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Faḍāᵓil,* 7:450.

all such fragments were burned. According to Muṣᶜab ibn Saᶜd, the people were rather pleased and no one voiced any objections,[49] a statement seconded by ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who declared that everything was done "in clear view of us all [i.e., with our consent]."[50]

It is in fact known that ᶜAlī himself was often consulted when the definitive *Muṣḥaf* was being prepared. Shiite sources also assert that ᶜAlī himself had a written copy of the Quran, which was also used to compare various passages. To this day there are, in several libraries, pages of the Quran whose calligraphy is attributed to ᶜAlī, who is in fact considered the creator of the Kūfic style of Quranic calligraphy by Islamic master calligraphers.

According to one report, six certified copies of the ᶜUthmānī *Muṣḥaf* were penned, of which five were dispatched to various parts of the Islamic state and one kept by ᶜUthmān himself for personal use. With each dispatched copy the Caliph also sent along a *qāriʾ* ("reciter"). The reciters included Zayd ibn Thābit, sent to Madinah; ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Ṣāʾib, to Makkah; al-Mughīrah ibn Shihāb, to Syria; ᶜĀmir ibn ᶜAbd Qays, to Basra; and ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, to Kufa. But why send along a reciter? Sending a scholar with every *muṣḥaf* emphasized that proper recitation was learned through direct contact with teachers whose transmission channels reached back to the Prophet himself and could not depend simply on the written script and spelling conventions.[51]

Accompanying each certified copy was also ᶜUthmān's decree that all personal fragments of the Quran differing from the *Muṣḥaf* be burned.[52] Ibn Ḥajar mentions that despite the use of the word "burn" in the decree, it is possible that individuals erased the ink rather than burning the fragment.[53] Radiocarbon dating of a recently discovered *muṣḥaf* palimpsest (referring to a parchment whose writing has been washed off or erased and then written over, creating two different layers of text), has revealed with 90 percent confidence that the palimsest can be dated earlier than 34/654,[54] placing it very close to the end of ᶜUthmān's reign. It is possible that this parchment was one of those fragments that was erased (in lieu of burning) and copied over with the text from the official *Muṣḥaf*.

The second reason for sending a *qāriʾ* with each copy was so that no recitation would be made of the text that was counter to the written script of the *Muṣḥaf*.

49. Abū ᶜUbayd, *al-Faḍāʾil,* p. 284; see also Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *al-Maṣāḥif,* p. 22.

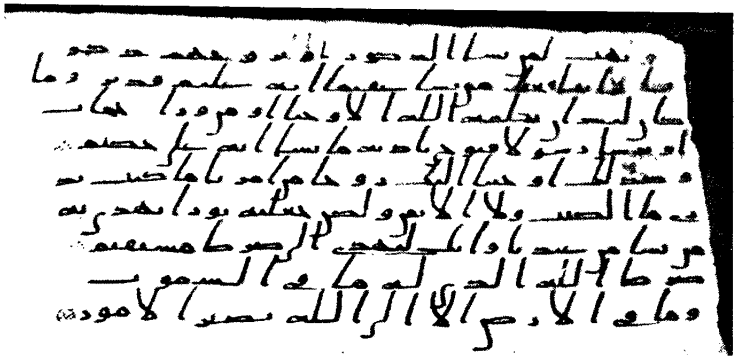
50. Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *al-Maṣāḥif,* p. 22.

51. ᶜAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī, "al-Qirāʾāt fī naẓar al-mustashriqīn wa'l-mulḥidīn," *Majallat al-Azhar* 43, no. 2 (March 1971): 175.

52. Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *al-Maṣāḥif,* pp. 19–20; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Faḍāʾil,* 7:442.

53. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī,* 9:21.

54. Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurʾān of the Prophet," *Arabica* 57, no. 4 (Sept. 2010): 343–436. While displaying the figure for illustrative purposes, I must point out that I disagree with some of their conclusions.



A parchment of a palimpsest *muṣḥaf* (Stanford '07 verso).

ᶜUthmān's script and spelling became the new standard, and from then on all reading and learning of the Quran by Muslims has been always based on the text thus established by ᶜUthmān.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ᶜUTHMĀNĪ *MUṢḤAF*

The official copies made under ᶜUthmān's supervision were largely consonantal, frequently dropping vowels, and with no dots. Being devoid of dots, the text could easily be read in many erroneous ways, and some orientalists claim that that is indeed what people did (see "Origin of Multiple Readings," below). But ᶜUthmān's objective was precisely the opposite: to eliminate all circumstances leading to disputes in recitation. Sending a *muṣḥaf* by itself or a reciter at liberty to devise any reading he chose would not have achieved this objective. But by sending both concurrently, ᶜUthmān brilliantly achieved the unity he sought to establish within the Islamic community.

It was not long before contemporary scholars began inspecting these official *muṣḥafs*. Many traveled to the various locales that had received a copy and began scrutinizing them, letter by letter, to uncover any inconsistencies between the copies. Their conclusion was that the six ᶜUthmānic *muṣḥafs* were almost perfectly congruent with each other. The minor deviations between them can be summarized as follows: (1) an extra *alif* in 11 places; (2) an extra *wāw* in 8 places; (3) an extra character (other than *alif* or *wāw*) in 16 places; (4) a character in place of another in 6 places; (5) an extra *min* in 9:100; and (6) an extra *huwa* in 57:24.[55] These amount to a mere 43 letters out of the 323,671 letters in the Quran. Moreover, none of the variants cause any changes in the meaning of the verse. Interestingly, however, keeping these "multiple readings" was deliberate. While preparing the official copies, Zayd, finding in each case two readings

55. Abū ᶜUbayd, *al-Faḍāʾil,* pp. 328–33; see also ᶜUthmān ibn Saᶜīd al-Dānī, *al-Muqniᶜ fī maᶜrifat marsūm maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār,* pp. 112–14.

to be authentic and of equal status, retained them in different *muṣḥafs*.[56] Relegating one of them to the margins would have implied inferior status, and placing them side by side would engender confusion, but by placing each variant in a separate copy he gave both readings their just due.

## EXTANT *MUṢḤAFS* ASCRIBED TO ʿUTHMĀN

According to many scholars, the official copies ʿUthmān dispatched are long lost, but in various parts of the world there are a handful of copies of the Quran that are popularly attributed to him, each bearing the label "*Muṣḥaf* of ʿUthmān," though not all scholars agree that they are truly ʿUthmānic. They are preserved at the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul; at the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, also in Istanbul; in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; at the al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī Mosque in Cairo; and at the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg, Russia.[57] Based on the existing description of the ʿUthmānī *Muṣḥaf*, which none of them fits exactly, the paleographic evidence suggests that these copies of the Quran are from a somewhat later period, possibly the second half of the first century or the first half of the second AH. What is more heartening is that, even though none of them is probably the original of any of ʿUthmān's six official copies, they all abide by one of the two multiple readings inserted by Zayd ibn Thābit into separate *muṣḥafs* at each of the forty-three positions mentioned above. The only exception to this fact is the *muṣḥaf* in Tashkent. In any case there is every reason to believe that these very early manuscripts were copied very scrupulously from the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥafs*.

Among the so-called *muṣḥafs* of ʿUthmān, the most celebrated is the one in Tashkent. It is also the one with the richest history and the saddest fate. Initially housed in Damascus, it caught the eye of Tamerlane after he sacked the city, and he had it transported to Samarqand. In 1868 the Russians overran Samarqand and moved the *muṣḥaf* to the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg. As the Bolsheviks advanced near the end of World War I, General Ali Akbar Bashi of the Imperial Army did not trust the young revolutionaries and hurriedly sent it to safety in Tashkent under armed guard. As a result of an 1891 article by a Russian orientalist describing this text, orientalist interest in the *muṣḥaf* became so pronounced that S. Pissareff opted to publish a full-size facsimile edition. Before doing so, he made the horrendous decision to retrace with fresh ink those folios that had faded over time, in the course of which he introduced many "unintentional" alterations into the text.[58] As the text has been corrupted, it is now both pointless and impossible to use it as a serious resource for textual study.

56. Abū ʿUbayd, *al-Faḍāʾil*, p. 333; and al-Dānī, *al-Muqniʿ*, pp. 118–19.

57. For a detailed study of these *muṣḥafs*, see Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, *The History of the Qurʾanic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Azami Publishing House, 2008), chap. 11.

58. Arthur Jeffery and Isaac Mendelsohn, "The Orthography of the Samarqand Qurʾān Codex," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 62, no. 3 (1942): 176.

## *Origin of Multiple Readings*

As mentioned earlier, the ᶜUthmānī *Muṣḥaf* was completely dotless and without marks indicating declensions. The Arabic word for "dots" is *nuqaṭ,* and it is used for referring to skeletal dots as well as diacritical marks; declension marks are called *iᶜrāb.* The former are dots that are placed over or under letters to differentiate them from others sharing the same skeleton, for example, *ḥāʾ* (ح), *khāʾ* (خ), and *jīm* (ج), much like è, é, ê, and ë in the Latin alphabet used in some European languages. *Iᶜrāb* refers to the dots or markings that are used to indicate the sound of short vowels (a, o, i). The position of *iᶜrāb* can also change the meaning of words such as *inna* (إنّ) and *anna* (أنّ).

Could this dotlessness and lack of declension marks cause divergences in the readings of the Quran? The answer in some cases could be yes if one had only the written text. Clearly a word such as حمل can be read as *ḥamal, khamal,* or *jamal* depending on where the dot is on the first letter or if there is a dot, though not all such permutations will necessarily correspond to existing Arabic words. In practice, however, the answer to the question is no, because the correct *qirāʾah* ("recitation") originated from the Prophet himself and was known to those who were scholars of the Quran.

It must be noted that in the early Islamic period people were not purchasing *muṣḥafs* casually from the local bazaar and then learning to read them by themselves at their convenience. Verbal schooling from a certified instructor was required. No official reading originated from a vacuum or from personal choice or guesswork. In the case of more than one authoritative reading for a particular word, the source for the existence of the two readings is itself always traced back to the Prophet. Copies of the Quran were later produced with complete dots, markings, and *iᶜrāb,* so that everyone who knew Arabic could read it correctly.

The spread of Islam over the Arabian Peninsula meant the assimilation of new tribes with new dialects.[59] For some the Qurayshī dialect proved difficult. The Companion Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb reports:

> The Prophet encountered Gabriel on the outskirts of Madinah and told him, "I have been sent to a nation of illiterates; among them are the elder with his walking stick, the aged woman, and the young." Gabriel replied, "So command them to recite the Quran in seven dialects (*aḥruf*)."[60]

59. To cite an example from the English-speaking world, it is estimated that the number of U.S. dialects ranges from a basic three (New England, Southern, and Western/General America) to twenty-four or more. Some researchers claim it is impossible to count the number of dialects in the United States due to a loose definition of the term; thousands of cities and towns have their own subdialects. See Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes, *American English: Dialects and Variation,* 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

60. Aḥmad 9.1 (no. 21595).

Over twenty Companions have narrated *aḥādīth* stating that the Quran was revealed in seven dialects.[61] Most agreed that the main objective was to assist those who were not used to the Qurayshī dialect in reciting the Quran. Zayd ibn Thābit said, "The *qirāʾah* is a *sunnah* that is strictly to be adhered to."[62] Some dislike the term "variant reading" and prefer "multiple readings," which is a far more accurate description. The word "variant" arises, by definition, from uncertainty. This is not the case here. As the sole human being chosen by God to receive the Quranic revelation (*waḥy*), the Prophet Muhammad himself taught specific verses in multiple ways. The doubt factor, which the word "variant" conveys, does not apply here.

But let us for the sake of argument return to the issue of whether dotlessness can cause discrepancy in the reading of the Quran. Many Quranic phrases contextually allow the inclusion of more than one set of dots and diacritical markings. In the vast majority of cases, however, scholars recite them in just one way. When a variation does arise (which is rare), the skeleton of both readings remains faithful to the ʿUthmānī *Muṣḥaf,* and each group can justify its reading based on a chain of authority leading all the way back to the Prophet. Had reciters been at liberty to supply their own dots and marks, as claimed by some orientalists, the list of variants would run into the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. Consider, for example, the skeletal بعلمه. Possible readings are بِعِلمِه, يُعلِّمه, نُعلِّمه, or تُعلَّمهُ, which are all legitimate from the linguistic point of view. Going over the entire *Muṣḥaf,* the Quranic scholar Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) counted roughly only one thousand multiple readings. These are due to the varying placement of dots and diacritical markings on the skeletal backbone of the ʿUthmānī *Muṣḥaf.* For example, the skeletal ملك occurs in 1:3; 3:26; and 113:2, and contextually it could be read in all three verses as either مالك (*mālik*) or ملك (*malik*). However, only in 1:3 is it read both ways (both backed by a valid *qirāʾah*), while in the other two it is unanimously read only one way. There are thousands of instances where two forms of a word are equally valid contextually, but only one is collectively used.

### THE EXAMPLE OF THE WRITING OF ALIF

In Madinah the Prophet employed many scribes, often from different tribes and localities, who were possibly accustomed to varying dialects and spelling conventions. For example, a letter dictated by the Prophet to Khālid ibn Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ reveals a few peculiarities. The word كان (*kāna,* usually spelled with a *kāf, alif,* and *nūn*) is written كون (with a *waw* instead of an *alif* ), and حتى (*ḥattā,* usually spelled with a *ḥāʾ, tāʾ,* and *alif maqṣūrah*) is spelled حتا (with a normal *alif* instead of an *alif maqṣūrah*).[63] There is no shortage of evidence regarding the variance in writing styles during the early days

61. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 1:131–41.

62. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 1:211. The word *sunnah* means the wonts or ways of the Prophet.

63. For details see Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *al-Maṣāḥif,* p. 104.

of Islam. This comes as no surprise when we consider, in our time, the spelling differences, for example, between American and British English.[64] Standardized spellings are in fact mostly a modern phenomenon. Variant spellings of individual words were common even in printed books. On the opening page of St. John's Gospel in the 1526 Tyndale English Bible, we note that "that" is spelled "that" and "thatt" on the same page, "with" is spelled "with" and "wyth," and "of" is spelled both "of" and "off."[65]

In Arabic, the letter *alif* (ا) is of particular interest. There are many instances where *alif* is pronounced but not written. For example, 2:9 in ᶜUthmān's *Muṣḥaf* is written يخدعون الله while it is actually pronounced يخادعون الله. Similarly السماوات (*al-samāwāt*) is mostly spelled السموت, that is, without *alif*. Most modern printed *muṣḥaf*s adhere faithfully to the ᶜUthmānī spelling system and there is a reluctance to deviate from its orthography. Once the famous scholar Imam Mālik (d. 179/795) was solicited for his legal opinion on whether one should copy the *Muṣḥaf* afresh utilizing the latest spelling conventions; he resisted the idea, except perhaps for schoolchildren. Another aspect of irregularity with *alif* in the ᶜUthmānī *Muṣḥaf* is that it may be written as a dotless *yāʾ*, for example, مأوىهم (*maʾwāhum*). With the oral transmission of the Quran, the pronunciation is never left in doubt even with these irregularities.

Even during the lifetime of the Companions a book appeared treating the subject of multiple readings on a small scale. Over time large works came to be written comparing the recitation of famous scholars from different centers and culminating in the work of figures such as Ibn Mujāhid. From the Islamic point of the view the codification of the Quran has been the object of continuous and meticulous study. The traditional Islamic position is not that the history of the *muṣḥaf* is closed to systematic inquiry, but rather that it has always been subject to such study and that the traditional Islamic account of the transmission and recording of the Quran is the one that is best supported by the available evidence. New theories related to the recording and transmission of the text often are no more than reinterpretations of historical evidence already known to the Islamic intellectual tradition for a millennium, and they are usually based on a set of assumptions brought to the textual evidence rather than deduced in some systematic way from it. Although contemporary scholars outside of the Islamic context have offered a range of imaginative interpretations to get to the "real" Quran, those unfamiliar with the Islamic intellectual tradition should remember that every last "variant" or "alternate reading" used as evidence that the classical Islamic account is inaccurate comes from the Islamic intellectual tradition itself.[66]

64. Compare "color," "center," "organize," and "program" (U.S.) with "colour," "centre," "organise," and "programme" (U.K.).

65. This is true in other languages as well. Until 1901 the German language had no unified spelling rules; e.g., *Thor* and *Tor* were equally acceptable variants for the word meaning "gate."

66. A detailed and fully documented discussion of these and other related issues can be found in Mohammad Mustafa al-Azami, *The History of the Qurʾanic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Azami Publishing House, 2008).

# QURANIC ARABIC

*Its Characteristics and Impact on Arabic Language and Literature and the Languages and Literatures of Other Islamic Peoples*

Muhammad Abdel Haleem

The Quran, which was revealed in Arabic, has had a profound and lasting effect on the theology, language, and culture of the Arab and non-Arab Islamic peoples in their various countries. Theologically, it is the Arabic text, the direct Word of God, that is considered the true Quran, which is read in acts of worship. Translations of the Quran are deemed to be merely renderings of the meanings of the Quran; no translation can be taken to be the direct Word of God in the same way as the Arabic, and thus none has the same status. In many Muslim countries, translations of the Quran are not permitted unless they are accompanied by the Arabic text.

All Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, learn and read the Quran, or parts of it, in Arabic in order to have the satisfaction and blessing of reciting the Holy Speech—the very same words that were uttered from the mouth of the Prophet and recited by his Companions; the same words that the Islamic canonical prayers are required to be spoken in; the same words that have been uttered by successive generations of Muslims in different lands throughout the Islamic era. No translation can claim this status. In fact, it is its connection with the Quran that has kept the Arabic language alive and given it an unrivaled position in the central area of the Islamic world, the Arab Middle Eastern and North African countries. The literary language, common to all Arabs, is used for writing, education, and formal speech.[1]

## *Quranic Arabic as the Language of Divine Speech*

*Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created* (96:1). This command, sent down to Muhammad in AD 610, was the first verse of the Quran to be revealed. The word *iqra'*

1. Around the beginning of the fourteenth/twentieth century in Egypt, for instance, there were calls for the adoption of English or the Roman script for writing or even the local Arabic dialect of Egypt. These were fiercely rejected, because it would have meant severing the connection with the language of the Quran and the rich history of Arab Islamic culture.

("Read!" or "Recite!") is an order addressed to Muhammad, linguistically making the source of the speech outside of him. God is seen here to speak Himself directly to the Prophet.[2] Later on, other commands, including *qul* ("Say!"), which occurs in the Quran over three hundred times, are addressed to the Prophet. Likewise, he is told, *Convey* (*balligh*) *that which has been sent down* (*unzila*) *unto thee* (5:67). Other forms of the verbs *nazzala* and *anzala* ("to send down") occur over three hundred times in the body of the Quran, again stressing the fact that it has been sent down from God and is His direct Word. In addition to addressing the Prophet, God also speaks directly to various other people in the Quran: the believers who have accepted Islam and those who have not, whether disbelievers (*al-kāfirūn*), the recipients of earlier revelations (*ahl al-kitāb*), the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrāʾīl*), or humanity in general (*al-nās*).

In a further expression of this truth, the Quranic discourse often takes the form of God speaking in the first person, as in 2:152: *So remember Me, and I shall remember you. Give thanks unto Me, and disbelieve not in Me.* More often, God speaks in the first-person plural of majesty, as in 15:9: *Truly it is We who have sent down the Reminder, and surely We are its Preserver.* When God speaks of Himself in the third person, it is normally for the purpose of comparing Himself with the presumed gods, or "partners," ascribed to Him by the polytheists to stress that it is God, not others, Who creates:

> *God it is Who created you, then nourished you; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life. Is there anyone among those you ascribe as partners who does aught of that? Glory be to Him and exalted is He above the partners they ascribe.* (30:40)

Thus, the first characteristic of the language of the Quran is that it is viewed by Muslims as sacred language. The direct Divine mode of speech gives the Quran unique power and a gripping effect. As the Word of God, the Quran has unparalleled status in Arabic and Islam in general and has been crucial in the building of beliefs, laws, morals, and nearly all aspects of Islamic culture. When Muslims hear it, they bear in mind the Divine instruction: *And when the Quran is recited, hearken unto it, and listen, that haply you may receive mercy* (7:204). In accordance with its preeminent status as Divine Revelation, the Quran must be accurately recited according to the particular rules of *tajwīd* (proper recitation): even the rules for recitation of classical Arabic poetry, considered an art form in itself, come nowhere near the exacting requirements for reciting the Quran. Similarly, the act of writing the Quran is treated in a very special way. Indeed, the art of Arabic calligraphy was developed especially for writing down the Quran and has continued to be used for this purpose over the

2. The Archangel Gabriel merely transmitted the Quran to Muhammad: *It is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon thine heart* (26:192–94).

centuries.[3] Moreover, a copy of the Arabic Quran or any part of it is to be handled in a unique way: *None touch it, save those made pure,*[4] *a revelation from the Lord of the worlds* (56:79–80).

The collected written text of the Quran was the first book in the Arabic language. It was also the starting point around which and for the service of which the various branches of Arabic language studies were initiated and developed. It was in order to ensure correct reading of the Quran, especially when non-Arabs began to accept Islam, that Arabic grammar was first written down and developed.[5] The same is true of Arabic phonetics, whose function is to ensure proper pronunciation and recitation of the Quran. Similarly, the study of Arabic rhetoric (*balāghah*) developed as Quranic scholars endeavored to identify the secrets behind the surpassing language and inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Quran.

Branches of Islamic knowledge such as *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Quran), theology, Islamic Law, Sufism, and ethics and morals are likewise based on Quranic language, which permeates them. Even in their study of the principles of literary criticism Arab critics drew heavily on the text of the Quran. This can be seen, for example, in the celebrated work of the famous critic ʿAlī ibn al-Athīr (d. 636/1239), *al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib waʾl-shāʿir* (*On the Criticism of Prose and Poetry*). As stated by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), a writer on many subjects including Quranic studies and linguistics, the Quran is in fact the source for all branches of knowledge in Arabic.

## *Characteristics of the Conceptual Language of the Quran*

As seen above, the foremost characteristic of the language of the Quran is that it is for Muslims a sacred language. There are, however, several other concepts fundamental to the Quranic message that can be seen in its characteristic use of language and mode of expression.

### GUIDANCE

The overriding objective of this Divine Speech is guidance (*hudā*), a word that occurs over three hundred times in the Quran. Thus, in the first *sūrah, al-Fātiḥah,* the

3. See Yasin Hamid Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987); Martin Lings, *Splendours of Quran Calligraphy and Illumination* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2005).

4. A person touching the Quran has to be ritually clean.

5. In the Islamic educational system, learning grammar is connected, to this day, with the Quran. In my first grammar lessons, at the primary school of Al-Azhar in Cairo (opened in 361/972), we were told that the status of grammar was very elevated because it ensures correct understanding and reading of the Arabic text of the Quran and as such its study was an obligation of the Muslim community. See M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, "Early Islamic theological and juristic terminology: *Kitāb al ḥudūd fi'l-uṣūl,* by Ibn Fūrak," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54, no. 1 (1991): 5.

believers recite, *Guide us upon the straight path* (1:6), and immediately at the beginning of the second *sūrah* it is announced that the Quran is guidance: *This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent* (2:2).

### CLARIFICATION

To achieve this guidance, the Quran uses clarification (*bayān*), a word that occurs 266 times in the text. The Quran describes itself on numerous occasions as making (things) clear (*mubīn*): *There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book, whereby God guides whosoever seeks His Contentment unto the ways of peace, and brings them forth from darkness into light* (5:15–16). To this end, the Quran addresses the Prophet: *We sent down unto thee the Book as a clarification of all things* (16:89)—all things, that is, pertaining to religion: beliefs, rituals, laws, ethics, and all the other teachings of Islam.[6] The Prophet is told that the Quran was revealed to him to explain to people what had been sent down to them (16:44) and is instructed: *Say, "It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve"* (18:29). Thus, the *bayān* of the distinction between truth and error is the Quran's primary objective, and on this basis it declares: *There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error* (2:256).

### SIGNS AND PROOFS

In making everything that it says intellectually clear, the Quran provides arguments even for the existence of God Himself and His Oneness,[7] for the prophethood of Muhammad,[8] for the Resurrection[9] and Judgment,[10] and for its legal and moral teachings. As part of this process, it provides *āyāt* (a word that occurs 382 times), meaning "signs" or "proofs":

> *And among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your tongues and colors. Truly in that are signs for those who know.* (30:21–22)

One of the remarkable characteristics of the language of the Quran is that the arguments and signs it uses satisfy the inquiries of those philosophers and intellectuals open to the truth of revelation and at the same time are equally available to ordinary men or women. After all, religion is meant for everybody, and such is the "magical"

6. Thus the Quran is not a book of history, science, or literature as such.
7. On His Existence, see, e.g., 30:19–27; 27:60–64; on His Oneness, 17:42–44; 21:21–24; 27:60–64.
8. See, e.g., 10:16; 21:3–9; 29:48; 52:30–34.
9. See, e.g., 36:77–82; 56:57–73.
10. See, e.g., 23:115–16; 38:27–28; 45:21–22; 95:7–8.

quality of the language of the Quran and the way it is received by Muslims all over the world.

### RATIONAL ARGUMENT

As the commentator Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) explains, at the time of the revelation, in addition to those who believed in the message, the Prophet Muhammad had to deal with all kinds of people: those who did not believe in an omnipotent God who had power and free will, those who believed in more than one god, those who disbelieved in prophethood, those who did not want to accept the Shariah, and those Christians and Jews who had their own beliefs and did not accept the prophethood of Muhammad.[11] In addressing all of these groups, the Quran produces logical arguments, accentuating the intellectual evidence that runs throughout the Quranic discourse. These arguments are often marked by various linguistic devices in the form of formulas such as:

*If you are in doubt, . . . then . . .* (*in kuntum fi rayb fa-inna,* 22:5)

*Do they say . . . ? Rather, . . .* (*am yaqulūna . . . bal,* 23:70; 32:3; 52:33)

*Bring forward your witnesses* (*halumma shuhadāʾakum,* 6:150)

*Bring your proof* (*hātu burhānakum,* 2:111; 21:24; 27:64; 28:75)

*Have they not considered . . . ?* (*a-fa-lam yaraw,* 34:9; *a-fa-lā yarawna,* 20:89; 21:44; *a-wa-lam yaraw,* 13:41; 16:48; 17:99)

*Have they not contemplated . . . ?* (*a-wa-lam yanẓurū,* 7:185)

*Let man consider . . .* (*fal yanẓur al-insān,* 80:24; 86:5)

### INSTRUCTION AND PERSUASION

Since the Quranic message came to change people's beliefs, it was not sufficient just to argue rationally with them. It requests the Prophet to *admonish them and speak to them about their souls with penetrating words* (*qawlan balīghan;* 4:63). The Quran seeks to persuade people to follow its teachings, especially when it is likely that they may think the instructions are hard to follow. An obvious example of this tendency toward persuasion can be seen in 2:183–87, which addresses the obligation to fast during Ramadan, demolishing, one by one, every possible obstacle that might arise in people's minds concerning this matter. Likewise, even when it introduces a legal penalty, a subject that in legal texts is usually presented in sharp, detached language, the Quran couches it in persuasive language that elicits compassion. Thus, after prescribing the

11. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* 32 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Bahiyyah al-Miṣriyyah, 1934–62), part 2, p. 90.

penalties for murder (*O you who believe! Retribution is prescribed for you*), it continues in the same verse:

> *But for one who receives any pardon from his brother, let it be observed honorably, and let the restitution be made to him with goodness. That is an alleviation from your Lord, and a mercy. Whosoever transgresses after that shall have a painful punishment.* (2:178)

## EXHORTATION AND REMEMBRANCE OR REMINDING (*DHIKR*)

One final device of significance that the Quran uses to achieve its objective of guidance is that of reminding (*tadhkīr*) its audience. God declares in the Quran, *We have made the Quran easy to remember; so is there anyone who remembers* (*muddakir*)*?* (54:17; see also 44:58). The Quran describes itself as *dhikr* ("remembrance" or "reminding"), and this concept of *dhikr* in its various forms occurs 255 times in the Quran. People are reminded of God Himself (7:205; 8:2), of God's Favor (2:231; 8:26), His Power (19:67), His Punishment of earlier nations (14:5; 54:17, 22, 32, 40), and of the Hereafter, a reminder that occurs regularly throughout the Quran.

One feature of *dhikr* in the Quran is the multiple use of related material, particularly stories of earlier prophets. At a first glance, this may be seen as mere repetition, but different sections of these stories usually form integral parts of the arguments along with other material in the *sūrah*. In my study "The Quranic Employment of the Story of Noah,"[12] it is shown that the Noah story appears ten times in passages whose length varies from two to thirty-eight lines, and that in each case the material selected is suitable for its context in the *sūrah* and the historical context of its revelation. This device ensures that when people hear or read in their daily lives any particular *sūrah,* they will usually find in it the employment of sacred history along with material about God, His Power and Grace, the Hereafter, and so on, so that what they receive in a very powerful way is a full picture of the faith.

The Quran, as seen above, carries the message of Islam, which is not just a spiritual faith, but a religion that guides and governs all aspects of Muslim life. As such, it necessarily includes teachings relating to knowledge of reality (*ʿilm*), belief (*ʿaqīdah*), law (*Sharīʿah*), and ethics and morals (*akhlāq*). Having said this, the basis upon which everything is built is belief, the *ʿaqīdah,* and it is for this reason that this aspect of the revelation occupies the greater part of the Quran. As al-Rāzī points out:

> *Sharīʿah* provisions in the Quran occupy less than six hundred verses (out of 6,236). The rest of the Quran is taken up by explaining the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), prophethood, and refuting the claims of pagans and polytheists. As

12. Muhammad Abdel Haleem, "The Quranic Employment of the Story of Noah," *Journal of Quranic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006).

regards the verses that deal with stories, they are intended to show God's Wisdom and Power.[13]

## *Linguistic Characteristics of the Quran*

The Quran's interaction with listeners or readers, one of its most fundamental aspects, is manifested in various ways.

### AFFECTIVE SENTENCES

In addition to declarative sentences (*jumal khabariyyah*), the Quran frequently uses affective sentences (*jumal inshāʾiyyah*). This serves to involve readers or listeners, a very important consideration in Quranic discourse. It explains the frequent occurrence of imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory forms; of prohibitions, propositions, exhortations, and oaths; and of phrases expressing wishing, hoping, and supplication.

### VERBAL SENTENCES

Arabic has two types of sentences: nominal sentences, which start with a noun, as is common in English; and verbal sentences, which start with a verb, laying stress on the action itself. The Quran frequently utilizes the power of the verbal sentence. Within this type of sentence it uses the past tense for historical accounts, in its argumentation, and even when discussing the Afterlife. This is effective, for example, in making momentous events of the Afterlife (mentioned directly or indirectly on almost every page of the Quran) seem as if they are already here, a device crucial for Quranic discourse and techniques of persuasion. This may involve *iltifāt* (for which, see the section on grammar below).

### DIRECT SPEECH AND DIALOGUE

Direct speech, words represented (usually but not always by quotation marks) as spoken directly by someone, and dialogue, direct speech between two or more parties, occur frequently in the Quran. For example, the Quran depicts Moses speaking with God and Pharaoh (26:11–51), God speaking to the angels and Satan (Iblīs; e.g., 2:30–33; 38:71–85), and various prophets speaking with their communities (e.g., 11:25–35, 50–58, 61–68).[14] Dialogue is also used in descriptions of the Hereafter: the people in bliss express their joy and gratitude, while those in torment argue and blame one another, and sometimes the people in Paradise speak to those in Hell.[15]

13. Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* part 2, pp. 88–89.

14. See also Tammām Ḥassān, *al-Bayān fī rawāʾiʿ al-Qurʾān,* part 2 (Cairo: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2000), 275–89.

15. See 7:44–50; 34:30–33; 37:50–62; 40:47–50.

Part of the reason this narrative device is used in the Quranic discourse is that direct speech is more lively, dramatic, and easier to understand than third-person, reported speech. It also allows listeners to form their own judgment of characters and events as personalities emerge through the words they utter rather than through an indirect or secondhand report of what they said. The fact that the verb *qāla* ("he said") occurs in the Quran hundreds of times is some indication of how frequently direct speech and dialogue are used.

### EMPHASIS

Because of the Quran's need to press home its messages to people who doubted or denied them, it frequently employs emphasis, using all the particles available in Arabic, such as *inna* and *la-*, and the suffix *-anna* with the imperfect verb.

### GENERALIZATION

The Quran frequently uses generalization, since it maintains that it is for all people. It categorizes people using such plurals as "the believers" (*al-muʾminūn*), "the reverent" (*al-muttaqūn*), "the disbelievers" (*al-kāfirūn*), "the wrongdoers" (*al-ẓālimūn*), and so forth, and employs conditional sentences with grammatical particles such as "whoever" (*man*), "whatever" (*mā*), "whichever" (*ayy*), "wherever" (*haythumā*), and "whenever" (*aynamā*) and also the indefinite noun.

### CONTRAST

Contrast occurs naturally in a book that declares, in 18:29, *Say, "It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve,"* and is a central feature of Quranic style. One of the linguistic habits of the Quran is to contrast two classes of beings or things and their respective destinies. Thus, the Quran contrasts this world and the next (each occurring, normally together, exactly 115 times); believers and disbelievers; Paradise and Hell; angels and satans; life and death; secrecy and openness, and so on, all found to occur the same number of times.[16] Grammatically, contrast is achieved by such linguistic structures as *Whosoever . . . and whosoever . . .* or *As for one who . . . and as for one who . . .* (*man . . . wa man . . .*), as found in 4:123–24 and 92:5–8. Another frequently used device is *As for . . . and as for . . .* (*amma . . . wa-amma . . .*), as in, *On the Day when faces whiten and faces blacken. As for those whose faces blacken, . . . And as for those whose faces whiten, . . .* (3:106–7). Sometimes the contrasted elements follow each other without any conjunction, which shows the contrast even more powerfully, as in 89:25–30: *That Day none punishes as He punishes, and none binds as He binds. O thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting. Enter among My servants. Enter My Garden.*

16. ʿAbd al-Razzāq Nawfal, *al-Iʿjāz al-ʿadadī li'l-Qurʾān al-karīm*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shaʿb, 1975).

### FREQUENT USE OF ATTRIBUTES

The use of attributes (*ṣifāt*) is an important means of Quranic persuasion and argument, noticeable from the very opening words of the Quran: *Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful* (1:2–3). Because He has such Attributes, He is worthy of praise and worship. The required path is the *straight* one, the one *of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray* (1:6–7). Such qualifications make it worthwhile to ask God's Guidance toward the path. Believers are also described using many attributes (see, e.g., 23:1–10; 70:22–29).

In a sentence where a number of adjectives of various kinds occur, the Quran tends to arrange them in order of length with the shortest first. For example, 40:28: *A believing man from the House of Pharaoh who was concealing his belief said . . .* (*Wa qāla rajulun muʾminun min āli Firʿawna yaktumu īmānahu . . .*). Here we have a single adjective, *believing* (*muʾminun*), coming before a prepositional phrase, *from the House of Pharaoh* (*min āli Firʿawna*), and then we have the adjectival clause, *who was concealing his belief* (*yaktumu īmānahu*).[17] According to Arabic conventions, this particular order serves to balance the sentence and maintain a good, effective rhythm.

## *Quranic Grammar*

As we have seen, one overriding objective of the Quran is to speak with penetrating words. It is clear from the foregoing that the Quran uses Arabic grammar and style together to serve this purpose. In general, grammar may follow the normal rules (a process known as *istiṣḥāb al-aṣl*). Considerations of style, however, give priority to "departure from the original norm" (*al-ʿudūl ʿan al-aṣl*) or, as the scholars of *balāghah* say, "departure from what is normally expected" (*al-khurūj ʿalā muqtaḍaʾl-ẓāhir*), but only "for considerations required by the situation in certain contexts."[18]

### GRAMMATICAL SHIFTS FOR RHETORICAL PURPOSES

An obvious area for departure from what is expected is agreement between the pronoun and its referent. This is done first and foremost in what is known as *iltifāt*, grammatical shifts for rhetorical purposes, and is a widespread feature of Quranic style. Traditionally, Arab writers have classified this feature among the "remarkable things and exquisite subtleties we have found in the glorious Quran."[19] *Iltifāt* involves changes to verbal agreement made according to effective patterns and for stylistic reasons.

17. For additional examples, see, e.g., 2:68–69; 23:117.

18. Aḥmad al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir al-balāghah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 239.

19. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib waʾl-shāʿir*, ed. M. M. A. al-Qazwīnī (793/1338; Cairo: al-Ḥalabī, 1971), 2:43–45. Without referring to the Arabic term, Theodor Nöldeke remarks in discussing some examples of this feature that "the grammatical persons change from time to time in the Quran in an unusual and not beautiful way" (see *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* [Strasburg: Trübner, 1910]).

Rhetoricians have referred to *iltifāt* as *shajāʿat al-ʿarabiyyah,* as it shows, in their opinion, the "daring nature of the Arabic language." If any daring is to be attached to *iltifāt,* it should, above all, be the daring of the language of the Quran, since it employs this feature more extensively and in more variations than does Arabic poetry.[20] The hundreds of examples of *iltifāt* in the Quran show clearly that stylistic considerations can overrule grammar, but always for rhetorical purpose and without impairing the sense or causing any ambiguity. Without such rhetorical purpose, departure from the normal rules would be inadmissible (*mumtaniʿ*) according to the rules of rhetoric, and *iltifāt* can only be used with the proviso that the departure does not cause any confusion or obscurity (*labs*). Six types of *iltifāt* have been identified:[21]

1. Change in person, between first, second, and third person, which is the most common. For example, in *Is He Who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water for you from the sky, through which We make grow beautiful gardens, whose trees it is not for you to make grow [. . . ]? Is there a god alongside God?* (27:60), the shift from third person to the first-person plural of majesty occurs at a crucial point for the listeners (see also 14:4). There is a shift from first to third person in *Spend of that which We have provided you before death comes upon one of you and he says, "My Lord, wouldst that Thou grant me reprieve! . . . Yet God will not grant any soul reprieve when its term has come* (63:10–11). In this example, the shift makes the final statement independent and absolute; it also indicates the contrast with other gods, who do not have such power.

   An example of a shift from third to second person is *Praise be to God. . . . Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help* (1:2, 5). After establishing that praise is only due to the Creator, Who has such attributes to make Him truly worthy of praise and the only true source of help, worshippers turn to address God for the rest of the *sūrah* to ask for His Help.

   A shift from second to third person can be seen in *God has ordained mates for you. . . . He has ordained for you children and grandchildren. . . . Will they then believe in that which is false, and show ingratitude for the blessings of God?* (16:72). In this shift God turns to call everyone to witness the ingratitude of the people addressed in this verse.

2. Change in number, between singular, dual, and plural. For example, *I swear by the blaming soul. Does man suppose that We shall not gather his bones? Nay! But We are able to fashion even his fingers and toes* (75:2–4).

20. As can be seen from the fact that Ibn al-Athīr, when writing about rhetoric in prose and poetry, derived most of his examples of *iltifāt* from the Quran.

21. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, "Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes and Related Features in the Qurʾān," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55, no. 3 (1992): 407–32.

3. Change in addressee. For example, *We revealed unto Moses and his brother, "Appoint* (*you,* dual) *for your people houses in Egypt, and make your* (plural) *houses places of worship and perform the prayer, and give* (*thou,* singular) *glad tidings unto the believers"* (10:87).

4. Change in the tense of the verb. For example, *He it is Who created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot. Then He brings you forth as infants* (40:67).

5. Change in case marker. For example, *But those among them who are firmly rooted* (*al-rāsikhūn*) *in knowledge, and the believers, . . . those who perform* (*al-muqīmīn*) *the prayer and give the alms* (4:162), where the shift is from the nominative to the accusative, to highlight the importance of performing the prayer in this particular context.

6. Using nouns in place of pronouns.[22] For example, *We did not create Heaven and earth and whatsoever is between them in vain; that is the conjecture of those who disbelieve. So woe unto those who disbelieve in the Fire!* (38:27). Here the noun is used again, rather than a pronoun, to indicate that it is because they disbelieve that they face the Fire. It also makes the final clause more quotable.

## WORD ORDER

In certain cases the word order is fixed in the Arabic sentence, for example, between prepositions and the nouns they govern, and exception, conjunction, and interrogation, all of which must precede the noun. But there are also cases where the order is not fixed, such as the placement of the object in relation to the verb and its subject, and the predicate of the subject of the nominal sentence. In a non–fixed order sentence, the object may be introduced first to serve a stylistic purpose of restriction (*ḥaṣr*), as in 1:5: *Thee we worship* (*iyyāka naʿbudu*). Departure from the original word order in the sentence for a rhetorical purpose is very common in the Quran. Take, for example, 37:86: *Is it a perversion, gods apart from* (or lower than) *God, that you desire* (*aʾifkan ālihatan dūna ʾLlāhi turīdūn*)*?* The rhetorical question shows objection to what the disbelievers do, and the objection is arranged according to the order of strength. The strongest objection is that it is a *perversion* (*aʾifkan*); to be doing this with lower gods (*ālihatan dūna ʾLlāhi*) comes second in deserving rejection, and especially as these are below God; and the final objection is to the fact that this is all done of their own volition (*turīdūn*). An alternative order such as "Do you desire gods apart from God as a

22. See Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran: Themes and Style* (London: Tauris, 2001), 184–208.

perversion?" (*aturīdūna ālihatan dūn Allāh ʾifkan*) would make the statement and the objection much weaker.[23]

### ELLIPSIS

One mechanism to achieve conciseness is omission, or ellipsis (*ḥadhf*). One aspect of omission, which has been discussed by Abū Muḥammad ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, is that of the *muḍāf* (part of the *iḍāfa* construction).[24] An example of this kind of ellipsis is in 23:102: *As for those whose scales are heavy, it is they who shall prosper,* an implied possessive noun "with his deeds" that would have appeared after *heavy,* has been omitted. Sometimes a whole clause is omitted, for example, in 13:31: *If there were a Quran whereby the mountains were set in motion, or the earth was cleft, or the dead were made to speak;* the implied concluding clause "it would have been this one" is omitted.[25] See also 24:10: *Were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy;* the concluding clause is not supplied until v. 14.

## *Memorability*

One objective of the language of the Quran and how it is presented is to make it easy to remember. Linguistically this is seen in such features as quotable statements, stories, imagery, balance and contrast, and rhythm and rhyme. Contrast has already been discussed above. The remaining features of Quranic Arabic that contribute to its memorability can be summarized as follows:

### PROVERBIAL STATEMENTS

The Quran is well known for its short, proverbial statements (*ījāz*), as Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz rightly affirms.[26] The Quran frames its statements in such a way as to make them proverbial and capable of multiple meanings. For example, *God provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning* (*Wa'Llāhu yarzuqu man yashāʾu bi-ghayri ḥisāb;* 2:212; 3:37; 24:38). In Arabic this can mean, "God provides for whomever He will without counting or being grudging," or "without calling him to judgment in the Hereafter," or "without anyone there to criticize or suggest to Him why He should

23. See Ḥassān, *al-Bayān fī rawāʾiʿ al-Qurʾān,* 95.

24. See ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Sulamī, *Majāz al-Qurʾān,* ed. Muṣṭafā Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (London: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li'l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1999), 261–478.

25. The Makkans were demanding that the Prophet perform such miracles to convince them of his prophethood. The Quran explains that it is not in his nature to do so.

26. Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz says: "Place your hand wherever you wish on the text of the Quran and count the number of words in the statements you see. Then compare this to what you consider most eloquent outside the Quran and then compare the amount of meaning in the two texts. Consider further how many words you can drop or replace from the Quran without disturbing the meaning and purpose of the statement" (*al-Nabaʾ al-aẓīm* [Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, 2005], 147).

give to this one or that one this much or that," or "without the recipient expecting to get that much." Since the context is God's Power and Generosity, the multiple possible meanings enrich the statement and are all appropriate. This feature makes the Quran quotable for all sorts of situations. If we remember that the Prophet dealt with believers and nonbelievers of his time, that his mission lasted twenty-three years, and that he went through various stages from being persecuted to being a head of state, then we can understand why the Quranic text contains quotable statements for a great range of situations. This is one of the ways Muslims encounter the language of the Quran in everyday life.

### STORIES AND PARABLES

The Quran makes frequent use of stories and parables. Some of the best known of these are the stories of earlier prophets, such as Noah, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus, scattered throughout the text. Other examples of stories are those of the Companions of the Cave and others in *Sūrah* 18; Korah (28:76–83); the owners of the garden (68:17–32); the man with two gardens (18:32–43); Solomon and the ant, and Solomon and the queen of Sheba (27:15–44); and the people of Sheba (34:15–21). These are always used to illustrate arguments and ideas.

### IMAGERY

The use of symbolic imagery has been recognized as one of the most frequent, marked, and effective literary and rhetorical devices in the Quran.[27] One of the most famous aggregations of images and symbols is to be found in the Light Verse and the verse that follows:

> *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. Light upon light. . . . [It is] in houses . . . wherein His Name is remembered.* (24:35–36)

Comparison is made between the deeds of good people and those of people who disbelieve, which are

> *like a mirage upon a desert plain which a thirsty man supposes is water, till when he comes upon it, he does not find it to be anything, but finds God there. He will then pay him his reckoning in full. . . . Or like the darkness of a fathomless sea, covered by waves with waves above them and clouds above them—darknesses, one above the other. When one puts out one's hand, he can hardly see it. He for whom God has not appointed any light has no light.* (24:39–40)

27. Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fi'l-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1966).

To give but one more example: *That Day We shall roll up the sky like the rolling of scrolls for writings* (21:104).

## RHYTHM

Rhythm is a very obvious feature of the language of the Quran, not only in the early, short *sūrah*s, such as 79, 92, 99, and 100, but even in the longest *sūrah*, 2. Take 79:1–5, for example: *Wa'l-nāziᶜāti gharqā, wa'l-nāshiṭāti nashṭā, wa'l-sābiḥāti sabḥā, fa'l-sābiqāti sabqā, fa'l-mudabbirāti amrā.* Try sounding it out. Even if you do not pronounce the Arabic syllables correctly, you will hear an unmistakable rhythm. Tammām Ḥassān (d. 1432/2011) analyzed the stress patterns in the Quran and showed that the distance between each two successive major stresses is equal or nearly so, and this produces a marked rhythm.[28] For instance:

> *Aw ka-ṣayyibin min al-samāʾi fīhi ẓulumātun wa-raᶜdun wa-barqun yajᶜalūna aṣābiᶜahum fī ādhānihim min al-ṣawāᶜiqi ḥadhara'l-mawti wa'Llāhu muḥīṭun bi'l-kāfirīn.* (2:19)

## RHYME

Rhyme at the end of verses is a consistent stylistic feature in the Quran, which has an aesthetic effect. It also gives finality to the statements and accords with the general feature of classification and generalization, frequently using the plural endings *-ūn* and *-īn*. The ending of the verse can be an integral part of it (as in *Sūrah* 1) or a related comment (4:34–35: *Inna'Llāha kāna ᶜāliyyᵘⁿ kabīra. . . . Inna'Llāha kāna ᶜalīmᵘⁿ khabīra*; Truly God is Exalted, Great. . . . Truly God is Knowing, Aware); both form part of the total meaning of the verse and are not just for embellishment.[29] In addition to the rhyme, the frequent occurrence of long vowels and diphthongs, and nasalization add further to the sound effect.[30]

## THE ENDURING QURAN

These linguistic and stylistic qualities characteristic of the language of the Quran have been seen as the marks of great eloquence and used in Arabic literature throughout the ages. As noted above, the Quran was the starting point for all the branches of Arabic language scholarship. It was seen as a main source of literary language and style. All books on rhetoric (*balāghah*) take their examples mainly from the Quran. Oratory in Arabic relies for its effective quotations on the Quran. Quranic quotations occur not only in the works of classical writers, but also in modern ones. Nobel Prize–winner

28. Ḥassān, *al-Bayān fī rawāʾiᶜ al-Qurʾān,* 187.

29. See A. M. Omar, "The *fāṣilah* in the Qurʾan: Word, Context, and Meaning," *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 220–38.

30. Abdel Haleem, "Quranic Orthography: The Written Presentation of the Recited Text of the Quran," *Islamic Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1994): 171–92.

Naguib Mahfouz (d. 1427/2006), who learned the Quran as a child and continued to read it throughout his life, employed Quranic words and phrases verbatim in his early novels, where scores and even hundreds occur, and continued to do so, if more subtly, toward the end of his career.[31]

## *The Effects of Quranic Arabic on Other Muslim Languages and Literatures*

It was the Quran that took Arabic outside the Arabian Peninsula, making it an international language that displaced local languages in what are now the Arab countries and for several centuries in Muslim Spain. In Persia, Arabic became the dominant written language for several centuries, until Persian was reintroduced as the official language under the Samanids.

In fact, what is called the Persian language today was born from the introduction of Quranic Arabic terms into Middle Persian (prevalent during the Sassanid period up to the seventh century). During the Islamic period after the conquest of Persia by the Arab armies, Persians played a major role in the exposition of Arabic grammar; they also wrote numerous works in nearly every field in Arabic and continued to do so even after Persian became the literary and scholarly language of the eastern regions of the Islamic world. It was mostly these scholars, who were masters of Quranic Arabic, who introduced so many words and expressions from the Quran into Persian. The formal structure of the Quran even influenced Persian prosody. And it was mostly through Persian that Arabic words penetrated into languages of the Indian subcontinent such as Sindhi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, and Urdu,[32] not to speak of Iranian languages such as Kurdish and Pashto.

However, even when Arabic ceased to be the primary language of certain parts of the Muslim world, it remained a major source of vocabulary for many languages such as Berber, Swahili, Hausa, Malay, and Indonesian. "In all Islamic countries the influence of Arabic is pervasive, because of the highly language-specific nature of Islam; since the revealed book was inimitable, it could not be translated."[33] In Africa, "the expansion of Islam brought many of the cultures in the northern half of the continent under the Islamic sphere of influence, which resulted in hundreds of loanwords in the domain of religion, culture, and science."[34] In Hausa, the Quranic and other Islamic

31. Muḥammad Ḥasan ʿAbd Allāh, *al-Islāmiyyah wa'l-rūḥiyyah fī adab Najīb Maḥfūẓ* (al-Sālimiyyah: Maktabat Amal, 1972); Rajāʾ al-Naqqāsh, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām, 1998); Abdel Haleem, "Grammatical Shift," 432; Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qurʾan,* 207, n. 52.

32. These are all Indo-Aryan languages derived from Sanskrit. Of course all these languages have been influenced by Persian (and Arabic, lexically), but the languages remain Indo-Aryan. See any tree of the Indo-European languages.

33. See Kees Versteegh, *Arabic Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1997), 226–40.

34. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 229.

elements show far-reaching effect, and songs of preaching (*waᶜazī,* Arabic *waᶜẓ*) constitute what is probably the biggest category in Hausa poetry.[35]

Likewise, the influence of the Quran on Swahili literature in East Africa has been profound. The Quran in its text "with its *sūrah*s, formulas, etc., and the influence of Islam as a religion with its values, ethics, stories, and most effectively, poetry, are the areas that bear the most influence."[36] The name for the three genres of Swahili literature, the novel (*riwaya*), drama (*tamthilia*), and poetry (*shairi*), are all Arabic. Approximately 50 percent of the vocabulary of Swahili derives etymologically from Arabic.[37]

In the Ottoman Empire, Turkish became the official language of the state, but at the same time Persian and Arabic were maintained as the languages of culture. "Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the lexical material of Turkish was almost completely taken from Arabic and Persian."[38] Even after Ataturk's attempt to purify the Turkish language of Arabic and Persian terms, a large number of loanwords from these languages (or from Arabic through Persian) are still present.[39]

It can be said with certainty that "of all the languages with which Arabic came into contact, Persian is the one that was most influenced in this process."[40] As for the Indian subcontinent, "the impact of Arabic on Persian and other modern Indian languages strongly correlates with the degree of Islamization which their speakers underwent."[41] In Bangladesh "there is a strong tendency to replace older Sanskrit words with Arabic/Persian loans, especially in the domain of religion."[42] In Indonesia, where the vast majority are Muslims, Arabic is regarded as the sacred language of their religion, as it is elsewhere in the Islamic world, and its position as a religious language is unshaken. Most Indonesians and also Malaysians have a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic because of their Quranic training.[43] In Malay literature, stories such as *Hikayat Iskandar Dzulkarnain* (from 18:83–98) as well as works of moral guidance and advice show the influence of the Quran and its language. One very obvious example of the influence of religious Arabic is the celebrated poem by Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Saᶜīd al-Būṣīrī (d. 695/1294) in praise of the Prophet known as the *Burdah.* This has been adopted as part of the literature of nearly all Muslim peoples of Asia and Africa,

35. Mervyn Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1975), 27.

36. Farouk Topan, "Swahili as a Religious Language," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22, no. 4 (1992): 331–49; "Projecting Islam: Narrative in Swahili Poetry," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2001): 107–19; "Muslim Literature in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Muslim Almanac,* ed. Azim Nanji (New York: Gale Research, 1996), 365–69.

37. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 231.

38. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 231.

39. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 234.

40. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 232.

41. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 237.

42. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 237.

43. Versteegh, *Arabic Language,* 238.

has been repeatedly performed, and has gained much acclaim. Moreover, Quranic vocabulary is an important part of this celebrated poem.[44]

## *The Quran in Daily Life and in Islamic Studies*

The Quran was, from the beginning, committed to memory by the first Muslims. Throughout Islamic history, many Muslims, both Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking, men, women, and children, have memorized and continued to memorize the whole Quran or large parts of it. Nowadays there are international Quranic recitation competitions held in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Iran, to name but a few countries, sometimes state-funded. The first *sūrah* of the Quran, *al-Fātiḥah,*[45] which is an essential part of the ritual canonical prayers, is learned and read in Arabic by Muslims in all parts of the world.[46] This particular *sūrah* is recited in Arabic by practicing Muslims at least seventeen times a day; moreover, other verses and phrases from the Quran in Arabic are incorporated into the everyday lives of not only Arabic-speaking, but also non-Arabic-speaking Muslims.

In addition to reciting *al-Fātiḥah* in Arabic, Muslims all over the world perform all their daily ritual prayers in Arabic in imitation of the Prophet's example and in keeping with unbroken tradition. In recent times, Muslims have settled in every continent, including Europe and America. Mosque schools are set up for their children, where the Quran is taught in its original Arabic. It is remarkable that many Muslims from non-Arab areas such as South Asia, Turkey, and Africa insist on having a Friday sermon during the congregational prayers in Arabic from the pulpits of mosques in Europe and America, even if they have additional sermons in the local languages. Despite the growing body of Muslim writing on Islam in European languages, Arabic, the language of the Quran, still occupies a privileged position that cannot be replaced by any other language.

If a group of ten Muslims come together from differing linguistic backgrounds, with no common language, they can all pray together, as it is the same Arabic prayer that they all perform. Any of the men among them is, moreover, eligible to lead the prayer. They will also find that they share in common a large amount of Quranic vocabulary in Arabic. As the Quran and *Ḥadīth* are in Arabic and are the fundamental sources of Islamic Law and teachings, the main classical works of the different schools of law, which are followed to this day, were all written originally in Arabic. This means that advanced Quranic and Islamic studies in non-Arab Muslim countries are based

44. *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa,* 2 vols., ed. Christopher Shackle and Stefan Sperl (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

45. See Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an,* 15–28.

46. Even though, according to one religious interpretation, it is permissible for those who cannot read Arabic to read the prayers in a foreign tongue, this rare view is opposed by the vast majority of Muslim experts on Islamic Law and is not practiced anywhere in the Islamic world.

on Arabic texts written by the followers of all the various schools, that is, Shāfiʿī in Egypt and Southeast Asia, for instance, Ḥanafī in South Asia and Turkey, Jaʿfarī in Iran and Iraq, Ḥanbalī in Saudi Arabia, and Mālikī in North and West Africa. Thus the Quran has kept Arabic alive in the religious scholarship of non-Arab Muslims.

A great service to the Arabic language and the study of the Quran and the Islamic sciences in general was actually rendered by non-Arab Muslims. The most striking example here is Sībawayh (Sībūyah in Persian; d. ca. 174/790), who was a Persian; his magnum opus, *al-Kitāb,* has been the first reference point for Arab grammarians throughout the ages. Muslims in the lands of Persia and beyond have rendered great service to Arabic grammar, phonology, *tafsīr,* and *balāghah* and have composed works that stand among the best writings in Arabic in Islam. One need only mention such names as al-Zamakhsharī, al-Jurjānī, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Jinnī for Quranic commentary; al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, and al-Nasāʾī for *Ḥadīth* literature; Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Jaṣṣāṣ for jurisprudence (*fiqh*); and the likes of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Bīrūnī for other sciences. All these works were written to serve the Quran and Islam.

Even when the people of Persia returned to writing in Persian,[47] the influence of the language of the Quran remained a very prominent feature of their language. It is estimated that even now between 50 and 60 percent of the Persian vocabulary is still derived from Arabic. Arabic affected not only the vocabulary of Persian, which is an Indo-European language, but also the grammar—a phenomenon that is almost an exception to the way contacts between languages work.[48] The Persian science of *balāghah* was, from the beginning, modeled completely upon Arabic *balāghah,*[49] which, as seen above, was developed for the study of the language of the Quran. The greatest Persian Sufi poet, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), studied Arabic and religious sciences before turning to Sufism and even wrote a number of poems in Arabic.[50] The great Persian poet Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz (d. 792/1389), as his name indicates, learned the Arabic Quran by heart and taught exegesis.[51] Persian Sufi poets often employed Quranic themes in their writing. A striking example is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 898/1492) treatment of the theme of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā.[52] Even as late as the eleventh/seventeenth century we find such an important author as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) writing his greatest works on philosophy and Quranic commentary in Arabic. As already mentioned, to a great extent it was thanks to Persian that Arabic words, mostly of Quranic origin, found their way into other languages such as Urdu, Ottoman Turkish, and even Malay.

47. Starting with the Ṭāhirid dynasty (821–73) and continuing under the later Saffārid, Samānid, and Ghaznavid dynasties. See Muḥammad Ghunaymī Hilāl, *Mukhtārāt min al-shiʿr al-fārisī* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-ʿArabiyyah, 1965), 7.

48. Hilāl, *Mukhtārāt,* 5.

49. Hilāl, *Mukhtārāt,* 9.

50. Hilāl, *Mukhtārāt,* 195.

51. Hilāl, *Mukhtārāt,* 225.

52. Muḥammad Ghunaymī Hilāl, *al-Adab al-muqāran* (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 1977), 302.

The Persians and the Turks, among others, continue to make a great contribution to Arabic calligraphy. Verses from the Quran form the main theme of calligraphy and have traditionally adorned mosques and other religious buildings as well as decorative items to hang in homes and offices. They bring the Quranic statements to the attention of Muslims in many situations. For example, on entering a court of justice, Muslims may read in Arabic calligraphy, *If you judge between men, to do so with justice* (4:58); in the parliament, *Their affair being counsel among them* (42:38); in a military academy, *Prepare for them what you can of strength [of arms]* (8:60); on a marriage certificate, *Among His signs is that He created mates for you from among yourselves, that you might find rest in them, and He established affection and mercy between you* (30:21); on drinking cups, *Their Lord shall give them to drink of a drink most pure* (76:21); on a freight van in Cairo, the prayer said by Noah when his people boarded the ark, *In the Name of God be its coursing and its mooring* (11:41); at the Cairo airport, Joseph's statement to his parents, *Enter Egypt in security, if God wills!* (12:99); in many mosques, *Turn thy face toward the Sacred Mosque* (2:144); and in schools, *My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!* (20:114). Such calligraphic works, written in Arabic and drawn from the Quran, are found in all parts of the Muslim world, which keeps Arabic visible, beautiful, and related to the Divine text of the Quran. It is the Quran that gives the Arabic language this unique position and makes Muslims return to it again and again.

The recent Islamic resurgence has also had an effect on the teaching of Arabic in a number of Muslim countries. In Pakistan, in 1977, under President Zia al-Haqq the study of Arabic was made compulsory in schools; although this has not been strictly maintained by later governments, Islamic studies (*Islāmiyyāt*) are still compulsory up to the level of the Bachelor of Arts degree in all Pakistani educational institutions, and this naturally involves knowledge of Quranic Arabic. The already compulsory study of Arabic in Iranian schools was given more emphasis following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and Arabic is also part of the curriculum of *madrasah*s throughout the Islamic world, both in the Middle East and elsewhere. Beyond this domain, reformers and preachers in the Arab and Muslim world now derive inspiration from the first command, "Read!" or "Recite!" in their campaigns for a new educational revival among Muslims. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the first word of the Quranic text to be revealed was *iqraʾ*. This first instruction, to *Recite in the Name of thy Lord* (96:1), lives on in the consciousness of Muslims and continues to influence their languages and literature.[53] The impact of the Quran on Arabic and other Islamic languages is an enduring reality that continues to influence the life of Muslims on all levels.

53. There are now many schools, publishing houses, educational institutions, media outlets, and publications called *Iqraʾ*. For example, a series of publications in Cairo is called *Iqraʾ*; there is an educational institution in Arabia with branches in other countries including Britain and America called *Iqraʾ*; and an Arab television channel also bears the same name.

archegos

# QURANIC COMMENTARIES

Walid Saleh

The Quranic interpretive tradition, *tafsīr,* is one of the most voluminous of Islamic literary genres, second only to the legal tradition. All generations of Muslims in nearly every Islamic land have consistently produced Quranic commentaries that reflect their outlook on fundamental issues confronting Muslim societies, making this genre a continuous record of what Muslims of different lands and different ages have thought on various topics. Yet it is also the most unpredictable of genres: unlike other Islamic sciences, which systematized their methodological underpinnings, the Quranic commentary tradition never established unanimous rules for how to interpret the Quran. There was more than one hermeneutical theory in medieval Islam. Indeed, most commentators availed themselves of more than one method in the same work. Competition invariably led to extensive exchange among theological camps and schools. Nonetheless, in the classical period, the *tafsīr* tradition displayed far more unity than in the modern period. Many modern exegetes have abandoned the dictates and methodologies of the classical tradition, interpreting the Quran according to ideological stances that reduce the subtleties of the revelation to the predilections of human beings in the present world.

## *Difficulties in Assessing the Literature*

Most of the Western scholarly studies available today are devoted to the earliest phase of the Quranic exegetical tradition, the pre-Ṭabarī (Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, d. 310/923) phase. There are noticeably fewer studies on classical exegesis, or post-Ṭabarī literature.[1] There are several reasons for this state of affairs. Perhaps

1. *Tafsīr* in this article refers to the Sunni and Shiite exegetical traditions and, more specifically, the surviving tradition written in Arabic. A history of *tafsīr* that accounts for the output of all different schools and in many different languages is a project not likely to be attempted anytime soon. Moreover, a history of the genre of *tafsīr,* even when limited to one school, will always have to live with the fact that many major works of *tafsīr* have been lost. In the case of the Muᶜtazilite tradition, the situation is irredeemable; most of the works of this school have not survived. For a survey of studies on early *tafsīr,* see Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (London: Curzon, 2000). Special

the first is the sheer volume of the material at hand; many of the classical commentaries—whether published or in manuscript form—run to thousands of pages or folios. This vast literature presents us with methodological problems about how to approach and study it. Indeed, *tafsīr* studies still lack the basic tools that would allow scholars the possibility of assessing the parameters of the field. We have neither a complete inventory of *tafsīr* works,[2] nor, apart from a few monograph studies on some famous exegetes,[3] detailed studies of individual authors or works. As a result, we have thus far been unable to develop an accurate outline of the historical development of *tafsīr*.

The second reason that has so far stood in the way of a systematic approach to the field is that the scholarly investigation of classical *tafsīr* has been on the whole constrained by what is available in print. The titles that remain confined to manuscript form are so numerous that any notion that what already exists in print is sufficiently representative to enable us to draw a picture of the genre should be forsaken. There are bound to be significant and seminal works of *tafsīr* that are still untouched, works whose assessment would not only fill gaps in our knowledge of the history of this genre, but are also likely to modify what we think of the cultural significance of *tafsīr*.

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mention should be made of John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977); see also Meir Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (1920; Leiden: Brill, 1970) remains foundational in the field and a must-read.

2. The two classical biographical dictionaries on *tafsīr* authors are neither studied by Western scholars nor available in translation. Al-Suyūṭī's *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,* ed. ʿAlī ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1976), and Shams al-Dīn al-Dāwūdī's book with the same title and editor (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1972) have not been mined by the scholars in the field. The recently published inventory of *tafsīr* manuscripts *al-Fihris al-shāmil li'l-turāth al-ʿarabī al-islāmī al-makhṭūṭ, ʿulūm al-Qurʾān, makhṭūṭāt al-tafsīr,* 13 vols. (Amman: Muʾassasah Āl al-Bayt li'l-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1987), offers the most comprehensive list of titles available so far. The value of this inventory has not been fully appreciated in the secondary literature. For the time being this is the standard reference work we have on *tafsīr.* By its very nature, however, the work has its limitations. It is simply a listing of titles and the locations of manuscript copies of such titles in the world, hardly the analytical history one would have hoped for. This is also not a complete inventory of the works produced in the history of the genre, since many works were lost and thus not listed in this index, which by definition is a list of extant works. Moreover, the catalogues that form the basis of this cumulative index have mistakes that gave rise to titles that do not exist in reality, and many collections were not and still are not properly catalogued. Yet even with all these drawbacks, this index is indispensable and should be the starting point of any historical handbook for the field.

3. See, e.g., Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980); Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam: L'Exégèse coranique de Tabari (m. 311/923)* (Paris: Vrin, 1990); Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ʿAlāʾ ad-Dawla as-Simnānī* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995); Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qurʾān Commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Andrew Lane, *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

Let me give a stark example of this situation. Recently the Quranic commentary of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), the founder of the Māturīdī Sunni school of theology, has been published in ten volumes.[4] Although the work has been discussed before in an article by Manfred Götz and was the subject of a doctoral dissertation by Muhammad Rahman, which was published in English, scholars continue to discuss the history of *tafsīr* as if this work did not exist.[5] One cursory glance at this work is sufficient to make us realize that, when fully investigated, it will radically change the way we perceive the development of early Quranic commentaries.[6] Al-Māturīdī—"the famous unknown," as Ulrich Rudolph describes him—was a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī, and they both represent different hermeneutical traditions. He is as significant a witness to the history of early *tafsīr* as al-Ṭabarī. Thus even the early period, the most studied part of *tafsīr* history, is, because of modern Western academia's haphazard method of studying *tafsīr,* insufficiently investigated, and much of what we have said to characterize it needs reevaluation.

The accounts of the tradition that have been written by modern Muslim scholars of *tafsīr,* despite all their drawbacks—guided as they are by a prescriptive analysis of the tradition—are currently the most exhaustive that we have.[7] Unfortunately, the long history of this genre, spanning fourteen centuries, means that the Muslim scholarly tradition has gone through many phases of internal reassessment along with what inevitably accompanies such a process: on the one hand, periodic downgrading of the significance of once very influential works and in some cases even the disowning of them and, on the other, the resurrection of marginal works that were never previously considered to be of substance. Thus the Quranic commentary of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), once an influential work, is now deemed worth-

4. Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunnah,* ed. Majdī Bāsallūm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005).

5. Manfred Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān," *Der Islam* 41 (1965): 27–70 (partially translated by Michael Bonner in *The Qurʾan: Formative Interpretation,* ed. Andrew Rippin [Brookfield: Ashgate Variorum, 1999], 181–214); Muhammad Rahman, *An Introduction to al-Maturidi's Taʾwilat Ahl al-Sunna* (Decca: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1981). Ulrich Rudolph, though cognizant of the significance of the work, does not argue that such an analysis should be done in the frame of the history of the Quranic commentary tradition. See his *al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 201–8.

6. See Rudolph, *al-Māturīdī,* 207.

7. The standard survey of *tafsīr* works written in Arabic is Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr waʾl-mufassirūn,* 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1961). We should add Ibrāhīm Rufaydah, *al-Naḥw wa-kutub al-tafsīr,* 2 vols. (Binghāzī: al-Dār al-Jamāhīriyyah liʾl-Nashr waʾl-Tawzīʿ waʾl-Iʿlān, 1990). This is an essential work on the history of "grammatical" works in *tafsīr* and is based on a survey of a large number of *tafsīr* works. It is also the first work to offer a chronological periodization of the history of *tafsīr.* Finally, the work written by Muḥammad al-Fāḍil ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Tafsīr wa rijāluhu* (Cairo: Majmaʿ al-Buḥūth biʾl-Azhar, 1970), is the only history that discusses the glosses (*ḥawāshī*) and their place in the history of *tafsīr.* This slim volume is an essential corrective to our current distorted view of *tafsīr.* There are also a large number of monographs written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish on individual exegetes. Eventually a survey of the secondary literature in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish is needed.

less among Sunni scholars and unfit for publication;[8] it was published for the first time only recently through the efforts of Shiite scholars.[9] Meanwhile, an author like Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938), a rather minor figure in the history of the field, was resuscitated and given new significance through the efforts of modern Salafī scholars who were influenced by the positive assessment of the merit of his work by Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328).[10] We cannot therefore rely solely on histories by partisans of the tradition to point us toward whom and what to research.

To give another example of how different elements work to impede the scholarly process of assessing this literature, one can cite the case of super-glosses, or what is known in Arabic as *ḥawāshī*. Like much of the scholastic tradition in Islam, the *tafsīr* tradition had an active subgenre of super-commentaries that were written primarily on two Quranic commentaries used in the teaching of *tafsīr,* the *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* (*The Unveiler of the Truths of Revelation*) of Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and the *Anwār al-tanzīl* (*The Lights of Revelation*) of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), and to a lesser extent on a third commentary, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (*Commentary of the Two Jalāl al-Dīns*), by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and his teacher, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459). In the thirteenth/nineteenth and early fourteenth/twentieth centuries, before the Romantic notions of a medieval Islamic decline and decadence penetrated the traditional Muslim establishments, publishing houses in the Islamic world (including Istanbul, the center of Ottoman seminary education) were busy issuing many of the voluminous "medieval" glosses on *tafsīr* works. They were an essential part of the *madrasah* curriculum and were considered part and parcel of the exegetical tradition, not medieval corruptions of a once classical tradition. As a matter of fact, *al-Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī and *Anwār al-tanzīl* of al-Bayḍāwī were usually printed with their glosses or refutations.

Publishing of new glosses has all but stopped, a regrettable development, but unless we have access to this subgenre of *tafsīr,* which became the dominant form of writing exegetical works after the seventh century AH, we shall remain severely hampered in our efforts to write any meaningful history of the genre.[11] If we add to this the fact that almost no scholarly interest has ever been shown in glosses by modern academics,

8. For a brief history of the entanglement of al-Thaʿlabī's work in Sunni-Shiite polemical works, see my *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition,* 215–21, 229–30.

9. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* ed. Imām Abī Muḥammad ibn ʿĀshūr, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002).

10. See the introduction to the incomplete edition by Aḥmad al-Zahrānī, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim* (Medina: Maktabat al-Dār, 1408), 1:1. On Ibn Abī Ḥātim, see Eric Dickinson, *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdima of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (240/854–327/938)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

11. Recently, publishing houses in Beirut and Cairo have reissued out-of-print early *ḥawāshī* editions. The reprinting of *ḥawāshī* does not change the general assessment offered here. There has been no printing of any new *ḥawāshī* in the last sixty years or so in the Muslim world.

we have a predicament in the field that will be hard to get rid of: the glosses are not being published (out of sight) and scholars are not interested in studying them (out of mind).[12]

Yet perhaps the main reason so little attention is given to the classical period of exegesis, in contrast to the early period, is epistemological. Historical scholarship on origins is thought to hold for us the promise of offering the most important explanation of the process of development. A study of the early period of the tradition has the added presumed value that one is studying the creative period of the tradition, in contradistinction to the classical period, which is assumed by modern scholars to be both transparent—the material is not lost, as the early material is—and redundant, because *tafsīr* in the classical period consists of nothing but recopying and recycling the early material. Unless we abandon epistemological obsessions with origins and Romantic notions of what constitutes originality, the study of classical *tafsīr* will unfortunately remain marginal. Such biases lead us to neglect some of the most fascinating and original works produced in Islamic civilization, works that were crucial to forming the intellectual outlook of the traditional educated elite.

A corollary of our not taking the post-Ṭabarī period of exegesis seriously is that we have also treated classical *tafsīr* works first and foremost as sources of information about matters that were not the primary focus of these works. Classical *tafsīr* works, when consulted by modern scholars, are usually used to shed light on fields of inquiry that are not concerned with hermeneutics. *Tafsīr* studies must refocus on hermeneutical issues and cease to consider these works as ancillary sources not worthy of attention on their own. Since the primary purpose of these works was exegetical, our primary scholarly preoccupation has been to reflect that reality. *Tafsīr* studies have not as yet experienced the turn to hermeneutics that Jewish midrash studies have experienced since the 1980s.

## *An Outline of* Tafsīr

The remainder of this essay discusses the methods used by classical commentators, offers a classification of the works produced, and attempts to explore the function and aim of *tafsīr*. Moreover, it highlights some commentators not usually discussed before, if only to show the richness of this tradition.

Writing at the end of the fourth/tenth century, the Muᶜtazilite theologian and judge (*qāḍī*) ᶜAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) gave a sketch of the existing methods of

12. The three-volume history of *tafsīr* written by the modern Egyptian scholar al-Dhahabī fails to mention any *ḥāshiyah* work, a remarkable omission. The only Arab scholar to give glosses their due was Ibn ᶜĀshūr, the mufti of Tunisia, in his slim yet fundamentally significant history of the genre, *al-Tafsīr wa rijāluhu* (see n. 7).

Quranic interpretation.[13] He spoke of those who claimed that the Quran should not be interpreted, but merely believed in and recited; those who maintained that it has a meaning, but that it was impossible to establish what that meaning was; and those who insisted that either only the Prophet or only the first three generations of Muslims could interpret the meaning of the Quran. A different camp insisted that the Quran has an inner meaning, a *bāṭin,* distinct from its surface meaning, but opinions varied about who could know that inner meaning; some said scholars, some thought the Prophet, and some said also the Shiite Imams. Others denied the existence of an inner layer of meaning and believed that only the Imam could know the outer meaning of the Quran.

The list given by ᶜAbd al-Jabbār is instructive not because it is an objective description of the reality in his time, but because it represents the first systematic attempt to distinguish the different hermeneutical methods of early Islam. He sets forth the different methods in order to substantiate his claim that they are incoherent and that the only logical and defensible hermeneutical method to use is the philological one. ᶜAbd al-Jabbār would like us to think that the Muᶜtazilites were the only advocates of philology, which was of course not the case.

Broadly speaking, the methods listed by ᶜAbd al-Jabbār reflected the methods adopted by some camps—the radical fringe camps, whether Sunni or Shiite—whose positions were never dominant in the classical, or post-Ṭabarī, period. These radical positions on how to approach the Quran would, however, be retained, but only as part of other methods. They would never be allowed supremacy in the manner that ᶜAbd al-Jabbār described. Nevertheless they remained available options and would every so often erupt on the scene as if from nowhere and attempt to claim the sole authority to interpret the Quran.

Two distinct issues were raised by ᶜAbd al-Jabbār's list. Can one interpret the Quran, and if so, with what method? Apart from ᶜAbd al-Jabbār's list, it is evident from the literary activities we have inherited that all Muslim schools believed in the interpretability of the Quran and each established one or more methods to arrive at the meanings of the Word of God. Sooner or later all Muslim schools came to believe that there was a role for the individual exegete in the interpretation of the Quran. The authority to interpret the Quran would never be limited solely to the Prophet, the Imams, or the early generations. What ᶜAbd al-Jabbār did not make clear was that he was describing the extreme views among the exegetes and not the mainstream camps, which were never fully hermetic; the fact of the matter is that few if any exegetes adhered to only one of the rigid methods he listed. All major schools shared, to varying degrees, some aspects of the different available methods. What existed was a variety of theories that were shared by most.

13. Al-Qāḍī ᶜAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-ᶜadl,* ed. Amīn al-Khawlī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah li'l-Taᶜlīf wa'l-Tarjamah, 1960), 16:345.

What were the methods used in classical Quranic interpretation? At the center of the craft of Quranic commentary stands the philological method. Philology, which was formulated as a science early in Islamic culture, proved to be such a force that sooner or later all major Islamic schools had to answer to its overwhelming dominance as *the* hermeneutical paradigm. Playing by the rule of philology became a must for any system, if it were to survive and withstand pressure from other competing schools. The Sunnis and soon the Shiites adopted the philological method in their Quranic commentaries, but they were not so naive as to cede to it full control. Indeed, neither were the Muᶜtazilites. Although all schools adopted philology into an already existing pattern, each also attempted to curb philology in order to preserve the theological coherence it was trying to present.

The history of Quranic commentary, hence, is the history of the interaction between philology and the other hermeneutical paradigms already in existence. This creative tension stood behind and explains the never-ending cycle of productivity: the *tafsīr* genre is one of the most complex of Islamic literatures precisely because of the precarious position of each school's claims in light of the probing eyes of philology. The dominance of philology meant that it presented an internal threat to each school, since each school was left with little choice but to adopt philology as the main method for interpretation; thus *tafsīr* was an unstable field even inside the confines of each traditional Islamic school. Proponents of each school were cognizant of the danger that philology presented, and they repeatedly attempted, without much success, to rid their systems of the dominance of philology.

The Sunni camp gave to the exegetical material claiming to come from the Prophet, the Companions, and their Followers undisputed authority in the hierarchy of methods. Sunnism thus preserved some aspects of the early position of its proponents—that only Muhammad or his immediate followers could interpret the Quran. The Prophetic exegetical lore was canonized in the Sunni *Ḥadīth* collections under chapters specifically assigned to *tafsīr*. The material from the Companions and their Followers was the backbone of the exegetical Sunni lore and was collected first in individual works and finally summed up in the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaᶜlabī.

But this inherited material constituted only one part of the Sunni exegetical outlook. The philological works that had been meanwhile produced on the Quran by grammarians were also incorporated. Thus all the works of pre-Ṭabarī grammarians on the Quran were admitted into his commentary, grammarians like al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) and Abū ᶜUbaydah (d. 210/825); and all pre-Thaᶜlabī grammarians who were not used by al-Ṭabarī, for example, al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), were incorporated into al-Thaᶜlabī's Quranic commentary. In this sense Sunnism was claiming that there was no contradiction between what its early founders had said about the Quran and what grammarians were stating—even when many of the grammarians were not Sunni scholars. Sunnism was based on the plain reading of the Quran, or so the claim went.

This understanding of how Sunni hermeneutics developed is the one we are familiar with, if only because of its predominance both in the early phase of the tradition and because of the publication of al-Ṭabarī's work and later of al-Thaʿlabī's. But it was not the only Sunni approach. The recently published work of al-Māturīdī makes it clear now that a blatantly theological approach was also devised to inoculate Sunnism against its adversaries. Thus in addition to the voice of the founding fathers of Sunnism, al-Māturīdī gave prominence to his own theological interpretation of the Quran. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), the leading theological-philosophical commentator on the Quran, thus has a much earlier antecedent in the tradition than we have so far realized. *Tafsīr* was thus from early on the medium through which Sunnism built its intellectual defenses against its adversaries.

It has become evident that the Sunni hermeneutical outlook was one of integration rather than exclusion. Any threat to the supremacy of the Sunni outlook should, if at all possible, be incorporated into the Sunni fold, and this was best done through Quranic commentary. Thus when Sufi sensibility became too dominant and too widespread an outlook, exoteric Sunnism opted to legitimize this approach to the Quran rather than attempt to resist the Sufi approach. This was done despite the evident contradiction between the Sufi hermeneutics—which spoke of an inner meaning (*bāṭin*) to the Quran that was not the same as the outer meaning (*ẓāhir*)—and the fundamental claim of philology that there was no inner meaning for a text beyond its surface structure. Al-Thaʿlabī, who studied with ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), the author of *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* (*The Realities of Exegesis*), the most influential early Sufi Quranic commentary, incorporated much of the Sufi interpretive material into what was a mainstream Sunni work. One generation later, Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) was writing Sufi Quranic commentaries as if that is how Sunnis always composed *tafsīr*. Sunnism rarely bothered to offer a coherent defense of this contradiction in its hermeneutical heritage.[14] It pretended that this was how things were always done!

Each such resolution, however, carries with it the seeds of its destruction; philology could rebel and traditionalism could decide to suffocate, while mysticism in its extreme form could opt for an antinomian disregard for the writ of the law. These were options available to Sunni exegetes, and certain camps at different historical junctures pursued them to many possible ends. Why put up with inherited material if philology proves them wrong and is ultimately capable of discovering the true meaning of any text, even the Divine? This was of course the supposed Muʿtazilite position, but Sunnism was capable of such variations, and it fostered a strong philological exegetical current that attempted to undo the predominance of the inherited traditions. The attraction of this path was that it allowed Sunnism to seem as intellectually solid as any

14. On Sufi commentaries, see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Mu$^{c}$tazilite system. The major instigator of this rebellion was Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) in his magnum opus, *al-Basīṭ,* which is still unedited.[15]

It is not that traditional material was fully jettisoned, so much as drowned in a flood of a philological interpretation. Quranic commentaries were reading now like grammar handbooks and not like works of *Ḥadīth.* The belligerent tone of al-Wāḥidī would eventually be dropped; there was no need to rub it in the faces of fellow traditionalist Sunni exegetes. Those who knew were aware not to rock the boat; yet an accomplished exegete such as Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) did not mince his words when pushed to the wall by the advocates of the traditionalist Sunni camp, those who called for the supremacy of the inherited material over and above philology. He would growl at the inanity of fellow Sunni traditionalist exegetes and mock the noble fathers they so admired if need be![16] But on the whole there was a guarded deference to the early Sunni layer, and homage was always paid to it even by radical grammarians. Other major figures in this current were al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 756/1355) and Ibn $^{c}$Ādil al-Dimashqī (d. 880/1475), bulwarks of the philological method and the mainstay of the intellectual hermeneutics of classical Islam.[17]

The traditionalist camp was meanwhile biding its time. The early full-fledged Quranic commentaries that gave prominence to inherited material over and above philology were presented in a meek voice, as one hermeneutical option among many and not as the only way to compose *tafsīr.* Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) was the first, it seems, to write a commentary in which inherited material was the only material to be offered. This was done not to unseat the mainstream method, but simply as a supplementary work. So also, it seems, did Ibn Mardawayh (d. 401/1010), whose work is lost. These works were on the fringe of the Sunni classical tradition, so much so that even the championship of Ibn Taymiyyah and the devotion of al-Suyūṭī could not save these works from being lost.

It was Ibn Taymiyyah who laid the intellectual foundation for this trend. His call, written in a hermeneutical manifesto, to solidify the traditionalist current in *tafsīr* was first answered by his student Ismā$^{c}$īl ibn $^{c}$Umar ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) in his *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr.* Yet even Ibn Kathīr was unable to escape the burden of the established method for writing Quranic commentaries and ended up updating al-Ṭabarī by incorporating Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī and a smattering of Prophetic traditions. Ibn Kathīr was, however, never noticed by the mainstream exegetical tradition, at least not until the thirteenth/nineteenth century. It was al-Suyūṭī who wrote the masterpiece of the traditionalist camp titled *al-Durr al-manthūr* (*The Precious Pearl*). Having

15. There seems to have been a general trend at the middle of the fifth century AH to establish philology as the only method. We know of al-Ḥawfī among others; see Rufaydah, *Naḥw,* 1:641–55.

16. Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-$^{c}$Ilmiyyah, 1993), 1:104.

17. The Quranic commentaries of these two exegetes, like the work of Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, though published, are still unexplored. These are massive works and await incorporation into the history of *tafsīr.*

surfaced so late, this traditionalist current never managed to overrun the manner in which *tafsīr* was done—at least not till the fourteenth/twentieth century.[18] Sunni medieval and early modern hermeneutics remained attached to the solution devised by al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī, in which the blending of the different methods available was the norm.

It has been mentioned that *tafsīr* was remarkably diverse and dynamic in its own methods. For example, if one read all the output in *tafsīr* up to the time of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and then picked up his Quranic commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (*Keys of the Unseen,* also known as *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* or *The Great Commentary*), one would be astounded to realize that nothing in the *tafsīr* tradition could have prepared one to read this work. Coming to the work from the mainstream *tafsīr* tradition, or from the fringe for that matter, one would find the work simply unintelligible. Had one read works of philosophers and theologians such as Abū ʿAlī ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), however, then the work would be readily comprehensible.

The transformation of the craft of *tafsīr* into a philosophical-theological enterprise at the hands of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is a good example that illustrates the role of *tafsīr* in the intellectual history of Islam. However, in order to fulfill the function of *tafsīr,* al-Rāzī was forced to forgo all previous methods of *tafsīr* and rely on a science never before used for exegeses. Sunnism had already offered many solutions to the philosophical challenge, from fully Islamicizing it to fully rejecting it. Yet apparently nothing received the imprimatur of orthodoxy unless it became part of *tafsīr.* In this sense *tafsīr* was making an understanding of the entire world seem to issue from the Quran.

The history of Shiite Quranic commentary mirrors that of the Sunni tradition. The early phase of Shiite *tafsīr* was as stridently partisan as that of Sunnism. The early Shiite hermeneutical practice was based on two premises, both formulated in contradistinction to the Sunni theory. The first was that the language of the Quran has an inner meaning (*bāṭin*) in addition to the literal meaning (*ẓāhir*). The second premise was that this inner meaning can only be made manifest through the interpretations offered by the Imams (the Divinely guided leaders of the community). The two major figures in early Shiite exegesis are Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī (d. ca. 310/922) and ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 328/939). When read thus, the Quran spoke of the truth of the claims of the Shiites and the supremacy of the role of the Imam along with the Prophet for salvation.

The classical phase of Shiite Quranic commentary, however, adopted the major strategy of Sunni hermeneutics: the supremacy of philology as a supporting tool for the theological claims of the school. Later on, much of the radicalism of the early Shiite exegetes was simply dropped or explained away, most notably the suspicion

18. A study of the Salafī radicalization of *tafsīr* is still a long way from being complete.

raised about the integrity of the codex of the Quran. Two great scholars represent this stage: Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and Abū ʿAlī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153–54), whose respective works, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*Elucidation Regarding the Exegesis of the Quran*) and *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*Confluence of Elucidation in the Exegesis of the Quran*), remain foundational in the Shiite tradition. The early phase of the tradition, however, refused to disappear.[19] Indeed, it witnessed a major comeback in Safavid Iran with the resurgence of a new Shiite dynasty and the flourishing of Shiite scholarship.[20] In fact, the last major *tafsīr* written in the classical style is that of the Shiite scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1401/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*The Balance in the Exegesis of the Quran*), which combines elements of al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī among others.

This so far has been a sketch of the genre, a bare outline that attempts to give a narrative of its development and evolution. Yet it can purport to be at most a provisional outline. Not even the published corpus of *tafsīr* has been fully analyzed, let alone the works that are still unpublished. The caveat must be repeated that we are far from any meaningful history of the genre, and our own generalizations are often proven wrong after the slightest investigation.

Another example of the significance of *tafsīr* for our understanding of Islamic religious history can be given here. One of the most researched fields in Islamic studies is the interaction between Islam and Christianity, on the one hand, and Islam and Judaism, on the other. The vast literature on this topic has never offered us an example of a Muslim using the Bible for religious purposes. The old wisdom was that because of the rise of the doctrine of *taḥrīf,* or alteration, the idea that the Bible has been corrupted, Muslims never used it for guidance or as a source of truth. When medieval Muslims used the Bible, it was either for polemics or apologetics. Yet a medieval exegete, Abu'l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480), decided to use the Bible as a source to interpret the Quran. He incorporated large sections of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament into his Quranic commentary in order to elucidate the Quran, despite the objections of some major scholars of his time.[21] Al-Biqāʿī overturned a ban on the use of the Bible and enshrined it in *tafsīr* as a holy text for Muslims to read. The reinvestigation of a single Quranic commentary thus overturns all received wisdom as to how Muslims interacted with the Bible.

19. For a general survey of Shiite exegesis, see Meir M. Bar-Asher, Annabel Keeler, and Todd Lawson, "Exegesis," in *Encyclopeadia Iranica,* 9:116–26.

20. Todd Lawson has already adumbrated the major outline of this development in Shiite *tafsīr.* See his "Akhbārī Shīʿī Approaches to *Tafsīr,*" in *Approaches to the Qurʾān,* ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 173–210.

21. For examples of his Bible quotations, see his Quranic commentary, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa'l-suwar* (Hyderabad, India: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyyah, 1967).

## *Types of Quranic Commentaries*

The works produced in the *tafsīr* tradition may be divided into three categories based on their function and degree of comprehension. Such a division avoids the problems associated with attempts made so far to divide works according to methods or content, such as that of Ignaz Goldziher, who divided the commentary tradition into discrete modes such as grammatical, doctrinal, mystical, sectarian, and modern.[22] The problem with such an approach is that most Quranic commentaries use more than one method and are concerned with more than one issue.

The first category of *tafsīr* works is what I term encyclopedic commentaries. These were commentaries written at crucial moments in the history of the genre and were usually the culmination of trends in the field. They acted as repositories of material and were usually very catholic in their outlook, aiming to include as many new views as possible. Encyclopedic commentaries were the locus in which Sunnism and Shiism attempted to answer the challenges posed to the Quran by insisting that the Quran had answered those challenges already. Among the major figures who wrote such works were al-Māturīdī, al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī, Abu'l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī (d. 525/1131), Ibn ʿAṭiyyah (ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālib ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, d. 541/1147), Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Biqāʿī, and Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, some of whom have already been mentioned. They wrote multivolume works that aimed to consolidate the major developments in the tradition. The Islamic tradition knew to give this kind of composition a name: *muṭawwalāt al-tafsīr,* "the lengthy works."[23]

The second kind of *tafsīr* works is what I term *madrasah*-style commentaries (called by the tradition *al-mukhtaṣarāt,* or "summaries"). These usually were based on encyclopedic works or written with a specific method in mind, such as giving only Sufi interpretations to the whole of the Quran. Authors who wrote *madrasah*-style commentaries include Naṣr ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), al-Sulamī, al-Wāḥidī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Bayḍāwī.

The third type of *tafsīr* are the glosses (*ḥāwāshī*) on the *madrasah*-style commentaries. The two works that were usually glossed were those of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī. It is rather unfortunate that not a single study in Western scholarship has ever been devoted to any of these glosses. Major figures of the scholastic tradition, such as Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390), left us glosses on both of these two commentaries, and these are important sources for the cultural history of classical Islam.

22. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen.*

23. I took the Arabic terms from al-Shawkānī, *al-Badr al-ṭāliʿ bi-maḥāsin man baʿd al-qarn al-sābiʿ* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿādah, 1348), 1:20.

## *The Function of* Tafsīr

*Tafsīr* has always been at the center of Islamic intellectual history, the prism through which the Quran has been mediated to believers. In the traditional Islamic world, the Quran was and is understood through the language of *tafsīr,* and much of what Muslims believe the Quran is stating is actually what *tafsīr* says it is. Thus the significance of *tafsīr* in the religious history of Islam is paramount. Since *tafsīr* is both a communal endeavor—it was bound by a tradition—and an individual endeavor—exegetes were at liberty to depart from that particular tradition—it has managed to survive into modern times almost unscathed. *Tafsīr* as a genre did not need institutions to support it; nor was it beholden to the power or lack thereof of the *ʿulamāʾ,* those religious scholars recognized as having the authority to interpret the Quran and help others understand it. Today there is a new situation in which modern Muslim intellectuals who are not *ʿulamāʾ,* including many Western-trained Muslims, engage in this activity. *Tafsīr* now is practiced by almost anyone who intends to make a claim about Islam.

*Tafsīr* still plays a central role in defining the religious outlook of many Muslims. It is one of the most active fields in Islamic religious writing and much of the discussion among contemporary Muslims takes place in *tafsīr* works. The scholarly study of modern *tafsīr* unfortunately has all but died out in the West, and we lack any overview of the development of the genre for the last two hundred years.[24] What we sorely need is a study of the political and social factors involved in the composition of Quranic commentaries and the cultural battles that are waged through the writing and publishing of *tafsīr* works. Most scholars of modern Islam pay little heed to what is being published of classical works and assume that to study modern *tafsīr* one only needs to study contemporary works. The problem with this attitude is that it disregards classical books of *tafsīr* as inspiration for modern works and as "ideological" works in their own right. Hence the politics of publishing in the Islamic world is of paramount significance in the study of modern Islamic religious development.

Four major trends can be noted in modern Islamic *tafsīr:* the modernizing, the Salafi, the classical, and the fundamentalist. The modernizing and the fundamentalist trends share the same hermeneutical outlook; both have escaped the dictates of the tradition and see fit to interpret the Quran according to an ideological stance. One has modernity as its guiding principle, the other a militant outlook. Both also seem to have had only a limited appeal to the general Muslim public. The Salafī trend, which is increasingly the norm in Sunni lands, attempts to leapfrog over a thousand years of Islamic scholarship in order to return to an imagined golden age of the first Islamic centuries. In the field of *tafsīr* it does this by denigrating many of the most important

24. The two major studies in the West on modern *tafsīr,* which are now several decades old, are J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); and Jacques Jomier, *Le commentaire coranique du Manār* (Paris: G.-P. Masionneuve, 1954).

classical *tafsīr* works and elevating the medieval traditionalist current in *tafsīr* as represented by Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī. Meanwhile, the richness and complexity of classical mainstream *tafsīr* has been pushed to the side, and the classical trend is kept alive among intellectuals only through the selective publication of medieval classics. Finally, mention should be made of what can be called the modern Sufi pietistic sensibility, which has been gaining more ground recently. A major result of this new trend in Sufism is that Sufi hermeneutics is witnessing a comeback after it suffered in the early fourteenth/twentieth century. Modern Shiite interpretation shows the same trends we see manifested in Sunni developments, although the Shiite tradition has managed to keep the craft mostly in the hands of professional religious scholars.

# TRADITIONS OF ESOTERIC AND SAPIENTIAL QURANIC COMMENTARY

Toby Mayer

A paradox of fundamentalism is that it sacrifices what it champions. If it restricts *by* scripture (as voiced by such slogans as *al-ʿawdah ila'l-Qurʾān,* "Back to the Quran!"), then it does so only by a restriction of scripture. The textual material must be controlled, its vital semantic range lost in enlisting it as a utopian template, namely, for *al-niẓām al-islāmī,* the Islamic "system." By a suppressed premise equating multivalence with doubt, Muslim fundamentalist exegesis founds univalence on texts such as, *This is the Book in which there is no doubt* (*dhālika al-kitāb lā rayba fīhi,* 2:2), that is, in which there is no plurality of sense, no mystery beyond the plain text.[1] A corollary is the trend to shun the traditions that reflect multivalence—of which the mystical and sapiential commentaries introduced in this essay are surely most characteristic. These long-running traditions in fact show that, historically, deep faith in the text was seldom grounds to restrict its semantic range. On the contrary, the sense that the Quran was of Divine origin implied that its meanings were fathomless. It was actively experienced as a portal within the finite into a transfinite, Divine dimension. The self-description of the Divine Speech as intrinsically transfinite is clear in verses such as 31:27: *And if all the trees on earth were pens, and if the sea and seven more added to it [were ink], the Words of God would not be exhausted* (*mā nafidat kalimāt Allāh*). Celebrating the scripture's boundless meaningfulness typifies Islamic mysticism.

For example, the great Sufi visionary, Quran commentator, and love theorist Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209) presents the verse just quoted in association with the following statement:

> I found that the pre-eternal Word had no limit in the outer and the inner (*lā nihāyah lahu fi'l-ẓāhir wa'l-bāṭin*), and that none of God's creation had reached Its perfection and the ultimate degree of Its meanings—because underlying every one of Its letters is an ocean of secrets and a river of lights (*taḥta kull ḥarf min ḥurūfihi baḥr min biḥār al-asrār wa-nahr min anhār al-anwār*),

1. Kenneth Cragg, *The Pen and the Faith: Eight Modern Muslim Writers and the Qurʾān* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 69.

> which [in turn] is because It is the description of uncreatedness; and just as there is no limit to His Essence, there is no limit to His Attributes.[2]

ᶜAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1336), one of the greatest Sufi hermeneuts, expresses the same sense of semantic boundlessness when he speaks of the first onset of his insights (*futūḥ*) into the Quran:

> It was as though perpetually, at the time of the evening draught (*ghabūq*) and the morning draught (*ṣabūḥ*), meanings were being unveiled to me beneath every verse, in describing which my tongue would get tired. There is neither power enough to grasp them and number them (*la'l-qudrah tafī bi-ḍabṭihā wa-iḥṣāᵓihā*), nor the strength to hold back from making them known and disseminating them![3]

## *Levels of Meaning*

It moreover emerges that a variety of *aḥādīth* clearly present the Quran as enshrining a semantic continuum from the most immediate and exterior to higher and higher levels of inner meaning. This ladder is ascended by the hermeneut, for as the Quran states: *Thou wilt surely journey from stage to stage* (*la-tarkabunna ṭabaq ᶜan ṭabaq,* 84:19). The hermeneutic ascent is ultimately to the Word's Divine Promulgator Himself, in an unending, because asymptotic, trajectory. Such is implicit in the regular Arabic term for spiritual hermeneutics, *al-taᵓwīl.* The verbal noun of the second form of the triliteral root *ᵓ-w-l* ("to derive from," "to return"), *taᵓwīl,* literally means "causing (something) to return (to its origin)"; hence we have the related word *al-awwal,* meaning "the first" or "the first part"—which is not accidentally one of the Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmāᵓ al-ḥusnā*) of God in Islam (*al-Awwal*). *Al-taᵓwīl* complements the regular Arabic term for revelation, *al-tanzīl,* literally "causing (something) to descend." Hermeneutics thus involves taking the Quran back up through the levels through which it descended to its very origin in the Divine.

Possibly the most important *ḥadīth* indicating that the Quran has intrinsic levels or tiered dimensions of meaning is the following, which is found in various traditional sources in slightly different forms: "No verse of the Quran has been revealed without its having (1) a back (*ẓahr*) and (2) a belly (*baṭn*). Every letter (*ḥarf*) has (3) a bound

2. Alan Arthur Godlas, "The *ᶜArāᵓis al-bayān:* The Mystical Qurᵓānic Exegesis of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 60 (English), 257 (Arabic). There is in part an Ashᶜarite doctrinal background to the comment. The Divine Word/Speech is an eternal Attribute of God and is thus characterized by God's own intrinsic infinitude.

3. Ibn ᶜArabī, *Tafsīr al-Qurᵓān al-karīm* [= al-Kāshānī, *Taᵓwīlāt al-Qurᵓān*], 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Yaqaẓah al-ᶜArabiyyah, 1387/1968), 1:4.

(*ḥadd*) and (4) a point of ascent (*muṭṭalaᶜ/maṭlaᶜ*)."[4] Notwithstanding the difficulty of the terminology—whose translation could be argued over—the saying has traditionally been taken to establish the scripture's multivalence and the gradation of readings as relatively outward, inward, lower, and higher. The four key terms were in fact interpreted in rather specific ways from an early period, for example, by the major early Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896). Rendering the terms *ẓahr* ("back") and *baṭn* ("belly") by their clearer cognates *ẓāhir* ("outward/exoteric") and *bāṭin* ("inward/esoteric"), al-Tustarī explains that (1) the outward aspect of a given verse is its oral articulation (*al-tilāwah*), (2) its inward aspect is the understanding of it (*al-fahm*), (3) its bound (*al-ḥadd,* a word with a strong legal resonance) is the ruling in it on what is licit and illicit (*al-ḥalāl wa'l-ḥarām*), and (4) the point of ascent is the looking down (*ishrāf*) by the heart upon the verse's intentionality, as comprehended by God Himself (*fiqh min Allāh*).[5]

The striking resemblance of these ideas to Christian Scholastic and late medieval Jewish schemes has been noted by a number of researchers, specifically, the similarly fourfold hermeneutical frameworks respectively known as the *Quadriga* and *Pardes.* In the case of the *Quadriga,* for example, it seems straightforward to match the *sensus historicus* (i.e., the literal, narrative aspect of the Bible) with the level called *al-ẓāhir* in our Islamic scheme; then to match the *sensus allegoricus* (i.e., the symbolic or typological understanding of the Old Testament in terms of the New) with the level called *al-bāṭin;* next to match the *sensus tropologicus* (i.e., the application of the Biblical text to the sphere of morality) with the moral/legal level called *al-ḥadd;* and finally to match the *sensus anagogicus* (i.e., the most arcane and exalted meaning) with the highest level, called *al-muṭṭalaᶜ/al-maṭlaᶜ*.

Perhaps this last equation is the most thought provoking of the four. *Anagoge,* a Greek term that, like *taʾwīl* in Arabic, suggests conducting something upward, not only betokened the highest, most radically esoteric of the Bible's senses, but in particular the full elevation of its meaning into the terms of the realities of the Afterlife.

4. The saying is found with variations inter alia in the following sources: Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 12 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-ḥadīth, 1407/1987), 1:9; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Maktab al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, 1386/1967), 4:39; Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ᶜaẓīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Gharbiyyah al-Kubrā, 1329/1911), 3; Abū ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr,* MS Fātiḥ 262, f. 2a/2a. In the precise form quoted here, and attributed to the Prophet, it is found, for example, in al-Sayyid Ḥaydar al-Āmulī, *Tafsīr al-muḥīṭ al-aᶜẓam,* ed. M. al-Mūsawī al-Tabrīzī (Qom: Nūr ᶜAlā Nūr, 1422/2001), 1:205.

5. See Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 139. A very similar interpretation of these terms is attributed by the great early redactor of mystical commentary al-Sulamī (see below in the text) to the much higher authority ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib himself. However, the authenticity of this has been disputed (Böwering, *Mystical Vision of Existence,* 140). Nevertheless many exegetes follow al-Sulamī in attributing the statement to ᶜAlī, for example, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī. See Godlas, "*ᶜArāʾis al-bayān,*" 63 (English), 259 (Arabic).

In this light it is extremely interesting to note that, alongside its role in hermeneutics, the Arabic term *muṭṭala*ᶜ is also used in Islam for a definitive episode of the Resurrection. It is a literal "high point" in the course of the Resurrection at which the soul undergoing judgment is elevated to witness the unfolding events from a transcendental perspective. This is the sense of *muṭṭala*ᶜ, for instance, implicit in the saying of the "righteous Caliph" ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 22/644): "Even if everything in the world belonged to me, I would ransom myself with it from the terror of the *muṭṭala*ᶜ."[6] So it turns out that this key hermeneutical term involves a combination of ideas not so far from *anagoge:* ultimate scriptural mysteries and the perspective of the eschaton (the end times).

## *Those Firmly Rooted in Knowledge*

The report quoted from ᶜUmar conveys a further noteworthy element: the sense that reaching the *muṭṭala*ᶜ is an awesome affair. This awe applies as much to the hermeneutical *muṭṭala*ᶜ as to the eschatological one to which ᶜUmar prima facie refers, and this is reflected in mystical commentaries.[7] Although the existence of unsearchable depths of meaning in the revelation was not questioned in the environment of early Islam, inquiring into them was a fearful matter. The arcanal dimension was sacrosanct and treated with dread—an attitude enjoined by the Quran itself. At issue here is primarily the momentous 3:7:

> *He* (God) *it is Who has sent down the Book upon thee* (i.e., the Prophet)*; therein are signs determined; they are the Mother of the Book, and others symbolic. As for those whose hearts are given to swerving, they follow that of it which is symbolic, seeking temptation and seeking its interpretation (taʾwīl). And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord." And none remember, save those who possess intellect.*

In this verse, one of the most vital in the Quran relating to its own hermeneutic, the very pursuit of *taʾwīl* by human individuals is seemingly condemned outright. The understanding of the higher significance of the revelations lies with God, not humanity. Yet if the Quran here sets up the idea that its interior is an inviolable dimension, it does not *quite* close the door to it, albeit for an elite. This possibility depends on the details

6. *Law anna lī mā ʿala'l-arḍ min shayʾ la'ftadaytu bihi min hawl al-muṭṭala*ᶜ. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fi'l-tafsīr bi'l-maʾthūr,* 6 vols. (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyyah wa'l-Maktabah al-Jaᶜfariyyah, 1377/1957), 4:282.

7. For example, ᶜAlāʾ al-Dawlah al-Simnānī (d. 736/1336) says that the fourth level, *al-muṭṭala*ᶜ, is only to be spoken of hesitantly: "The individual who has attained the secret of the essence should not comment at all, but proceed in a faltering manner into the point of ascent (*al-muṭṭala*ᶜ) of the Quran" (*Tafsīr najm al-Qurʾān,* MS 165/1, Ṣehit Ali Pasa, 1–68, 18b). Translated and quoted in Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ᶜAlāʾ ad-Dawla as-Simnānī* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), 40.

of the verse's punctuation. The shift from the original *scriptio defectiva* (Semitic script without voweling and other markings) to the *scriptio plena* (script with such markings) took time, and indeed the former still leaves its trace in the distinctive orthography of the Quran. Voweling and pointing are recorded as being formalized on the initiative of the unlikely figure al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 95/714), the notorious Umayyad authoritarian and military leader, during his governorship of Iraq between 694 and 714. The introduction of the various signs of pause may have taken yet longer.

At any rate it is momentous that some authorities have always disregarded the obligatory pause (*al-waqf al-lāzim*), marked by a small superscript *mīm* (*m*) in most copies of the Quran and represented by the period in the following rendering: *And none know its interpretation save God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, "We believe in it . . ."* Suspending the *waqf lāzim* actually places this enigmatic elite, *those firmly rooted in knowledge* (*al-rāsikhūna fi'l-ᶜilm*), together with God as comprehending the hermeneutic of the revelation, for the sentence now reads: *And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, "We believe in it . . ."* On this reading, though the Quran surely disqualifies the group *whose hearts are given to swerving* for hermeneutics, it affirms that an elite *is* qualified.

Careful scrutiny of commentary traditions suggests that this reading was acceptable in the earliest period. For example, Mujāhid ibn Jabr al-Makhzūmī (d. ca. 104/722), one of the earliest authorities in exegesis, according to some reports did not observe any pause in the syntax between *God* and *those firmly rooted in knowledge:* "*Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge* know *its interpretation*, and *they [also] say, 'We believe in it'*" (*wa'l-rāsikhūna fi'l-ᶜilm yaᶜlamūna taᵓwīlahu wa-yaqūlūna āmannā bihi*).[8] Mujāhid's great teacher was Ibn ᶜAbbās ibn ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 68/687), considered second only to ᶜAlī as the preeminent exegete among the Companions of the Prophet. He famously asserted, "I am among those who know [the scripture's] hermeneutic" (*ana mimman yaᶜlamu taᵓwīlahu*), and fully implicit in this claim is that he too observed no necessary break at this point in the verse's syntax.[9] Moreover, what are we to make of the venerable traditions in which the Prophet himself prays over Ibn ᶜAbbās for God to teach him the knowledge of the Quran's hermeneutic?[10] All such traditions suggest that the now standard, stricter punctuation of the codex here was primarily precautionary in motive.

At any rate, though the mainstream observed this more circumspect punctuation (which prevails in the Ḥafṣ and Warsh transmissions of the text, including all modern printed editions), nevertheless three major historical trends within Islam have maintained its suspension in the case of an elite as they have separately defined it. The trends in question are the Shiites, the Sufis, and the *falāsifah* (i.e., those representing the Graeco-Arabic, or properly speaking Islamic, philosophical tradition). In

8. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān*, 3:122, on Quran 3:7.

9. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān*, 3:122.

10. For example, Ibn Saᶜd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1376–80/1957–60), 2:366.

a Shiite context the *firmly rooted in knowledge* are of course the Imams, the lineal descendants of the Prophet via his daughter Fāṭimah through her marriage to ᶜAlī. Scriptural hermeneutics is the preserve and primary function of the imamate, and in consequence it is normal in Shiite references to disregard the *waqf lāzim* here in 3:7. Thus Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), common to both the Twelver and Ismāᶜīlī lines of Imams, is reported to have commented on this verse with the statement: "We [the Imams] are those who are firmly rooted in knowledge; so we understand [the Quran's] hermeneutic."[11]

Next, in a Sufi context the *firmly rooted in knowledge* are identified with the saints or spiritual adepts—whether or not they are lineal descendants of the Prophet. For instance, the aforementioned Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī says:

> The commonality recite the verse, [*They*] *would say, "Our Lord! We believe"* (23:109). In the same way they have no share in the symbolism of *Ḥadīth* except [simple] faith. But the saints are referred to by the verse, *And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge* (3:7). For others there is faith, but for them there is gnosis in the problems of symbolism.[12]

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's disregard for the *waqf lāzim* is quite clear in this reference.

Finally, a noteworthy defense of philosophy by Abu'l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), one of the greatest Aristotelian thinkers in both Islam and medieval Europe (through Latin translations), contains a similarly telling reference to the verse. In his *Decisive Treatise* (*Faṣl al-maqāl*) he argues for the legitimacy, indeed the obligation, of philosophy in Islam,[13] equating the philosophers with the *firmly rooted in knowledge*. Here he here states explicitly his preferred punctuation of 3:7:

> We prefer to place the pause *after* the words of God the Exalted *and those firmly rooted in knowledge,* because if the learned did *not* understand hermeneutics, there would be no superiority in their assent, which results for them in a faith in it which is *not* found among the unlearned. God has described them as those who *believe in it,* and this can only be taken to refer to the [special] faith which is based on [philosophical] demonstration (*al-burhān*).[14]

11. Abu'l-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Masᶜūd al-ᶜAyyāshī, *al-Tafsīr,* 2 vols. (Tehran: Muᵓassasat al-Baᶜthah, 1421), 1:293–94, on Quran 3:7. For a contemporary example, see the translation by S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Qurᵓān* (Karachi: Muhammad Khaleel Shirazi, 1964), 247.

12. Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyyāt,* ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran: Bibliothèque Iranienne, 1966), 57–58.

13. Ibn Rushd views it of course as a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*), to be fulfilled by those qualified on behalf of the whole community. He does not view it as an obligation at the level of the individual (*farḍ ᶜayn*).

14. Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl,* ed. George F. Hourani (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 17. See also George F. Hourani, *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1976), 53–54.

In this instance, Ibn Rushd, who was a great jurist as well as a major Aristotelian philosopher and commentator, is ingeniously using the dynamics of the verse itself to justify his interpretation of the punctuation. The verse states that the *firmly rooted in knowledge* say of the Quran, *We believe in it; all is from our Lord.* But our philosopher points out that any pious Muslim would say as much. Therefore, there must be some extra factor that explains why God honors them as being *firmly rooted in knowledge.* This factor is only provided by linking the previous words to them; that is, it lies in their possessing the Quran's hermeneutic—for Ibn Rushd, a rational, demonstrative hermeneutic. And of course, this dictates disregarding the *waqf lāzim.*

But, to repeat, all such currents are marked by a strong distinction between the spiritual/intellectual elite and common believers. All these hermeneutic trends accepted the premise that it was right to shield the Quran from idle interpretation. For the unqualified the *waqf lāzim* of 3:7 was considered wholly apt. Qualification was moreover based on two criteria: they had to be not only members of the relevant hermeneutic elite, but also grounded in the scriptural sciences (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*). Initiation is a paradigm for many forms of knowledge in Islam, not least knowledge of the Word. The scriptural sciences were thus not only a scholarly propaedeutic, but also an initiation for would-be hermeneuts—an intellectual catharsis that tested and refined their inner receptivity to the Word.

## *Approaches of Mystical Commentaries*

Echoing Biblical traditions of Sophianism, the Quran was sometimes tellingly personified in Sufism as a feminine entity, to be wooed, indeed, to be engaged with on *her* terms or not at all. For example, in his famous collection of discourses, *Fīhi mā fīhi* (*In It Is What Is in It*), the great Sufi mystic and Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273) describes the scripture as follows:

> The Quran is as a bride (*ʿarūs*) who does not disclose her face to you, for all that you draw aside the veil. That you should examine it, and yet not attain happiness and unveiling (*kashf*) is due to the fact that the act of drawing aside the veil has itself repulsed and tricked you, so that the bride has shown herself to you as ugly, as if to say, "I am not that beauty."[15] The Quran is able to show itself in whatever form it pleases. But if you do not draw aside the veil and seek only its good pleasure, watering its sown field and attending on it from afar,

15. "I am not that beauty" renders *man ān shāhid nīstam;* that is, "I am not that beautiful person through whom God is contemplated." There may be an implicit reference here to the mystical practice known as *shāhid-bāzī,* or contemplating the face of a beautiful individual as a reflection of Divine Beauty.

> toiling upon that which pleases it best, it will show its face to you without your drawing aside the veil.[16]

The passage plays with the concept of *kashf,* a Persian/Arabic term that acquires the technical sense of mystical insight, but that literally means "unveiling," as when a Muslim woman uncovers her face and head. We have here a basic reflex of Sufi epistemology: the perception that insight is received spontaneously through catharsis and humility, not self-aggrandizement.

A practical impact of this is that hermeneutic insight into the Quran assumes the traditional disciplines of conventional exegesis. In a surprising number of cases these disciplines are explicitly included in the structure of mystical commentaries. The mystical interpreter here synopsizes, combining discussions of the literal sense and the spiritual sense. Examples, to a greater or lesser extent, of this approach are the commentaries of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (d. 520/1126), Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), Niẓām al-Dīn Ḥasan al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328), and later Niʿmat Allāh ibn Maḥmūd al-Nakhjawānī (d. 920/1514), Maḥmūd ibn Faḍl Allāh al-Hudāyī (d. 1038/1628), Aḥmad ibn ʿAjībah (d. 1224/1809), Qāḍī Thanāʾ Allāh al-Pānīpatī (d. 1225/1810), Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh al-Gunābādī (d. 1327/1909), and al-ʿĀnī "Mullā Ḥuwaysh" (d. 1384/1964).[17]

However, in contrast to this approach, is an enduring class of mystical commentary that is nonsynoptic, omitting all exoteric matter. The main original exemplar of this group of commentaries, heavily drawn on by later authors, is that of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021). Although significantly later than the aforementioned al-Tustarī, whose commentary is extant and has been studied in some depth,[18] al-Sulamī nevertheless records a precious body of early mystical exegesis of the Quran in his *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* (*Truths of Commentary*) and *Ziyādāt ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* (*Addenda to Truths of Commentary*), and some of this material purports to be even earlier than al-Tustarī's. Above all, al-Sulamī's text preserves an apparent Sunni recension of the mystical exegesis of the Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[19] Attention has admittedly been drawn

16. *Discourses of Rūmī,* trans. Arthur J. Arberry (London: John Murray, 1961), 236–37. For the Persian text see Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Mashhūr bi-Mawlawī, *Kitāb fīhi mā fīhi,* ed. Badīʿ al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran: Muʾassasa-yi Intishār-i Amīr Kabīr, AH 1362), 229.

17. See the discussion of these commentators by Alan Godlas in "Ṣūfism," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 351–61.

18. See Böwering, *Mystical Vision.*

19. Translated by Farhana Mayer as *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qurʾān Commentary Ascribed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq as Contained in Sulamī's Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr from the Text of Paul Nwyia* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011).

to problems with the transmission stemma for this text.[20] Yet if the Jaᶜfarite material in the *Ḥaqāʾiq* is even partially authentic, it momentously demonstrates that the mystical stream of Islam has a fountainhead in the esoteric teachings of the Prophet's Household (*ahl al-bayt*). Though the commentary has elements that seem too Sunni for it to be genuine, these may be no more than evidence of an attempt to normalize the material for a Sunni Sufi audience.[21] Such elements are anyway surprisingly few. They are balanced by features fully expected in a Shiite context.[22]

Issues of authenticity aside, al-Sulamī's Jaᶜfarite material constitutes a matchless example of mystical or "allusive" Quran commentary (*al-tafsīr biʾl-ishārah*) from early Islam, worthy of intensive study. Epitomic doctrines of the classical Sufi tradition are exhibited with great concision and power, and many later hermeneutical themes of Islamic mysticism appear here in their earliest form. The commentary begins and ends, for example, with a highly esoteric form of Sufi interpretation in which the interpreter acronymizes. Such acronymic letter mysticism is normal in the case of the mysterious "separated letters" (*al-muqaṭṭaᶜāt*) at the beginning of various *sūrah*s of the Quran, but the Jaᶜfarite material opens with such an analysis of the consecratory formula itself, *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful* (*biʾsmiʾLlāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*). In the first unit of this formula, *biʾsm,* the entirety of reality is said to be alluded to in hierarchy, for the *bāʾ* stands for God's timeless mode of being (*baqāʾ Allāh*), the *sīn* stands for God's Names/Attributes (*asmāʾ Allāh*),[23] and the *mīm* stands for the whole dominion of God (*al-mulk*).[24] In this way, in some sense comprised within *biʾsm* is

20. As discussed in Gerhard Böwering, "The Qurʾān Commentary of al-Sulamī," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams,* ed. Wael Hallaq and Donald Little (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 41–56. Also see Paul Nwyia, "Le *Tafsīr* mystique attribué à Jaᶜfar Ṣādiq: Edition critique," in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 43, fasc. 4 (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1968), 181–230, esp. 181–85.

21. See Imam Jaᶜfar's comment on Quran 24:35, which respectfully lists all four "Righteous Caliphs," stating that just as God illumines the heavens through the archangels, He illumines the earth through the four Caliphs. The relevant comment quotes the *ḥadīth*, "My Companions are like the stars: whichever you follow, you are guided" (Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 212). Also see the reference to Abū Bakr as *al-ṣiddīq al-akbar* in the comment on 57:10 (Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 225).

22. For instance, there is a repeated stress on the doctrine of infallibility (*al-ᶜiṣmah*). See, for example, the comment on 12:81 (where it is ruled that the statement that Benjamin, "the son of a prophet," had stolen, is among the problematic verses, *mushkilāt al-Qurʾān;* Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 201); also the comment on 20:121 (where Adam's fall is said to have been outward, but not inward; 210); also the comment on 21:83 (where Job's cry *Affliction has befallen me!* is not seen as a complaint, but rather as "part of his secret converse," *al-munājāt;* 210). *Al-ᶜIṣmah* is also mentioned explicitly in the comment on 2:210 (190). Nwyia has additionally presented a strongly Shiite comment on 2:27 absent from his edited text, but available in the manuscript Yeni Cami 43. See Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et language mystique* (Beirut: Dār Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 159. Here God is said to have primordially created five beings from His Glory and attributed one of His own Names to each of them. They are the Prophet, ᶜAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.

23. In explaining this identification, we perhaps need to think of the verbal root underlying *asmāʾ*, namely *sīn-mīm-yāʾ*. Moreover, Arabic acronymy sometimes employs root letters other than the first.

24. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 188–89.

God qua God, God's interface with the world, and finally the world itself. Perhaps more mysteriously, the commentary proposes here that God actively bestows His Mercy (*al-raḥmah*) through the *yāʾ* and the *mīm* of the word *al-Raḥīm*. It may be that the Arabic word for "sea," *yamm,* is implicit in this comment. More likely however, it combines—highly intuitively—a sense of the actual auditory impact of the sound *īm,* with its tender, elongated quality, and the belief that the Quran, as Logos, is in some sense instrumental in the Divine creative activity itself.

There is an unspoken but palpable link between this kind of letter mysticism, so often employed in Sufi interpretation, and the premises of *al-sīmīyāʾ*, a theurgic science associated with certain dimensions of Sufism. Central to this science is the so-called science of letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*), which analyzes Arabic (also Persian) letters through intuitions of their intrinsic potencies (*ʿilm al-khawāṣṣ*). This insight into the letters from which words and names are made is then put to use in onomantic divination (as per the principle *Nomen omen est,* "The name is a sign"), or, more controversially, for actively affecting external reality in its course of unfolding (*al-taṣarruf*). A basic assumption here is that in the case of a sacred language such as Arabic, words and their referents are intimately connected and even that they are mysteriously identical—"The name is the named" (*al-ism huwa al-musammā*), as Islamic scholastic theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) usually formulated this principle. Therefore, to penetrate the structure of words through resolving them into their component letters and the letters' properties is a general form of gnoseological empowerment.

Let us move on to other themes of Sufi hermeneutics typified by al-Sulamī's Jaʿfarite material. The commentary recurrently analyzes the Quranic text in terms of the primary Sufi concept of a series of stations (*maqām,* pl. *maqāmāt*), which are traversed on the mystical path (*al-ṭarīqah*). One such comment is on 7:160, where we find the famous Biblical story (Exodus 17) of the waters that erupted from a rock at the touch of Moses' staff in the wilderness at Horeb. The Quran includes here the Mishnaic detail that there were twelve springs that gushed forth, one for each of the Israelite tribes. This is the occasion in the commentary for a concise but incredibly evocative presentation of the *maqāmāt*. Each spring at Horeb is a station in the ascent in the realization of God, in which the highest station is represented by the very highest spring, "intimacy" (*al-uns*) with the Divine. The mystic ascends through fountains of (1) professing Divine Unity, (2) joy in servanthood, (3) faithfulness, (4) sincerity, (5) humility, (6) contentment in God, (7) peace and dignity, (8) generosity and confidence, (9) certainty, (10) intellect, (11) love, and finally (12) intimacy and solitude with God. The comment states: "Whoever drinks from any one of these springs discovers its sweetness and hopefully strives for the spring that is higher up than it (*arfaʿ minhā*)—from spring to spring until he reaches the origin. When he reaches the origin, he realizes God (*taḥaqqaqa bi'l-Ḥaqq*)."[25]

25. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 197.

From the interplay of the scriptural imagery of springs and the mystical doctrine of a ladder of stations, we are thus given an idea of great spiritual potency: the mystical path not as the traversal of a set of static placements or milestones on a route, but something more mysterious, an ascent through a stairway of sources of "living water," conducted down from ever higher, more transcendental, planes. The mystical adept aims to climb to the ultimate fountainhead in the Unseen, the real source from which perpetually emerge all of the waters flowing on each level below. It is impossible to read this text without thinking of the actual hydraulic technology to be found in Muslim agriculture, the ancient systems of channels (*qanāh,* pl. *aqniyah*) that distribute water to fields and homes, sometimes from remote sources at much higher elevations. More particularly, Persian and Mughal garden design harbors a seemingly exact historical concretization of the comment's imagery. The beautiful Mughal terraced gardens, for example, to be found in the hills above Dal Lake in Kashmir, embody precisely this concept of a descending set of pools and channels, through which the water cascades (Persian, *chādurān*) down from ever higher levels, till we reach the source pool, where the water originally bubbles out of the mountainside.

Another example of a noumenal concept of Sufi thought used to understand the Revealed Text is the key doctrine of the mystic's successive *passing away* from contingent existence and then *subsistence* in and through God (*al-fanāʾ wa'l-baqāʾ*). This teaching is typically disclosed in the commentary by a verse that is prima facie about creation and resurrection, reconfigured here in terms of the individual mystic's internal experience. So it is that 85:13, *It is He Who originates* (*yubdiʾu*) *and brings back* (*yuʿīdu*), is commented on as follows: "*He Who originates:* that is, He causes [you] to pass away from everything other than Him (*fa-yufnī ʿammā siwāhu*); then He *brings back:* that is, He causes [you] to subsist through His Subsistence (*fa-yubqī bi-ibqāʾihi*)."[26] Another comment with this theme is on 8:17 (ostensibly about victory against the odds at the Battle of Badr): *that He might try the believers with a beautiful trial:* "That He might cause them to pass away from their own souls (*an yufniyahum ʿan nufūsihim*), and when He has caused them to pass away from their own souls, He Himself becomes the substitute (*ʿiwaḍ*) for them in place of their souls."[27] The transfer of the verse's meaning from a Divine ordeal of a military kind to one pertaining to spiritual realization is unexpected but potent.

## *Transformative Inner Experiences*

Understanding the Quranic text in terms of the transformative inner experiences undergone on the mystical journey is a feature of all Sufi commentary. This "experiential concretion" of the revelation marks many of al-Sulamī's Jaʿfarite sayings. The verses are richly interpreted in terms of active spiritual experience, albeit of an order at the

26. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 228.
27. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 197.

outer limit of the expressible. For example, 27:88, *And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away like clouds,* is explained in terms of the absolute quiescence of the mystic's soul on the occasion of the ecstatic projection of the mystic's spirit into the sphere of the Divine: "You see the soul motionless when the spirit goes forth, the spirit penetrating deep into Paradise, betaking itself to its place beneath the Throne [of God]."[28] In a similar vein, there are intermittent references to the photic phenomena of mystical experience (referred to, for instance, as the "effects of the lights of realization," *āthār anwār al-taḥqīq*) and to the spiritual heart as an active point of contact with transcendental realities.[29]

The heart (*al-qalb*) is alluded to in extraordinary terms, for instance, in a comment on 25:61, *Blessed is He Who placed constellations in the sky.* After alluding to the lexically objective point that *al-samā'* ("the sky" or "Heaven") derives from a verbal root (i.e., *s-m-w*) meaning "to be raised high" or "to be elevated," the commentary states that the spiritual heart also "is a sky, since through faith and gnosis it is elevated (*yasmū*) to infinity (*bi-lā ḥadd wa-lā nihāyah*). [For] just as the divine *object* of gnosis (*al-maᶜrūf*) is infinite, likewise the *gnosis* of Him is infinite."[30] In this comment, an image of striking power—that of the mystic's heart as a vast sky—gains in force exponentially through its conversion from tropal to literal status. What at first seems metaphorical becomes factual through the detail that God Himself is the object of the heart's knowledge. Since God is boundless, the heart is indeed discovered to be an *interior* unbounded heaven, given that it is the locus for the dawn of His Gnosis. Following through the implications of this idea, the commentary next coordinates the twelve zodiacal mansions of the macrocosmic sky with their microcosmic analogues, twelve "cardiac mansions" (*burūj al-qalb*), consisting of yet another list of *maqāmāt,* the last of which is said to be "amorous passion" or "rapture" (*al-walah*). We discover that, whereas the welfare (*al-ṣalāḥ*) of the transient sphere (*al-dār al-fāniyah*) and of ordinary human beings is transmitted through the zodiac, the welfare of the spiritual heart (and its elite folk) instead flows into it through the said cardiac mansions. Coordinating the universal macrocosm and human microcosm is a typical trait of Sufi exegesis.

The intensely experiential flavor of such comments is, however, combined with a deanthropomorphic trend. Though God is presented as an actual datum of mystical experience, the theology of Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq's sayings is radically transcendental. For example, the gloss on 57:3, *He is the First* (*al-Awwal*), *and the Last* (*al-Ākhir*), *and the Outward* (*al-Ẓāhir*), *and the Inward* (*al-Bāṭin*), states with cryptic succinctness that God is apparent in the sense that "the *He is* is clear to us" (*bāna lanā al-kān*), and God is hidden in the sense that "the true *nature* of the *He is* is concealed from us"

28. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 215.
29. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 192.
30. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 213.

(*wa'ḥtajaba ᶜannā kunhu al-kān*).[31] This is evidently an early and highly expressive way of putting the vital point presently made in Avicennan metaphysics: that the quoddity (*al-anniyyah*) of the Necessary Being, that is, the fact that It exists, is certain, but Its quiddity (*al-māhiyyah*), that is, Its intrinsic identity, is unknowable, because It is wholly transcendent. In line with this stance, the Jaᶜfarite sayings sublate scriptural imagery, especially pertaining to God, and construe it "philosophically" and allegorically.[32] The concretion is thus counterpoised with abstraction—producing a spiritually overwhelming tension in readers.

## *Divine Symbolism*

Al-Sulamī's Jaᶜfarite material heralds much Sufi commentary in this allegorism—a term used here in view of the method's clear comparison with the *sensus allegoricus* in the *Quadriga* of the Christian Scholastics. Allegory reads the sacred text as symbolic, but more than this, as *systematically* so—not simply a set of discrete, uncoordinated symbols. To uninitiates what is in question is not strictly allegory, but allegoresis, that is, "the interpretation of already existing texts according to *extrinsic* philosophical or dogmatic criteria."[33] However, to Sufis, such readings need not imply subjecting the Word to extrinsic, random criteria, but rather involve deciphering the symbols of a true Divine allegory, that is, a Divinely intended system of symbols, by clues transmitted either in the Revealed Text itself, in tradition, in lexicography, or through private inspiration (*al-kashf*). Doubtless, the allegory will have great strata of possible meaning. The interpretations are unenclosed. But the Quran is self-defined as in its entirety a book of indicative symbols ("signs," *āyāt*)[34] and states explicitly that God figurates (*ḍaraba al-amthāl*) in His Self-Expression.[35] In line with this premise, the angelic legions (*junūd*) at Badr mentioned in 9:40, for example, are interpreted in the Jaᶜfarite material to mean the virtues on the mystical path, such as certainty (*al-yaqīn*), trust in God, and wholesale dependence on Him (*al-thiqah wa'l-tawakkul*).[36] The broad

31. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 225.

32. One of many possible examples is the comment on 2:210: *Do they wait for naught less than that God should come in the shadows of clouds?* This ostensibly anthropomorphic statement is interpreted to mean the witnessing of God's Kindness and Gentleness (*birruhu wa-lutfuhu*) by way of the removal of amnesic veils (*astār al-ghaflah;* Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 190).

33. Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā): With a Translation of the Book of the Prophet Muḥammad's Ascent to Heaven* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 71; italics added.

34. Among many examples: *We have expounded the signs* (or "We have detailed symbols," *qad faṣṣalna'l-āyāt*) *for a people who take heed* (6:126).

35. Among many examples: *We have set forth for mankind in this Quran every kind of parable (mathal), that haply they may remember* (39:27).

36. Nwyia, "*Tafsīr* mystique," 198.

thrust of this interpretation is certainly supported by the Prophet's own designation of spirituality as a kind of warfare, indeed, "the greater holy war" (*al-jihād al-akbar*).[37]

In this kind of hermeneutic many—in principle all—Quranic verses become symbolic. To use terms from rhetorical theory, the revelations are viewed as metaphors that use either a natural, historical, or perhaps apocalyptical vehicle, but have a strictly *spiritual* tenor. Historical and other contextual concerns are muted, and the revelations become immediately and deeply connected to the mystic's interior life—a manner of interacting with the text that has been called eisegesis instead of exegesis.[38] The traditional Arabic term for this kind of hermeneutics is *al-taṭbīq*, "application" or "adaptation." All verses, even legal ones, are freely treated in this manner in Sufi commentary. For example, 4:29 gives the following statute: *O you who believe! Consume not each other's wealth (amwāl) falsely, but trade by mutual consent, and slay not yourselves. Truly God is Merciful unto you.* In a typical example of this Sufi approach, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī interprets the ban on homicide here, *Slay not yourselves* (*lā taqtulū anfusakum*), to mean that the higher, spiritual "self" should not be deprived of life through indulgence of the demands of the sensual ego, known as "the soul that commands to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammārah bi'l-sū'*). As he puts it:

> *Slay not yourselves* that derive from spiritual and suprasensible realms (*anfusakum al-rūḥāniyyah al-malakūtiyyah*), by following the desires of [your] satanic commanding selves (*bi-mutābaʿat hawa'l-nufūs al-ammārah al-shayṭāniyyah*). Indeed, the self that derives from the spiritual realm becomes distressed, and dies (*tamūtu*) when in proximity to the commanding self, when the commanding self, by means of its desires, gains ascendancy over the self that derives from the spiritual realm and darkens it with the clouds of disobedience.[39]

One of the most highly reputed Sufi commentaries, attributed to the Andalusian "Supreme Master" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), but in fact by the member of his school ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, has many such cases of *al-taṭbīq*. For example, the entire story of Joseph as narrated in *Sūrah* 12 (and familiar from the Bible, Genesis 37–50) is analyzed by al-Kāshānī as an allegory of the soul, in which Joseph himself is a metaphor (*mathal*) for the heart, extremely beautiful in its spiritual preparedness (*al-qalb al-mustaʿidd alladhī huwa fī ghāyat al-ḥusn*) and regarded lovingly by his father, Jacob, who symbolizes the intellect (*al-maḥbūb al-marmūq ilā abīhi Yaʿqūb al-ʿaql*).[40] Joseph's eleven brothers, for their part, represent the inner and

37. He defined the greater holy war as "the slave's struggling with his passion" (*mujāhadat al-ʿabd hawāhu;* al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-zuhd al-kabīr,* 165, no. 373). Also see Jamāl al-Dīn Abu'l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl,* ed. A. ʿA. ʿUbayd and Ḥ. A. Āghā, 22 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1994), 2:144.

38. Böwering, *Mystical Vision,* 136.

39. Godlas, "*Arā'is al-bayān,*" 112 (English), 309 (Arabic).

40. Ibn ʿArabī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 1:590.

outer sense faculties, and their hostility toward Joseph expresses the senses' tendency to draw the heart away from the intellect. The analysis is elaborately systematic, so that, for example, Jacob's wife Rachel—as mother of the beloved sons Joseph and Benjamin—stands for the soul's "upbraiding" aspect or the moral conscience (*al-nafs al-lawwāmah*), while Jacob's wife Leah stands for the lower soul, which commands to evil (*al-nafs al-ammārah bi'l-sū'*).

Al-Kāshānī similarly explores that key episode for mysticism throughout the Semitic monotheisms, Moses and the Burning Bush, as referred to, among others, in 20:9–16 (cf. Exodus 3:1–12). Each tiny detail is again treated according to the premise that the narrative is, in some sense, an extended metaphor in absentia—that is, one with a wholly inexplicit tenor.[41] The location of the miracle, the mysterious *holy valley of Ṭuwā* (*al-wādi'l-muqaddas Ṭuwā*), is identified as a signifier of the spiritual world (*ʿālam al-rūḥ*). The Divine Commandment to Moses to shed his sandals in the environs of the Burning Bush represents the catharsis (*al-tajarrud*) necessary for contact with the Holy Spirit (*al-ittiṣāl bi'l-rūḥ al-qudus*). In particular, shedding *two* sandals signifies a double catharsis, that of the soul (*nafsuka*) and that of the body (*badanuka*), and thus of the two worlds related to them (*al-kawnayn*), the psychic and the corporeal.[42] In 20:17–18 Moses is asked by God what is in his right hand and replies that it is the staff he leans on and uses to gather fodder for his flocks. Moses is taken here as a symbol for the intellect and the staff as one for the soul. Its being useful lies in the soul's instrumentality in acquiring perfection and, ultimately, assimilating the Divine Attributes themselves. Moses' statement *I . . . beat down leaves of fodder with it* (*ahushshu bihā ʿalā ghanamī*) is taken to mean, "I pore over (lit., I rap on) the pages (or leaves) of beneficial sciences" (*akhbiṭu awrāq al-ʿulūm al-nāfiʿah*).[43] When he is then bidden in 20:19 to cast down his staff, this represents freeing the soul from constraint by the intellect (*khuluwwihā ʿan ḍabṭ al-ʿaql*). The Quran next speaks of the staff as miraculously transformed into a *serpent, moving swiftly* (*ḥayyah tasʿā*), signifying the animation of Moses' soul, now unfettered by reason, by Divine Wrath (*al-ghaḍab*).[44] In its writhing, the very power of the Lord (*al-qahr al-rabbānī*) is epiphanized through it.

Although not the sole approach found in Sufi commentaries like al-Kāshānī's, such symbolism is a basic trait of them. Crucially, it also marks the stance on the Quran found in Islamic philosophy and features, for instance, in the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*), Ibn Sīnā's *Directives and Remarks* (*al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*), and numerous other such texts. But motives may be differentiated. Where philosophical allegorism is *abstractive* and is part of a "rhetoric of harmonization,"

41. As distinct from metaphor *in praesentia* and simile.
42. Ibn ʿArabī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 2:35.
43. Ibn ʿArabī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 2:37.
44. Ibn ʿArabī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 2:38.

aiming to conceptualize scripture in terms of Islamic Peripatetic and Neoplatonic philosophy, the impulse of Sufi allegorism—despite appearances—is perhaps the very opposite. It is, in other words, *concretive* and reflects a concern with the actual realization (*al-taḥqīq*) of the Quran or with a translation of it into tridimensional experience, which is typical of Sufism. This realizing attitude toward the Revealed Text cuts both ways—the relationship is chiastic. Entextualization of the soul goes with internalization of the Quran: the internal life becomes purely textual and the text becomes purely internal.[45] In other words, if the soul is to be read in terms of the Quran, then the Quran is to be read in terms of the soul—and this last would seem to be the real significance of the Sufi version of this symbolic method. Rendering one's identity Quranic is a primary objective in Sufism and stands firmly on the Prophet's precedent, since a well-attested *ḥadīth* states that when his widow ʿĀʾishah was asked after his death what he had been like, she made the simple but profound observation, "His nature was the Quran (*kāna khuluquhu al-Qurʾān*)."[46]

Probably the most radical case of a Sufi hermeneutic that reads the Quran in these internalized terms was developed in the Kubrawī tradition, initiated by Najm al-Dīn al-Khīwaqī (d. 618/1221), known as Najm al-Dīn Kubrā in view of his ironic nickname *al-Ṭāmmah al-Kubrā* ("the Greatest Calamity"). The Kubrawī tradition gives formal voice to a deep undercurrent of Sufi thought tending to give primacy to consciousness. In the final instance, in this perspective *everything* is within; external reality is included in internal consciousness. This is captured in a counterintuitive formulation of the great Kubrawī master and Quran commentator ʿAlāʾ al-Dawlah al-Simnānī (d. 736/1336).[47] Al-Simnānī takes over the Sufi commonplace that coordinates the greater universe with the human being, as declared in the dictum, "The world is a great human being (macrocosm), while the human being is a little world (microcosm; *al-kawn insān kabīr wa'l-insān kawn ṣaghīr*)." However, in al-Simnānī's formulation the expected proportion is reversed, the macrocosm and microcosm inverted. For him, the true microcosm is the world and the true macrocosm is the human being; that is, metaphysically, in contrast with materially, human consciousness contains the world, not vice versa. Moreover, this reversal of the relation of the outward and the inward continues, so that from the spiritual point of view the more external element

45. This analysis draws on a point made by Gavin Flood about ascetic practice, in which an "internalization of the tradition can also be described as the entextualization of the body" (*The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004], 212).

46. ʿĀʾishah's report continues: "He would be pleased through its good pleasure and angry through its anger (*yarḍā li-riḍāhu wa-yaskhaṭu li-sukhṭihi*)," or similar wording according to the version. See Aḥmad 10 (no. 25240); al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*, 1:30 (no. 72); al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-ʿummāl*, 7:137 (no. 18378).

47. See n. 7.

*within* the human person is actually contained by the more internal.[48] The doctrine is supported by, among others, the much-cited *ḥadīth qudsī:* "My earth and My Heaven contain Me not, but the heart of My believing slave does contain Me."[49]

From this perspective, the whole of reality, from top to bottom, is within, such that the rites of worship with their prescribed orientation in external space (i.e., *al-qiblah*)—to take one example—are in the final analysis concerned with cultivating the proper orientation between one lower aspect of our "internal space" and another, higher one. The path that leads from creation to Godhead is wholly located inside the mystic. In Kubrawī theory this concept becomes elaborated into a complex hierarchy of seven subtle centers (*laṭāʾif,* sing. *laṭīfah*), which are ascended in the path of realization. There is an obvious parallel between this mystical system and Laya Yoga in the Indic world, with its similarly sevenfold system of subtle centers (*cakras/padmas*), which are penetrated in succession by the *kunḍalinī,* defined as the "power of consciousness" (*cit-sakti*). Where God realization is taken in the Yogic theory as the final ascent of consciousness to a purely transcendental center (the supreme point, or *mahā-bindu*) beyond the seven and above the head, in this Sufi theory realization also occurs in the mysterious "center of Selfhood" (*al-laṭīfah al-anāʾiyyah*), again beyond the seven subtle centers and above the head. Just as Yogic theory identifies each *cakra* by inwardly perceived lights or "photisms" of different colors and by a succession of divine epiphanies (*devas*), in the Kubrawī theory each *laṭīfah* has its distinctly colored photism and its presiding Quranic prophet.

It is in this very last aspect that the radical implications of the theory for Quranic hermeneutics emerges. From Adam at the basal center, through Noah at the abdominal center, through Abraham, Moses, and David at centers from right to left in the chest region, to Jesus Christ at the center of the frontal cortex, and finally to the Prophet Muhammad atop the cranium—in principle all references to these prophets within Quranic narratives may be deciphered in terms of the relevant *laṭāʾif.* Such, at least, is al-Simnānī's daring hermeneutical agenda as he presents it in the introduction to his *Tafsīr najm al-Qurʾān* (*The Commentary Star of the Quran*).[50] Indeed, given a

48. Al-Simnānī, *Tafsīr najm al-Qurʾān,* 89a. The general point has been well summarized as follows: "The spiritual realm, which is the world that lies within the body, is the macrocosm of the physical world, and the physical world, which appears to be larger than the body, is a microcosm. Since we view the relationship of the body and the soul from the point of view of human perception, the breast appears to be larger than the heart and to encompass it. However, at a metaphysical level, it is the heart that is larger. The spiritual realm, of which the mystical heart is a part, exists beyond the confines of the temporal realm and structures such as the human breast, which exist within it" (Elias, *Throne Carrier,* 68).

49. The *ḥadīth,* although noncanonical, is often quoted in Sufi texts. Suᶜād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muᶜjam al-ṣūfī* (Beirut: Dandarah, 1401/1981), 1265–66.

50. See Paul Nwyia, ed., "Muqaddimat tafsīr al-Qurʾān li-ᶜAlāʾ al-Dawla al-Simnānī," *al-Abḥāth* 26 (1973–77): 141–57. Al-Simnānī says, for example, about the Eden narrative and references to Adam in the Quran, that these are to be read in relation to the basal center, *al-laṭīfah al-qālabiyyah* (lit. "the matrix subtle center"): "Whenever you hear a part of the Book addressing Adam, listen to it with your

*ḥadīth* stating that the Quran has seven interior levels of meaning, it is theoretically possible for al-Simnānī to interpret every verse of the scripture in relation to each of the seven *laṭā'if.*[51]

A primary genre of Sufi literature is the spiritual manual, in which the path in all its details, etiquettes, and terminology is mapped out for aspirants. A series of such manuals were produced between the third/ninth and the fifth/eleventh centuries, seminal works such as al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb* (*The Nourishment of Hearts*), al-Kalābādhī's *Kitāb al-ta'arruf* (*The Doctrine of the Sufis*), and al-Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (*Unveiling of the Veiled*). There is a clear sense in which, through this Kubrawī system of interpretation, the Quran itself—if properly deciphered—is fully instated as the ultimate "manual" for mystical adepts in their spiritual quest.

## *The Sapiential Tradition*

The perils of generalization notwithstanding, such a practical concept of the Quran may be contrasted with that emerging from the non-Sufi currents covered by the term "sapiential," that is, rooted in wisdom, or "sapience" (*al-ḥikmah,* a Quranic term extended to philosophy as pursued in the Islamic tradition). Islamicized Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions of philosophy within the Persianate world are sometimes referred to as "*ḥikmat* philosophy." Distinctions become complex post-seventh/thirteenth century due to the suffusion of Sufism in the wake of Ibn 'Arabī by terms and concepts from philosophy, especially the philosophy of the "Chief Shaykh" (*al-shaykh al-ra'īs*) Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037). The convergent trend bears ultimate fruit in a hermeneutic in which the approaches of Sufism and *ḥikmat* philosophy merge—as is the case with *The Keys of the Unseen* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā, d. 1050/1640). But this work is rather late and unusually synthetic. Piety generally demanded that systematic works of scriptural commentary were unharnessed from philosophy, *even* when composed by philosophers. An example of this is the voluminous *Triumph of the All-Bountiful in the Exegesis of the Quran* (*Fatḥ al-mannān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) by the noted Illuminationist

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bodily subtle substance (*laṭīfah qālabiyyah*). . . . Know with certainty that the inner sense (*baṭn*) of this Book is connected to you in [the realm of] souls (*anfus*) just as its external sense is connected to Adam in [the realm of] horizons (*āfāq*)" (Nwyia, "Muqaddimat tafsīr," 147). Quoted in Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 44.

51. "The Quran has an exterior (*ẓahr*) and an interior (*baṭn*), and its interior has an interior—up to seven interiors or up to seventy interiors." See, for example, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-mīzān,* 1:7. Also see al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī,* 2:599, *bāb faḍl al-Qur'ān,* no. 2. On al-Simnānī's coordination of the levels of interior meaning mentioned in this *ḥadīth* with the seven subtle centers, see Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries,* 44.

philosopher Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311), which seemingly steers quite clear of philosophical principles.[52]

However, in one particular Islamic community there was already, significantly earlier, a thoroughgoing scriptural hermeneutic that can be viewed as fully sapiential—a system of higher interpretation (*ta'wīl*) understood to be grounded in a form of *ḥikmah*. A clue lies in an unexpected quarter. The historian and scholarly biographer Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1169) says of his contemporary and acquaintance Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153): "[Al-Shahrastānī] was composing a Quran commentary, interpreting the verses according to the canons of both the law (*al-sharīʿah*) and wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and other things too. So I said to him, 'This is to give up what is right! The Quran is not to be commented on except by the reports of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf*), consisting of the Companions and the Followers. Wisdom is something quite separate from the exegesis of the Quran.'"[53] A precious unicum manuscript of this commentary, *The Keys of the Arcana* (*Mafātīḥ al-asrār*), exists in Tehran and is gradually being brought out in an Iranian edition.[54] Though it is sadly truncated—ending before *Sūrah* 3—it has an extensive introduction in which al-Shahrastānī presents his hermeneutical system in satisfying detail. There is a body of scholarly opinion now that the basis of this framework lies in Ismāʿīlism, and that the commentary is strong evidence for the truth of the claim by some of al-Shahrastānī's contemporaries that this apparent paragon of the Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī Sunni hierarchy was in reality secretly aligned with this form of esoteric Shiism—then widely feared in the form of the new Nizārī movement.[55]

Be that as it may, the hermeneutical system in question is very profound and also is to be distinguished from that of Sufism. Al-Shahrastānī presents a great lattice of complementary concepts underlying the Quran, and with these interpretive keys he claims to penetrate the arcane dimension of the scripture, scrupulously applying them to every verse in succession. The complementarities include creation (*al-khalq*) and the Command (*al-amr*), hierarchy (*al-tarattub*) and contrariety (*al-taḍādd*), the inchoative (*al-mustaʾnaf*) and the accomplished (*al-mafrūgh*), generality (*al-ʿumūm*) and specificity (*al-khuṣūṣ*), the abrogating (*al-nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*al-mansūkh*), the clear (*al-muḥkam*) and the ambiguous (*al-mutashābih*), and exegesis (*al-tafsīr*) and hermeneutics (*al-taʾwīl*). Although some of these pairs are of course familiar from the

52. John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights: Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 188.

53. Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh ḥukamāʾ al-islām,* ed. M. Kurd ʿAlī (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-Taraqqī, 1365/1946), 143.

54. Al-Shahrastānī, *Mafātīḥ al-asrār,* ed. M. ʿA. Āzarshab, vol. 1 (Tehran: Iḥyā-i Kitāb, 1997).

55. Al-Subkī quotes al-Shahrastānī's contemporary Abū Saʿd al-Samʿānī: "He was suspected of inclining to the people of the mountain fortresses (*ahl al-qilaʿ*), meaning the Ismāʿīlīs, their missionary activity, and defending their calamities" (Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyyah al-kubrā,* ed. Maḥmūd al-Tanāḥī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw [Cairo: Ṭabʿat ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1383/1963], 128–30).

wider commentary tradition, al-Shahrastānī's use and elaboration of them is strikingly ingenious. For example, he distinguishes at least four grades of generality operating within Quranic concepts.

A detailed discussion of his system is beyond the scope of this essay, but it unveils a breathtaking degree of intelligibility within the text—a kind of semantic logic of the revelation.[56] But crucial to understanding the significance of al-Shahrastānī's overall project is the primary distinction between creation and the Command. The two are clearly distinguished in 7:54, *Do not creation and Command belong to Him?,* and for our thinker these constitute the prime orders of reality distinctly dependent on God. The Command has a certain paramountcy insofar as it is ultimately reducible to the Divine creative fiat *Be!* (*kun*), through which the data of creation enter existence in the first place—comparable with the Logos of John 1:3, through which "all things came into being" and without which "not one thing came into being." Creation is thus premised on the Command. Now, for this hermeneut, the Quran in its entirety is mysteriously identical with the latter reality. We might say that for al-Shahrastānī, reality is being channeled *through* the Quran. It follows that the authentic hermeneutic of the Quran, deriving (he claims) from the teaching of the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) and made up of the mentioned complementarities, ipso facto amounts to a penetration of the veil of created existence and an ascent to the transcendental roots of manifestation, which are known as the Command. What results is a strikingly "positivistic" form of *ta'wīl* distinct from mystical allegorism. Attention is paid to every minute detail of the scripture in view of its ongoing cosmic function. In this example of sapiential commentary—whose quality makes its recent reclamation from the brink of oblivion all the more poignant—the Quran amounts to the active presence of the Transcendent in our midst, which if properly grasped in its interior, raises us beyond our existential confinement by space and time.

56. For an analysis of his system and its application to *Sūrah* 1, *al-Fātiḥah,* see my *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

# SCIENTIFIC COMMENTARY ON THE QURAN

Muzaffar Iqbal

The Quran invites its readers to reflect on various aspects of the three manifest realms from which it draws most of its arguments: the cosmos (*āfāq*), the human self (*nafs*), and history (*āthār*). This Quranic invitation is directed toward instilling an unshakable certitude about its message in the hearts and minds of its readers. The first and foremost message of the Quran is *tawḥīd,* the uncompromising Oneness of God—the Originator (*al-Mubdi'*) of everything, the absolute Sovereign, Who has set signs (*āyāt*) throughout His creation, so that Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) can be distinguished from falsehood (*al-bāṭil*): *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things?* (41:53).

All that exists, the Quran tells us, exists because of God, because *unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (e.g., 2:107; 3:189; 9:116). This ontological dependence on the Creator ennobles existing things; they become signs (*āyāt*) of a transcendent Real (*al-Ḥaqq*), Who, nevertheless, remains beyond them. Thus the "sign verses" of the Quran have an irresistible urgency,[1] drawing our attention to what lies beyond the phenomena they mention. Viewed from the Quranic perspective in this way, the rhythmic alternation of the day and the night (2:164) and the regularities in the movement of the sun and the moon traversing their courses by *the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing* (36:38–39) are not merely cosmic processes; rather, these are signs pointing toward the existence of the Compassionate (*al-Raḥmān*) and the Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*), Who made neither the night nor the day perpetual, for *if God should make night come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection,* the Quran asks rhetorically, *what god other than God would bring you light?* (28:71). Likewise,

> *If God should make day come over you unceasingly until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God would bring you night, that you might rest therein? Will you not, then, see? Out of His Mercy He made for you night and day, that you*

1. The "sign verses" are so called because of a refrain that often occurs in these verses in various forms, such as *Truly in that is a sign for a people who reflect* (16:11) or *Surely in this is a sign for a people who hear* (16:65).

*may rest therein, and that you may seek of His Bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.* (28:72–73)[2]

The Quran presents the entire cosmic order as proof for its message. Observable processes of the manifest cosmos—such as the movement of stars and planets—are not orderly merely because they observe certain laws of nature, but rather because the One Who created them has set a specific course for them. In fact, the concept of "laws of nature" independent of a Lawgiver is essentially a secular concept, because it makes "nature" a giver of law or at least imbues nature with some inherent order independent of the Creator. The Quran asserts, however, that authority to make laws rests with God alone—the Sovereign and Ruler of the Cosmos:

*The sun runs to a dwelling place of its own. That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. And for the moon, We have decreed mansions, till it returns like an old palm stalk. It befits not the sun to overtake the moon, nor the night to outstrip the day. Each glides in an orbit.* (36:38–40)

Thus placed within the broader thematic structure of the Quran, these references to nature have traditionally been understood as integrally linked to its overall message. These signs were considered worthy of deep reflection, and it was understood also that one cannot fathom the mysteries of these signs without understanding their scientific content in the traditional sense. The sign verses, therefore, remained a central focus of scientific activity in Islam, and generations of scientists and commentators of the Quran wrote on their significance.

"The principles of these sciences which we have enumerated as well as those which we have not are not outside the Quran," writes Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) in his *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* (*Jewels of the Quran*), "for all of these sciences are derived from one of the seas of the knowledge of God—may He be exalted—that is, the sea of His actions." He continues:

> We have already mentioned that [the Quran] is like an ocean without a shore, and indeed, *If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted* (18:109). Among the actions of God—may He be exalted—which are like a sea of actions, are recovery and disease, as He—the most High—mentioned in the story of Abraham, upon whom be peace: *the Lord of the worlds, . . . Who, when I am ill, heals me* (26:77, 80). This action can only be understood by the one who knows the science of medicine completely. For this science means nothing but the knowledge of all aspects of diseases, their symptoms, and the knowledge of their cure and its means.

2. See also 25:62 and 78:11, in which the day is mentioned as a time for seeking sustenance.

> And among the actions of the Most High and Exalted are the determination of the course of the sun and the moon and their stages according to a fixed reckoning, as God—the Most High—has said: *The sun and the moon are upon a reckoning* (55:5). And He said: *He it is Who made . . . the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time]* (10:5). And He said: *And the moon is eclipsed, and the sun and the moon are brought together* (75:8–9). And He said: *He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night* (35:13). And He said: *The sun runs to a dwelling place of its own. That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing* (36:38). The real meaning of the movement of the sun and the moon according to a fixed reckoning and their eclipse, of the merging of the night into the day and the manner of the wrapping of the one onto the other can only be known to him who has the knowledge of the composition of the heavens and the earth, and this in itself is a science.
>
> Likewise, the complete meaning of His saying—may He be Exalted—*O mankind! What has deluded you with regard to your noble Lord, Who created you, then fashioned you, then proportioned you, assembling you in whatever form He willed?* (82:6–8)—cannot be known to any except the one who has mastered the science of anatomy of man's apparent and hidden parts along with their numbers, kind, uses, and the underlying wisdom [of their creation]. And He has pointed to these in many verses of the Quran and [the knowledge] of these belongs to the sciences of the ancients and of later generations.[3]

Likewise, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) established a specific classification (*naw*ᶜ) in his celebrated work *al-Itqān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān* (*The Most Excellent in the Sciences of the Quran*) for discussing the concept that principles of all branches of knowledge are present in the Quran.[4] Commenting on 6:38 (*We have neglected nothing in the Book*) and 16:89 (*And We sent down unto thee the Book as a clarification of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy and glad tidings for those who submit [unto God]*), al-Suyūṭī relates a saying of Ibn Masᶜūd, one of the most eminent scholars of the Quran among the Companions of the Prophet: "Whoever wishes to acquire knowledge should take to the Quran, for it contains knowledge of everything."[5]

This traditional understanding of the sign verses of the Quran was to go through a major transmutation with the rise of scientism in the Muslim world in modern times.

3. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 1988), 32–33, translated by Muhammad Abul-Quasem as *The Jewels of the Qur'an* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983), 46–47. Also of interest is his *al-Ḥikmah fī makhlūqāt Allāh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2003), in which he reflects on many sign verses of the Quran.

4. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, n.d.), 2:1025.

5. Al-Suyūṭī adds that al-Bayhaqī explained that by "knowledge" Ibn Masᶜūd means here principles of knowledge (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:1025).

Initially emerging in Europe, scientism cultivated the belief that the assumptions and methods of research of the modern physical and biological sciences are equally appropriate and essential for all other disciplines, including philosophy, theology, the humanities, and the social sciences. This doctrine spread to the Muslim world at a time when most of the traditional lands of Islam were under colonial rule, and this situation had a deep impact on the traditional understanding of the sign verses of the Quran. Its thirteenth/nineteenth-century Muslim advocates included reformers who thought that the "backwardness" of Muslims was a consequence of the lack of science and technology, which, according to their view, had enabled Europe to attain material power and economic strength. In order to convince Muslims that the acquisition of modern science was beneficial, these reformers attempted a reinterpretation of the "scientific verses" of the Quran.

These attempts had two distinct goals. The first was to provide a certain degree of legitimacy to the enterprise of modern science in the Muslim world. Toward this end, the advocates of this project pointed out that the Quran contains some 750 such "scientific verses" and maintained that it was, therefore, the religious duty of Muslims to acquire modern science. The second goal was to prove that the Quran is a Divine Book on the basis of the fact that it contains particular facts or theories recently discovered by modern science, facts and theories that could not have been known to the Prophet.

The need to legitimize the reformers' call for the acquisition of modern science dwindled over the course of the fourteenth/twentieth century, but the second goal of the reformists' approach to the Quran bloomed and eventually gave rise to a fully differentiated branch of Quranic commentary (*tafsīr*), the scientific *tafsīr* (*tafsīr ʿilmī*). The stock material on which this literature is based has, however, been exhausted and new additions to the existing literature are often mere repetitions or elaborations, as we shall see later in this essay.

## *The Rise of Scientific Exegesis of the Quran*

Two almost simultaneous attempts at a scientific *tafsīr* of the Quran were in progress near the end of the thirteenth/nineteenth century. The first, by the Indian reformer Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1315/1898), was begun in 1296/1879 and left unfinished at his death; the second, by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī (d. ca. 1306/1889), an Egyptian physician, was published as *Kashf al-asrār ʿan al-nūrāniyyah al-qurʾāniyyah fī mā yataʿallaqu biʾl-ajrām al-samāwiyyah waʾl-arḍiyyah waʾl-ḥayawānāt waʾl-nabāt waʾl-jawāhir al-maʿdiniyyah* (*The Unveiling of the Luminous Secrets of the Quran in Which Are Discussed Celestial Bodies, the Earth, Animals, Plants, and Minerals*) in 1297/1880.[6] Khān was restricted in his knowledge of Western science and hence could

6. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī, *Kashf al-asrār ʿan al-nūrāniyyah al-qurʾāniyyah*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Wahbiyyah, 1297/1880).

not identify specific discoveries and inventions in his *tafsīr*.[7] He was, instead, more concerned with motivating Muslims to acquire modern science. Al-Iskandarānī, however, had more knowledge of modern science and therefore could be more thorough in identifying specific modern inventions and discoveries, claiming they were already present in the Quran.[8] In 1300/1883, al-Iskandarānī made a second attempt to demonstrate the presence of scientific discoveries related to vegetation, minerals, and animals in the Quran in his *Tibyān al-asrār al-rabbāniyyah fi'l-nabāt wa'l-maʿādin wa'l-khawāṣṣ al-ḥayawāniyyah* (*The Clarification of Divine Secrets in Vegetation and Minerals and in the Characteristics of Animals*).[9]

Shortly after these early efforts, the field opened up, and many new books appeared. These include the works of ʿAbd Allāh Bāshā Fikrī (d. 1307/1889), Sayyid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawkabī (d. 1320/1922), and Muḥammad Tawfiq Ṣidqī (d. 1338/1920), all of whom wrote either exegeses or shorter works on the Quran in which scientific explanations of the verses were offered instead of or in addition to the traditional exegesis. By the end of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, scientific exegesis had established itself as an independent discipline, though it still lacked the general acceptance granted other kinds of exegesis such as juristic and linguistic exegeses (*tafsīr fiqhī* and *tafsīr lughawī*).[10]

This blossoming forced writers of surveys on Quranic exegesis to include this new genre in their accounts. Thus Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (d. 1377/1977), whose seminal work *al-Tafsīr wa'l-mufassirūn* (*Exegesis and Exegetes*) is one of the most important fourteenth/twentieth-century surveys of the field, devotes a full chapter to *al-tafsīr al-ʿilmī* (scientific exegesis).[11] Likewise, J. M. S. Baljon (d. 1422/2001), ʿIffat Muḥammad al-Sharqāwī, and J. J. G. Jansen have all included this genre in their surveys.[12]

7. Aḥmad Khān, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa huwa 'l-hudā wa'l-furqān*, 6 vols. (Lahore: Munshi Fazal Din, 1930). This *tafsīr* covers the first seventeen *sūrahs* of the Quran.

8. See, e.g., Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī, *Tibyān al-asrār al-rabbāniyyah fi'l-nabāt wa'l-maʿādin wa'l-khawāṣṣ al-ḥayawāniyyah* (Damascus: n.p., 1300/1883), 5, 29, 132, passim.

9. See n. 8. The word *tibyān* ("clarification") in the title is taken from 16:89: *And We sent down unto thee the Book as a clarification of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy and glad tidings for those who submit.*

10. Other distinct categories of traditional *tafsīr* include: *tafsīr riwāʾī*, which makes transmitted report (*riwāyah*) its mainstay; *tafsīr kalāmī*, which focuses on theological issues; *tafsīr naḥwī*, which discusses issues of grammar; *tafsīr ṣūfī*, mystical *tafsīr; tafsīr ʿirfānī*, gnostic *tafsīr;* and *tafsīr adabī*, which treats matters of language and style. In many *tafsīr*s, aspects mentioned above are often combined.

11. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa'l-mufassirūn*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1985). This work has been posthumously reprinted in three volumes by Shirkah Dār al-Arqam ibn Abi'l-Arqam, n.d. In a short note at the beginning of the third volume, the publisher states that this volume is based upon al-Dhahabī's lectures delivered at the University of Baghdad, 1960–63, and that these lectures act as a prologue to many discussions of *al-Tafsīr wa'l-mufassirūn*. All references are to this expanded edition.

12. J. M. S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation, 1880–1960* (Leiden: Brill, 1961); Muḥammad ʿIffat al-Sharqāwī, *Ittijāhāt al-tafsīr fī Miṣr fi'l-ʿaṣr al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Kīlānī, 1972); J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

During the course of the fourteenth/twentieth century, several new scientific *tafsīr*s appeared, but none has been as thorough as the twenty-six volume *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (*Pearls of* Tafsīr *of the Noble Quran*) by Ṭanṭāwī al-Jawharī (d. 1359/1940).[13] This work was illustrated with drawings, photographs, and tables. In his preface to the work the author states that he prayed for God to enable him to interpret the Quran in a way that includes all the sciences attained by human beings, so that Muslims could understand the cosmic sciences. Al-Jawharī attempted to show that *sūrah*s of the Quran complement discoveries of modern science.[14]

Another writer who has influenced considerably the growth of scientific interpretations of the Quran, especially in Turkish, is Badīʿ al-Zamān Saʿīd al-Nūrsī (d. 1380/1960), the founder of the Nurcu movement in Turkey. Nūrsī's various works, now collected as *Risāle-i nūr* (*The Radiant Book*), were clandestinely circulated during his years of exile, but are now freely available in several languages.[15] Nūrsī wrote in very expressive language pulsating with energy. He had considerable knowledge of modern science, which he used to show consonance between the Quran and modern science, primarily in what is called classical physics. He makes attempts to establish normative beliefs of Islam on the basis of the certainties of modern physical sciences and reads the cosmic verses of the Quran in light of modern science.

For Nūrsī, 36:41–42, *And We created for them the like (of the full-laden ark) upon which they ride,* points to the railway, and 24:35, the "Light Verse," "alludes to electricity as well as to numerous other lights and mysteries."[16] Further, 34:12, *And unto Solomon* [*We made obedient*] *the wind, whose morning course was a month and whose evening course was a month,*

13. Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm al-mushtamil ʿalā ʿajāʾib,* 26 vols. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1931).

14. Other scientific *tafsīr*s of the twentieth century include ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ismāʿīl, *al-Islām waʾl-ṭibb al-ḥadīth (Islam and Modern Medicine)* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād, AD 1938); Ḥusayn al-Harāwī, *al-Naẓariyyāt al-ʿilmiyyah fīʾl-Qurʾān (Scientific Theories in the Quran)* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Risālah, 1361/1942); Ḥanafī Aḥmad, *Muʿjizāt al-Qurʾān fī waṣf al-kāʾināt (Quranic Miracles About the Cosmos)* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Bayān al-ʿArabī, 1373/1954; repr. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1968 as *al-Tafsīr al-ʿilmī liʾl-āyāt al-kawniyyah fīʾl-Qurʾān (Scientific Exegesis of the Cosmic Verses in the Quran);* ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Shāhīn, *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān waʾl-iktishāfāt al-ḥadīthah (The Inimitability of the Quran and Modern Discoveries)* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Ismāʿīliyyah al-Kubrā, 1369/1950); Ḥasan Ḥāmid ʿAṭiyyah, *Khalq al-samāwāt waʾl-arḍ fī sittat ayyām fīʾl-ʿilm waʾl-Qurʾān (Creation of the Heavens and the Earth in Six Days in Science and in the Quran)* (Cairo: n.p., 1992); Mūsā al-Khaṭīb, *Min dalāʾil al-iʿjāz al-ʿilmī fīʾl-Qurʾān waʾl-sunnah al-nabawiyyah (Signs of the Scientific Miracles of the Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah)* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1415/1994); and ʿAbd al-Razzāq Nawfal, *Min al-āyāt al-ʿilmiyyah (On the Scientific Verses)* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1409/1989).

15. *Risāle-i nūr* is available in various print and electronic formats and on the Internet. Its Arabic version, *al-Mathnawī al-ʿarabī al-nūrī* (Cairo: Sharikat Sözler li'l-Nashr, 1994), has been edited by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣāliḥī. An English version was edited and translated by Şükran Vahide as *The Words: On the Nature and Purposes of Man, Life, and All Things* (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat Ticaret ve Sanayi, 1992). All references are to the new revised edition published in 1998.

16. Nūrsī, *Words,* 261.

> suggests that the road is open for man to cover such a distance in the air. . . . In which case, O man! since the road is open to you, reach this level! And in meaning Almighty God is saying through the tongue of this verse: "O man! I mounted one of my servants on the air because he gave up the desires of his soul. If you too give up laziness, which comes from the soul, and benefit thoroughly from certain of My laws in the cosmos, you too may mount it." . . . The verse specified points far ahead of today's aeroplanes.[17]

Likewise, the miracle of the prophet Moses' staff (2:60) predicts the development of modern drilling techniques to dig out such indispensable substances of modern industry as oil, mineral water, and natural gas. The mention of *iron made . . . supple* for David (34:10) becomes a reference to the future significance of iron and steel for modern industry.[18]

As the genre "matured," these initial attempts were refined in order to avoid discovering direct correspondence between the vocabulary of the Quran and that of science. These reformulations have disguised scientism to such an extent that in some cases it has become impossible for undiscerning readers to pinpoint it. This disguised form of scientism has pervaded the works of many modern Muslim rationalists, who have submitted to the authority of modern science without examining its premises. A direct consequence of this scientism has been the denial of miracles through allegorical and scientific interpretations of verses that apparently point to a higher order of laws and existents that cannot be scrutinized through the methods of modern science. *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad (d. 1412/1992) exemplifies such a thoroughgoing scientism.[19]

17. Nūrsī, *Words*, 262–63.

18. Nūrsī, *Words*, 264.

19. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus, 1980). Asad's scientism and rationalism are more obvious in the translation and notes of those verses of the Quran in which direct reference is made to miracles. For instance, he translates 3:49, in which the Quran mentions miraculous actions of Jesus, such as the breathing of life into clay birds, the healing of the blind and the leper, and bringing the dead back to life, as: "And [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel. 'I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it, so that it might become [your] destiny by God's leave; and I shall heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave; and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses. Behold, in all this there is indeed a message for you, if you are [truly] believers." Explaining his translation in notes (nn. 36–39), he states: "In the parabolic manner so beloved to him, Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny, and that this vision, brought to life by his God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny by God's leave and by the strength of their faith. . . . It is probable that the 'raising of the dead' by Jesus is a metaphorical description of his giving new life to people who were spiritually dead. . . . If this interpretation is—as I believe—correct, then the 'healing of the blind and the leper' has a similar significance: namely, an inner regeneration of people who were spiritually diseased and blind to the truth" (p. 74).

This type of scientific *tafsīr* is on occasion integrated into general *tafsīr,* as is the case with Farīd Wajdī's (d. 1419/1998) *Ṣafwat al-ʿirfān* (*The Best Part of Cognition*), a Quranic commentary with an elaborate introduction that is now commonly known as *al-Muṣḥaf al-mufassar* (*The Quran Interpreted*).[20] This commentary, printed in the margin of the text of the Quran, is divided into two parts. The first part, *Tafsīr al-alfāẓ* ("Explanation of Expressions"), explains difficult and rare words; the second, *Tafsīr al-maʿānī* ("Explanation of Meanings"), "translates" the text of the Quran into contemporary Arabic with "scientific" remarks spread throughout the translation. In his remarks Wajdī inserts scientific explanations, often with exclamations placed in parentheses: "You read in this verse an unambiguous prediction of things invented in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries," or "Modern science confirms this literally."[21]

Another noteworthy development in the genre of scientific *tafsīr* is the attempt to link its methodology, concepts, terms, and techniques to the classical *tafsīr* literature. For instance, the concept of *iʿjāz,* which classically referred to the inimitability of the Quran, has been expanded by some writers of scientific *tafsīr* to include scientific *iʿjāz*.[22] The concept of *iʿjāz* originated on the basis of the Quranic challenge to the unbelievers to produce a *sūrah* like its own (11:13). This theme is often present in many classical exegeses of the Quran, where scholars define *iʿjāz* in precise terms and explore its various dimensions such as its linguistics and grammatical inimitability. By including so-called scientific *iʿjāz* in this category, the writers of scientific *tafsīr* made an attempt to graft their work onto the existing coherent body of classical *tafsīr.* What they mean by "scientific *iʿjāz*" is, however, quite different from and foreign to the original concept.[23]

In addition to the attempts to link scientific discoveries directly to the verses of the Quran, the impact of scientism has produced interpretations of the Quran molded to conform to specific scientific theories (which are frequently modified) and worldviews that have already been accepted as unquestionable. An important example of this kind of scientism is the attitude of some commentators toward the theory of evolution. Such commentators seek to establish a theistic version of the theory of evolution by

20. Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, *Muqaddimat al-muṣḥaf al-mufassar* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dāʾirat Maʿārif al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn, 1349/1930).

21. Wajdī, *Muqaddimat,* 346, 423.

22. The word *iʿjāz,* from the root *ʿ-j-z,* has various meanings including "to disable," "to incapacitate," "to be impossible," "to be inimitable." The Quranic challenge occurs in 2:23; 10:38; 11:13; and 17:88 in slightly different forms. The first one states: *If you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down unto Our servant, then bring a* sūrah *like it, and call your witnesses apart from God if you are truthful.* Responding to disbelievers accusing the Prophet of fabricating the Quran, 10:38 challenges them to produce a *sūrah* like the *sūrah*s of the Quran, and 11:13 asks them to produce ten. The last one, 17:88, maintains that even human beings and jinn working together could not meet the challenge.

23. Many books have been written on this aspect. See, e.g., Muṣṭafā Muslim, *Mabāḥith fī iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1999).

interpreting metaphorically those verses of the Quran that are in direct opposition to the theory of evolution. They consider Adam a representative of humanity rather than a specific individual.[24] The impact of the theory of evolution can also be traced in the works of Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905) and those who were influenced by his thought, including Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935),[25] Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1357/1938),[26] Abu'l-Kalām Āzād (d. 1377/1958),[27] Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh (d. 1423/2002),[28] and Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī (d. 1373/1953).[29]

Another related development in scientific interpretations of the Quran is the appearance of a large amount of secondary literature, including books, articles, television productions, and audiovisual and Web-based material.[30] The dramatic increase in this literature during the last three decades of the fourteenth/twentieth century can be attributed to various social, political, and economic factors. It was a time during which a sudden increase in oil revenues gave economic leverage to certain Muslim

24. Ghulam Ahmad Parvez says: "It is generally understood that Adam, about whom the Quran states at various places that he was expelled from *jannah* (the Garden), was a prophet, but the Quran does not support this view. What the Quran has stated in different verses indicates that the person expelled from *jannah* was not any specific man, but a metaphorical representative of humanity. In other words, the story of Adam is not the story of one particular person (or a couple), but the tale of Man which the Quran has told metaphorically" (*Lughāt al-Qurʾān* [Lahore: Adārah Ṭalūʿ-e Islām, 1960], 1:214).

25. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ḥakīm al-shahīr bi-tafsīr al-manār,* 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah li'l-Ṭibāʿah waʾl-Nashr, 1973).

26. Muḥammad Iqbal did not write a commentary on the Quran, but the Quran was the most central influence on his life and thought. He had studied modern Western philosophy and was aware of new developments in modern science. His poetry does not show any sign of Western influences, but in his basic philosophical work, *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought,* he seems to be deeply influenced by evolutionary concepts: "I am, therefore, inclined to think that the *jannat* in the Quranic narration is the conception of a primitive state in which man is practically unrelated to his environment and consequently does not feel the sting of human wants the birth of which alone marks the beginning of human culture. Thus we see that the Quranic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience" (*The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought* [Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1986], 66–67).

27. Abu'l-Kalām Āzād, *Tarjumān al-Qurʾān* (Lahore: Islāmī Academy, n.d.).

28. Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh, *The Emergence of Islam (Khuṭbāt-i Bahāwalpūr),* trans. Afzal Iqbal (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1993).

29. Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, "Question of Evolution and the Qurʾān," in *al-Nadwah,* January 1908, quoted in Mawlānā Shihāb al-Dīn Nadwī, *Takhliq-i Ādam aur naẓriyah irtiqā* (Karachi: Majlis-e Nashriyāt-e Islām, n.d.).

30. This literature is being produced in all languages and countries. A few examples of such works are: Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Bārr, *Khalq al-insān bayn al-ṭibb waʾl-Qurʾān (The Creation of the Human Being in Medicine and the Quran)* (Jeddah: al-Dār al-Saʿūdiyyah, 1986); Ghulam Jilani Barq, *Dō Qurʾān (Two Qurans)* (Lahore: Shaykh Ghulam Ali, n.d.); S. Bashir ud-Din Mahmood, *Doomsday and Life After Death* (Islamabad: Holy Qurʾān Research Foundation, 1991); Syed Sibte Nabi Naqvi, *Islam and Contemporary Science* (Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1973); and Z. R. El-Naggar, *Sources of Scientific Knowledge: The Geological Concept of Mountains in the Quran* (Herndon, VA: Association of Muslim Scientists and Engineers and the International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991).

states, which then established institutions to promote scientific interpretations of the Quran. These institutions organized numerous international conferences and seminars in which speakers linked verses of the Quran to specific data and theories of modern science to prove that (1) the Quran is truly a Book of God revealed to the Prophet of Islam because such specific scientific information was unknown during his lifetime, and (2) the Quran already contains all scientific knowledge, and it is for science and scientists to discover this knowledge.

This secondary literature is enormously popular in the Muslim world, and this popularity has, in turn, contributed to its exponential growth. It ranges from *The Bible, the Qurʾan and Science,* by the French doctor who embraced Islam, Maurice Bucaille, (d. 1418/1998; it was first published in 1976 and since then translated into every major language in the Muslim world), and is in hundreds of websites that attempt to prove the authenticity of the Quran on the basis of modern science.[31]

In addition to the oil boom of the 1970s, the rise, popularity, and mass distribution of this literature owes its existence and propagation to a number of other political, social, psychological, and technological factors, such as the reach of the Internet and other mass communication technologies. During the last quarter of the fourteenth/twentieth century a number of state-sponsored institutions, such as the Pakistan Hijrah Council and the Commission for Scientific Miracles of the Quran and *Sunnah* (*Hayʾat al-ʿijāz al-ʿilmī fi'l-Qurʾān wa'l-Sunnah*), established at Makkah under the aegis of the World Muslim League (*Rābiṭat al-ʿālam al-islāmī*), organized international conferences and research programs to promote the idea of the scientific miracles of the Quran. These international conferences typically invited scientists—especially non-Muslim scientists—to relate their scientific research to specific verses of the Quran or to the traditions of the Prophet of Islam.[32] Videotaped proceedings of such conferences were then distributed throughout the world.[33] This undertaking further propagated the trend of writing scientific interpretations of the Quran.

31. Maurice Bucaille, *La Bible, le Coran et la science: les Écritures saintes examinées à la lumière des connaissances modernes* (Paris: Seghers, 1976), translated by Alastair D. Pannell and the author as *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (Indianapolis: North American Trust Publications, 1978). Since its original publication, the book has been published in hundreds of pirated local editions all over the Muslim world. Also of interest is a rebuttal to this work by William F. Campbell, *The Qurʾan and the Bible in the Light of History and Science* (Upper Darby: Middle East Resources, 1986).

32. Notable among the Muslim scholars who have been associated with the commission are Sheikh Abdul Majeed Zindani, its founder and first secretary-general, and Zaghloul El-Naggar, an Egyptian geologist. The commission has published about twenty books dealing with the "scientific miracles" of the Quran in fields such as embryology, botany, geology, astronomy, and cosmology. Among non-Muslim scholars who have participated in these conferences are gynecologist Joe Leigh Simpson, marine scientist William Hay, and embryologist Keith Moore.

33. The first international conference organized by the Commission for Scientific Miracles of the Quran and *Sunnah* was held in Islamabad, Pakistan, in 1987; the fifth in Beirut in 2000.

## *Content, Methodology, and General Approach of Scientific* Tafāsīr

The stock content of scientific *tafsīr*s consists of those verses of the Quran in which certain biological, geological, meteorological, or cosmic processes are mentioned. Since many such processes are the subject matter of science, modernist writers of such *tafsīr*s and secondary literature have used the theories and data of modern science to explain such verses. In so doing they often identify Quranic vocabulary with that of modern science. For instance, an often cited verse purportedly supporting the big bang theory is 21:30 (*Have those who disbelieve not considered that the heavens and the earth were sewn together and We rent them asunder?*), in which the words *ratq* ("sewn together") and *fatq* ("rent asunder") are interpreted to mean that the earth and the skies were fused together as a dense, hot mass, which God split apart *à la* the big bang model of creation proposed by Martin Ryle and Allan R. Sandage. This prefiguration of the big bang theory in the Quran is then taken as proof of its Divine Origin.

Another popular example is that of embryonic development, for which 23:12–14 are usually cited as proof of the presence of recently discovered scientific data in the Quran:

> *And indeed We created man from a draught of clay. Then We made him a drop in a secure dwelling place. Then of the drop We created a blood clot, then of the blood clot We created a lump of flesh, then of the lump of flesh We created bones and We clothed the bones with flesh; then We brought him into being as another creation. Blessed is God, the best of creators!*

The analogy between these verses and the scientific understanding of embryonic development was first demonstrated by Canadian embryologist Keith Moore, who was invited to several conferences organized by the Commission on Scientific Signs of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and later published by the commission in a special edition of his book *The Developing Human*.[34] This edition contained "Islamic Additions" and a new preface by Moore in which he states:

> I was astonished by the accuracy of the statements that were recorded in the seventh century AD, before the science of embryology was established. Although I was aware of the glorious history of Muslim scientists in the fourth/tenth century and of some of their contributions to medicine, I knew nothing about the religious facts and beliefs contained in the Quran and *Sunnah*. It is important for Islamic and other students to understand the meaning of these

34. Keith L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology, with Islamic Additions*, 3rd ed. (Jeddah: Dār al-Qiblah, 1983); see also Keith L. Moore, Marshall E. Johnson, N. Persaud, Gerald C. Goeringer, A. Abdul-Majeed Zindani, and Mustafa A. Ahmed, *Human Development as Described in the Qur'an and Sunnah* (Mecca: Commission on Scientific Signs of the Qur'an and Sunnah, 1992).

Quranic statements about human development, based on current scientific knowledge.[35]

Illustrated with drawings and photographs, the "Islamic edition" of Moore's book identifies certain key words of these verses (*sulālah, nutfah, ʿalaqah,* and *muḍghah*) with stages of embryonic development and then asks: "How could Muhammad have possibly known all this 1400 years ago, when scientists have only recently discovered this using advanced equipment and powerful microscopes which did not exist at that time?"[36]

A remarkably similar methodology appears in all the numerous scientific interpretations of the Quran, as if they have come from the same mold; they usually differ from one another only in details. All of them focus on those verses of the Noble Quran that describe natural processes or the constituent elements of the cosmos, such as the sky, planets, stars, earth, sun, moon, mountains, oceans, and clouds. All of them use only the most current scientific data and theories and avoid any reference to obsolete scientific theories, without realizing that what is current today will soon become obsolete tomorrow.[37] Sometimes these works do acknowledge the fact that our scientific understanding of the physical cosmos is always changing; yet they continue to proffer scientific data as proof of the Divine Origin of the Quran. These interpretations lack context—that is, they isolate the verses being interpreted from their immediate context as well as from the overall Quranic perspective on the cosmos.

## *Scientific Exegesis Revisited*

Even prior to the rise of modern science and its impact on the Muslim world there were some scholars who did not approve of any overt reading of science in the Quran. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388), for instance, argued that the Quran was not sent down as a compendium of medicine, astronomy, geometry, chemistry, or necromancy, but as a book of guidance for leading humanity out of darkness and into light.[38] Agreeing with al-Shāṭibī, al-Dhahabī adds that 6:38, *We have neglected nothing in the Book* (*mā farraṭnā fi'l-kitābi min shay'*), should not be interpreted to mean that the Quran contains details of all types of knowledge, but only that it contains the general principles (*uṣūl ʿāmmah*) of all those matters that human beings must know in order to reach physical and spiritual perfection.[39] Furthermore, al-Dhahabī adds, the word

35. Moore, *The Developing Human,* x.

36. Moore, *The Developing Human,* 9.

37. See Mustansir Mir, "Scientific Exegesis of the *Qur'ān*—A Viable Project?," *Islam and Science* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 33–42.

38. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Ittijāhāt al-munḥarifah fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, 1396/1976), 86–87 (quoted in Mir, "Scientific Exegesis," 36).

39. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Ittijāhāt,* 87.

*al-kitāb* in this verse could refer to the *Preserved Tablet* (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ;* 85:22).[40] This critique was meant to keep readers' focus on the main purpose of the Quranic revelation—the guidance of humanity—an issue that never arose before, because until the rise of modern scientism no one dissociated the sign verses of the Quran from its overall worldview.

The attempts to read modern science in the Quran are, however, quite different from what was indicated by traditional scholars such as al-Ghazzālī. These new works decontextualize verses of the Quran; they take a changing human science as the criteria for "proving" that the Quran is in fact the Word of God; and they attempt to show compatibility between the Quran and modern science, although the latter is built upon philosophical premises about the cosmos in which the existence of a Creator is irrelevant. Various attempts to show that certain verses of the Quran prefigure theories of modern science are flawed, because there is no essential correspondence between the terminology and *Weltanschauung* of modern science and that of the Quran.

It is problematic to claim, as do many proponents of the scientific *tafsīr,* that *ratq* and *fatq* in 21:30 point to a big bang of the sorts claimed by modern science, because these words simply do not mean the "dense, fused matter" that "exploded" in the big bang model of modern scientific cosmology. In the context of the verse, it is quite clear that these two words have many meanings, including the closing up of the skies and the earth, so no rain falls and no vegetation grows from the ground, and the sudden opening of the skies so that, through God's Mercy, torrential rains cause the earth—dead until now—to be revived, yielding its treasures, allowing vegetation to grow. These are presented as evidence for the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) and Resurrection (*maʿād*), as Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1418/1997) has pointed out in his *tafsīr.*[41]

Likewise, all other verses of the Quran that are the stock material of modern attempts at scientific exegesis can be shown to indicate something far different from what these commentators wish to read into them. In general, it can be said that attempts at finding modern science in the Quran or proving the veracity of the Quran by way of modern science are fundamentally flawed, because they suffer from a conceptual confusion produced by various forms of scientism. They dissociate and decontextualize the Quranic vocabulary and concepts in order to graft modern scientific theories onto the Book.

## *Conclusion*

As already mentioned, the sign verses of the Quran direct our attention to three realms of existence, the cosmos (*āfāq*), the human self (*nafs*), and history (*āthār*), in order to establish an unshakable belief in the Quranic message. Various elements of the first

40. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān;* 2:342.

41. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qurʾān,* 9 vols. (Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1997), 5:140–41.

realm, the cosmos, are described in the Quran in their dual role as discernible physical entities regulated through Divine laws (often misnamed laws of nature) and as signs or symbols (*āyāt*) pointing beyond themselves. These signs are presented as material for reflection for those who have hearts to reflect:

> *Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth; and the variation of the night and the day; and the ships that run upon the sea with what benefits mankind; and the water God sends down from the sky whereby He revives the earth after its death, scattering all manner of beast therein; and the shifting of the winds; and the clouds subdued between the sky and the earth are surely signs for a people who understand.* (2:164)

The sign verses are points of departure for people who reflect on them. The very act of bringing into existence the heavens and the earth and all that is contained within them is a proof of the infinite Power and Might of the Creator, His inimitable Skill (*ṣanᶜah*) and infinite Wisdom (*ḥikmah*). The remarkable harmony of the innumerable elements and forces present in the cosmos could not have come into existence, had there been more than one Creator; in that case there would be more than one operative volition, resulting in the destruction of order and eventually the entire cosmos.

Without mentioning directly here the Most Beautiful Divine Names (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*)—such as *al-Bāriʾ* ("the Maker") and *al-Mubdiʾ* ("the Originator"), which evoke the infinite and absolute creativity of God—the verse just mentioned refers to the coming into existence of the heavens and the earth as proof of God's Oneness and His absolute Sovereignty. The bounteous generosity of the elements of the cosmos (waters bring life to earth, the winds bring rain) point to His inexhaustible Wisdom and Mercy. Furthermore, the cosmos and its elements testify that there is, indeed, a purpose in the creation, for such a vast, complex, and interconnected cosmos cannot be pointless. Likewise, the succession of night and day, their regularity, contrast in color, function, and effects on humanity and other things and beings existing in the cosmos are proofs for the harmonious functioning of various elements of the cosmos, despite their opposite natures. The movement of winds (*taṣrīf al-riyāḥ*) sometimes brings rain-laden clouds; at other times the winds scatter clouds, so that they do not bring rain to the barren earth; for some, winds bring Divine Mercy, while for others they are means of His Retribution.

Unlike the worldview created by modern science, the Quranic view of the elements of nature does not make them only subservient to humanity; rather, they remain in the service of their Lord, Who created them and set them to tasks for His Purpose. They benefit humanity, and their existence and functioning can be studied by human beings through an understanding of the laws prescribed by the Creator for their existence, but the cosmos remains ultimately beyond human control.

In addition to their physical descriptions and functions, the Quran contains numerous other levels of meaning in relation to the elements of the cosmos. Water pouring

down from the sky is a physical process; it helps to bring forth vegetation, but its ability to do so depends on the receptivity of the earth; some regions of the earth are more receptive to it than others and benefit from rain, while others remain unreceptive and do not bear fruit. The guidance of the Quran is like rain. Some benefit from it; others pay no heed to it. Winds are physical; they drive clouds and bring rain. But there are also winds of Divine Mercy blowing in the hearts of those who believe and remain steadfast in their beliefs and servitude to their Creator. Their functions vary, and thus they carry not only life-nurturing rains, but also, as mentioned in the Quranic story of Joseph (*Sūrah* 12), the fragrance from the tunic of a long-lost son, which serves as a secondary cause for the restoration of a father's eyesight (10:94).

The elements of the cosmos are both proofs and witnesses for the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*), which is infinitely better than this world. This testimony (*shahādah*) of the elements and of the entire cosmos to the Hereafter is present in various forms in the Quran, ranging from oaths to arguments drawn from the properties of the elements. In fact, the very act of creation testifies to the coming of a moment when God will fold back His creation to complete the cycle. Taken as a whole, this entire cosmic scheme of the Quran establishes an inalienable link between the manifest cosmos and its Creator. Furthermore, built into this Quranic description of the cosmos is a teleology that anchors the physical cosmos in a metaphysical realm, thereby establishing an incontrovertible nexus between God and the cosmos, on the one hand, and whatever exists in the cosmos and its raison d'être, on the other. This anchoring of the physical cosmos and all that exists in it in a realm beyond the physical is utterly lost in modern science, where the physical cosmos and its contents stand independently by themselves, utterly disconnected from anything higher than their own existence. Attempts to interpret the Quran scientifically, therefore, suffer from the inherent disparity between the Quranic and modern scientific views of the cosmos.

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# THE QURAN AS SOURCE OF ISLAMIC LAW

Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib

The Quran descended (*nazala*) or was revealed over a period spanning almost twenty-three years, divided by the migration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet—peace and blessings be upon him—into two fundamental eras: the almost thirteen years of the Prophet's residence in Makkah and the ten years of his residence in Madinah before the end of his earthly life. Among the most important topics covered by the traditional disciplines devoted to the study of the Quran (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*) is the determination of which revelations belong to the Makkan period and which to the Madinan with regard to the number of verses revealed, the themes covered, the different commandments, and their various possible meanings (*dalālāt*).[1] The Makkan and Madinan parts of the Quran are distinguished from one another based on the principal objectives (*maqāṣid*) of each period as established by the scholars of Quranic exegesis (*ʿulamāʾ al-tafsīr*). The primary objectives of the Quran during the Makkan period were to establish the fundamentals (*uṣūl*) of the faith, argue for the truth of Divine Oneness (*tawḥīd*) while deepening knowledge of it, refute the errors of polytheism (*shirk*) and idolatry (*wathaniyyah*), and elucidate the connections between the central tenets of the faith and the fundamentals of morality.[2] The principal objective during the Madinan period was to promulgate laws for the creation of an Islamic society and therefore the ordering of life in a wide range of areas covering family life, social interactions, and business transactions.

The verses of the Makkan period are therefore distinguished by extensive references to the Resurrection and the Judgment, Paradise and Hellfire and stories of the early communities of faith and their acceptance or rejection of revelation—those truths most necessary to bring about a change in the hearts and minds of people given to false beliefs, misconceptions about reality, and unworthy habits and customs. The Madinan parts of the Quran are distinguished by the promulgation of laws for personal affairs, society, and the state, including rules of marriage, child nursing (*raḍāʿah*), family maintenance (*nafaqah*), inheritance (*mīrāth*), usury (*ribā*), commercial transactions

1. According to the majority of scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), verses revealed during the Prophet's migration to Madinah, prior to his arrival, are classified as Makkan, and verses revealed after the Prophet's migration to and travels outside of Madinah after his migration there are classified as Madinan.

2. These fundamentals invite people to virtue, noble character traits (*makārim*), and good manners (*adab*) and warn them against acts of vice (*radhāʾil*) and vileness (*qabāʾiḥ*) in speech and deed.

(*buyūᶜ*), retribution (*qiṣāṣ*), and struggle in society and in the path of God (*jihād*)—all of the different laws that came to be a matter of concern for Muslims as soon as they were constituted as a community, with a state of their own, social institutions, an army, and a leader.

Accordingly, Makkan groups of verses almost always begin with an address to humanity at large, such as *O mankind* or *O Children of Adam,* while Madinan sections usually open with an address to the community of the faithful, that is, Muslims in particular, almost always beginning with the phrase *O you who believe.* Similarly, verses of the Makkan period are characteristically short and redolent with endless shades of warning (*tarhīb*) against wrong action and incitement (*targhīb*) to right action; they abound in symbolic stories that convey moral and spiritual lessons and offer admonitions. By contrast, most of the verses of the Madinan period are relatively long, comprising accounts of fundamental changes in society and elaborations of rules pertaining to these changes. The majority of scholars also point out that all *sūrah*s mentioning hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) are Madinan, whereas all *sūrah*s containing the retort *kallā* ("Nay!") are Makkan. Additional distinguishing characteristics exist, but need not be mentioned here.

For the purposes of the present inquiry, the most important point to draw from this distinction is that it is in verses from the Madinan period that are found the roots of Islamic laws in their vast number and variety. Therefore, it is through special attention to verses of the Madinan period that the pivotal connection between Islamic Law and the Quran—that is, the fact that it issues directly from the revealed Book—will be most clearly seen.

The Quran carries within it many references indicating its status as a lawgiving book: it gives commands (*awāmir*) and prohibitions (*nawāhī*); it states what is licit (*ḥalāl*) and illicit (*ḥarām*); it contains formal obligations (*takālīf*) as well as doctrines and ethical directives. In this respect the Quran is more like the Torah of Moses than the Gospel of Jesus—may peace be upon them both. We read in *Sūrah* 7, *al-Aᶜrāf* ("The Heights"):

> *Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them, who enjoins upon them what is right, and forbids them what is wrong, and makes good things lawful for them, and forbids them bad things, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles that were upon them. Thus those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him; it is they who shall prosper.* (v. 157)

In *Sūrah* 42, *al-Shūrā* ("Counsel") it is said:

> *He has prescribed for you as religion that which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed unto thee* (Muhammad), *and that which We enjoined upon*

> *Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, that you uphold religion and not become divided therein. Grievous for the idolaters is that to which thou callest them. God chooses for Himself whomsoever He will and guides unto Himself whosoever turns in repentance.* (v. 13)

In *Sūrah* 45, *al-Jāthiyah* ("Upon Their Knees") we read:

> *Then We placed thee* (Muhammad) *upon a clear path from the Command, so follow it, and follow not the caprices of those who know not.* (v. 18)

And, finally, in *Sūrah* 2, *al-Baqarah* ("The Cow") it is written:

> *And whosoever transgresses against the limits set by God, those are the wrongdoers. . . . These are the limits set by God, which He makes clear to a people who know.* (vv. 229–30)

The Quran thus contains explicit statements that it is the sacred source and primary authority for Muslim legislation in personal, social, economic, and political matters—and no change of time or place can affect this primacy. Nowhere does the Quran indicate—whether directly or indirectly—that its laws are of limited duration, that they belong to a particular period, age, or society, that Muslims may thereafter deem themselves no longer bound by its precepts, or that they may choose to organize their lives or societies by resorting to other than the revealed Book or the Prophetic authority in founding their common laws and establishing their familial, social, economic, and constitutional orders.

Quranic laws are accordingly distinguished by permanence; yet they are flexible and have the potential to accommodate future developments. Indeed, Muslims consider the capacity of Quranic laws to yield perennially appropriate rulings and applications one of the features of the Divine inimitability or miracle (*iʿjāz*) of the Noble Book. Other such features include eloquence (*faṣāḥah*), rhetorical power (*balāghah*), and the telling of unseen events, past, present, and future. Concerning this understanding of its supernatural nature, Muslims have remained unanimous for fourteen centuries. And, indeed, history has proven that Islamic civilization has prospered and flourished under the shining rays of the Quran, reaching, by virtue of its Divine Guidance, summits of excellence and unity, enduring over the long stretch of fourteen centuries, and procuring happiness and contentment for a vast sector of humanity by offering truth, goodness, and beauty—hardly the products offered by the civilizations of today.

Against this view maintained by Muslim scholars and a large sector of the community of believers over the ages, some people today object to the necessity of linking legislation to the Quran as the primary source of law and the insistence that it should remain the authoritative reference for the Islamic social order, arguing that it makes no sense to honor the authority of a text revealed some fourteen centuries ago in today's world, which has little or no similarity to or continuity with the one that gave birth to

it. This perception has led such people to resort to modern readings of the text that are totally unconnected to the traditional Quranic disciplines (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*), which developed around the Quran and became, over a long period, an integral corpus establishing the logical and linguistic criteria that alone guarantee the Quran's accurate interpretation. The results of such ungrounded forays into the demanding territory of Quranic exegesis are readings foreign to both the form and content of the Quran and, in many cases, reach conclusions directly opposed to its true objectives (*maqāṣid*). The root of the problem here is a conflict between the nature of modern readings that believe in neither the sacredness nor the inimitability of the Quranic text and those who see the Quran as a Divine Text transcending time and place and not merely a work of human authorship. We shall thus try to refer as much as possible, in the context of the present inquiry, to some of the fallacies into which this or that modern reading has fallen. Some are either entirely Western or simply misguided from the start insofar as they do not see the Quran as a Sacred Text, but as a literary one upon which all the crises and deviations of the modern Western mind may be projected.[3]

## *Principles of Islamic Law*

### EASE OF OBLIGATIONS (*ʿADAM AL-ḤARAJ*)

The first point to note concerning the laws promulgated in the Quran is that they do not burden believers with more than they can bear; nothing excessive is imposed. The Quran indicates the lightness and ease of its laws for the faithful in many verses, for example: *God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you* (2:185); *God tasks no soul beyond its capacity* (2:286); *God desires to lighten [your burden] for you, for man was created weak* (4:28); *God desires not to place a burden upon you* (5:6); and *There is no fault against the blind, nor fault against the lame, nor fault against the sick* (24:61). The Prophet—peace and blessings be upon him—confirmed this principle when he said, "I have been sent with the true and tolerant religion of primordial unity (*al-ḥanīfiyyah al-samḥāʾ*),"[4] which he would put into practice whenever he was presented with a choice between two things by always choosing the least burdensome obligation.

The universal rules of Islamic Law upon which are based all obligations of the religion, whether in matters of ritual (*ʿibādāt*) or pertaining to human transactions and social relations (*muʿāmalāt*), were developed in conformity with this principle of not imposing a heavy burden. Among these rules we find such legal maxims as:

3. Of course, the Quran can certainly be explored through literary-critical means—the results of such inquiry will be further testament to its "inimitability" or miraculous nature—but an integral understanding of the Sacred Text requires it to be read as such, making use of the full breadth and depth offered by the traditional Quranic disciplines.

4. Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr* (Cairo, AH 1424), 3:262 (no. 3150).

"Too much hardship calls for ease" (*al-mashaqqah tajlibu 'l-taysīr*); "Necessity makes the unlawful lawful" (*al-ḍarūrāt tubīḥu 'l-maḥẓūrāt*); and "When a matter becomes too narrow, it calls for broadening" (*idhā ḍāqa 'l-amr ittasaᶜa*). As an example of this principle jurists cite the rules for the canonical prayer, which Muslims must normally begin in an upright posture—an easy enough requirement; but they are permitted to perform it sitting or even lying down whenever sick, exhausted, or otherwise unable to maintain the upright position. The same qualification applies to the obligation to fast, which people are allowed to forgo in situations of great hardship, during travel, illness, pregnancy, or when nursing a baby.[5] Carrion meat (*al-maytah*), normally forbidden, also becomes permitted when there is no other alternative. Similarly, the rite of ablution with water (*wuḍūᵓ*) ordained in the Quran may be replaced by the easier rite of dry ablution (*tayammum*) in cases of illness, danger, or the unavailability of water.

Thus, whenever there may be a legitimate reason, Islamic Law either releases believers completely from the obligation to perform a certain act of worship, lightens it for them, exchanges it for a less taxing act of worship, combines two acts of worship, changes the form or order of some acts of worship, or allows the use of a forbidden thing in situations of dire necessity.[6] Indeed, the rule even touches upon one of the major principles of Islam, the duty to "enjoin right and forbid wrong" (*al-amr bi'l-maᶜrūf wa'l-nahy ᶜan al-munkar*), a pivotal principle of the Quran confirmed by many verses. The principle of noncomplication permits a Muslim to remain silent before an evil, if a greater evil or a greater tribulation could result from speaking out. The jurists derived such rulings by means of rational inference from the practices of the Prophet during his thirteen years in Makkah prior to migrating to Madinah, during which time he witnessed many objectionable events, yet remained patient and silent because he could do nothing to change them. It is narrated that the Ḥanbalite jurist Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), while in the company of some scholars, came across a group of Tartars who were drinking wine. One of the scholars wanted to object to their practice, but Ibn Taymiyyah forbade him, saying: "Wine was forbidden because it distracted from the remembrance of God and prayer, and these men are distracted from killing souls, enslaving offspring, and seizing money and property. So, let them be."[7]

5. See Muḥammad al-Sāyis et al., *Taᵓrīkh al-tashrīᶜ al-islāmī* (Cairo: Jāmiᶜat al-Azhar, Faculty of Islamic Law, 1937). See also Shaykh Muḥammad al-Madanī, *Daᶜᵓim al-istiqrār fi'l-tashrīᶜ al-qurᵓānī* (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat al-Azhar, 1959).

6. The *ḥajj* may be left undone if one is unable to perform it (for financial or health reasons) or in the case of a lack of security on the road; prayers may be shortened during travel; dry ablution may take the place of water ablution; two canonical prayers may be combined; prayer may be discontinued and made up later in case of fear or danger; carrion meat may be eaten in case of need; and wine may be drunk to remedy choking.

7. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Iᶜlām al-muwaqqiᶜīn ᶜan Rabb al-ᶜālamīn* (Cairo, 1422/2002), 3:6–7.

## FEWNESS OF OBLIGATIONS (*QILLAT AL-TAKĀLĪF*)

The second principle upon which Islamic Law is founded is fewness of obligations. Among the obligations imposed by the Quran, verses that issue rulings governing human or social relationships (*muʿāmalāt*) are by far fewer in number than those that prescribe ritual acts or ethical behavior. They are also fewer in number than verses that call for learning from the examples of earlier religious communities, warning against their ways or showing the perils that result, and they are likewise fewer than the verses exhorting to reward (*targhīb*) or warning against punishment (*tarhīb*) and similar topics. Even though jurists are not unanimous about the exact number of verses that pertain to formal obligations, because they differ with regard to their specific number or meaning,[8] they are nonetheless unanimous about the small number of these verses as such, which accords with the Quranic precept forbidding excessive questioning about rules in order to prevent the proliferation of restrictions and obligations. Thus: *O you who believe! Ask not about things that, if they were disclosed to you, would trouble you* (5:101). And the Prophet used to forbid his followers to ask too many questions, saying: "The gravest wrong committed by a Muslim against other Muslims is to ask about something that is permissible, causing it to become impermissible because of his question."[9] He did not encourage inquiry into matters about which the Quran is silent, leaving them to the golden Islamic rule declaring, "The norm in all things is permissibility (*al-aṣl fi'l-ashyāʾ al-ibāḥah*)." Prohibition is only an exception (*ṭāriʾ*) and, as such, always stands in need of proof; if no proof is found, no prohibition is possible.

In other words, there are matters about which the Quran remains silent, and this silence on the part of the Lawgiver is deliberate; it is meant to offer people more leverage, more room for maneuver and choice. They are left to the jurists' exercise of independent judgment (*ijtihād*), conducted in accordance with their changing perception of the welfare of society, relative to time and place. This is precisely what the following *ḥadīth* refers to: "God has enjoined certain obligatory duties: do not neglect them. He has imposed certain limits: do not transgress them. He has remained silent about certain matters, out of mercy to you, not out of forgetfulness: do not seek after them."[10] This *ḥadīth* is quite positive about the existence of a vast area of cases and issues in peoples' lives about which the *Sharīʿah* offers no specific rulings. These belong to the sphere of Divine Pardon (*al-ʿafw*), described in another *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said, "Whatever God has called licit in His Book is indeed licit; whatever He deemed

8. Al-Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt (al-Imām al-Akbar), *Al-Islām: al-ʿaqīdah wa'l-sharīʿah* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1428/2007), 29:416.

9. Al-Bukhārī, book 96, chap. 3 (no. 7289).

10. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿala 'l-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut, 2008), 2:375, a *ḥadīth* with authentic *isnād*.

illicit is indeed illicit; whatever He remained silent about is pardoned, for God does not forget a thing."[11]

## FLEXIBILITY OF TEXTS

Despite their limited number, the Quranic texts dealing specifically with legislative matters are marked by broadness, flexibility, and variety of forms and are general or specific depending on the nature of the circumstances and obligations. In the verses that deal with legislative matters having little room for the exercise of independent reasoning, such as the spheres of ritual acts and of rules concerning the family, or what is now called personal law—that is, in matters not particularly affected by the logic of social customs and circumstances—the Quran is quite specific. Acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage are obligations whose meanings, mysteries, and wisdom alongside the reasons for their taking one form rather than another are beyond the power of the human mind to know or determine. Such obligations are what the *Sharīᶜah* calls "matters of worship" (*al-umūr al-taᶜabbudiyyah*), that is, matters that the Lawgiver—God Himself—commands people to perform, matters they are incapable of determining on their own initiative. To take the canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*) as an example, *prayer* occurs in more than seventy places in the Quran and given, among others, are its correct performance, the necessary conditions for making it acceptable (such as ablution, *wuḍūᵓ*, and facing the Kaᶜbah, *qiblah*), the particular times it must be performed, and the general bodily position that must accompany it, although the details of the form of the *ṣalāh* are based on Prophetic example.

Then there are the rules for acts pertaining to "human transactions" (*muᶜāmalāt*) and "matters of public welfare" (*maṣāliḥ*), which are generally unaffected by either the passage of time or a change of environment; they are causally determined (*aḥkām muᶜallalah*), their meanings and objectives intelligible, and the verses revealed about them are accordingly fewer and less specific in nature. In these spheres the Quran offers mostly general principles, leaving vast room for the use of analogy, inference, and other forms of reasoning. With the exception of a few rulings concerning inheritance (*mawārīth*) and the punishment of certain crimes, "specific rules are generally lacking," in the formulation of the Quran itself.[12]

With regard to situations subject to change, the Quran offers a general framework of universal principles, ethical and humane in essence, to regulate and govern the particulars of changing conditions.[13] Among other places, this may be seen in the

11. Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr*, 3:545 (no. 3858).

12. Al-Shaykh Zakī al-Dīn Shaᶜbān, *Minhāj al-Qurᵓān fī bayān al-aḥkām* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aᶜlā li'l-Shuᵓūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1391/1971), 28.

13. The Quran draws attention to the law of "change" in 13:11 (*Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves*). We note here that awareness of the principle of becoming and continuous change in this world is deeply rooted in Islamic thinking, most of all in the sciences of wisdom

rules concerning the contract of sale. Though this is the contract with the most rules in civil law, only four are mentioned in the Quran: the rule that makes trade lawful: *God has permitted buying and selling and forbidden usury* (2:275); the stipulation that transactions between seller and buyer be governed by mutual consent: *O you who believe! Consume not each other's wealth falsely, but trade by mutual consent* (4:29); the instruction that they be declared and witnessed: *And take witnesses when you buy and sell between yourselves* (2:282); and the prohibition against buying and selling after the call to prayer is made on Friday: *O you who believe! When you are called to the congregational prayer, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off trade. That is better for you, if you but knew* (62:9).

Similarly, with regard to constitutional law, the Quran limits itself to specifying the principles of consultation (*shūrā*), justice (*ʿadl*), and equality (*musāwāh*); and with regard to criminal law, the Quran stipulates only five punishments, for the crimes of murder, theft, adultery and fornication, corruption upon earth (*ḥadd al-ḥirābah*), and calumny against women of virtue. The same may likewise be said of most other aspects of legislation relating to daily life or affected by changing circumstances in the general conditions of society, the foremost among these being matters pertaining to human transactions, punishments, crimes, and economic affairs.[14]

In all of these changing matters, the philosophy of Quranic Law is to determine the general principle or universal rule, so that people will be able to integrate the diverse conditions of life with the guidance of Heaven. This purpose of Quranic legal texts, to combine the sphere of permanence with the sphere of change, is the main reason for Quranic Law's continuing vitality, survival, and ability to keep pace with various developments; it has allowed Quranic Law to guide Muslims for more than thirteen centuries prior to European colonial powers' replacement of it with laws imported

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(*ʿulūm al-ḥikmah*): *falsafah* (philosophy), *kalām* (theology), and *taṣawwuf* (mysticism). The theologians of Islam (*al-mutakallimūn*) have been conscious, from the very early days of philosophical meditation in Islamic civilization, that the universe is in a state of flux, becoming, and change. Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935) emphasized that no accident can occur twice; the Muʿtazilites took a similar view. The theosopher of great genius Mullā Ṣadrā al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640) departed from philosophical convention by introducing a profound theory about substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*). Whereas Ibn Sīnā and the philosophers of the Middle Ages, Eastern and Western, maintained that motion occurs only in the category of accidents (time, place, quantity, quality, etc.), Mullā Ṣadrā added to these the category of substance, demonstrating that motion occurs in the category of substance itself and not only in the category of accidents. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, change and renewal from moment to moment is a definite law in the cosmos, in both the celestial (the planets and the heavenly bodies) and the terrestrial realms—in this matter, "The condition of the sun and the moon is similar to persons, such as Zayd or ʿAmr; all are subject to change, evanescence, and perishing"—and this insight was inspired specifically by verses of the Quran, such as the following: *And thou seest the mountains that thou dost suppose are solid pass away like clouds* (27:88); *Nay, but they are in doubt regarding a new creation* (50:15); and *All affairs are journeying unto God* (42:53).

14. Al-Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Khallāf, "Maṣādir al-tashrīʿ al-islāmī," *qurnah* 3–5, *Maqāl manshūr* in *Majallat al-qānūn wa'l-iqtiṣād,* no. 5, year 15 (April–May 1945).

from the West. It is, indeed, to this very flexibility that the credit for the preservation of Islamic civilization must be given, and this Law continues even today to possess and provide the power to resist the disintegrative elements of modern conditions.

### GRADUALISM OF LEGISLATION

Many of the verses of the Quran pertaining to legislation were revealed gradually and intermittently. This is particularly true of the verses that legislate against the deep-rooted customs of the pre-Islamic Arabs. As the most effective way to bring about lasting social change, gradualism was the chosen method for drawing people away from slavish adherence to idolatrous customs to the freedom and dignity of sufficiency in God. It is almost certain that if the Quran had confronted the Arabs of the time of revelation with strict commands and prohibitions without offering them sufficient time to abandon their entrenched ways by degrees, many of them would have abandoned its teachings.

We thus find the gradual announcement of the prohibition against intoxicating substances rather than the issuance of a single law, because the habit of drinking was a deeply ingrained custom among Arabs at the time. First the Quran undertook to show that intoxicants possess both benefits and evils; then it prohibited the performance of prayer while in a state of intoxication; and finally it prohibited intoxicants altogether, along with gambling (2:219, 4:43, 5:59), once people were prepared to accept this final ruling. Similarly, the Quran's prohibition of fornication and usury came gradually, as did its calling upon Muslims to remain patient vis-à-vis the aggressive acts of their enemies; only at a later stage were they commanded to defend themselves by fighting back.

This was likewise the case with the command to perform prayers and the *qiblah,* the direction of prayer. At the beginning prayers consisted of only two cycles performed by day and two cycles by night, but were increased when people were ready and able to do more, as decreed by the Wisdom of God. Muslims originally prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, until a special revelation descended commanding them to face the direction of the Sacred Sanctuary in Makkah. Quranic laws were, therefore, not arbitrarily imposed all at once, but were revealed gradually, which allowed the Arabs to reform within themselves deeply rooted patterns of behavior that may otherwise have been ineradicable.

## *Implicitness of Rulings in the Text of the Quran*

Determining the rulings implicit in the text is one of the subtlest of all inquiries that deal with legislation in the Quran, since it is related to knowing the sense and meaning of the relevant verses and how one may extract rulings from them. This task is made more intricate by the fact that the Quranic text is revealed in Arabic, a language with unique linguistic, poetic, and metaphysical qualities requiring of its readers special

linguistic and intellectual qualifications in order to access its treasures of knowledge and wisdom.

For Muslims, the Quran is unique among all texts, ancient and modern, in possessing three distinctive qualities:

1. It is an intact and direct sacred text. According to the Islamic faith, it is the record of the very Speech of God—may He be exalted—not the speech of some mortal, including Muhammad, who had no role in its wording, composition, or stylistic construction. This sacrality confers upon the Quran a degree of sublimity and transcendence that makes it unyielding, unless one comes to it with the necessary intellectual and psychological qualifications.

2. Its verses are supremely fertile and rich in meaning. They transcend the boundaries of time and space, acting as a witness and a corrective for whatever situations or contingencies human beings may face. According to Muslim belief, they store in their simple yet profound sentences an infinitude of Divine Knowledge, including ethical and legal directives potentially applicable to all times and places.

3. The authenticity of its verses is extraordinarily well documented, established permanently and indubitably. The Quran is perhaps the only Divinely revealed text that possesses an unbroken line of transmission to its earthly source. Its verses were conveyed by a mouthpiece of Heaven, written down in his presence, memorized, and recorded in manuscripts exactly as dictated by the Prophet, verse by verse and letter by letter. These words, moreover, never disappeared after the death of their transmitter; nor were they ever attributed to anyone other than him (as their communicator), by way of either inspiration or revelation.

Anyone who reads or contemplates this Sacred Text without seeing it in light of these three distinctive qualities can go no farther than the merely literal meaning, for the Text reveals or withholds its more profound meanings relative to the degree of one's knowledge of the philosophy of its language, its learned disciplines, its literary heritage, and of one's spiritual inspiration to understand its secrets. Muslim scholars are unanimous in maintaining that the Quranic Text is "unequivocally evident" (*qāṭiᶜ al-thubūt*) as an authentic text; the proof of this unequivocality is precisely its broad and uninterrupted transmission (*tawātur*). Through it alone can we believe in such things as the events of the past that constitute sacred history, the historicity of great personages, the great religions, and the great messengers as well as eschatological events to come.

However, this "unequivocality" (*qāṭiᶜ*) of the Text is not shared by the concepts and the meanings implicit within it. Among Quranic texts, there are those that are unequivocal, bearing no shade of meaning except what can be learned from the Text

itself, as in the case of the verses indicating the obligation to pray (*ṣalāh*), give alms (*zakāh*), or determine the different allotments of the inheritors of a legacy. The same applies to the verses declaring the illicitness of such things as adultery and fornication, murder, and the dispossession of others' lawful rights. However, there are other verses in which the evidence for the *Sharīᶜah* ruling given by the Text is only probable (*muḥtamal*); in such cases, the implication of the verse is called "equivocal" (*dalālah ẓanniyyah*). The difference between an unequivocal implication and an equivocal one is that the first does not require any extra human effort to understand it, there can be no difference of opinion regarding it, nor is it amenable to modification or development, whereas the second permits different opinions as long as each is based on a process of reflection consistent with the principles of jurisprudence that usually comes under the rubric of "intellectual effort" (*ijtihād*) in this particular science.[15]

Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence (*al-uṣūliyyūn*) have summarized this duality between the unequivocality of the Quranic text in itself and the equivocality of the meanings, judgments, or rulings derived from it in the maxim: "The Quran is of unequivocal immutability and equivocal meanings" (*qaṭᶜī al-thubūt ẓannī al-dalālah*). By this they mean that absolute certainty with regard to the Noble Quran is posited only with regard to the words and letters of the Sacred Text, but the rulings that may be understood from it can be of either an unequivocal nature, having no possible meaning but one, or an equivocal nature, bearing more than one meaning; all of this is ultimately governed by the nature of the words and grammatical constructions of the Arabic language.[16]

In this context, one must bear in mind that the unequivocal texts are few in number, mostly concerning the sphere of dogma and ritual, whereas most of the equivocal texts concern the sphere of social relations (*muᶜāmalāt*). This fact shows that the

15. *Aḥādīth* also play a crucial role in the determination of laws based on the Quranic Text; this will be discussed in the final section of the essay.

16. Among the examples scholars posit of equivocal and unequivocal verses one can mention:

(1) *Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three courses* (2:228). The word translated *courses* (*qurūᵓ*) here possesses the two contrary meanings of both "a menstruation" and "a state of purity from menstrual discharge." If the first is intended, then a (nonpregnant) divorced woman must wait for three menstruation periods before remarrying; if the second, then for three periods of purity following menstruation. The first suggests a period shorter than the second, and legal opinion differs as to which is correct.

(2) *Forbidden unto you [as wives] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your fathers' sisters, your mothers' sisters, your brothers' daughters, your sisters' daughters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, the mothers of your wives, the stepdaughters in your care—born of your wives with whom you have consummated marriage, but if you have not consummated the marriage with them, then there is no blame on you—and the wives of your sons who are from your loins, and two sisters together, save for what is past. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful* (4:23). This text indicates that marrying both a mother and daughter is prohibited unequivocally, but determining what a "daughter" is is equivocal. Does it mean a natural daughter or the linguistic term "daughter," which includes a foster daughter?

claims of certain Western orientalists who accuse Islamic Law of rigidity and stagnation are untrue—the *Sharīᶜah* is replete with open-ended texts, and its overall philosophy relies on principles such as desisting from judgment (*ᶜafw*) and maintaining silence (*sukūt*) about innumerable things, so as to give ample room for human thought and responsibility. Moreover, a deeply rooted principle of the *Sharīᶜah* posits continuous revivification (*tajdīd*): "God causes to rise in this community, at the beginning of every century, someone who will revive for it its religion";[17] and rational inference (*al-istinbāṭ al-ᶜaqlī*) is one of the sources of legislation and the formation of legal judgment. Such a legal system can never become fixed in a single understanding or a potentially unchanging school of legal thought (*madhhab*); nor can its relevance, applicability, or products be limited to a specific time or place.

## *Rules for Inferring Legal Judgments*

Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence study the implications of the Quran for legal judgments on two unequal levels: the purely linguistic level, dealing with the relation of words to their implied meanings, and the level of legal judgments derivable from the Quranic Text.

### LINGUISTICS OF THE QURANIC TEXT

All texts are relevant to the inquiry into the relation between words and meanings, whatever their provenance within the Arabic literary heritage—poetic, historical, literary, scientific, and so on—might be. This study is purely linguistic, based on general principles that are thereafter applied to the "Quranic composition,"[18] so as to enable one to learn the meaning implied by the texts. This level of inquiry is a necessary prologue to the inference of legal judgments from the Quran, for, even if it is Divine Speech, the Quran is manifest to the human mind in the form of language, that is, through words, meanings, and specific usages. The understanding of the implications of the Quranic composition for legal judgments depends first on understanding the universal rules concerning Arabic words and their meanings. On this level, one has to study several disciplines including logic, linguistics, and Sacred Law, which differ in the perspectives they adopt on the relation of words to their possible meanings.

Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence delineate four perspectives from which to approach the connection of words to their possible meanings:

17. Abū Dāwūd, *K. al-malāḥim,* chap. 1 (no. 19240).

18. Muslim scholars do not speak of the terms of the Quran (*alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*), but of Quranic composition (*al-naẓm al-qurʾānī*). *Naẓm* signifies the ordering of pearls (*naẓm al-durr*) on a string, which sense is more consonant with the words of the Quran, which are strung together in a subtle order like a string of pearls. Saᶜd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-talwīḥ ᶜala'l-tawḍīḥ* (Beirut), 1:30.

1. The linguistic perspective of words, determining whether the word denotes one meaning or more, and, if it denotes more than one meaning, whether all of these meanings unite in a single general meaning or diverge in numerous ones.

2. The perspective of the usage of words, to determine the specific denotation and find out whether it is literal or metaphorical, whether the word is transposed from its original denotation or bears another connotation, and related issues.

3. The perspective of the "strength" of the word in denoting the meaning and the degree of clarity, categorized as apparent (*ẓāhir*), hidden (*khafī*), problematic (*mushkil*), general (*mujmal*), obscure (*mutashābih*), and so forth.

4. The qualitative perspective in the denotation of a text, that is, whether the phrasing yields the meaning directly, allusively, or definitively.[19]

## LEGAL JUDGMENTS DERIVABLE FROM THE QURANIC TEXT

In the terminology of the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence, legal judgments are of two kinds:

1. Judgments involving an obligation (*ḥukm taklīfī*), in which the Divine Address concerns the acts of the obligated person, by declaring an act to be obligatory (*wājib*), prohibited (*ḥarām*), or permitted (*mubāḥ*).

2. Positive judgments (*ḥukm waḍ'ī*), in which the object of Divine Address is to posit one thing as either a cause, condition, or hindrance for another, such as kinship (*qarābah*) as a cause for inheritance (4:11), the sighting of the new moon of Ramadan as a cause for the obligation to fast (2:185), ability (*istiṭā'ah*)

19. Naturally, it is not possible to recount all of the subtle and deep studies that have resulted from research into how words indicate meanings; nor can we summarize them in this essay. It is extremely difficult in our present age for nonspecialists to master the intellectual foundations necessary for the movement of intellectual renewal (*ijtihād*) that constitutes an essential attribute of Islamic civilization and is in the spirit of the Quran and the *Sunnah*. Seeking to understand the Quran and the *Sunnah* in the absence of these fundamentals leads to the abuse and distortion of Islam that negate the learned consciousness of the *ummah* and lead to the flattening and superficialization of the religion—whether this comes from those working to bring an end to the Quran and the *Sunnah* as the sources that form the Muslim mind, imagination, and sentiment or from those limited by their own deviant premises, which they believe to be genuine knowledge. The final objectives of both of these camps coincide in their desire to see the Noble Quran reduced to a petrified relic severed from present-day reality. Perhaps one can diagnose the mystery of the affliction that has befallen the *ummah* by understanding the intentions of these kinds of people, whom the Prophet described when he said: "They recite the Quran, but it does not go beyond their throats; they stray from religion like a shaft strays from its mark" (al-Bukhārī, *K. faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* chap. 36, no. 5058). It will suffice readers to study the subtle inquiries in the science of the principles of jurisprudence, which abound in hundreds of masterly works and are capable of helping people learn how to deal with the Quran and the *Sunnah* in an adequate intellectual manner, opening up the vistas of learning that previously succeeded in inspiring Muslims and non-Muslims alike and changing the face of history and the march of civilizations.

as a condition for the obligation to make the pilgrimage to Makkah (3:97), ablution (*wuḍūʾ*) as a condition for the performance of prayer (5:6), and so on. One may also mention murder as a hindrance keeping a murderer from inheriting from the victim because of the authentic *ḥadīth:* "A murderer does not inherit [from his victim]."[20]

Thus the difference between a ruling involving an obligation (*ḥukm taklīfī*) and a positive judgment (*ḥukm waḍʿī*) is that the first involves an obligation one must either fulfill or fail to fulfill—or it involves a choice between acting and refraining from action—whereas the second involves no obligation, but is a legal declaration connecting two acts by means of a relationship that could be either causal, conditional, or of reciprocal hindrance concerning the obligated person's acts in one way or another. However, both rules belong to the Sacred Law (*Sharīʿah*); or, they could be specifications of the different kinds of *Sharīʿah* rulings, which the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence define by the maxim: "God's Address that concerns the actions of the obligated person involves a definite requirement (*iqtiḍāʾ*), a choice (*takhyīr*), or a positive law (*waḍʿ*)."[21]

## *Types of Rulings About Obligations*

Rulings containing obligations have the sense of a definitive requirement to act or desist or the sense of a choice. In both cases the requirement can be either binding or not binding. On this basis rulings containing obligations tend to take various forms.

20. Ibn Abī Shaybah, *K. al-farāʾiḍ.*

21. What is meant by Divine Address, in both Sunni and Shiite circles, is the eternal Word of God (*al-kalām al-azalī al-qadīm*), not word in the sense of letters or written text. Thus the legal rulings of God that we know as the *Sharīʿah* are actually the eternal Word that is spoken within God (*al-kalām al-nafsī al-qadīm*), and the Quranic composition that we recite refers to the eternal rule governing God's Word. As for the Muʿtazilites, who believe the Quran to be created and who deny the uncreated and eternal nature of the Quran, the legal rulings of the *Sharīʿah* are not Divine Speech or Word, but the actions that the Lawgiver establishes in accordance with intrinsic beauty and goodness (*ḥusn*) or ugliness and evil (*qubḥ*) of actions. What is beautiful He commands us to do; what is ugly He forbids us to do. This is the inverse position from that of the people of the *Sunnah,* who maintain that it is God's Address that makes commands beautiful and God's Interdiction that makes it ugly; acts themselves, before the arrival of the indications from *Sharīʿite* rulings, may not be described as either beautiful or ugly. Therefore, we find the question of the beauty or the ugliness of acts and whether they are determined by reason or by the *Sharīʿah* taught in the prologues to the science of the principles of jurisprudence, because it is directly linked to *Sharīʿite* rulings and their effects on the acts of those obliged to follow them. Whether these rulings create the nature of acts, as the people of the *Sunnah* say, or simply reveal their intrinsic nature, as the Muʿtazilites say, is explained in these sources. See ʿAbd al-ʿAlī ibn Niẓām al-Dīn al Laknawī, *Fawātiḥ al-raḥamūt bi-sharḥ musallam al-thubūt* (Beirut, 2002), 2:3; Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Shalabī, *Uṣūl al-fiqh al-islāmī* (Beirut, 1986), 56; and Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī al-Ḥakīm, *Uṣūl al-fiqh al-muqāran* (Beirut, 2001), 1:5–2.

### OBLIGATORY RULINGS

The obligatory (*al-wājib*) is what the Lawgiver commands as absolutely binding, such as the rites ordained for Islam, for example, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and the recitation of the Quran, as well as the essential virtues and the rules of morality. The performance of such obligations is rewarded, and their omission is punished by God.

### RECOMMENDED RULINGS

The recommended (*al-mandūb*) is what is prescribed, but not compulsory; whoever omits it may not be censured. An example is committing a debt to writing, for even though there is a specific command to write down a debt (2:282), it comes with an indication that no obligation is attached to it, since God says in the next verse: *And if one of you trusts the other, let him who is trusted deliver his trust* (according to the pact between them; 2:283). This means that a debtor may trust the recipient of the debt, the gist of the meaning being that writing down the debt is not required.

Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence divide recommended acts into three categories:

1. Acts that the Prophet practiced without fail, such as praying two cycles of prayer before the dawn prayer. These are called regular practices, or "wonts" (*sunan,* sing. *sunnah*), because it was the Prophet himself who established their practice. The ruling concerning such acts is that whoever practices them shall be rewarded, while those who omit them are not punished, even if they may be blamed or rebuked for neglect or for disregarding the wont of the Prophet.

2. Supererogatory acts (*nawāfil*) that the Prophet performed, but not regularly. Whoever performs such acts is rewarded, but to neglect them occasions neither blame nor censure.

3. Acts that the Prophet performed as matter of custom or convention, by virtue of his being, as an individual, a member of a particular society with its own customs and conventions. The Prophet never commanded anyone to perform such acts as part of obedience to the Sacred Law. Scholars give as examples of such recommended acts dress, wearing white clothes, the conventions of food, drink, sleep, manner of sitting, growing a beard, shortening the mustache, and so on.

The majority of the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence are in agreement that the terms "recommended" (*mandūb*), "preferred" (*mustaḥabb*), "voluntary" (*taṭawwuᶜ*), "Prophetic wont" (*sunnah*), and "supererogatory" (*nafl*) are essentially synonymous and revolve around the notion that a requirement is nonobligatory or nonbinding. The majority of scholars therefore consider recommended acts not legally

required to begin with, so even if individuals begin performing them, they are still under no obligation to continue to do so without fail.

### PROHIBITED RULINGS

A prohibited act (*al-ḥarām*) is one that the Lawgiver has imperatively required must not be committed. There are, on the one hand, terms of prohibition that may only be understood as such if there is no indication (*dalīl*) negating the meaning of prohibition, and there are, on the other, terms concerning which the requirement to desist is categorical. Quran and *Sunnah* indications providing for rulings involving prohibition are many. Consider, for example, the following: *He has forbidden you only carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by necessity—neither coveting nor transgressing—no sin shall be upon him* (2:173); *Hunted game being unlawful when you are in pilgrim sanctity* (5:1); *Forbidden unto you [as wives] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters* (4:23); *Slay not your children for fear of poverty* (17:31); *O you who believe! Wine, and gambling, and idols, and divining arrows are but a means of defilement of Satan's doing. So avoid it, that haply you may prosper* (5:90); and, "Whatever belongs to a Muslim is not lawful to take, unless his soul is glad to give it away."[22] Obligated persons who fail to desist from a prohibited act shall incur punishment in the Afterlife, and those who deny a prohibition that the *Sharīʿah* establishes by means of an unequivocal indication become thereby apostate, as they will then be giving the lie to the Quran or to the Prophet.

### ABHORRED RULINGS

Abhorred (*al-makrūh*) acts are those that the Lawgiver has prohibited in an ambiguous manner; they should not be done; yet there is no explicit command making noncommission obligatory. Scholars say that these are any acts the omission of which is better than their commission. Abhorred acts are usually related to the kinds of behavior that are below the level of virtue and dignity that Muslims should strive to embody.

### PERMITTED RULINGS

The permitted (*al-mubāḥ*) act is the kind that may be equally committed or omitted; the *Sharīʿah*'s legal discourse about it is that it is one of choice, not of obligation, such as the saying of God: *This day, all good things are made lawful unto you. The food of those who have been given the Book is lawful unto you, and your food is lawful unto them* (5:5); or, *There is no fault against the blind, nor fault against the lame, nor fault against the sick* (24:61). Permission does not require a textual indication of obligation or prohibition.[23]

22. See Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Kinānī, *al-Talkhīṣ al-ḥabīr* (1995), *K. al-Ṣulḥ*.

23. Also see the greater division of the *ḥukm taklīfī* and its subcategories in al-Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī al-Ḥakīm, *al-Uṣūl al-ʿāmmah li'l-fiqh al-muqārin* (Beirut, 1422/2001), 53–64.

## *Philosophy of Commands and Prohibitions in Islamic Law*

Inquiry into the rulings that involve *Sharīʿite* obligations stands in need of another inquiry into the nature of commands and prohibitions as such. These two inquiries are as closely linked as terms are to their meanings or sentences to their import. If commands and prohibitions both express imperative requirements, it is logical that jurists should inquire into their nature. The vast treasury of accumulated juristic principles is replete with rich and subtle inquiries in this field, which are beyond the scope of this essay. We shall content ourselves here with reference to only the most important inquiries representative of the general direction of the juristic schools in the majority of cases.

The first matter to which attention is given in this study is the actual linguistic formulation obligations take in the Quran in order to be considered as constituting definite legal obligations. From extensive investigations into the command statements of the Quran, scholars of the principles of jurisprudence conclude that commands are communicated by more than one linguistic form. Foremost among these are imperative verbs, such as God's saying: *Complete the* ḥajj *and* ʿumrah *for God* (2:196); *Let him among you who is present, fast during that [month]. And whosoever is ill or on a journey, it is a number of other days* (2:185); and *Give the women their bridewealth as a free gift* (4:4). Or an imperative may come in other linguistic forms; it will suffice here to mention predicative clauses that are not standard predicates, but go beyond predication to indicate a definite requirement, such as: *And let mothers nurse their children two full years, for such as desire to complete the suckling* (2:233). The verb *nurse,* even if it is in the present tense grammatically, is meant to indicate a predicative clause, yet the context shifts it from indicating a predication into indicating a command, as much as would the imperative verb itself. Quranic discourse in such sentences is therefore not meant to "predicate" about mothers who are nursing their infants, but to "obligate" categorically that mothers must suckle their infants, for a certain period—and other legal rulings become incumbent as a consequence of this, such as the prohibition of marriage between suckle-siblings. The same principle holds for God's saying: *Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three courses* (2:228). The verb is indicative, not imperative, but what is intended is not to describe an event that will happen in the future (divorced women waiting for a time before they can remarry), but to command that the waiting period (*ʿiddah*) for all divorced women be for a duration of three months.

Another matter concerning scholars of the principles of jurisprudence on the subject of commands is the inquiry into what a command indicates and whether a given formula signifies a command or requirement to act whenever it appears in the Quran or the *Sunnah.* The meaning of a command statement is not limited to indicating obligation, but can also indicate other meanings far removed from this, even in cases where the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence affirm that the first meaning to occur to the mind is one of obligation. By means of inquiries and rational inference

(*istiqrāʾ*) into the command statements of the Quran and the *Sunnah,* it has been well proven that they may indicate recommendation (*nadb*) as much as obligation (*wujūb*). They may even convey permission (*ibāḥah*): *But when you have left pilgrim sanctity, then hunt for game* (if you will; 5:2); or the teaching of etiquette, such as the saying of the Prophet to a young boy: "Pronounce the Name of God, eat with your right hand, and eat from the portion that is closest to you."[24] Command may also communicate the sense of human beings' indebtedness to God: *O mankind! Eat of what is lawful and good on the earth* (2:168); it may have the sense of a threat: *Do what you will; truly He sees whatsoever you do* (41:40); or it may reflect the sense of the inimitability of the Word of God: *Then bring a* sūrah *like it* (2:23); and other meanings are possible as well.

Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence have enumerated some twenty-five different senses indicated by command statements apart from the sense of obligation.[25] They thus concluded from the earliest period in the development of the discipline that the command statements in both the Quran and the *Sunnah* are not all categorical and inevitable requirements belonging to the category of command in the strict sense. This understanding was responsible for the differences among the scholars regarding the nature of the command statements that may indicate legal rulings. Do they indicate obligation in the first place and, as such, may not be taken in any other sense unless additional textual evidence (*shawāhid*) exists indicating otherwise? Or may they indicate a recommendation in the first place that may later be disregarded due to other supportive evidence (*qarāʾin*) in favor of obligation? A majority of scholars in fact espoused the first school of thought (*madhhab*), but a sizable number also followed the second.

In any case, what matters in this connection is to clarify that the philosophy of restriction (*taqyīd*) as it is used to determine the concept, phrasing, and meaning of "command" helps to narrow greatly the sphere of "obligations" in the practical and social life of Muslims, for it grants them the freedom to move in a much larger sphere of possibilities and permissible actions. This outlook in fact reveals the internal harmony between the Quran and the cosmos, showing them to be two faces of the same reality: the Quran is an audible cosmos (*kawn masmūʿ*) to be heard, and the cosmos is a visible Quran (*Qurʾān marʾī*) to be contemplated. The two complement and correspond to each other. This outlook also demonstrates that an excessive number of prescriptions and obligations actually detracts from the principle of intellectual contemplation, which the Quran advocates for the discovery of truth and the knowledge of beings as they truly are. This knowledge is the Divine Wisdom (*ḥikmah*) that is mentioned in the Quran and praised along with those who possess it in passages such as: *He grants wisdom to whomsoever He will. And whosoever is granted wisdom has been granted much good* (2:269).

24. Muslim, *K. al-aṭʿimah, bāb al-tasmiyah ʿala 'l-ṭaʿām wa'l-akl bi'l-yamīn.*
25. Al-Ḥakīm, *al-Uṣūl al-ʿāmmah,* 56.

In the Quran, many verses teach that God does not impose upon human beings a burden of commands greater than what they can fulfill, greater than what their souls, time, and abilities can accommodate. He does not burden them with anything too heavy to bear or something that they could not help but discontinue or abandon after a while. The Prophetic wisdom emphasizes that few works constantly observed are by far better than many works eventually abandoned. Indeed, there is an explicit prohibition against excessive zeal in religious works and pedantic focus on external observances as such. The Prophet invoked perdition upon such extreme pedants (*al-mutanaṭṭiʿūn*), saying: "Perdition shall befall extreme pedants," and repeating the phrase three times.[26]

It is reported that once when one of his Companions complained about the prayer leader's inordinately prolonging the prayer session, the Prophet said: "O Muʿādh, do not drive people into a state of tribulation (*fitnah*), for in the congregation praying behind you there are the old, the weak, ones with pressing errands, and the travelers."[27] The Prophet himself used to shorten his prayer whenever he heard a child crying, saying: "Oftentimes I enter into prayer intending to prolong it, but when I hear a child crying, I relinquish my intention, knowing how his mother must be distressed for his crying."[28] The ease of the prescriptions in Islam is such that performing the bare minimum of obligatory ones is sufficient to achieve happiness in this world and the next. Concerning whoever keeps the fundamental obligatory prescriptions alone, without adding or omitting anything, the Prophet says, "He shall attain to salvation, if he is sincere."[29] Needless to say, the philosophy of commands in Islamic Law, as presented here, is in total contradiction to the attempts at "schematization" (*tanmīṭ*) propagated by some strident groups in the public arena today who besiege the lives of Muslims and represent a perversion of the proper understanding of Islam and an adulteration of its laws and rulings.

Most of what was said about commands, their formulations, and significance may also be said of prohibitions. The majority of the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence are of the opinion that the least interdiction should indicate prohibition on the basis of such Quranic passages as: *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo* (59:7). Yet others hold the view that mere interdiction does not imply prohibition, but only abhorrence or scrupulousness, which may correspond to prohibition, but may not indicate it unless an additional piece of evidence (*ḍamīmah*) indicates that intention. According to a third view, an interdiction remains "deferred" (*mawqūf*), without indicating either prohibition or abhorrence.

On the grounds of this pluralistic interpretation of the concept of prohibition, jurists state that an interdiction may occur in the sense of prohibition, such as in: *And*

26. Muslim, *K. al-ʿilm, bāb halaka al-mutanaṭṭiʿūn.*
27. Abū Dāwūd, *K. al-ṣalah, bāb fī takhfīf al-ṣalāh.*
28. Muslim, *K. al-ṣalāh, bāb amr al-aʾimmah bi-takhfīf al-ṣalāh.*
29. Muslim, *K. al-īmān.*

*approach not adultery* (17:32); *And slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right* (17:33); *And approach not the orphan's property, save in the most virtuous manner, till he reaches maturity* (17:34); and *Walk not exultantly upon the earth; surely thou shalt not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height* (17:37). Or it may occur in the sense of abhorrence: *And seek not the bad, spending of it though you would not take it except shutting your eyes to it* (2:267). It may also occur in the sense of guidance (*irshād*): *O you who believe! Ask not about things that, if they were disclosed to you, would trouble you* (5:101); or of indicating the fruits of action: *Do not suppose that God is heedless of the deeds of the wrongdoers* (14:42). The hallmark of the study of interdiction is to lessen the number of prohibitions in Islam, because the formulas of the *Sharīʿah*, despite their small number, do not spontaneously indicate prohibition. To return to the general rule of legislation: permission (*ibāḥah*) is the original state of things, and no prohibition may be pronounced without explicit evidence. Prohibited matters in Islam are therefore necessarily restricted to a small number of things.

This is the position supported by the text of the Quran. For instance, we find verses limiting the number of prohibited foods to just three categories: *Say, "I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save carrion or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine—for that is surely defilement—or a sinful offering made to other than God. But whosoever is compelled by necessity, without willfully disobeying or transgressing, truly thy Lord is Forgiving, Merciful* (6:145). This text explicitly confirms that in Islam prohibited foods are limited to just three types and that this prohibition itself is lifted in cases of necessity and extreme need—that is, that even the prohibited can become permitted—and not to avail oneself of such permissions in cases of necessity, but choose instead self-destruction, is to sin. Similarly, the Prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*) indicate that grave sins (*kabāʾir*) are limited to only seven in number: "Avoid the seven mortal sins (*al-mūbiqāt*) . . .";[30] and that the absolute requirements for salvation may be summarized in just a few conditions: "There is no servant who performs the five canonical prayers, who fasts the month of Ramadan, who gives alms when they are due, who avoids the seven mortal sins, but who shall have the gates of Paradise open to him and it shall be said unto him: enter therein in peace."[31]

Just as a misunderstanding of the philosophy of "commands" in Islamic Law forms a pernicious ground for the bickering of extremist groups, whose portrayal of it is both deceitful and fraudulent, so an ignorance of the philosophy of "prohibitions" in Islam has played a grievous role for some in transforming Islam into a catalogue of interdictions and prohibitions, banning for people what God has permitted. Had the advocates of such maimed views availed themselves of the speculative legacy bequeathed by the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence on the topics of commands

30. Al-Bukhārī, book 55, chap. 23 (no. 2766); also book 86, chap. 44 (no. 6857).
31. Al-Nasāʿī, *K. al-zakāh*, chap. 1.

and prohibitions, they would have realized how alien in form and substance is the Islam such people preach to the Quran, the *Sunnah,* and the overwhelming consensus of Muslims.

## *The Quran and the Other Sources of Islamic Law*

In both Sunni and Shiite schools, the Quran occupies the most prominent position among the sources of law in Islam. The juristic tradition dealing with the principles of law describes it as the first source of law, because it is the Word of God and also because of its unequivocally evident nature.[32] Since the Quran includes numerous and varied rulings, one might imagine the Divine Book to be a self-sufficient source of legislation. However, in most cases the Quran tends to provide general rather than specific rules. In many instances, it limits itself to "allusion to the general objectives of legislation and its universal principles, not offering extensive detail in rules except in a few instances."[33] Moreover, despite its simplicity and clarity, a grasp of the objectives and ends of the Quran requires meditation and insight as well as training in Arabic stylistics and the subtle ways of indicating meaning in that language. It must also be borne in mind that the Quran itself makes a distinction between unequivocal (*muḥkam*) and equivocal (*mutashābih*) verses, saying that the interpretation of the latter can only be carried out by the exceptionally erudite among the learned: *And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge* (3:7).

There therefore had to be another source to function as an explanatory, illustrative, interpretive, and exegetical complement to the Divine Discourse, particularly insofar as human actions and conduct are concerned. If the explicated and interpreted text is purely Divine, it makes sense that the explanatory and interpreting text should be worthy of it, that is, of equally Divine Provenance; this is what is guaranteed by the *Sunnah,* which, again according to both Sunni and Shiite schools, constitutes a second source of legislation after the Noble Quran. *Sunnah* ("wont") designates the sayings and actions of the Messenger of God, whereas *Ḥadīth* ("tradition") specifically designates his sayings.[34]

Understanding the Quran needs the *Sunnah* to provide clarifications and specific illustrations of the former's general declarations. As an example of this principle, consider the canonical prayer. The command making it obligatory comes as a general declaration in the Quran, but if we restrict ourselves to knowledge of the prayer derived from the Quran alone, we would be unable to know the details of its substance, forms, times, the number of its cycles (*rakaʿāt*), and so on. All of these matters can be known

32. To reiterate the point made earlier, Muslims believe that the Quran fulfills uniquely all of the conditions necessary for the preservation of the authentic original text, an authenticity that is guaranteed by the fact that it has been preserved unaltered over the ages in hearts as well as in written form.

33. Shaʿbān, *Minhāj al-Qurʾān,* 58.

34. Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-talwīḥ,* 2:1.

only from the *Sunnah.* The same holds true for many other obligations, such as almsgiving (*zakāh*), fasting (*ṣawm*), and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). Indeed, there are certain commands and prohibitions in the Quran that can be neither understood nor acted upon in the absence of the *Sunnah.*

The jurist and authority on the principles of the Law Ibn Ḥazm al-Ẓāhirī (d. 456/1064) summarized this point by asking:

> In which Quran shall I find that the noon prayer is four cycles or that the sunset prayer is three cycles; the clarification of what counts as true fasting; the clarification of the manner of giving alms from gold, silver, sheep, camels, or cattle; . . . the categories of prohibited marriages, of prohibited child nursing (*al-raḍāᶜ al-muḥarram*), and which foods are prohibited; the rulings regarding punishments; in what way a divorce becomes final; rulings concerning valid business transactions and the clarification of the ways of usury? Indeed, there are passages concerning these matters in the Quran, but if they were left to us without the commentaries from the *Sunnah,* we would never know how to apply them. Thus one has to refer these matters back to the traditions of the Prophet.[35]

The Quran itself mentions in many places the importance of the *Sunnah* and its necessity for elaborating the meaning of the Quran: *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo* (59:7); *We have sent down the Reminder unto thee that thou mightest clarify for mankind that which has been sent down unto them, that haply they may reflect* (16:44); *He it is Who sent among the unlettered a Messenger from among themselves, reciting unto them His signs, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and Wisdom, though before they were in manifest error* (62:2). And the Prophet himself emphasizes this truth when he says:

> I was given the Quran and with it its similitude; soon a day will come when a man of full stomach reclining on his couch shall say: "Go to the Quran; whatever you find permitted therein, consider it as permitted, whatever you find prohibited therein, then prohibit it"; yet that which the Messenger of God has prohibited is equal to that which God has prohibited; indeed, the meat of the domestic ass as meat is prohibited unto you; and so is the meat of every wild beast with molars.[36]

The *Sunnah*'s relation to the Quran is one of seconding and confirming the rulings in it, explaining and clarifying texts of general meaning in specific terms, clarifying problematic texts that bear more than one meaning, or giving a particular emphasis for a ruling that occurs only generally. All of these aspects serve to demonstrate the ne-

35. *Al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām* (Cairo, AH 1345), 2:79–80.
36. Abū Dāwūd, *K. al-sunnah, fī luzūm al-sunnah* (no. 4604).

cessity of the *Sunnah* for reaching a proper understanding of the rulings of the Sacred Law. The *Sunnah* is indeed as binding as the Quran and is thus second only to it as a source of legislation.

Although Sunni and Shiite scholars alike unanimously maintain that the Quran and the *Sunnah* are the two fundamental sources of legislation, there is no agreement with regard to the remaining sources, though these are most commonly recognized as including analogy (*qiyās*), consensus (*ijmāᶜ*), juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), benefits in the public interest (*maṣāliḥ mursalah*), and injunctions presuming continuity with a *status quo ante* (*istiṣḥāb*).[37]

## *Conclusion*

In summary, Islamic Law is rooted directly in the Quran as its foundational source, and the definitive authoritativeness of the Quranic text for Islamic Law is permanently binding and effective for all times and places. The Law established in the Quran and elaborated by the Islamic legal tradition therefore possesses an inherent immutability and timeless quality, but it is nonetheless simultaneously characterized by a unique flexibility, an ability to take into account and adapt to diverse contingencies or changing conditions. As a sacred text of the highest order with a long and profound interpretive tradition, it can only be properly understood by reading it as the revealed Word of God and making use of the invaluable tools, methods, and insights bequeathed by the tradition.

Islamic Law is founded on four fundamental principles: a lack of constriction or difficulty in its implications for believers; a relatively small number of formal obligations, all restrictions being in fact exceptions to the rule, as "the norm in all things is permissibility"; a multiplicity and variety of form on the part of Quranic legal passages according to the nature of the matter at hand; and a wise and effective gradualism in the implementation of its laws. In the words of Muslim scholars, the Quran is of "unequivocal immutability" and "equivocal meanings," meaning that its literal text is indubitably authentic and permanently established, possessing an unbroken line of transmission, whereas the meanings comprised by the text are bountifully multiple, and rational inference, the suspension of judgment, and recourse to regular, Divinely guided "revivifications" of the meanings of the Sacred Book are key elements in Islamic legal philosophy.

Islamic Law possesses a rich tradition of systematic studies on the ways in which legal judgments are contained in the Quranic text and may be derived from it as well as

37. Concerning these subjects see al-Ḥakīm, *al-Uṣūl al-ᶜāmmah*. This is a precise and valuable work in explaining sources upon which Sunnis, Shiites, and Muᶜtazilites agree and those upon which they differ. See also Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyah, *ᶜIlm uṣūl al-fiqh fī thawbihi 'l-jadīd* (Beirut, 1975); Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Uṣūl al-fiqh* (Cairo, 1997); and Shalabī, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*.

studies on the nature, meanings, and formulations of commands and prohibitions as such. On the basis of such studies, all actions subject to legislation are seen to fall into one of five categories—obligatory, recommended, permitted, abhorred, or prohibited. Given the general and often polyvalent nature of Quranic legal passages, Islamic Law requires a second source to explain, clarify, and embody the rulings found in principal form in the Divine Text. On the testament of the Quran itself as well as the *Ḥadīth,* and as agreed upon fully by all schools of Islamic Law, this is providentially and superlatively provided by the *Sunnah,* or wont, of the Prophet Muhammad.

*Translated from Arabic by Maryam Ishaq al-Khalifa Sharief*

# THE QURAN AND SCHOOLS OF ISLAMIC THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Muṣṭafā Muḥaqqiq Dāmād

As the objective crystallization of Divine Revelation for all Muslims and as Islamic sacred scripture, the Noble Quran has naturally exercised great influence upon Islamic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy. It is true that in Islam the intellect (*ʿaql*) plays a central role as the means of acquiring knowledge, but Muslim theologians and philosophers, like all Muslims, look upon the Quran as a most important reality and rely on it in their debates with contending schools of thought. In theological and philosophical disputations, therefore, full attention is paid to Quranic teachings.

In the context of Islam the Quran is the Revelation that has made access to the content of God's message possible, but for theologians and sometimes philosophers the Quran has been also significant from another perspective. As the crystallization of the Word of God, it is directly connected to discussions about Divine Attributes. Furthermore, the Quran is recognized as the greatest miracle associated with the Prophet of Islam. These truths alone provide the foundation for the historical theological discussions about whether the Quran is uncreated or created and debates about the miraculous nature of the Quran (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*).

## *The Quran as the Word of God*

From the beginning of Islamic theology, *kalām,* and parallel with constraining discussions about the eternity of Divine Qualities, the problem of the eternity versus the created nature of the Quran came to be debated by a group considered the founders of *kalām*. In the Quran are verses that mention its prior existence in the *Preserved Tablet* (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ;* 85:22), as *the Mother of the Book* (*ʿumm al-kitāb;* 43:4), and as a Book that was *concealed* (*maknūn;* 56:77–78). Still, there is uncertainty about how and whether the discussion of the eternity of the Quran took place in the first Islamic century or later. The most important indication is a story about Ibn ʿAbbās, a Companion of the Prophet who died in 68/687, in which there is a kind of reference to the uncreated nature of the Quran.[1]

1. See ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq,* ed. Ibrāhīm Ramaḍān (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1994).

During the first decades of the second Islamic century, some began to place emphasis on the createdness of the Quran during the process of the first formulation of *kalām* by such figures as Jaʿd ibn Dirham (d. 126/743–44) and Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 129/746–47). Yet one cannot point to anyone who defended the eternity of the Quran at the end of the first and the first half of the second century amid the debate about its createdness. In any case there are indications that the views of the createdness of the Quran, on the one hand, and its eternity, on the other, did not only take shape during this period, but also prepared the way for intermediate positions. A saying transmitted from Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) points to an intermediate position holding that the Quran is created (*muḥdath*) and at the same time uncreated.[2] This view relies on the description of the Quran as *muḥdath* and seeks to show that it is at the same time eternal, for it does not consider every being that is *muḥdath* to also be created (*makhlūq*).

During the second half of the second century AH debates about the createdness of the Quran intensified, and the Muʿtazilite movement came to be identified as the defenders of the view of the createdness of the Sacred Text. During the caliphate of the Abbasid al-Maʾmūn (198–218/813–33) and as a result of the efforts of his vizier Aḥmad ibn Abī Dāwūd, who had Muʿtazilite tendencies, the view that the Quran was created gained political support and even significance. In a letter to the governor of Baghdad, Caliph al-Maʾmūn openly declared that those who believed in the uncreatedness of the Quran were like Christians who considered Jesus the son of Mary to be uncreated, since he was seen as the Word of God.[3] Following the assertion of this position and through the efforts of Aḥmad ibn Abī Dāwūd, the event known as *al-miḥnah* ("the calamity") took place, in which courts of inquiry were convened to investigate the views of the scholars of Baghdad about this matter, and those who did not adhere to the doctrine were persecuted.

It was during the *miḥnah* that the *Ḥadīth* scholar Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), who despite great pressure refused to accept the idea of the createdness of the Quran, came to be known as a hero and a model for later defenders of the uncreatedness of the Sacred Book. In the writings of Ibn Ḥanbal, for example, in his letter to Musaddid ibn Musarhad, followers of *Ḥadīth* were presented as leaders in the defense of the uncreatedness of the Quran, and the Jahmites and Muʿtazilites were introduced as leaders of the opposite camp, those who believed in its createdness.[4]

2. Muḥammad ibn al-Bābūyah (Bābawayh), *al-Tawḥīd,* ed. Hāshim Ḥusaynī (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣaddūq, 1967), 227.

3. Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-umam waʾl-mulūk* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, AH 1407), 5:188.

4. Muḥammad ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābilah,* ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, 1952), 1:341–45; and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿādah, AH 1349), 224–29. One can also find a more extended explanation of this question throughout Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Radd ʿalaʾl-jahmiyyah.*

Historical evidence reveals that, in spite of what has been reflected in later sources of the followers of *Ḥadīth*, or "People of *Ḥadīth*" (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*), there was no unified view concerning the uncreatedness of the Quran even among the "People of *Ḥadīth*." In the face of the strong theological discussions in favor of the createdness of the Quran, some of the "People of *Ḥadīth*" could not find firmly established documents against this view and on this issue sided with the Muᶜtazilites and Jahmites. Among such figures one must mention the celebrated ᶜAlī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234/848–49). In contrast to Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Madīnī not only confirmed the createdness of the Quran,[5] but also held other beliefs, such as determinism (*qadar*), that were close to the Muᶜtazilite position.[6]

The juxtaposition of the ideas of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and ᶜAlī ibn al-Madīnī began a process that, during the century after the affair of the *miḥnah,* determined the lines of development of the beliefs held by different theological factions in Sunni circles. Ibn Ḥanbal's view did of course have followers for many centuries after him. As late as the eighth/fourteenth century, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) rose to defend the position of Ibn Ḥanbal and the "People of *Ḥadīth*" against those who believed in the createdness of the Quran; without taking more moderate positions into consideration, he completely rejected the belief that the Quran was created.[7]

Some circles in the Sunni world, however, followed another path. Abū Muḥammad ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Kullāb (d. after 240/854–55), one of the first Sunni theologians (*mutakallimūn*), put forth his own intellectual position on the problem of the eternity of the Quran, a position that did not take as its starting point the Quran as it was revealed in the Arabic language. He adopted an intermediate position holding that the Word of God is eternal in its essence; it is not composed of letters and sounds, does not have divisions, parts, and particulars, and does not change. Letters are the written forms of the Word of God and are for that reason subject to change. The Word of God is called the Quran when its form—that is, its written language, interpretation, and recitation—is Arabic, in the same way that it is called the Torah when its form is Hebrew.[8] In this context one must also mention another Sunni theologian, Ḥusayn al-Karābīsī (d. after 248/862–63), who, in turning the views of the scholars of *Ḥadīth* (*muḥaddithūn*) into a theological discussion, introduced the distinction between inner *kalām* (Word) and literal *kalām*.[9]

5. See Aḥmad al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, AH 1349), 11:466–70.

6. See Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1:108, on the basis of a manuscript in the Ẓāhiriyyah Library in Damascus.

7. Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *al-ᶜUluww liʾl-ᶜAlī al-Ghaffār,* ed. Ashraf ibn ᶜAbd al-Maqṣūd (Riyadh: Maktabat Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf, 1995).

8. Abuʾl-Ḥasan ᶜAlī al-Ashᶜarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn,* ed. Helmut Ritter (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1980), 584–85.

9. Al-Ashᶜarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn,* 602; and Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991–95), 4:210.

In the middle of the third/ninth century a tendency toward moderation appeared on both sides of this debate. On the side of the "People of *Ḥadīth*," Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), the author of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and one of the greatest scholars of *Ḥadīth*, adopted an intermediate position. He believed that the uncreatedness of the Quran cannot be extended to the human reading of it. He developed the idea of literal *kalām* further and believed that the human language of the Quran is created. Because of his beliefs, discussed in detail and with great care in his *Kitāb khalq afʿāl al-ʿibād wa'l-radd ʿala'l-jahmiyyah* (*The Book of the Createdness of the Actions of God's Bondsmen and Refutation of the Jahmites*), al-Bukhārī was severely criticized in his own lifetime by extremists among the "People of *Ḥadīth*," such as Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Dhuhlī (d. 258/872).[10]

Similar moderation can also be seen among theologians who held views similar to those of the Muʿtazilites. Muḥammad ibn Shujāʿ ibn al-Thaljī (d. 266/879), who was a Ḥanbalite theologian of the "People of Justice" (*ahl al-ʿadl*), asserted, in contrast to other members of his school, that to talk about the createdness or uncreatedness of the Quran is itself an innovation (*bidʿah*), and one must remain silent about it.[11] In the years leading up to the turn of the fourth/tenth century, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 334/946), the founder of the Ashʿarite school, reexamined the theory of literal (*lafẓī*) *kalām* and inner (*nafsī*) *kalām* and integrated this discussion into his theological system.

From the beginning of the fourth/tenth century on, as various theological positions became more distinct, the views concerning the createdness of the Quran coalesced into a few distinct positions. These positions consisted of complete denial of the createdness of the Quran by those who claimed to follow the traditions of the "ancestors" (*salaf*) and extremists among the "People of *Ḥadīth*," insistence upon the createdness of the Quran on the part of the Muʿtazilite thinkers, and the proposal of literal *kalām* by the Ashʿarites. The view of Twelve-Imam Shiites from the fourth/tenth century on favors the createdness of the Quran despite differences of opinion on this matter during the period of the lives of the first eleven Imams.[12]

## *The Noble Quran as Miracle*

The belief that the Noble Quran contains an aspect or aspects that are miraculous can be seen in Quranic verses themselves, primarily in the *āyāt al-taḥaddī* ("verses of challenge," e.g., 52:33–34). Theological discussion of the miraculous aspect of the Quran began in the middle of the second/eighth century with the famous Muʿtazilite

10. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq ibn ʿAṭiyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣādiq Mallāḥ (Cairo: Dār ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, 1974), 3(2):191.

11. ʿUthmān al-Dārimī, *al-Radd ʿalā Bishr al-Marīsī*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.), 110.

12. Muḥammad al-Mufīd, *Awāʾil al-maqālāt* (Qom: Kungira-yi Hizāra-yi Shaykh-i Mufīd, AH 1413).

Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām (d. 230/845). He proposed a view that came to be known as the theory of *ṣarfah* ("redundancy"). He believed that the miraculous aspect of the Quran is not to be found in its eloquence or structure. Rather, the miracle resides in the fact that whenever enemies try to compose words like it, God's Will that they do so is removed from them; they thereby turn away from it and of necessity fail to achieve their original goal.[13]

After al-Naẓẓām the theory of *ṣarfah* had only a few followers among the Muᶜtazilites. Outside of the circle of Muᶜtazilites a number of figures such as Shiite authorities Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) and Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) supported this view of the miraculous nature of the Quran, but with some further elucidation and expansion.[14] Among Sunni scholars, a number of figures also defended this view to some extent, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210).[15]

Another issue pursued by Islamic theologians in relation to the miracle of the Quran is the claim that it provides news of the invisible world, lifting the veil from hidden and unknown events of the past. No theologians oppose this view, although the more limited claim that news of the invisible world is the main factor constituting the reality of the miraculous nature of the Quran has only a few distinct supporters, among them the Sunni scholar Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 258/872).[16]

Another miraculous aspect of the Quran, possibly the most important one among theologians and one that was supported especially by some Muᶜtazilites, is its order and harmony. Among the first figures to discuss this issue is the celebrated Muᶜtazilite theologian and man of letters ᶜAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 254/868), who devoted a book entitled *Naẓm al-Qurʾān* (*The Order and Harmony of the Quran*), a work that is now lost, to the explanation of this thesis.[17] According to al-Jāḥiẓ, the Quran itself is miraculous speech the like of which no human beings can produce. This has nothing to do with the theory of *ṣarfah* (redundancy). In the theory of al-Jāḥiẓ and others who have followed his view, what has prevented enemies from producing the like of the Quran is a special characteristic of the Quran itself. That special characteristic resides in the particular order and harmony that can be found in the words of the Divine Text. Al-Jāḥiẓ believed there was an essential difference between the order and composition

13. Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal waʾl-niḥal,* ed. Muḥammad Badrān (Cairo: Maktabat Anjīl al-Miṣriyyah, 1956), 1:57; and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān,* ed. Muḥammad Abuʾl-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1967), 4:7.

14. Al-Mufīd, *Awāʾil al-maqālāt,* 18; and ᶜAlī Sayyid Murtaḍā, "Jawābāt al-masāʾil al-rassiyyah," in *Rasāʾil al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,* ed. Aḥmad Khumaynī (Qom: Dār al-Qurʾān, AH 1406), 323–27.

15. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaᶜah al-Bahiyyah, n.d.), 2:115–16; also Ibn ᶜAṭiyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz,* 1:71–72.

16. Ḥamad al-Khaṭṭābī, "Bayān iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān," in *Thalāth rasāʾil fī iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān,* ed. Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Salām (Cairo: Dār al-Maᶜārif, 1991), 23–24; and Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī, "Iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān," in *Thalāth rasāʾil,* 48–51.

17. Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Tehran: Maktabat al-Asadī, AH 1350 solar [S]).

of the Quran and those of works composed by human beings. They are two basically different types of composition.[18] Among other early Muᶜtazilites who supported and wrote about the order and harmony of the Quran are Abū ᶜUmar Muḥammad ibn ᶜUmar al-Bāhilī (d. 300/913); Abū ᶜAlī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), of the school of Basra; and Muḥammad Zayd al-Wāsiṭī (d. 306/918), of the school of Baghdad.[19]

After al-Jāḥiẓ the thesis that the order and harmony constitute the miracle of the Quran attracted the attention of not only Muᶜtazilites, but also that of scholars belonging to different parts of the spectrum of Islamic thought. Among later Muᶜtazilites who defended this thesis are Abū Bakr ibn al-Akshīd (d. 326/938) and Abū ᶜAlī Ḥasan ibn ᶜAlī ibn Naṣr (d. 312/924), both of whom expanded al-Jāḥiẓ's thesis and wrote independent works on it.[20] The most important Ashᶜarite figure to expand this theory was Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), who in *Iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān* (*The Miraculous Nature of the Quran*) sought to expound extensively upon what al-Jāḥiẓ had mentioned in summary fashion and to treat delicate aspects of this subject. He believed that the Quran possesses the highest degree of order, harmony, fluency, and beauty, which are miraculous and beyond what human beings are capable of producing.[21]

Furthermore, beyond the works of theologians, the exposition of this thesis can also be found in the writings of such men of letters as Abū Hilāl al-ᶜAskarī (d. ca. 400/1010), especially his *Kitāb al-Ṣināᶜatayn* (*The Two Arts*), and ᶜAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 417/1078), especially his *Asrār al-balāghah* (*Mysteries of Eloquence*) and *al-Risālah al-shāfiyah fī iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān* (*The Salutary Treatise of Healing on the Miraculous Nature of the Quran*). The efforts of al-Jurjānī in this context were in themselves a foundation for the expansion of the linguistic science of eloquence.[22] Al-Jurjānī's tendency toward Ashᶜarism has been made clear in various traditional sources.[23]

Finally, one must recall that some theologians, such as ᶜAlī ibn ᶜĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), the great Muᶜtazilite scholar, were among those who sought to present the multiple factors that make the Quran miraculous. In a treatise entitled *al-Nukat fī iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān* (*Fine Points Concerning the Miracle of the Quran*) he expanded his composite view of this subject.[24]

18. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 4:6–7.

19. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* sec. 41, pp. 219–20.

20. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* sec. 41, pp. 219–20.

21. Al-Bāqillānī, "Iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān," part 7; p. 419.

22. Abū Hilāl al-ᶜAskarī, *Kitāb al-Ṣināᶜatayn,* ed. Mufīd Qumayḥah (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 1984), 2, and bibliography no. 26, pp. 2–8.

23. Aḥmad al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,* ed. Sulaymān ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Khizay (Medina: Maktabat al-ᶜUlūm wa'l-Ḥikam, 1997), 133.

24. ᶜAlī ibn ᶜĪsā al-Rummānī, "al-Nukat fī iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān," in *Thalāth rasāʾil fī iᶜjāz al-Qurʾān,* ed. Khalaf Allāh and Zaghlūl Salām, passim.

## *The Noble Quran as Source of Knowledge*

Obviously Muslim scholars cannot discuss or provide answers to religious questions without making use of the Quran as the most basic transmitted source of Islam or recalling its message in the intellectual content of their theology. It is for this reason that all theological sources have made use of Quranic references to one degree or another, depending on the circumstances. But because the number and uses to be made of Quranic verses related to theological questions (in the sense of *kalām*) are limited, references to Quranic verses in theological and doctrinal sources, although basic, have been few in number. Even the "People of *Ḥadīth*" have made much greater use of the Prophetic tradition (*aḥādīth*) than Quranic verses. This is also true for a large number of the discussions by theologians more attracted to rational argumentation; they have been more concerned with *aḥādīth* because of the very nature of theological reasoning.

Basing arguments extensively upon Quranic verses occurs especially in debates between the "People of *Ḥadīth*" and theologians. In this case it appears that the extensive use of Quranic verses is due to the fact that the Quran is shared in common in a basic manner by theologians and scholars of *Ḥadīth*, and in fact all Muslims. An outstanding example of this kind of writing is *al-Ḥaydah* (*Projection*) by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Kinānī (d. 240/854), which contains the debate between himself and Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 218/833), one of the theologians of the "People of Justice" (*ahl al-ʿadl*). This text is one of a small number of theological works filled with references to Quranic verses.

In the case of certain particular branches of theology, such as the one concerned with the imamate, debates carried out between Sunnis and Shiites again reveal great interest in Quranic verses. From the Shiites' side, usually in defense of their position concerning the "Household of the Prophet" (*ahl al-bayt*), what was of special interest to the authors were the conditions surrounding the revelation (*shaʾn al-nuzūl*) of certain verses. In such cases obviously the citation of Quranic verses by Shiite scholars was accompanied by a collection of *aḥādīth* concerning the reason for the revelation of those verses, *aḥādīth* that were usually drawn from Sunni sources so that they would be accepted by the Sunnis who held opposing views. This procedure produced many works with the title *Mā nazala min al-Qurʾān fī ahl al-bayt* (*What Has Been Revealed in the Quran Concerning the Household of the Prophet*). Furthermore, one can see the same situation in certain other works of a theological nature, such as *al-Shāfī* (*The Salutary*) of Sayyid al-Murtaḍā.

In addition, references to the Quran can also be found in Quranic commentaries written from a theological or philosophical point of view. Works of this kind with a theological perspective are as old as texts on the science of theology itself, but philosophical commentaries appeared later and are also few in number. One of the first among those theologians seeking to write a Quranic commentary was Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). Al-Baṣrī was an influential teacher whose students included Wāṣil ibn

ʿAṭāʾ (d. 130/748) and ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd al-Baṣrī (d. 144/761), two scholars who would go on to become the founders of the Muʿtazilite school. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was in fact the author of a book of Quranic commentary.[25]

## *Quranic Commentaries Among the Muʿtazilites*

The first Muʿtazilite Quranic commentary was that of ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd al-Baṣrī, one of two founders of the Muʿtazilite school. Apparently this work was voluminous. At present there is no known manuscript of the book, but citations from it can be found in other commentaries. Parallel with the spread of the Muʿtazilite school was an increase in the number of Quranic commentaries. Toward the end of the second/eighth century, ʿAmr ibn Fāʾid al-Aswārī (d. after 200/815–16), a Muʿtazilite theologian, composed a major commentary, manuscripts of which were still available in the fourth/tenth century.[26] Also in the beginning of the third/ninth century Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, a scholar who branched out from Muʿtazilism and had certain theses of his own, wrote a book of Quranic commentary.[27]

The years marking the transition from the third/ninth to the fourth/tenth century were witness to increased activity among Muʿtazilite theologians in the field of Quranic commentary. Among scholars of this period one must mention Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), the great theologian of Basra who, according to the fourth/tenth-century *al-Fihrist* (*The Catalogue*) of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn al-Nadīm, wrote a book of Quranic exegesis considered to be of much importance for centuries not only by the Muʿtazilites, but also by Imāmī Shiites. Many quotations from this commentary appear in the works of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) and Sayyid ʿAlī ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266).[28] Also of note during this period was Abu'l-Qāsim ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Balkhī (d. 319/931), the great theologian of Baghdad, whose book *Jāmiʿ ʿilm al-Qurʾān* (*Compendium of the Science of the Quran*) or *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*The Grand Commentary*) was welcomed more by Shiite scholars than the commentary of al-Jubbāʾī.[29] This work was one of the main sources of *al-Tibyān* (*The Exposition*) of Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and was also used during later centuries by such scholars as Ibn al-Shahrāshūb and Ibn al-Ṭāwūs.[30] In this context we must also mention the great Muʿtazilite commentator

25. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* 37.

26. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* 205; and ʿAmr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn,* ed. Fawzī ʿAṭwī (Beirut: Dār Ṣaʿb, 1968), 1:235.

27. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* 37.

28. Muḥammad ibn al-Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* (Qom: Chapkhana-yi ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.), 2:69; and ʿAlī ibn al-Ṭāwūs, *Saʿd al-suʿūd* (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1950), 142–83.

29. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* 37, 219.

30. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān,* ed. Quṣayr ʿĀmilī (Najaf: Maktabat al-Amīn, 1964), 1:13; Ibn al-Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib,* 1:122; and Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Saʿd al-suʿūd,* 192–209.

Abū Muslim Muḥammad ibn Baḥr al-Iṣfahānī (d. 322/933–34), whose major commentary in fourteen volumes, *Jāmiᶜ al-taʾwīl li-muḥkam al-tanzīl* (*Comprehensive Hermeneutics of the Decree of Revelation*), was used by such outstanding Shiite figures as Sayyid al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī.[31]

Also during the fourth/tenth century such Muᶜtazilite figures as Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (d. 384/994–95) and ᶜAlī ibn ᶜĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) continued this tradition by writing commentaries.[32] In his *Jāmiᶜ aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (*Compendium of the Commands of the Quran*), the Mālikī commentator Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) quotes this latter commentator with reference to his name.[33] Moreover, Qāḍī ᶜAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (d. 415/1024), the famous Muᶜtazilite scholar of Rayy, wrote such works as *Mutashābih al-Qurʾān (Metaphorical Verses of the Quran)* and *Tanzīh al-Qurʾān ᶜan al-maṭāᶜin* (*The Purity of the Quran Beyond All Tarnish*), in which he sought to respond to questions that had arisen concerning certain verses of the Quran. Moreover, he also composed a third work dealing with Quranic commentary in general.

During the fifth/eleventh century a new wave of Muᶜtazilite commentaries began. One of the most significant is the commentary of Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī ibn Mihrzād al-Iṣfahānī (d. 459/1067),[34] who was followed by Abu'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī ibn Ḥasan al-Ṣandalī al-Naysābūrī (d. 484/1091–92), one of the companions of Abū ᶜAbd Allāh al-Ṣaymarī (d. 315/927), who began a commentary and succeeded in finishing half of the Quran.[35] Another important figure is Abū Yūsuf ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 488/1095), who was the leader of the Muᶜtazilites of his day in Baghdad. He composed a voluminous commentary that, if not an exaggeration, has been said to comprise three hundred and according to some five hundred volumes. His commentary on *al-Fātiḥah* ("The Opening") alone was seven volumes. Aḥmad al-Samᶜānī (d. 534/1140), who had studied this commentary, mentions that among all commentaries none was longer or of greater value. Abū ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1245), the Baghdādī historian, states that al-Qazwīnī's principal expertise was in fact the field of Quranic commentary.[36]

The last outstanding Quranic commentary by Muᶜtazilite scholars is *al-Kashshāf ᶜan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* (*The Unveiler of the Truths of Revelation*) by Maḥmūd ibn ᶜUmar

31. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* 151; and Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-ẓunūn* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basimevi, 1941–43), 1:538; ᶜAlī Sayyid Murtaḍā, *al-Shāfī fi'l-imāmah,* ed. ᶜAbd al-Zahrāʾ Ḥusaynī Khaṭīb (Qom: Dār al-Kitāb, AH 1410), 2:244–319; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān,* passim; Ibn Ṭāwūs, 229–31.

32. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,* ed. ᶜAlī Muḥammad ᶜUmar (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1976), 110–11; Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aᶜlām al-nubalāʾ,* ed. Shuᶜayb al-Arnāʾūṭ et al. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1985), 16:534; al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,* 87.

33. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān,* 1:443.

34. Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-ẓunūn,* 1:538.

35. ᶜAbd al-Qādir al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-muḍīʾah* (Karachi: Kitābkhānah Mīr Muḥammad, n.d.).

36. Al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,* 67–68.

al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), who was considered by Abū ᶜAbbās Shams al-Dīn ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) as the leader of the Muᶜtazilites of his day. This book, which has been printed many times, is one of the most enduring commentaries not only among Muᶜtazilite works, but in the field of Quranic commentary in general. Many summaries of this book and commentaries on it appeared during later centuries. Despite theological differences between many Sunnis and Muᶜtazilites, al-Zamakhsharī's commentary never lost its pertinence for Sunnis and was also constantly studied by Shiite scholars. ᶜAbd al-Karīm al-ᶜIrāqī (d. 640/1242–43), who later joined the circle of the Muᶜtazilites, wrote a response entitled *al-Intiṣār li'l-Zamakhsharī* (*The Revenge of al-Zamakhsharī*) to refute the Muᶜtazilite aspects of *al-Kashshāf*. This response is one of the last endeavors of Muᶜtazilites to write Quranic commentaries.[37] The date of the decline of Muᶜtazilite commentaries coincides in fact with the decline of Muᶜtazilism itself.

## *Quranic Commentaries Among the Ashᶜarites*

The earliest Ashᶜarites paid little direct attention to Quranic commentary. In some sources there is reference to a Quranic commentary entitled *al-Mukhtazan* (*The Preserved*) written by Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ashᶜarī himself.[38] A century after him the celebrated Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), who was an Ashᶜarite, showed special interest in this subject and composed several works, of which the most important is the well-known *kalāmī* commentary *Jawāhir al-Qurᵓān* (*Jewels of the Quran*).[39] The famous man of letters ᶜAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, who was also an Ashᶜarite, in addition to writing on the miraculous nature (*iᶜjāz*) of the Quran, also wrote a commentary on it.[40] Considering the scholars of that period, one must also mention ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Yūsuf al-Juwaynī (d. 438/1047), an Ashᶜarite of Khurasan, who wrote a large Quranic commentary.[41] He was followed on this path by his son, Imam al-Ḥaramayn ᶜAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), who is one of the best-known Ashᶜarite theologians.[42]

The peak of Ashᶜarite writings in the field of Quranic commentary occurred in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century, and the most outstanding figure of this epoch is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210).[43] In the Sunni world his *Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*The Grand Commentary*), consisting of many volumes, is considered the most outstanding *kalāmī* commentary. This work is among his last writings. As he wrote in the introduction, he sought to reinterpret Ashᶜarite *kalām* on the basis of the Quran

37. Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 1:173.
38. ᶜAlī ibn al-ᶜAsākir, *Tabyīn kadhib al-muftarī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ᶜArabī, 1984).
39. Edited by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1985).
40. Al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 109–10.
41. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taᵓrīkh al-umam*, 56–57.
42. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:35, 51.
43. His commentary has been printed several times, including by al-Maṭbaᶜah al-Bahiyyah in Cairo.

and the direct understanding of its verses. To judge the extent to which he succeeded in the task of directly comprehending the meaning of Quranic verses while avoiding a priori *kalāmī* judgments is beyond the bounds of this brief presentation. In any case the distance between al-Rāzī's *kalāmī* positions in his purely theological works and other Ashᶜarite writings and those in his commentary demonstrates that he had taken some strides on this path.

In the latter part of this century, Abū Ḥāmid ᶜUthmān ibn ᶜUmar al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 675/1276–77), an Ashᶜarite theologian from the province of Fars in Persia, wrote a work entitled *Farāʾid al-tafsīr* (*Precious Gems of Exegesis*) as a gloss upon the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī. In this work al-Fīrūzābādī sought to respond to al-Zamakhsharī's Muᶜtazilite interpretations from the Ashᶜarite point of view.[44]

This wave of Ashᶜarite scholarship continued into the eighth/fourteenth century among such figures as Sharaf al-Dīn Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭayyibī (d. 743/1342), who wrote the voluminous *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*Commentary on the Quran*) and glosses upon the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī,[45] and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Lubān al-Miṣrī (d. 749/1348–49), the author of *Radd al-mutashābih ila'l-muḥkam* (*Referring the Metaphorical Back to the Firm*).[46] A notable figure belonging to this current of thought is Saᶜd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390), who composed glosses upon the *Kashshāf*. This theologian also wrote another Quranic commentary, this time in Persian with the title of *Kashf al-asrār* (*Unveiling of Secrets*).[47] Even after this period Ashᶜarite commentaries continued to appear. In connection with similar theological currents, one can mention Akmal al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384), a follower of the school of al-Māturīdī, who wrote glosses upon the *Kashshāf* as well as an independent Quranic commentary.[48]

Among later scholars who continued the school of the "People of *Ḥadīth*" and the Salafī school (followers of the ancestors) in disputing *kalāmī* positions, some were themselves engaged in *kalām*. Among this group is first of all the Egyptian scholar Nāṣir al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Manṣūr (d. 673/1274–75), who in addition to an independent Quranic commentary composed a work entitled *al-Intiṣāf min al-Kashshāf* (*Taking Revenge on the* Kashshāf), which seeks to refute the Muᶜtazilite views of al-Zamakhsharī in his *Kashshāf*.[49] The most important Salafī scholar within this current of theological (*kalāmī*) studies and commentaries is, however, the famous scholar Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), who took important steps in this field

44. Al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 249.

45. Al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 277–78.

46. Ḥājjī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 1:837.

47. Al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 301–2.

48. Al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 17:299.

49. Ibn al-Munayyir, "al-Intiṣāf min tafsīr al-kashshāf," in Maḥmūd ibn ᶜUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ᶜan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ᶜArabī, n.d.), passim; and al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 283.

by writing a number of works on Quranic commentary and the "principles of commentary" (*uṣūl al-tafsīr*).

## *Quranic Commentaries Among Imamite Theologians*

On the basis of Imamite (Twelve-Imam Shiite) bibliographical sources, it can be asserted that some of the earliest Imamite theologians were concerned with and wrote works of Quranic commentary. Among these works one can mention the commentary of Sawā ibn ᶜAbdik al-Jurjānī (d. 360/971) and Abū Manṣūr al-Naysābūrī (d. 429/1038), who were near contemporaries of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī (d. 311/923).[50] Also from the first half of the fourth/tenth century one can mention Muḥammad ibn Baḥr al-Ruhnī (d. ca. 330/941–42), who contributed to this current with his commentary entitled *Kitāb al-burhān al-sadīd min ᶜawn al-madīd* (*The Book of Salutary Demonstration from the Extended Help*).[51]

With the formation of the Imamite school of theology in Baghdad, Quranic commentary became one of the major subjects of concern. Sayyid Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 408/1018), who belonged to this school, wrote an extensive commentary in some ten volumes entitled *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* (*Truths of Revelation*). The five volumes that survive from this work clearly reveal its *kalāmī* character.[52] As for Shaykh al-Mufīd, the founder of the Imamite school of theology, we only know that he wrote a refutation of the commentary of Abū ᶜAlī al-Jubbāʾī.[53] Another scholar of this school, Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, deals in a selective manner in his celebrated book *al-Amālī* (*Summary Sayings*) with discussions of Quranic commentary and comments in a theological as well as literary manner upon certain verses.

Although Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and Sulaymān al-Ṣahrashtī (fifth/eleventh century) were not exactly members of the Baghdādī school, they were nevertheless trained in that school. The *Kitāb al-tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*The Book of Exposition in Exegesis of the Quran*) by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in ten volumes, contains extensive selections from earlier theological commentaries, especially those of the Muᶜtazilites. Depending on the nature of the verses concerned, it contains extensive *kalāmī* discussions. This work is in fact the oldest commentary of its kind and one of the most extensive Imamite commentaries that have survived. Later Imamite commentaries such as *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* (*Concourse of Explanation*) of Abū ᶜAlī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153–54) and *Rawḍ al-jinān* (*Meadow of Paradise*) of Abu'l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī (d. 525/1131) were deeply influenced by

50. Aḥmad al-Najāshī, *al-Rijāl,* ed. Mūsā Shubayrī Zanjānī (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, AH 1407), 382; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist,* 190; and Muḥammad ibn al-Shahrāshūb, *Maᶜālim al-ᶜulamāʾ* (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1961), 140.

51. Al-Najāshī, *al-Rijāl,* 374; and Ibn al-Shahrāshūb, *Maᶜālim al-ᶜulamāʾ,* 96.

52. See *Ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl fī mutashābih al-tanzīl,* ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Āl Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ (Beirut: Dār al-Muhājir, n.d.).

53. Al-Najāshī, *al-Rijāl,* 401.

it. In speaking of the scholar Sulaymān al-Ṣahrashtī, who lived in the latter part of the fifth/eleventh century, one must also mention his refutation of the commentary of the Muᶜtazilite theologian Abū Yūsuf al-Qazwīnī, to which Ibn al-Shahrāshūb refers.[54]

During the middle centuries of Islamic history, among Imamites, as among Sunnis, preaching came to predominate over the writing of commentaries, and *kalāmī* commentaries became rare. Among works on commentary that were nevertheless written during this period, one must mention *Mutashābihāt al-Qurʾān* (*Metaphorical Verses of the Quran*) by Ibn al-Shahrāshūb, which is one of the few commentaries organized according to subject matter. In a manner that is unprecedented among older commentaries, the author comments upon verses of the Quran based on subject matter rather than the order of the verses as they appear in the Quran.

In later centuries, although Imamite theology entered a new period of expansion and prominence through the efforts of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and others, *kalāmī* commentary became less prevalent. Among the limited number of works in this field after al-Ṭūsī, one can note the efforts of Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Rāzī (d. 766/1365). He wrote glosses upon the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī and evaluated the theological (*kalāmī*) interpretation of the author. These glosses were later criticized by Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Āqsarāʾī (d. 771/1369 or 791/1389).[55]

Needless to say, the writing of Quranic commentaries among both Sunnis and Shiites continued after the classical period into the fourteenth/twentieth century; examples are the commentaries of Badīᶜ al-Zamān Saᶜīd al-Nūrsī (d. 1379/1960), Abu'l-Kalām Āzād (d. 1377/1958), Mawlānā Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966), and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1401/1981). Moreover, commentaries continue to be written today. Although these commentaries are not strictly speaking *kalāmī,* they nevertheless contain some *kalāmī* discussions and need to be mentioned. Most such works continue classical currents of Quranic commentary, but in a new context.

## *Quranic Commentaries Among the Philosophers and Some Sufis*

The Quranic revelation created the worldview within which Islamic philosophers philosophized even if they continued to make use of ideas inherited from Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus.[56] Such questions as the relation between faith and reason, the eternity or newness of the world, the relation between revealed and rational knowledge, the epistemological meaning of revelation as understood in relation to the Quran, and many other issues discussed extensively by Islamic

54. Ibn al-Shahrāshūb, *Maᶜālim al-ᶜulamāʾ*, 56.

55. Al-Adirnawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn,* 292.

56. This section is based on the text of Ayatollah Muḥaqqiq Dāmād as supplemented by S. H. Nasr.

philosophers were related directly to the Quran as source of both ethics and knowledge for Muslims. Even the name of philosophy in Arabic, *al-falsafah,* taken from the Greek word *philosophia,* came to be complemented by the word *ḥikmah* ("wisdom"), taken from the Quran, and many a later Islamic philosopher came to be known as a *ḥakīm,* that is, a possessor of *ḥikmah.*

In addition to this general influence of the Quran on the whole Islamic philosophical tradition, some Islamic philosophers also wrote direct commentaries on certain verses or *sūrah*s of the Sacred Book. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), the second major Islamic Peripatetic (*mashshāʾī*) philosopher following Abū Yaʿqūb al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/856), not only discussed the meaning of revelation from the point of view of epistemology, but also in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikmah* (*Ringstones of Wisdom*) commented upon certain Quranic verses. His successor in this school and the most influential of Islamic philosophers, Abū ʿAlī ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037), took it a step further and wrote separate works of commentary on certain *sūrah*s of the Quran, including *al-Ikhlāṣ* ("Sincerity"), *al-Falaq* ("The Daybreak"), *al-Aʿlā* ("The Most High"), and part of *Fuṣṣilat* ("Expounded").[57] In addition, in the *al-Risālah al-nayrūziyyah* (*The Nayrūzī Treatise*), attributed to him, there is a commentary on the single letters that appear at the beginning of some of the *sūrah*s of the Quran.

The most influential commentary of Ibn Sīnā, however, is his philosophical commentary on the Light Verse (*āyat al-nūr;* 24:35). This commentary appears not as a separate work, but as part of his last philosophical masterpiece, *Kitāb al-ishārāt waʾl-tanbīhāt* (*The Book of Directives and Remarks*). This work influenced many later philosophers, and even the theologian and Sufi al-Ghazzālī, the author of *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*Niche of Lights*). This latter work itself played an important role in the teachings of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and the founding of the School of Illumination (*al-ishrāq*) and definitely influenced the magisterial commentary of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā; d. 1050/1640) on the Light Verse.

Among other Peripatetics who commented upon certain verses of the Quran and tried to correlate their meaning with philosophical teachings, one must mention Abu'l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Rushd (Averroës, d. 595/1198), who in his *Faṣl al-maqāl* (*The Decisive Treatise*) sought to harmonize the Divine Law (*al-Sharīʿah*) and philosophy (*al-ḥikmah*). In this task he was joined by many Ismāʿīlī philosophers before him such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 470/1077). In fact, other Ismāʿīlī philosophers also quoted Quranic verses and sought to comment on them philosophically. As an example one can cite the famous *Rasāʾil* (*Epistles*) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ ("Brethren of Purity"), written during the fourth/tenth century, a work of general Shiite character claimed by Ismāʿīlīs as their own.

57. See Ibn Sīnā, *Rasāʾil al-Shaykh al-Raʾīs Abī ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sīnā* (Cairo: Hindiyyah Press, 1908).

One can see a greater interest in philosophical commentary on the Quran in the School of Illumination, whose founder, Suhrawardī, turned to the Quran more than any of his predecessors or contemporaries. Almost all the works of Suhrawardī cite Quranic verses, upon which he then comments. This is especially true of *al-Alwāḥ al-ʿimādiyyah* (*The ʿImādī Tablets*), which is in reality itself a Quranic commentary.[58] The first commentator on Suhrawardī, Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī (d. after 687/1288), also mentions a work by Suhrawardī with the title *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*Commentary on the Quran*), which, however, is lost. It is also notable that Suhrawardī used specific Quranic terms for some of the most important ideas expressed in his works, terms such as *nūr* ("light"), which he uses as the central concept of Illuminationist philosophy, referring directly to the Quranic usage of this term. He also uses the Quranic term *ghasaq* ("obscurity"), by which he means the physical body, for the first time in Islamic philosophy.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to say something about the method used by the Islamic philosophers in their commentaries on the Quran. This method, called *taʾwīl,* which literally means taking something back to its origin, is central to both Shiite and Sufi methodology. According to these schools, not only is God both *al-Bāṭin* ("the Inward") and *al-Ẓāhir* ("the Outward"), as asserted by the Quran, but also all things have an inward and an outward aspect, especially the Word of God, the Quran, according to the text of the Quran itself.

One must not, however, confuse the philosophical method of Quranic commentary and the Shiite or Sufi method. There is a long tradition of Sufi commentaries that includes such works as the *Tafsīr* of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896); *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* (*Truths of Quranic Commentary*) of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021); *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* (*Subtleties of Indications*) of Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072); *Kashf al-asrār wa-ʿuddat al-abrār* (*The Unveiling of Mysteries and Provision for the Pious*) of Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (d. 520/1126); *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* (*Brides of Elucidation*) of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209); several commentaries attributed to Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) as well as *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Openings*), which is in reality a commentary on the Quran; *Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān* (*Hermeneutics of the Quran*) of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1336); and *Mawāhib-i ʿaliyyah* (*Lofty Gifts*) of Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Kāshifī (d. 910/1504). This tradition was later continued by such figures as Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi (d. 1176/1762), Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1327/1909), Ṣafī ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1361/1899), Mawlānā ʿAlī Thānwī (d. 1362/1943), and many others. The Sufi tradition, along with the tradition of Shiite commentaries, was also to influence later philosophical commentaries, especially those of Mullā Ṣadrā, but must not be confused with philosophical commentaries strictly speaking.

58. There is an anthology of Suhrawardī's commentaries on various verses of the Quran and his interpretation of them edited by Sīmā Sādāt Nūrbakhsh under the title *Āyat-i ishrāq: tafsīr wa taʾwīl-i āyāt-i Qurʾān-i karīm dar āthār-i Suhrawardī* (Tehran: Mihr Niyūshā, 1386/2007).

One can see commentaries on some Quranic verses in the works of the members of the School of Shiraz, which was the central locus of philosophical activity from the seventh/thirteenth through the tenth/sixteenth century. But the peak of philosophical commentary on the Quran is to be found in the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640). In the introduction to his magnum opus, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿah* (*The Four Journeys*), he reminds readers that the goal of the Transcendent Theosophy/Philosophy, or *al-ḥikmah al-mutaʿāliyah,* which is the name of the new philosophical school established by him, is to integrate *Qurʾān, ʿirfān,* and *burhān,* that is, the Quran, gnostic knowledge, and philosophical demonstration. And indeed we find references to the Quran and the *Ḥadīth* throughout his works. Moreover, with the aim of bringing out the philosophical meaning of the Quran, he composed commentaries on specific *sūrah*s and verses that have been assembled together in seven large volumes as *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (*Commentary on the Noble Quran*).[59]

Mullā Ṣadrā also wrote *Asrār al-āyāt* (*Mysteries of Quranic Verses*), in which he discusses his understanding of the method of hermeneutic interpretation (*tawʾīl*), which does not follow completely the methods of earlier works of Quranic commentary.[60] Finally, one must also mention another major work of Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (*Keys of the Invisible World*), which deals with the inner meaning of the Quran.[61]

These works influenced many Qajar philosophers of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, such as Mullā ʿAlī Nūrī (d. 1246/1830–31), who wrote glosses upon them. Perhaps the greatest Islamic philosopher of that period, Ḥājjī Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (d. 1289/1872), also followed Mullā Ṣadrā in commenting on Quranic verses. He did not, however, compose a separate work dedicated only to Quranic commentary, although he did write well-known commentaries on famous Shiite prayers that were themselves based on the Quran.

Many scholars, including a number from Egypt, have severely criticized the whole tradition of philosophical commentaries on the Quran. We can find allusions to this matter as early as the work of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035). The greatest opposition, however, came from Ibn Taymiyyah, who again and again turned to the criticism of the philosophers' understanding of the Quran.[62] Nor did such criticism cease in the eighth/fourteenth century. It has continued among certain jurists and theologians to this day, as has opposition in certain circles to Sufi commentaries.

59. Edited by Muḥammad Khwājawī (Qom: Bīdār Press, AH 1410).

60. Edited by Muḥammad Khwājawī (Tehran: Anjuman-i Islāmī-yi Ḥikmat wa Falsafi-yi Īrān, AH 1360 S).

61. Edited by Muḥammad Khwājawī (Tehran: Anjuman-i Islāmī-yi Ḥikmat wa Falsafi-yi Īrān, AH 1363 S).

62. Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqāʾiq al-tafsīr,* ed. Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Julaynid (Damascus: Muʾassasat ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān, AH 1404), 2:115; and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 2:33, 247.

In conclusion, it is necessary to say a few words about the major contemporary scholar, gnostic, and philosopher Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1401/1981), the author of the twenty-seven volume Quranic commentary *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (*The Balance in the Exegesis of the Quran*). In composing this most extensive of fourteenth/twentieth-century commentaries, he drew from all the different approaches of earlier commentators, whether they were historians, linguists, jurists, theologians, philosophers, or Sufis. Being the great philosopher that he was, he interpreted many verses philosophically, so that *al-Mīzān* may be considered to some extent part of the tradition of philosophical commentaries on the Quran. Nevertheless, he opposed strongly imposing certain theological or philosophical ideas upon Quranic verses.[63] He sought to interpret the verses of the Quran through other verses of the Quran itself, and yet the result is a commentary that is at once theological, philosophical, and mystical. It also deals with the language of the Quran, the meaning of the sacred history contained in it, and its legal, ethical, metaphysical, cosmological, and eschatological doctrines.

*Translated from Persian by Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

63. In the introduction to *al-Mīzān* he expresses criticism of certain views of the theologians and philosophers; see Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-mīzān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1997), 1:4–5, 7.

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# THE QURAN AND SUFISM

William C. Chittick

The Arabic word *ṣūfī,* from which English "Sufism" is derived, was first used to designate a certain type of religiosity in the second/eighth century. The original meaning of the word seems to have been "someone who wears wool," though other derivations have also been proposed. Once the word came into use, Muslim scholars never reached any consensus as to what exactly it implied. Down into the seventh/thirteenth century, it was generally used to characterize certain saintly figures and their teachings, and from then on it was also applied to various "orders" (lit. "paths," *ṭuruq;* sing. *ṭarīqah*), within which teachers guided students on the quest for God. Many scores of such orders still flourish in the Islamic world, each of them tracing its lineage back to one or more founding saints and eventually to the Prophet. For centuries, the orders played a dominant role in the religious life of the Muslim community, but more recently the politicized forms of Islam known as "fundamentalism" have to a notable degree obscured their presence, at least to the media.

Modern-day scholars commonly take the word "Sufism" as a synonym for mysticism, spirituality, or esoterism, all of which suggest something of what the word has connoted. For the purposes of this essay, Sufism can best be understood in relation to the structure of the Islamic tradition. The twin foundations of Islam—the Quran and the *Sunnah*—provide guidance on three levels: activity, understanding, and transformation; or practice, thought, and spirituality. As Muslims drew out the implications of God's Guidance on the level of practice and activity, they gradually brought into being the realm of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the schools of the Revealed Law (the *madhāhib* of the *Sharīʿah*). As they pondered the implications of Divine Guidance for a correct understanding of God, the cosmos ("everything other than God"), and human embodiment, they gave rise to schools of thought like *kalām* (theology) and philosophy. At the same time, many Muslims—often the same figures involved in the first two realms—held that the goal of both right activity and correct understanding was transformation of the soul, that is, achieving inner conformity with *al-Ḥaqq,* "the Real," the Supreme Truth and Absolute Reality that is God Himself. It is these Muslims who were often called "Sufis" by their contemporaries or by later generations.

The outstanding characteristic of the Sufi approach to the Islamic tradition has been to focus on assimilating the soul to the Divine Word, always on the basis of the

model established by the Prophet. Addressing him, the Quran says, *Truly thou art of an exalted* (*ʿaẓīm*) *character* (68:4), and it was lost on no one that the Quran uses the same adjective to refer to itself—*the Mighty* (*ʿaẓīm*) *Quran* (15:87). The exaltedness of the Prophet's character derives precisely from the fact that he had assimilated the Quran into his very being. This is how Sufis have understood the saying of the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah, when she was asked about his character after his death. She replied, "Have you not read the Quran? His character was the Quran."[1]

The Quran's role in the soul's transformation is implicit in the accounts of the Prophet's ascent (*miʿrāj*) to God, the "Night Journey," to which reference is made in 17:1: *Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night. Laylat al-isrāʾ,* "the Night of the Journey," or *al-miʿrāj,* "the Ascent," was understood as the fulfillment of *laylat al-qadr,* "the Night of Power" (97:1–3). Having brought the Divine Word down to the Prophet on the Night of Power, Gabriel took him up to meet God on the Night of the Journey. He could encounter God precisely because "His character was the Quran," which had descended into his soul and transmuted it into *a luminous lamp* (33:46) in answer to his prayer, "Make me into a light."[2] The Quran itself, after all, is *the light* (64:8), revealed by *the Light of the heavens and the earth* (24:35) to *bring forth mankind out of darkness into light* (14:1).

## *The Path of Transformation*

Sufi teachers frequently spoke of the goal of the Islamic tradition as "realization" (*taḥqīq*), a word derived from the same root as the Divine Name *al-Ḥaqq,* the Real, the Right, the True, the Appropriate. Grammatically, realization means to actualize truth (*ḥaqq*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and in Sufism it came to designate the end result of following the path to God. To achieve realization means to reach the Real, to see and understand all things in light of the Real, and to act rightly and appropriately in all situations. This demands the transformation of the very being of the seeker, and it is precisely the role of Sufi writings to explain the nature of this transformation, to describe the path that can lead to it, and to offer practical instructions and means on how one can travel on the path.

The notion of "path" is central to Muslim self-understanding. During every cycle of the daily prayers Muslims recite *al-Fātiḥah* (*Sūrah* 1). After praising God and declaring

1. Aḥmad 10 (no. 25240); Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ,* ed. Abū Muʿādh Ṭāriq ibn ʿAwaḍ Allāh ibn Muḥammad and Abu'l-Faḍl al-Ḥusaynī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1994), 1:30 (no. 72).

2. The sentence is part of this prayer of the Prophet: "O God, place in my heart a light, in my hearing a light, in my sight a light, on my right hand a light, on my left hand a light, before me a light, behind me a light, above me a light, below me a light, and appoint for me a light" or "make me into a light" (Muslim 7.26, no. 1830).

human neediness, the *sūrah* voices the heart of the religious quest: *Guide us upon the straight path* (1:6). It is this very path (*ṣirāṭ*) that is embodied as the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) over Hell that everyone must attempt to cross on the Day of Resurrection. Those who follow the Divine Guidance in this life will pass over safely, and those who ignore it will fall into the Fire. The Quran makes "guidance" (*hudā*) the general attribute of prophets, and it ascribes "misguidance" (*iḍlāl*) to Satan. Addressing the Prophet, it says, *Truly thou dost guide unto a straight path* (42:52). But it also reminds us that the Prophet guides only on the basis of God's Guidance, and that God alone is the ultimate Guide: *Surely thou* (Muhammad) *dost not guide whom thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will* (28:56).

Quranic words for "path" or "road" play a prominent role in conceptualizing the tradition. *Sabīl* designates the general path of right guidance, especially in the phrase "the path of God." *Sharīʿah,* "avenue," comes to designate the specific path of right practice codified in Islamic Law and jurisprudence as well as prophetic guidance generally (especially in the plural form, *sharāʾiʿ,* "paths," i.e., "religions"). *Ṭarīqah* comes to mean the path of spiritual discipline, the inner journey toward right understanding and right conformity with the Real that is taught by the Sufi masters (*shaykhs, pīrs*); hence its use to denote the Sufi orders.

In summarizing the nature of the path to God, teachers often spoke of "purification of the soul" (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), an expression derived from 91:7–9. Purification demands eliminating blameworthy character traits (*akhlāq dhamīmah*) and acquiring praiseworthy character traits (*akhlāq ḥamīdah*). *Akhlāq,* or "character traits," is the plural of *khuluq,* "character," and is used to designate the science of ethics (*ʿilm al-akhlāq*). Among all of God's servants, the one who had the most "exalted character" was Muhammad, literally "the Praised One," also called Aḥmad, "the Most Praiseworthy" (61:6). The Quran speaks of God as "the Praiseworthy" (*al-Ḥamīd*), the implication being that no one else is truly worthy of praise. If the Quran calls the Prophet both "Muḥammad" and "Aḥmad," this is because his character conforms to God's "character," which is to say that "his character was the Quran," God's Speech and Self-Expression.

In short, all those who want to purify their souls must follow the straight path, the path of God. This requires imitating the Prophet on two basic levels: right activity, by following the *Sharīʿah;* and right understanding and realization, by following the *ṭarīqah.* Imitating the Prophet can lead to the recovery of the soul's primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), created in God's "image" or "form" (*ṣūrah*). Hence Sufis commonly spoke of the goal as "coming to be characterized by the character traits of God" (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*), and they understood that the Prophet's "exalted character" derived precisely from his being characterized by the entire range of Divine Names and Attributes, his full realization of the Reality of the Real. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) devotes a chapter of his commentary on the Divine Names to this process and, following terminology long since used by both Sufis and philosophers, he refers

to the goal as the actualization of one's innate *ta'alluh,* "being like unto Allāh," that is, "deiformity" or "theomorphism."[3]

The fact that Sufis have focused their attention on achieving spiritual transformation helps explain their dedication to what one scholar has called the "Quranization of memory."[4] This meant not only that they, like other Muslims, put great stock in the memorization and recitation of the Quran and invocation of the Divine Names contained in the Quran, but also that they voiced their teachings in Quranic terminology and kept in mind that the purpose of all their efforts was to assimilate the Divine Word. Always the goal was for the soul to be transmuted into the Divine Light, the living reality of God's Self-Expression. This special dedication to the Quran can be observed clearly among the Sufi teachers of the early generations, who are remembered mainly by aphorisms that elucidate the spiritual significance of key Quranic words and phrases. When later Sufis began to write detailed expositions of the human situation vis-à-vis God and the cosmos, they filled their works with commentary on Quranic verses. One of the best examples here is Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), whom the Sufis call "the Greatest Master," because of the unsurpassed detail and profundity with which he explained the nature of the path to God. His monumental *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Openings*) is nothing if not a series of meditations on the Quran and its inner meaning.

In the Sufi reading of the Islamic tradition, every human being is called to undertake the path of spiritual transformation. All have inherited the knowledge of the names that God *taught Adam* (2:31), and all are capable of recovering this primordial, Adamic knowledge by assimilating the Quran. In two verses, the Prophet is instructed to say, *I am only a human being like you* (18:110; 41:6). Like us, he had inherited knowledge of the names from Adam, but unlike us, the verses go on to say, God sent down upon him the revelation of His Unity. It was this event that allowed him to follow the Divine Guidance back to its source and recover the primordial human nature, the *fiṭrah.* As mortals like him, we can follow in his footsteps.

## *God's Signs*

One might say that the goal of Sufi theoretical teachings is to provide a cosmic anthropology combined with cosmology, that is, an exposition of human nature with respect to God's purpose in creating the universe. Right understanding of human nature must begin at the beginning, which is God, the assertion of whose unity, *tawḥīd,* is the first principle of Islamic faith. *Tawḥīd* is expressed most succinctly by the first

3. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *al-Maqṣid al-asnā* (*The Highest Goal*), ed. Fadlou A. Shehadi (Beirut: Dar El Machreq, 1971). Part 1, chap. 4 is called "Explaining that the servant's perfection and felicity lies in becoming characterized by the character traits of God." He mentions *ta'alluh* on p. 65.

4. Paul Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh et la naissance de la confrérie šādilite* (Beirut: Dar El Machreq, 1971), 46.

part of the *shahādah,* "(There is) no god but God," a formula that provides the core of Islamic thought. Its two halves—typically called the negation (*nafy*) and the affirmation (*ithbāt*)—negate Divine Qualities from everything other than God and ascribe all Reality and all Qualities to Him alone.

The dialectic established by this negation and affirmation reverberates throughout the writings of the Sufis and provides the basic standpoint for understanding the Quran's message, which is encapsulated by God's "Most Beautiful Names" (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*). Thus, for example, if God is the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), this means that there is no creator but God. In other words, this Name negates ontological creativity from creatures and affirms that it belongs to God alone. The Quran puts it rhetorically: *Is there a creator other than God?* (35:3). If God is the Strong (*al-Qawī*), then *there is no strength save in God* (18:39). If He is the Rich (*al-Ghanī*), then, *O mankind! You are needful of God; and He is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised* (35:15). If He is the Sovereign (*al-Malik*), then *unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth* (3:189) and *He has no partner in sovereignty* (17:111).

Meditating on God's Quranic Names leads to the understanding that everything in the universe comes from God, returns to God, and is sustained and supported by God at every moment. The universe is in reality a vast panorama of God's "signs" (*āyāt*), a word that the Quran uses to designate the phenomena of the natural realm, the perception and awareness of the soul, the activities and miracles of the prophets, and its own verses. It calls upon people to reflect and meditate on the signs, each of which displays marks and traces of God's Most Beautiful Names. The broad manner in which the Quran speaks of signs/verses leads to a discussion of three books—the cosmos, the human soul, and the Quran itself, the last of which is the key to the interpretation of the first two. As Ibn ʿArabī tells us, all of the cosmos is "letters, words, *sūrah*s, and signs/verses, so it is the Great Quran."[5] His student Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) often elaborates on this imagery. In one passage he explains why the human soul, taught all the names by God, is God's revealed book:

> Have you not heard the Words of God? *Read your Book! On this Day, your own soul suffices as a reckoner against you* [17:14]. Whosoever reads this Book has come to know what has been, what is, and what will be. If you cannot read all of your Book, then read of it what you can. Have you not seen how He says, *And within your souls. Do you not then behold?* [51:21] And have you not seen how He says, *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things?* [41:53]. . . . So this, my son, is the Book and the knowledge of the Book. And *you* are the Book, as we said. Your knowledge of your own soul is your knowledge of the Book. And there is not *anything moist,*

5. Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (Cairo: n.p., 1911; repr., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 4:167, l. 22.

which is the visible world, *or dry,* which is the spiritual world and everything beyond, *but that it is inscribed in a clear Book* [6:59], and that is you.[6]

Everything in the universe, the soul, and the Quran is a sign/verse. All signs need to be deciphered through both negation, "no god," and affirmation, "but God." With regard to negation, signs have no reality compared to God's infinite Reality; as for affirmation, each sign points to the Real, for all qualities derive their sustenance from His Qualities. Inasmuch as all things denote God's Names and Attributes, everything in the entire universe is a *tajallī,* a "theophany," a Divine "Self-Disclosure" (*tajallī*). This word is taken from a verse in which Moses asks God to show Himself. God replies that Moses will not be able to see Him. *And when his Lord manifested Himself* (*tajallā*) *to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon* (7:143). The blinding light of theophany negates the mountain and its viewer, just as every sign, seen with the eye of discernment, negates the unreal and affirms that there is nothing real but the Real.

Each of the cosmic signs/verses is a specific thing, event, word, or sentence, but each also points to something else beyond itself. The signs/verses that make up the Quran are also pointers; yet the Quran is *the clear Book* (12:1) and the *clear Quran* (15:1), providing the clarity and insight with which to interpret the signs in the cosmos and the soul. To understand this Divine Guidance, however, people must dedicate themselves to what the Book asks from them, not least following God's path and careful study of His Word. Without understanding the written signs of the Quran, they will never be able to decipher the cosmic and inner signs. They will then be heedless of their own role in creation and unable to deal with the world and themselves appropriately and rightly (*bi'l-ḥaqq*), that is, in conformity with the Reality of the Real.

## *The Face of God*

The Quran sometimes speaks of God's Self-Disclosure as His "Face" (*wajh*), as in 2:115: *Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God.* In other words, God discloses Himself in everything; so each is a sign affirming God's Reality and negating its own independent reality. At the same time, however, each thing is simply itself; so it is a veil that conceals the Divine Face disclosed within it. A second verse suggests something of the two-sided nature of the Divine Self-Disclosure with its grammatical ambiguity: *All things perish, save His Face* (28:88), a sentence that can equally well be read, "Each thing perishes except its face," that is, the thing's face. If we take the pronoun to mean "His," then the verse affirms the permanence of God and negates the permanence of all things. If we take it to mean "its," then a thing's face, that is, its aspect of relation

6. *Mir'āt al-ʿārifīn fī multamas Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (The Mirror of the Gnostics: On the Request of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn),* in manuscript. A faulty text with translation has been published by S. H. Askari in *Reflection of the Awakened* (London: Zahra Trust, 1983).

to God, is permanent, but not the rest of the thing. Ibn ʿArabī explains that this permanent face of a thing is its inmost reality, which is always gazing upon God, a reality that is ultimately nothing other than the Face of God gazing upon it. He calls this inmost reality God's "Specific Face" (*wajh khāṣṣ*), meaning that God in His infinite Knowledge has an infinity of Faces, each of which is turned toward a specific thing to bring it into existence and sustain it.

The Quran tells us that seekers of God *desire the Face of God* (30:38), and it praises those who turn their faces to Him: *Whosoever submits (islām) his face to God and is virtuous (muḥsin) has indeed grasped the most unfailing handhold* (31:22). By submitting their faces to God, seekers find their own true faces, which are the same as the Specific Faces that God has turned toward them. The two faces are ultimately one, for "there is no face but God's Face." Those who seek God's Face, then, are striving to recognize the Face of God that is their own true self.

This quest to recognize God's Face helps explain one of the senses of the famous *ḥadīth,* "He who recognizes himself recognizes his Lord."[7] This *ḥadīth,* which is constantly cited in Sufi texts, is usually translated, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." The verb *ʿarafa,* however, designates recognition (i.e., re-cognition) rather than simple knowing (which is designated by *ʿalima*). The use of this specific word suggests that the knowledge gained from coming to know oneself is in fact a renewed knowledge of what one already knows in one's inmost being. Indeed, so important is this notion of "recognition" that Sufism is often called *maʿrifah* or *ʿirfān,* both of which are verbal nouns from the verb *ʿarafa*. If scholars usually translate these two words as "gnosis," it is because this English word means immediate knowledge of spiritual truth, and this suggests something of the nature of the self-recognition that is simultaneously God recognition.

It is worth recalling here that the Quranic term *dhikr* denotes both the "reminder" that comes from God and the "remembrance" that is the human response to that reminder. At the same time, the word also means "to mention" or "to invoke," and the Quran frequently encourages mentioning or invoking the Name of God as a means of remembering Him, as in 76:25: *Invoke the Name of thy Lord morning and evening.* This Quranic teaching is the basis for the universal practice of remembering (*dhikr*) God's Name (or "invocation") found in all the Sufi orders. The Quran's use of this word and its cognates shows that, in the Quranic view of things, we already possess the knowledge that we are being reminded of, but we must recover it. In short, true recognition of oneself demands seeing oneself as a Face of God and understanding that "everything is perishing but His Face," which is none other than one's true face.

7. This *ḥadīth* is not found in the standard collections and is rejected by most *Ḥadīth* experts, some of whom ascribe it instead to the Prophet's cousin ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. See Muḥammad ibn al-Munawwar, *Asrār al-tawḥīd fī maqāmāt al-Shaykh Abī Saʿīd,* ed. M. R. Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehran: Āgāh, 1366/1987), 774–75.

The ultimate identity of God's Face and the human face reminds us that our remembrance of God is simultaneously God's remembrance of us: *Remember Me, and I shall remember you* (2:152).

Still another verse that mentions God's Face is the source of one of the most famous conceptual pairs in the Sufi vocabulary, *fanāʾ*, passing away or annihilation, and *baqāʾ*, remaining or subsistence: *All upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty* (55:26–27). All signs disappear, but the Divine Face that discloses itself in the signs remains. Sufis take this not only as a statement of the transitory nature of the world, but also as a call to action. Seekers must recognize the passing nature of their own souls save their "faces" and find the permanent Face of the Real; they must negate the veils and affirm the Face, which is to say that they must annihilate their own ignorant and limited selves, so that they can behold the Divine Face.

Human beings, created by God to be His vicegerents (*khalāʾif;* sing. *khalīfah*) on earth (2:30), can play their proper roles only if they recognize who they are and who their Lord is. Adam was taught all the names, but he *forgot* (20:115) and *disobeyed* (20:121). God forgave Adam and appointed him as prophet and vicegerent, but most of his children are dominated by forgetfulness and disobedience. God sends guidance precisely to remind them of their role in creation. When they remember, they will understand that they should be striving to actualize the character traits that are latent in their primordial nature. Veils must be lifted so that the Face of God may appear. Blameworthy character traits must be annihilated, and praiseworthy character traits—the traits instilled in the *fiṭrah*—must become manifested to subsist. Guided by the negation of the veil and the affirmation of the Face, seekers of God aim to follow the Prophet on the ladder of ascent and to recover their own primordial form in the Divine Presence, their own original faces before they were born of their parents. When all ignorance and blameworthy character traits have been annihilated, only God's Face—the magnificent character of the Real—remains.

## *Love*

Historians have noted that Sufism has had a remarkable ability to appeal to the masses and permeate popular culture. The Sufi reading of the Quran was transmitted through the personal radiance of saintly teachers and a vast literature, much of it presented in the form of poetry and song. Theologians and jurists preferred dry disquisitions in Arabic, the universal language of Muslim scholarship, though they often wrote more popular works in Persian, Turkish, other languages, and even Arabic itself. Poets sang their songs in their own languages, and poetry became a beautiful and accessible vehicle for Sufi teachings. The monumental *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), for example, has often been called the Quran in the Persian language. This is not because it bears any outward resemblance to the Divine Word, but rather

because Rūmī was able to capture in a nontechnical, everyday language, understandable to any Persian speaker, what he himself calls "the roots of the roots of the roots of the religion"[8]—which is an apt description of the Quran itself, the foundation of everything Islamic.

The basic theme of most popular poetry, especially Sufi poetry, is love, with all of its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows. The contours of Sufism as a cosmic and spiritual anthropology can perhaps best be seen by looking at a few Quranic verses about love and the manner in which these verses were understood. The most commonly cited is no doubt 5:54, *God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him,* usually in the abbreviated form, *He loves them, and they love Him.* The theologian Aḥmad al-Samᶜānī (d. 534/1140) explains that God mentions His Most Beautiful Names in the Quran so as to clarify to His servants that they must negate Divine Attributes from themselves and affirm them for God alone. God speaks of His Exaltation and their abasement, His Knowledge and their ignorance, His Holiness and their taintedness, His Life and their death, His Unity and their multiplicity. But "when He gave news of love, just as He affirmed love for Himself, so also He affirmed love for us—*He loves them, and they love Him.*"[9]

Notice that this verse speaks of both God and human beings as lover and beloved. *Tawḥīd* alerts us to the fact that there can be no true lover and no true beloved but God. So in what sense can human beings be called lovers of God, and why should they be the objects of God's Love? We can begin by recalling that the Prophet said, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty."[10] With regard to *tawḥīd,* this means that nothing is truly beautiful but God, and that no one truly loves but God. Nonetheless, God created human beings in a beautiful form: *He formed you and made beautiful your forms* (40:64). Our forms are beautiful because God created us in His own "form," which is to say that He in-formed us with the Most Beautiful Names. God loves beauty; so He loves the beauty of human forms, which is to say that He loves the manifestation of His own Most Beautiful Names in creation.

Why, then, did God create the universe in the first place? In the Quran He says, *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me* (51:56), the last phrase of which can also mean "to serve Me." Fulfilling the proper human role as God's vicegerent demands serving the Lord, and no service is greater than negating oneself and affirming God, annihilating blameworthy character traits and allowing the Divine character traits to subsist. But what does service/worship have to do with love? Here Sufi texts like to quote the *ḥadīth qudsī,* "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to

8. Rūmī begins the Arabic introduction to his great work with these words: "This is the book of the *Mathnawī,* and it is the roots of the roots of the roots of the religion, unveiling the mysteries of arrival [at God] and certainty; it is God's greatest jurisprudence (*fiqh Allāh al-akbar*), God's brightest Path (*sharᶜ Allāh al-azhar*), and God's most manifest proof (*burhān Allāh al-aẓhar*)."

9. Quoted in William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 120.

10. Muslim 2.41 (no. 275).

be recognized; so I created the creatures so that I would be recognized."[11] In other words, God created the universe because, as the verse of mutual love puts it, *He loves them;* that is, He loves human beings; so He gave them the capacity to recognize Him and to love Him in return. By recovering their *fiṭrah,* they recognize themselves as God's servants, and they recognize their Lord as the possessor of the Most Beautiful Names, which are also the Most Lovable Names, for beauty attracts love. Recognition, in other words, turns their love toward God, and love demands devoted service.

So, there is no lover but God, and *He loves them,* that is, human beings created in His "form," for they are the Self-Disclosures of His Most Beautiful Names. And there is no beloved but God, which is to say that human beings love God and God alone, whether they know it or not. This is because no one is beautiful but God; so all love is attracted to His Beauty. Sufi authors are especially fond of explaining this truth, for it goes against common sense, which tells us that we love this person or that thing. Indeed, the Quran remarks, *Made to seem fair unto mankind is the love of passions, among them women, children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle, and tillage* (3:14). But why do these things "seem fair"? The reason is that *they love Him* and they see the Beauty of God's Face in His signs without being aware of it. As Rūmī puts it, the objects of love are gold-plated by God's Attributes. People should strive to recognize that it is not these objects per se that they love, but God. Ibn ʿArabī explains the point in this way, referring first to a series of beautiful women celebrated in Arabic poetry:

> No one loves anyone but his own Creator, but he is veiled from Him by love for Zaynab, Suʿād, Hind, Laylā, this world, money, position, and everything loved in the world. Poets exhaust their words on all these existing things, but they do not know. The gnostics [i.e., those who "recognize" themselves and God] never hear a verse, a riddle, a panegyric, or a love poem that is not about God, hidden beyond the veil of forms.[12]

The significance of the verse of mutual love becomes a bit clearer as soon as we reflect upon what lovers desire. If *He loves them and they love Him,* both God and human beings desire the same thing, which is to be together. To use the technical language of Sufism, they desire union (*wiṣāl*), not separation (*firāq*), for love can never be consummated at a distance. It is equally true, however, that lovers cannot come together unless they are at first apart. It is precisely the desire for union that incited the One Reality to bring about duality and separation in the first place. *His Command when He desires a thing,* says the Quran, *is only to say to it, "Be!" and it is* (36:82). This

11. This saying is much quoted in later texts from around the seventh/thirteenth century on, but most *Ḥadīth* scholars do not consider it authentic.

12. Quoted in Chittick, *Sufism,* 67.

desire to create things is none other than the Hidden Treasure's love to be recognized, for without a separate creation, there would be none to recognize Him and none to love Him.[13]

So the goal of God's creative activity is not, as some might think, for there simply to be a world out there, but rather for God and His loved ones to come together, as they were before creation. Rūmī explains this game of love when he says that all of us used to be fish swimming in the ocean of Divine Unity, unaware of our distinction from the water. Then God threw us up on dry land, the realm of separation, longing, pain, and suffering. Only by tasting separation can we remember the joy of water and desire to return to it. Once we return, we will swim in the Ocean of Unity again with full awareness of the joy of consummated love.

The most explicit reference to union with God in the earliest Islamic sources is probably the sound *ḥadīth qudsī* in which God speaks of the servant who seeks nearness to Him through good works. When the servant advances on the path, then, God says, "I love him, and when I love him, I am the hearing with which he hears, the eyesight with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, and the foot with which he walks."[14] This *ḥadīth* has been the subject of endless explication in Sufi texts, for it describes in concrete terms the fruit of *He loves them*. But *they love Him* also plays a basic role: the servants' love for God drives them to follow the path of guidance. If their love were to be misguided, then they would be attracted to the gold plating rather than to God; so they would not advance on the path. To advance they must act beautifully and virtuously (*iḥsān*) and come to be characterized by beautiful character traits. The only way to accomplish this is to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet. The Prophet is instructed, *Say, "If you love God, follow me, and God will love you"* (3:31). When God does love us, then He will be the hearing with which we hear, the eyes with which we see, and the heart with which we love.

"God is beautiful, and He loves beauty." Clearly the Prophet, the last of the prophets and the "most praiseworthy" of God's creatures, is the embodiment of human virtue and beauty. As the *ḥadīth qudsī* puts it, "But for thee [O Muhammad], I would not have created the spheres."[15] God created the universe out of His Love to be recognized, and the Prophet fulfilled this role in the most perfect manner, making him God's foremost beloved and the model that all lovers should follow. By following the Prophet, they can actualize the Most Beautiful Names within their own character, and it is the beauty of the reflection of these Names in human beings that God loves. It is of course also true that God loves all human beings, and indeed

13. In other versions, the *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure reads "I desired" (*aradtu*) instead of "I loved" (*aḥbabtu*). Theologians usually classify "love" as a specific form of "desire."

14. Al-Bukhārī 81.38 (no. 6581).

15. The saying is commonly quoted in Sufi texts, but is not attested in the standard sources. Some *Ḥadīth* works have it in this form: "But for thee, I would not have created the Garden and the Fire." Badīʿ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1347/1969), 172.

all creatures. He *made beautiful all that He created* (32:7), and He loves the beautiful. So also the fruit of His "love to be recognized" was the creation of all creatures, not just human beings.

Nonetheless, the Quran never mentions explicitly any creatures other than human beings as the objects of God's Love. Specifically, it says that God loves the beautiful-doers (those who have *iḥsān,* in five verses), the God-fearing (three verses), the just (two), the self-purifiers (two), the repentant, the patient, and those who trust in Him. It also says that there are people whom God does *not* love: unbelievers, wrongdoers, workers of corruption, transgressors, and those who are immoderate, proud, and boastful. In other words, the Quran tells us that God has a special love for those who choose to follow His ways, and this love is not exactly the same as the love that brought the universe into existence. The ways of God followed by those whom He loves are encapsulated in the *beautiful example* (33:21) and exalted character of the Prophet.

Explicating the path of becoming adorned by beautiful character traits provides the basis for numerous books by Sufi masters. Probably the most famous of these in the West is *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*The Language of the Birds*), by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221), a book-length Persian poem that has been translated into English several times. The title refers to a Quranic verse in which Solomon is said to know *the language of the birds* (27:16). In ʿAṭṭār's reading, the verse is alluding to Solomon's prophetic knowledge of human souls, who alone among all creatures have the potential to fly into God's Presence. Each of the birds in the tale represents a human type with its own strengths and weaknesses. After a great deal of discussion and debate, thirty birds agree to set out on a quest for the Sīmurgh, the fabulous king of the birds who dwells in a faraway country. With much hardship they fly over seven mountains, each higher than the previous one and each representing a stage on the path to God, a character trait that must become a permanent quality of the soul. The seven stages—seeking, love, recognition, independence, unity, bewilderment, and poverty—are based on Quranic terminology and reflect centuries of Sufi teaching and practice aimed at recovering the *fiṭrah* and achieving "deiformity." Reaching the end of the path, the birds find that all of their own character traits have been annihilated and only the traits of the Sīmurgh subsist. The "thirty birds" (*sī murgh*) come to recognize that from the outset, they had been the Self-Disclosure of the Sīmurgh.

Sufi teachers enumerate the stages on the path to God in many different ways, but their common insight is that the Quran and the *Sunnah* provide the guidelines for the realization of the Divine Form that is latent in every soul. Each human being is called to recognize the Hidden Treasure, to recollect the names taught to Adam, to love the true Beloved, and to be embraced by the true Lover. To be fully human demands actualizing and realizing the meaning of *tawḥīd* in the depths of the heart. Rūmī sums up the Quranic path of Sufism:

*Love is that flame which, when it blazes up,*
*burns away everything except the Subsistent Beloved.*
*It drives home the sword of "no god" in order to slay other than God.*
*Look closely—after "no god" what remains?*
*There remains "but God," the rest has gone.*
*Bravo, O great, idol-burning Love!*[16]

16. *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī,* ed. R. A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1925–40), bk. 5, vv. 588–90.

archegos

# THE QURAN AND ISLAMIC ART

Jean-Louis Michon

Among the numerous historians and specialists who have studied Islamic art, quite a few have attempted to sort out and analyze its specific traits in order to explain how, through the centuries when and in the countries where this art has appeared, it has marked with the same novel and original imprint the architecture, decorative forms, and many branches of the craft industry. This originality, however, together with the most conspicuous characteristics of this art, is obviously the result of the intimate relationship established since the advent of Islam between some forms of artistic production and the precepts and practices of the new religion, born from the Quranic revelation and the Prophetic tradition, or *Sunnah*. Therefore, it is this relationship that we shall try to elucidate here, first by examining what the Quran says about the creative power of human beings, and then by searching in the Noble Book and in the lessons the Prophet drew from it and passed to his community for the fundamental constituents of Islamic aesthetics and the ethical code of Muslim artists. Armed with these guides, we shall be able to review the main branches of Islamic artistic production and observe how each of them bears the mark of the theological foundations (*uṣūl al-dīn*), the ethical rules (*muʿāmalāt*), and some of the great symbols and similes (*amthāl*) that initiated it and accompanied its development.

## *Homo Faber*

Addressing the idolaters who were offended at seeing him striking with his right hand the statues of their divinities, Abraham said, *Do you worship that which you carve, while God created you and that which you make?* (37:95–96). With these words, the Friend of God reminded them of a truth that the Noble Quran unflaggingly calls to human beings' attention: God alone, the omnipotent Creator and Lord of the universe, controls the destiny of all creatures, and no human being may pretend to take His place in the creative act, since *none is like unto Him* (112:4). And yet, having decided to create human beings in His image (*ʿalā ṣūratihi*), God has invested them with, among other faculties, a creative power that each individual is free to use according to the Eternal Decree.

The similarity between the creative act of human beings and that of God is implied in the Quran when God says of Himself, *He created man from dried clay, like earthen*

*vessels* (55:14). Proceeding in the same order from the human level to the Divine, the theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī writes: "Just as the architect first draws (*yuṣawwiru*) all aspects of a house on a blank piece of paper in order to build it subsequently according to the copy (*nuskhah*), so too the Creator of the heavens and earth inscribed the *Preserved Tablet* (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ;* 85:22) with a blueprint of the Word from its beginning to its end before bringing it into existence in accordance with His copy."[1]

Like the Creator, the artist, artisan, or crafts worker (*ṣāniᶜ*)—in the traditional context, all these terms are synonyms—starts with a "blank canvas" that is devoid of any representation, whether it is the architect's blank page, the carver's bed of plaster, or other workers' naturally occurring or prepared surfaces of earth, wood, metal, textiles, or leather, in order to re-create on it an image formed in the imagination. The work, then, is completed in three stages, namely, conception (*taqdīr*), creation or production (*ījād*), and shaping (*taṣwīr*), the last of which gives the object its form. These stages have their prototypes at the Divine level, since God, according to a series of Names attributed to Him in the Quran, is called *the Creator* (*al-Khāliq*), *the Maker* (*al-Bāriᵓ*), and *the Fashioner* (*al-Muṣawwir;* 59:24). The first Attribute implies a sense of predestination, as in the verse, *He . . . Who created everything, then measured it out with due measure* (25:2); the second suggests the power to originate and bring to life; and the third describes how He bestows on all that He makes the most perfect and beautiful form.

The actual process of artistic creation has perhaps nowhere been analyzed and explained with such clarity in Islam as in the *Epistles* (*Rasāᵓil*) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāᵓ ("Brethren of Purity"), a group of Muslim philosophers who in the fourth/tenth century compiled an extremely detailed encyclopedia of contemporary sciences and their spiritual and metaphysical foundations. Distinguishing between practical arts (*al-ṣanāᵓiᶜ al-ᶜamaliyyah*) and theoretical arts (*al-ṣanāᵓiᶜ al-ᶜilmiyyah*), that is, the creation of an object and its preexistent form in the human intellect, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāᵓ showed that the created object (*al-maṣnūᶜ*) is a homogeneous entity composed of substance and form.[2]

This is the sacred basis of all art as practiced by artists who seek to conform to God's Will and create only by the power delegated to them and through an association with Heaven that spans the various degrees of Divine manifestation. In this respect, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has pointed out that the word *ṣanᶜah* has been used by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāᵓ to designate "art" in the sense of "production," because it encompasses all human creativity:

1. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāᵓ ᶜulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Maᶜrifah, 1983), 3:20–21.
2. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāᵓ, *Rasāᵓil,* 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1376/1957), 1:277.

> Now used to mean also "technology," it refers to the crafts, which are identical with art, or more precisely the plastic arts in the Persian and Islamic contexts. There are no arts "and" crafts; the two are one and the same. To make a beautiful plate or pot is as much art as to paint a miniature. The word *ṣanᶜah,* therefore, confirms once again through the very breadth of its meaning the unity of art and life which has characterized Persian culture, like every other authentic traditional culture, throughout history.[3]

However, human participation in the Divine Quality of *Muṣawwir* carries an intrinsic limit, since human artists are unable to give life to the creatures they reproduce, even if done with a great degree of perfection. Their creativity, then, is tainted by a gross imperfection, the result of a vain attempt to equal the Creator. The "Greatest Master" Ibn ᶜArabī (d. 638/1240), in his commentary on the famous *ḥadīth* about the condemnation that awaits the "fashioners of images" (*muṣawwirūn*), explains: "God has condemned and threatened the shaper (*muṣawwir*), because he has not completed the form that he has created."[4]

Another interpretation of the same *ḥadīth* is given by Titus Burckhardt in the prologue to his remarkable book on the art of Islam. Commenting upon the sacred character of the Kaᶜbah and its value as the symbol of pure monotheism, Burckhardt recalls how the Prophet overturned the 360 idols surrounding the monument and ordered the effacement of the realistic paintings executed inside it. He adds:

> This traditional story demonstrates the meaning and the scale of what is erroneously called "Muslim iconoclasm," and which we would rather call "aniconism": if the Kaᶜbah is the heart of man, the idols, which inhabited it, represent the passions which invest the heart and impede the remembrance of God. Therefore, the destruction of idols—and, by extension, the putting aside of every image likely to become an idol—is the clearest possible parable for Islam of the "one thing necessary," which is the purification of the heart for the sake of *tawḥīd,* the bearing of witness or the awareness that "There is no divinity save God."[5]

The feeling of being no more than an instrument in the hands of an All-Wise and Guiding Will infinitely greater than their own is reflected in the care that artists take to follow as closely as possible the guidelines conveyed by the Quran, commented on by the *Ḥadīth,* and translated into rules and practices by the virtu-

3. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987), 67.

4. Ibn ᶜArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah,* 4 vols. (Bulāq [Cairo]: n.p., 1911; reprint, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 4:212. Cited in Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2005), 52.

5. Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning,* with photographs by Roland Michaud and a foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (London: World of Islam Festival, 1976), 5.

ous ancestors, the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. Filled with the certitude that the whole creation is *the work of God, Who perfects* (*atqana*) *all things* (27:88), and having heard that the Prophet Muhammad said, "God loves if one of you makes something that he leads it to perfection (*yutqinahu*),"[6] Muslim artisans endeavor to adopt *itqān,* the "search for perfection," as a permanent ideal and rule of behavior. The self-discipline followed by artists to attain perfection (or rather to approach it, since any believer knows that complete perfection belongs only to God) is very similar to the effort of the faithful who purify their souls by intensive devotions. Whence the *ḥadīth:* "God, indeed, loves the believing servant who practices a craft."[7]

Artists who produce well-finished artifacts are also motivated by the feeling of participating at their own humble level in God's plan of action, a plan that includes the radiation of beauty throughout the created world. To a visitor who was anxious to know whether a person attracted to fine garments and shoes would have access to Paradise, the Prophet answered: "God, truly, is beautiful; He loves beauty!"[8] This saying contains a double invitation: to recognize God as the Source of beauty and to please Him with one's own production. No incentive, it seems, may have ever proved more effective than this *ḥadīth* in stimulating the zeal of the innumerable believers who, through successive generations, have used the formal language of art to celebrate the glory of the All-Powerful Lord.

## *Two Celestial Gifts*

The very words by which the Quranic revelation began fourteen centuries ago, in AD 610, summoning Muhammad to recite and proclaim the Divine message, not only brought the good news that God still cared for the salvation of human souls, but, as pronounced in Arabic by the Archangel Gabriel, carried a unique resonance and strength: *Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created, created man from a blood clot. Recite! Thy Lord most noble, Who taught by the Pen, taught man that which he knew not* (96:1–5).

In addition, they contained the seed and heralded the advent of two art forms that are among the most precious aids enabling people to respond to the will of their Creator, Who declared, *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me* (51:56), and also, *The remembrance of God is surely greater* (29:45). How could human beings effectively conform to their true *raison d'être,* which is to worship God and remember Him as constantly as possible, unless they received assistance from the Lord Himself?

6. *Inna 'Llāha yuḥibbu idhā ʿamila aḥadukum ʿamalan an yutqinahu.* Al-Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-īmān,* from ʿĀʾishah.

7. *Inna 'Llāha taʿālā yuḥibbu al-ʿabd al-muḥtarif.* Reported by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, al-Ṭabarānī, and al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿab al-īmān,* from Ibn ʿUmar.

8. *Inna 'Llāha jamīl yuḥibbu 'l-jamāl.* Muslim, *K. al-īmān* (no. 147).

The answer to that question can be found in the history of humanity as revealed in the Holy Book. Created *in the most beautiful stature* according to 95:4, human beings lost their pristine nature through their own pride and disobedience of the Divine Command; after they had been driven out of Paradise, God forgave their error, and all the generations born from Adam through thousands and thousands of years have received sacred teachings brought to them by successions of envoys, prophets, and holy preachers.

The last of these merciful interventions is the Quran, that is, the "reading" or "recitation," descended from its heavenly Source to be heard, memorized, and incessantly repeated. In its auditory form, it is the source of the first art of Islam, psalmody, which manifests in time the sounds and modulations of the verses of the Noble Book. And since the revealed words are composed of letters and assembled in a book, they may be seen as the source of the second major art form of Islam, calligraphy, which visually transcribes the Holy Word and gives it a spatial location. This is an art form that humans carry within themselves, in some way, from the very beginning of the revelation, since God *taught by the Pen,* the calamus or reed, a symbol of the Prime Intellect, which, having been plunged in the ink of Divine Wisdom, traces the sacred signs and grants to human beings access to knowledge.

The psalmody of the Quran is the sacred art par excellence. "God has never sent a prophet without giving him a beautiful voice,"[9] declared the Prophet Muhammad, and the history of the Quranic revelation illustrates the pertinence of this remark. Brought to human beings *in a clear, Arabic tongue* (26:195), the Divine message had to be proclaimed clearly. *Recite the Quran in a measured pace* was the command given to Muhammad (73:4), and he himself, in a *ḥadīth,* recommended to the faithful: "Make beautiful your voices [while reciting] the Quran,"[10] meaning that there exists a veritable correspondence between the Divine Word and the human voice.

"Recite the Quran following the melodies and intonations of the Arabs," the Prophet also recommended.[11] That this injunction was generally followed is demonstrated by the undeniable kinship that exists between all the styles of psalmody present in the Muslim world. It is true that in the course of its expansion in space, the art of psalmody, even though its major structural elements had been fixed at an early date by several recognized schools,[12] absorbed a number of melodic elements present in

9. Al-Tirmidhī, *al Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah,* 306 (*mā jā'afī qirā'ati . . .*).

10. Abū Dāwūd, *K. al-witr,* 1470.

11. *Ḥadīth* cited by Hamza Boubaker in "La psalmodie coranique," *Encyclopédie des musiques sacrées* (Paris: Éditions Labergerie, 1968), 1:388.

12. There are seven or, according to certain classifications, ten "readings" of the Quran, which all go back to the second century AH and are drawn from the Prophetic tradition. They are the schools of Madinah, Makkah, Basra, Damascus, and Kufa and two others propagated, respectively, in Morocco, and eastern Arabia and Iraq. See Muḥammad Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Kurdī, *Ta'rīkh al-Qur'ān wa gharā'ib rasmihi wa ḥukmihi,* 2nd ed. (Cairo: Muṣṭafa 'l-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1372/1953), 108.

various local milieus, giving birth to easily recognizable, characteristic styles. All these styles, however, bear the indelible stamp of Islam; they incorporate a unique sonorous sound, the one that has been and still is the vehicle of the Quranic message.

Practiced on all occasions, individually or collectively, psalmody is for each believer the means par excellence of remembering God and of meditating on His signs and blessings, following His injunction: *Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation of the night and the day are signs for the possessors of intellect, who remember God standing, sitting, and lying upon their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth, "Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain. Glory be to Thee! Shield us from the punishment of the Fire"* (3:190–91). Taught to children from the earliest age, it not only impresses upon them the spiritual and moral precepts of Islam, but acts on the very fiber of their artistic sensibility and actions, through the alchemy of the Word, a transmutation that restores to human nature something of its primordial sacredness.

Making perceptible the eternal truth and beauty of the Quranic message is also the role of calligraphy. It served to establish, a few years after the death of the Prophet, a complete and definite recension of the Noble Book, and it has never ceased to spread the text in all directions, giving birth to forms and styles of writing the aesthetic qualities of which arouse the admiration even of non-Muslims and non-Arabists.

Each script, in playing on the forms, dimensions, and proportions of the letters, brings certain Divine Attributes into greater relief. Thus, the Divine Majesty and Transcendence are evoked by the vertical strokes, especially those of the *alif,* symbol of the Oneness of the Supreme Principle, *Allāh,* which stamps its mark on the rhythms of the discourse. Beauty and Immanence are expressed by the horizontal lines, above and below which are written the diacritic and vowel signs, like the notes of a musical score. Mercy and Plenitude are suggested by the rounded forms, which in some styles of calligraphy exhibit generous curves under the horizontal plane. To this type belongs, for example, the letter *nūn,* which is a symbol of the protection granted to the prophet Jonah (Yūnus or Dhu'l-Nūn), who was swallowed by a whale and miraculously rescued.[13]

"Whoever taught me one letter, I have become his slave!"[14] This saying is by ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the person to whom is attributed the Kufic script, which developed in the city of Kufa about AH 30. This script illustrates the value and importance of the letters as keys for the understanding of hidden mysteries and for obtaining special graces. In fact, a whole discipline, the "science of letters" (*ᶜilm al-ḥurūf*), is based on the individual forms and arithmetic values of the letters (*abjad*) of the Arabic alphabet. At a popular level it is practiced by a

13. A splendid collection of the various styles of calligraphy used to transcribe the Quran has been compiled by Martin Lings in his *Splendours of Quran Calligraphy and Illumination,* published with great care by the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: 2005). It contains 180 color samples of Kufic, Naskh, Muḥaqqaq, and Rayḥān as well as other small and large cursive scripts of the Islamic East and West.

14. *Man ᶜallamanī ḥarfan ṣirtu lahu ᶜabdan.*

certain class of *fuqahāʾ* (jurists, Quranic teachers; sing. *faqīh*) who have also acquired a knowledge of folk medicine and may prepare for their patients amulets (*ḥirz, ṭilasm*) bearing magic squares and written formulas drawn from the Quran.

Just as the Divine Word chanted from minarets is diffused in all directions, weaving a network of sound around the whole space, so are the written verses present everywhere: on the pages of handwritten and printed *maṣāḥif* ("copies," sing. *muṣḥaf*) of the Quran present in every Muslim home, on the epigraphic friezes of monuments, and on a multitude of ritual objects: candlesticks, lamps, lecterns, votive banners, embroidered cloths hung on walls or covering a catafalque after the example of the black velvet *kiswah* that is wrapped around the Kaʿbah and renewed annually. Weapons, jewelry, wooden and metal chests, and domestic utensils like ewers and basins also bear formulas quoted or derived from the Quran, which are believed capable of keeping pernicious influences at bay and attracting Divine Protection to those who bear, use, or merely look at them.

The inscriptions most frequently chosen as cues for recollection are the *shahādah,* especially its first part, *lā ilāha illa'Llāh* ("No god, but the One God"), and the Supreme Name, *Allāh.* Both may be seen drawn in "square Kūfic" characters with enameled bricks on the facades of many monuments in Iran and central Asia, traced in large ornamental style, the so-called *thuluth,* on the majolica coverings of Near and Middle Eastern mosques and palaces, and written in various styles of calligraphy wherever the human eye can perceive them: not only in oratories, but also in merchants' boutiques, artisans' workshops, and family sitting rooms.

Although psalmody and calligraphy were instruments built directly into the revelation to facilitate the penetration and firm establishment of the Divine message, other forms of art were soon developed, in full accordance with the monotheistic dogma and the legal prescriptions, to respond to the moral, social, and material needs of the newly established community of believers (*ummah*). The first of these needs, deeply felt by the Prophet as he was making his way toward Madinah on the *hijrah* as an emigrant (*muhājir*) from Makkah, was for a place where he himself would live and where he and his disciples could meet and pray together.

## *The Prophet's Mosque in Madinah*

The need for a suitable worship venue was in perfect harmony with the Divine Custom (*sunnat Allāh*), according to which, during the whole course of history and as an aid to His prophets and messengers, *[It is] in houses* (*buyūt,* sing. *bayt*) *that God has permitted to be raised and wherein his Name is remembered* (24:36). Just as the vessel constructed by Noah as a blessed refuge from the flood was made *before Our Eyes and by Our Revelation* (23:27); just as the Kaʿbah (*al-bayt*), when built by Abraham and Ishmael, was made *a place of visitation for mankind, and a sanctuary* (2:125); just as Solomon built sanctuaries (*maḥārīb,* sing. *miḥrāb*) with some *jinn* who *worked before him by the leave of his Lord* (34:12); it was also with a special charism that Muhammad

was led to the place where he built the mosque that was to be known forever as the *ḥaram al-nabawī,* the Sanctuary of the Prophet.

This is how it happened. When the Prophet, after migrating from Makkah, arrived in Yathrib—the future Madinah—mounted on his she-camel Qaṣwā', he was welcomed with such enthusiasm that he had to refuse some of the offers of hospitality made by a number of disciples. To those who tried to grasp the camel's bridle and lead her to their respective dwellings, the Prophet said, "Leave her alone! She is under the Command of God." In fact, after several hesitations, she definitely stopped and bowed down so that the Prophet could dismount; he knew that the place she had chosen was the right one. The next day, after the price of the land had been paid to the two orphans to whom it belonged, the Prophet traced the floor plan of the mosque and, with his Companions, started digging to lay the foundation.

The construction of the mosque took seven months. For its design, planning, and construction, the Prophet must have received the same heavenly assistance that had been given to the saintly builders of the past, especially since no building had ever been erected in the whole of Arabia that could have been used as a model fitting the needs of the new community. The final layout of the mosque was simple and adaptable; it consisted of a vast enclosed courtyard, the *ṣaḥn,* accessible by three doors. A part of it, along the *qiblah* wall, covered with a thatched roof supported by palm-tree trunks, served as the regular prayer room. The largest space was left open to the sky, ready at all times to welcome the visitors desirous to meet or just see the Prophet, to attend some religious or social gathering, or to stay in the blessed precinct while occupying themselves with some minor handicraft.

On one of the lateral sides of the *ṣaḥn* were the houses or "apartments" (*ḥujurāt*) of the Prophet and his wives, a proximity mentioned in the Quran (49:4–5) as having caused some problems for the Prophet, paving the way for the formulation, at a later stage of urban development, of standard rules of correct behavior and good neighborly relations between citizens. Another aisle sheltered a long bench (*ṣuffah*) where visitors could rest and where homeless Companions were hosted and could benefit from the Prophet's proximity. One of them, Abū Hurayrah (d. 61/681), is still venerated for having kept and transmitted, thanks to his prodigious memory, thousands of the Prophet's *aḥādīth.*

The primary piece of liturgical furniture was the *minbar,* a wooden pulpit with two steps supporting a platform on which the Prophet could sit or stand when he delivered *khuṭbah*s ("sermons") and solemn proclamations. The *qiblah,* the direction believers face while performing the canonical prayers, was marked in the very early days by the *ʿanazah,* a lance that the Prophet planted in front of him before leading the prayer, as he used to do during the military expeditions when he prayed in front of his troops. The lance was soon replaced by one or two big stones leaned against the north wall, in the direction of Jerusalem. This was the first *miḥrāb,* or niche in a mosque wall indicating the *qiblah.* A few months later, when the revelation changed the *qiblah* from

Jerusalem to Makkah (2:142–44), the stones were transported to the middle of the southern wall, an indication that all believers had henceforth to face, when praying, toward the *Masjid al-ḥarām,* the Sacred Mosque of Makkah, in the center of which stands the Holy Kaʿbah.

As soon as it was erected, the Prophet's Mosque gained the unanimous approval of the Prophet and the believers who prayed and meditated in it, asking God for the strength to fight against their outer and inner enemies *in ranks, as if they were a solid structure* (*bunyān marṣūṣ;* 61:4). It was also an effective setting for establishing bonds of mutual understanding and affection among the faithful. As the population of Madinah increased, the *ṣaḥn* became so frequented that seven years after its completion it became necessary to enlarge it. The work was done during the third year preceding the Prophet's death (11/632). According to his will, he was buried in his wife ʿĀʾishah's apartment, at a place known as the *Rawḍah al-sharīfah,* "The Noble Garden," near the *minbar* from which he used to address the faithful. In spite of the many reshapings for restoration and enlargement carried out in the course of centuries, the Jāmiʿ al-Nabawī (Mosque of the Prophet) is still considered the second most sacred—after the Kaʿbah—religious monument of Islam, the one where it is possible to pay a pious visit (*ziyārah*) to the tomb of the last prophet whom God had chosen, among all people, to receive and proclaim His sublime last message to humanity.

The Prophet's Mosque, classified by orientalists as belonging to a group called "Arab" (because it was built by Arabs with their local methods and materials) or "hypostyle" (because of the rows of columns that divided the space and supported the ceilings), has played an essential role in the development of Islamic architecture. Its layout has been adopted for the construction of a long series of celebrated monuments, starting with the Mosque of ʿAmr, built in Fusṭāṭ (Cairo) in 22/643 as a replica of the Prophet's Mosque; however, in the later mosque the palm-tree trunks supporting the roof were replaced by columns and, for the first time, a square minaret (*manār*), possibly inspired by the steeples of the Christian churches of northern Syria, was annexed to the *ṣaḥn.* Among the other mosques of the same type erected during the Umayyad caliphate (41–132/660–750), some are well preserved and still in use today. Among them are the Great Mosque of Qayrawān, founded by ʿUqbah ibn Nāfiʿ in 50/670 and finely restructured in 200–249/816–63; al-Jāmiʿ al-Aqṣā of Jerusalem (83/702); and al-Jāmiʿ al-Umawī of Damascus (86/705). Mention must also be made, for their historical importance and architectural characteristics, of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, founded in 137/755 and subsequently extended three times, the Great Mosque of Sāmarrāʾ (231–37/846–52), and the mosques of Ibn Ṭūlūn (262/876), al-Azhar (362/973), and al-Ḥākim (381/991) in Cairo.[15]

15. The typology of mosques has been clearly analyzed and presented, with photographs by Henri Stierlin and Eduard Wismer and plans drawn by Alfred Hersberger, in Ulya Vogt-Göknil, *Mosquées: Grands courants de l'architecture islamique* (Paris: Chêne, 1975). After the Arab hypostyle mosque,

Although quite different structurally from the Holy Kaʿbah, which in the Quran (22:26) is called *Bayt Allāh* ("the House of God"), the Prophet's Mosque, which his followers in Madinah called *Bayt al-Nabī* ("the House of the Prophet"), has been the object of almost the same kind of veneration as the *Bayt Allāh*. This comes from the fact that both "Houses" share the same characteristic: each is a sacred space, a *ḥaram*, with special status deriving from the pact sealed between God and one of His faithful servants, in the first case the prophet Abraham and in the second the Prophet Muhammad. In Madinah, holy protection was bestowed upon the mosque built at the place and with the layout fixed by Providence, so that during the decade between the first year of the *hijrah* (AD 622) and the departure of the Prophet Muhammad from this world all of the doctrinal and practical content of the Islamic religion could be revealed, commented on, and applied by members of the newly constituted Muslim community; the Mosque of the Prophet served as the primary center for all these aspects of the nascent Muslim society. As expressed by a connoisseur of Islamic civilization: "The Prophet's house-mosque became the context as well as the core of his communal tradition. In spite of its successive physical transformations well beyond its original simplicity, it acquired an archetypal stature as a mental model of social behavior and architectural imagination."[16]

The *ḥaram* ideal has been so strong that it has had a major influence on the physical and social development of Islamic cities. Made conscious of their state of estrangement from the Divine Presence by the severe teachings of the Quran, Muslims have realized that the protection offered by the Prophet's Mosque was largely due to its specific, compact architectural layout inspired by him and that this could be extended to other components of the urban environment. Hence the quasi-systematic preference given to the "internal courtyard" system of construction for the private houses, mosques, and the majority of buildings in general in the classical cities of the Islamic world.

Seen from the air or surrounding hills, the Islamic city is easily recognizable by its appearance as a cellular conglomerate. Each cell comprises a square or rectangular structure surrounding a courtyard onto which open the living quarters of houses, the workshops and storerooms of bazaars and caravanserais, the rooms of religious colleges (*madrasahs*), or the galleries and prayer halls of mosques. Even though they may be of different sizes according to their functions, these quadrangular cells give the urban canvas a homogeneity akin to that of a biological organism, as it is formed from similar and compatible elements able to multiply and interweave without undue

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the author examines three types of Islamic architecture that appeared up to 1706, namely, the Persian mosque with four *īwāns*, the Seljuq mosque of Asia Minor, and the Ottoman mosque with dome. None of these types has been considered in our essay, where the primordial simplicity of the earliest Nabawī Mosque has been taken as the key to understanding the nature of the relationship between Islamic architecture and the Quranic Revelation.

16. S. Gulzar Haider, "Islamic Architecture and Urbanism," in *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture, vol. 5, Culture and Learning in Islam* (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), 633–94.

interference as the city develops. In fact, the classical Islamic city is a *ḥaram,* a sacred place for its occupants, just as every mosque is a *ḥaram,* and just as every family house, folded in on itself, closed to the exterior and open to the courtyard and the sky, is also a *ḥaram,* a sanctuary where the father officiates as an *imām* and the mother as an unchallenged mistress of domestic life.

## *A Gift of Synthesis*

When Muslim crafts workers who had moved from Arabia and settled in parts of the Near and Middle East were called to participate in the expansion and embellishment of recently conquered cities, they came across and had to assimilate techniques and materials that were previously unknown to them. Their ability to adopt and even perfect building and decorative techniques and forms from other civilizations may be attributed to an intuitive feeling that many of these "novelties" were quite compatible with their own ancestral customs and Islamic cultural heritage. In other words, they perceived these creations as blessed gifts issuing from the inexhaustible reservoir of traditional Wisdom provided by the Lord, Who *provides for whomsoever He will without reckoning* (e.g., 2:212). Among the significant elements borrowed from previous cultures, one may note:

1. Architectural components such as the Byzantine dome, a reminder of "the world above us," and the Sassanid arch, a universal symbol for the intimate relationship between Heaven and earth.

2. Urban planning concepts, such as the arrangement of the Roman castrum with its two perpendicular axes or the composition of the Persian garden.

3. Structural and decorative features and motifs, including the Roman niche, originally made to shelter the statue of a god or hero and converted by Muslims to the *miḥrāb,* a reminder of the right orientation for prayer; the Persian *muqarnas,* often described as a stalactite or beehive; and Coptic geometric and linear patterns, which have been cleverly integrated into "arabesques" by generations of artisans.[17]

## *A Perpetual Source of Inspiration*

This brief look at the history of Islamic art brings us back to the heart of our subject and leads us to consider the specifically Quranic origin of some of the great themes

17. For more details on the sources, classification, and organization of handicrafts, see Jean-Louis Michon, "Islamic Handicrafts," in *Different Aspects of Islamic Culture,* 5:787–810.

that have continually caught the attention of artisans, who have translated them from the world of ideals into the concrete language of forms. A first example is the Light Verse (*āyat al-nūr,* 24:35), which celebrates the radiance (*tajallī*) of God over the whole universe and proposes for meditation the simile of a lamp in a niche, lit by the oil of a blessed tree. This verse has inspired not only the generations of crafts workers who have built and decorated the splendid *miḥrāb*s that can still be admired today from the far west (Cordoba, Fez) to the extreme east (Isfahan, Delhi) of *dār al-islām* ("the Abode of Islam"), but also the artisans who have wrought various metals to furnish mosques, palaces, and simple houses with fine chandeliers, lamps, and candlesticks and who have applied the highly symbolic image of the *miḥrāb*—an arcade with a lamp hanging from its apex—to ornate wood and ceramic panels, mural tapestries, and prayer carpets.

Another source of inexhaustible creativity has been the verse in which God says of Himself, *We made every living thing from water* (21:30). Whereas the primordial water, the *materia prima* ("first material") of the creation, which the Bible designates as "the waters that were above the dome" (Genesis 1:7), cannot be represented by any artistic process, the lower waters, which lay under the dome and which the Quran designates by the sole word *water,* deserve the attention of artists. A gift of God indispensable for the material and spiritual life of every human being, the earthly water is common property, and every ruler or group leader has the obligation to ensure its equitable distribution among all members of the community. This explains the remarkable degree of development achieved in all Muslim countries with hydraulic works found in the countryside and city alike: irrigation canals and pools, waterwheels and aqueducts, and public fountains, not to mention the facilities needed for ritual purification in the form of baths (*ḥammāms*), latrines, and ablution basins.

Water symbolizes beauty, joy, and plenitude, and in patrician and princely gardens it flows and sings continuously. When it is not actually present, because of unfavorable climatic or housing conditions, an effort is made to at least suggest its existence by some evocative means like a cruciform design on the pavement of the inner courtyard recalling the four rivers flowing in Paradise or an orderly arrangement of plant and flower pots simulating the outline of a *riyāḍ,* the classical closed garden with its partitioned borders and beds of vegetation.

In Arabic, the word *jannah,* which often appears in the Quran, may be used to designate an earthly or a heavenly garden, and for Muslims, especially in semi-arid countries, any garden, whether modest or richly arranged, allows the imagination a precursory sense of the joys that await the elect in their happy Abode. Processes and devices capable of enhancing this connection have been carefully selected and successfully applied throughout the centuries by the master gardeners of Islam. They include the planting of trees that have great longevity, like yews and cypresses, or bear the fruits of Paradise, like the dates and pomegranates mentioned in Quranic descriptions of the heavenly Garden; the choice of flowers whose fragrance is

suggestive of an immaterial beatitude; the use of water mirrors, which produce an inverted image of earthly things and therefore consciousness of their impermanence; and the setting up of pleasant dwellings analogous to those reserved for the companions of Heaven in the form of pergolas, pavilions, and tents woven out of sumptuous brocades. To make sure that hearing, like the other senses, received its full part of joy in this place of delight, landscape architects working in the Shalamar Garden of Lahore (1641) caused water to zigzag upon marble grids and cascade before running into marble basins, so that the murmur of the stream may sweetly accompany the cooing of the doves.

We will now look at two testimonies illustrating the very close relationship between Muslim artists' work and their thoughts and feelings concerning religion. In fact, this relationship is always harmonious, based on the faith in the one true God, the Merciful and Compassionate, and on a full confidence in His Wisdom. After the exposition of some theoretical and historical foundations of the art of Islam, some reflections based on the experience of artists may offer a welcome confirmation of the high value of Islamic art as an instrument of spiritual elevation.

The first testimony is an account that comes from Titus Burckhardt, who relates his visit to an old comb maker in the historic city of Fez, where he watched him detaching the horns from the skulls of oxen, splitting them, opening them out over a flame, and filing each tooth of the comb with the greatest of care. The craftsman said to him:

> My work may seem crude to you, but it needs a sixth sense which I cannot describe in words. I only realized it myself after many years and, even if I wanted to, I could not teach it directly to my own son if he was not already capable of seeing it for himself. It is a trade which goes back from apprentice to master as far as to our lord Seth, who was the first to teach it to men. What comes from a prophet—for Seth was a prophet—is always remarkably profitable, both outwardly and inwardly. What I gradually came to realize is that nothing is done randomly in this trade. In every movement or gesture of the hand, there is a modicum of wisdom. Not everybody understands this. But, even so, it is stupid and indefensible to deprive people of the heritage of the prophets by sitting them in front of machines where, day after day, they are required to carry out meaningless tasks.[18]

In the second case, a researcher who was conducting a survey among those specializing in decorative arts interviewed a painter who had just decorated two wall panels in a local house. He questioned him about the way in which Muslim artisans in Malaysia are inspired by the local flora, and the painter responded:

18. Titus Burckhardt, *Fez: City of Islam,* trans. William Stoddart (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 76–79.

In the oval at the center of the first panel is the name of the Prophet's father-in-law and the first Muslim caliph, Abū Bakr. The second oval is blank, because it represents the existence of the one and only God, whose Essence cannot be observed with the human eye. The endless cable pattern of intertwined lines around the ovals expresses the infinite existence of the Omnipotent, who is without beginning or end. All creation emanates from Him, its beginning represented by a bulb or seed and its end by a shoot, a flower, or a bud. The occupant of the house is therefore constantly reminded of the omnipresence of God and of the inevitable destiny of mankind.[19]

19. N. M. N. Zamal Abidin, "Malaysia's Flora and Its Inspiration to Traditional Artisans," *Arts and the Islamic World* 18 (Supplement 1990): 79ff.

# THE QURANIC VIEW OF SACRED HISTORY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Joseph Lumbard

In presenting itself as the final revelation of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, the Quran recounts the stories of prophets from Adam to Muhammad, encapsulating much of the sacred history that precedes it.[1] According to the Quran, prophets have been sent at different times to all human collectivities with revelations in different tongues, but their message was one: *lā ilāha illa'Llāh*—there is no god but God. From this perspective, the history of humanity is a history of forgetting and being reminded again and again of this eternal truth. Hence the trials, triumphs, defeats, and rebellions confronted by the prophets of old are not told with a view to historicity in the modern sense. Rather, the history related in the Quran tells the story of the epic struggle between truth and falsehood or good and evil that takes place among peoples and within each individual's soul. From a Quranic perspective, the principles that govern the cosmos also determine the reality of the human microcosm,[2] and just as the Will of God has shaped the destiny of humanity, so too does it shape the life of every individual human being.

Presenting itself as the culmination of all revelation, the Quran expands upon the theme of religious continuity more extensively than previous revelations. The unity of revelation as such is implicit throughout the Quran, but many verses make it explicit. In one, Jesus tells his disciples, *[I come] confirming that which was before me, the Torah, and to make lawful unto you part of that which was forbidden unto you* (3:50). In this vein, the Quran presents itself as *a Book sent down after Moses, confirming what came before it, guiding to the truth and to a straight road* (46:30). From a Quranic perspective, every prophet has confirmed what the previous prophets brought, which is first and foremost an essential message of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*); thus the Prophet is told, *And We sent no messenger before thee, save that We revealed unto him, "Verily, there is*

1. For a comprehensive treatment of the history of prophets and prophethood in the Quran, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets of the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (New York: Continuum, 2002); also see Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 234–47.

2. In this vein the Quran says: *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth* (41:53).

*no god but I; so worship Me!"* (21:25). Other prophets are also presented as saying to their communities, *O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him* (7:59, 65, 73, 85). Since every prophet is believed to have been sent with this same essential message, the Quran commands Muslims to believe in all of them:

> *Say, "We believe in God, and in that which was sent down unto us, and in that which was sent down unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit."* (2:136; cf. 3:84)

Each phase of the Abrahamic tradition, and implicit other religious traditions, can thus be seen as the continuation of a single stream of revelation beginning with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad. The forms of the message change, since God has *sent no messenger, save in the language of his people, that he might make clear unto them* (14:4). But the content remains the same, for *the Word of thy Lord is fulfilled in truth and justice. None alters His Words* (6:115; cf. 6:34, 10:64, 18:27). Accordingly, the Quran declares of itself:

> *Truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon thine* (Muhammad's) *heart—that thou mayest be among the warners—in a clear, Arabic tongue. It is indeed in the scriptures (zubur) of those of old.* (26:192–96)[3]

Another passage reads, *Truly this* (message) *is in the scriptures of old, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses* (87:18–19).

Confirming the underlying unity to which such verses allude, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "The prophets are half brothers; their mothers differ, and their religion (*dīn*) is one."[4] Thus, like David, Jesus, and other prophets before them, the Prophet Muhammad was not sent to destroy previous religions, but to reaffirm their essential content. From this perspective, each revelation is a formal manifestation of an eternal formless truth. The variegated religious forms do not contravene the validity and efficacy of one another, but are part of a test that human beings confront in this world, a test emphasized in 5:48:

> *For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise],* that He might try you in that which He has given you. *So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ.* (emphasis added)

3. The word *zubur* is translated here "scriptures." The singular, *zabūr,* identifies the revelation with the Prophet David (4:163; 17:55). *Zubur* could thus be translated "Psalms" or "scriptures."

4. Al-Bukhārī 60.51 (no. 3481).

From a Quranic perspective, there are thus different ways of revering and worshipping God for different human communities. God has not revealed one law, but many laws, and to each law corresponds a particular path that is based upon the performance of rites particular to that form of worship:

> *For every community We have appointed a rite they are to perform; so let them not argue with thee over the matter. And call to thy Lord. Truly thou art following a straight guidance. And if they dispute with thee, say, "God knows best what you do. God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein you used to differ."* (22:67–69)

Other verses reiterate that the Quran confirms previous revelations and even religions (e.g., 2:97; 3:3; 10:37; 35:31; 46:30).[5]

The notion that previous scriptures have been abrogated in the sense of being nullified or excessively distorted to such an extent that their message no longer reflects the particularity of the original teachings, as some Muslims maintain,[6] would seem to be contradicted by verses such as 5:43: *And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah, wherein is God's Judgment?* and 5:68: *Say, "O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord."* In this same vein, 5:47 says of Christians: *Let the people of the Gospel judge by that which God has sent down therein.* It would be contradictory for the Quran to speak of the efficacy of judging by the Torah and the Gospel if it were to also maintain that these scriptures have been abrogated or excessively distorted. It would also make little sense to say that the religions in which these scriptures are applicable are defunct, or were defunct at the time the Quran was revealed, for it is the methodologies developed within the religions that would provide their followers with the ability to judge in accord with them. If previous religions were abrogated by the revelation of the Quran, it would be implausible to tell the Prophet Muhammad to seek their counsel when it says, *Ask the people of the Reminder, if you know not* (16:43; cf. 21:7).[7]

5. Several verses also speak of Jesus as confirming what came before him (3:50; 5:46; 61:6), and Moses is said to confirm what was already with his people, i.e., the Torah (2:41, 89, 91; 4:47).

6. For a discussion of Muslims who maintained that the previous scriptures had been abrogated, see Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), chap. 6.

7. That *the people of the Reminder* refers to the People of the Book, or more specifically to the believers among the People of the Book, is the position of the majority of the classical exegetes. See, e.g., Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān ᶜan taᵓwīl āy al-Qurᵓān,* ed. Maḥmūd Shākir al-Ḥaristānī, 30 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāᵓ al-Turāth al-ᶜArabī, 1421/2001), 14:130; Abū Muḥammad Farrāᵓ al-Baghawī, *Maᶜālim al-tanzīl,* 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 1424/2004), 3:58; and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiᶜ li-aḥkām al-Qurᵓān,* ed. Muḥammad Ibrahīm al-Ḥafnāwī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1323/2002), 5:460.

Modes of prayer derived from their scriptures would also be of little benefit and would have little or no soteriological efficacy, a position that would stand in direct contrast to 48:29, which likens the prayers of Jews and Christians to those of Muslims:

> *Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Those who are with him are harsh against the disbelievers, merciful to one another. You see them bowing, prostrating, seeking bounty from God and contentment; their mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah. And their likeness in the Gospel is a sapling that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it, such that it grows stout and rises firmly upon its stalk, impressing the sowers, that through them He may enrage the disbelievers. God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those among them who believe and perform righteous deeds.*

## *Religious Form*

According to the Quran, every religion entails prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, among other obligations, though the specific forms differ. The Quranic understanding of such differences in creed and practice is stated in 49:13:

> *O mankind! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you.*

That the *most noble* are the *most reverent* emphasizes the preeminent importance of reverence or *taqwā,* an all-encompassing awareness of the Divine Reality, rather than the simple fact of following a particular creed or forms of practice.

This does not mean that people are free to invent new creeds, laws, and ways. Rather, it indicates that God has revealed many ways and many religions for humanity. The fact that other people have been given different creeds and rites for remembering and worshipping God thus provides a means by which one can look beyond outward differences and value people for what the Quran considers to be most important—the degree of their reverence and piety toward God. In this vein the Quran chastises those who equate outward deeds with faith itself: *Do you consider giving drink to the pilgrims and maintaining the Sacred Mosque to be like those who believe in God and the Last Day and strive in God's way?* (9:19). Such hypocrisy implies a grave lack of discernment and is a mark of failing the test to which allusion is made in 5:48.

Like the Bible, many verses of the Quran condemn those who fail to adhere to the teachings of previous prophets. But these concern those who falsify religion by submitting it to human desires, not those who follow religion by submitting their desires to God. Therefore, those who continue to submit to the ways ordained by former prophets are praised:

> *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.* (2:62; cf. 5:69)

The broad applicability of this verse is confirmed by Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the dean of Quranic commentators, who writes: "As regards the bestowal of reward for virtuous action with faith, God has not singled out some of His creatures as opposed to others."[8] He then relates the view of others that "those who believe among this community [i.e., Muslims], and those who are Christians, Jews, and Sabeans—those among the Jews, Christians, and Sabeans who believe in God and the Last Day—they *shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.*"[9] The Quran thus says of those who follow the previous revelations:

> *Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate. They believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and hasten unto good deeds. And they are among the righteous. Whatsoever good they do, they will not be denied it.* (3:113–15)[10]

## *The Covenant*

As in the Bible, the Quranic view of human history is one of people being called time and again to observe a covenant with God.[11] The Quran honors the covenant made by God with previous religious communities, though each is seen as but one manifestation of a pre-eternal covenant that God made with all of humanity when they were still in Adam's loins: *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your*

8. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān,* 1:369. Regarding the claim that 2:62 is abrogated by 3:85, the sixth/twelfth-century commentator al-Ṭabrisī says: "This is far [from the mark], because it is not permissible for abrogation to be applied to a report that contains a [Divine] Promise." Abū ᶜAlī al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaᶜ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 10 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aᶜlamī, 1415/1995), 1:244.

9. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān,* 1:373.

10. Many prefer to interpret these verses as a reference to a group of Jews who became Muslim, but the argument is illogical, as they would no longer be referred to as "People of the Book" after having joined the Islamic community. In addition, many exegetes, such as al-Qurṭubī (2:532), also mention that it could refer to a group among the People of the Book who believe as opposed to a group who disbelieve (as in 98:1–4). Al-Ṭabarī gives preference to this interpretation, saying that it refers to two groups among the People of the Book, one believing and one disbelieving (4:67).

11. Though the Biblical presentation of the covenant is heavily disputed, making it difficult to draw specific comparisons between the Quranic and the Biblical accounts, the general concept is nonetheless similar enough to warrant comparison. For the Biblical treatment of the covenant, see Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969).

*Lord?" they said, "Yea, we bear witness"* (7:172). Though reminiscent of God's Promise to the Israelites in Exodus,[12] this verse refers to existence before creation, when the spirits of all human beings are said to have been assembled before God. *Am I not your Lord?* is a rhetorical question whereby God affirms His principal Reality as the Lord of all that is on earth and in Heaven. And the human response is the everlasting affirmation of this covenant. Every covenant made while human beings are on earth is thus a recognition, renewal, and continuation of this pretemporal covenant. From this perspective, the history of religion is a multifaceted series of temporal reassertions of a single pretemporal covenant.

The next verses reveal that God has reminded human beings of this pretemporal covenant through the various prophets, so that no human beings can claim that they are not responsible for observing it:

> *Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Truly of this we were heedless," or lest you should say, "[It is] only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God aforetime, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?"* (7:172–73)

Seen in this light, all of humanity bears the imprint of the pretemporal covenant within. The functions of revelation and prophecy are to reawaken the awareness of this imprint and remind all people that they must observe the covenant with God. Hence every human collectivity has been sent a reminder: *We indeed sent a messenger unto every community* (16:36). This is reinforced by 10:47: *For every community there is a messenger, and when their messenger comes, judgment shall be rendered between them with justice, and they will not be wronged.* The Quran mentions a handful of these messengers by name, yet also alludes to the existence of others:

> *Verily We have revealed unto thee, as We revealed unto Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and unto David We gave the Psalms, and messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee; and unto Moses God spoke directly,*[13] *messengers as bearers of glad tidings and as warners, that mankind might have no argument against God after the messengers. And God is Mighty, Wise.* (4:163–65)

12. "Then he [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exodus 24:7–8).

13. The Quranic assertion that God spoke to Moses directly, which is also part of the Biblical tradition, is the basis of Moses' Islamic title *Kalīm Allāh;* it is also the basis for Moses' particular degree of distinction among the prophets as implied (without mentioning his name explicitly) in Quran 2:253.

According to Islamic tradition, the messengers not recounted in the Quran are far more numerous than those recounted; the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have stated that there have been 315 messengers in human history and 124,000 prophets.[14]

Presented as a continuation of the Abrahamic line of prophecy, the Quran confirms explicitly the covenant that God made with previous communities through the revelations to His messengers. But whereas the New Testament claims to establish a new covenant that supplants the covenant between God and the Israelites,[15] the Quran seeks to reaffirm the essential substance that is at the heart of every covenant. As the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be *the Seal of the Prophets* (*khātam al-nabiyyīn;* 33:40), it is believed that he completed the prophetic cycle, but brought nothing concerning *tawḥīd* that was not brought by the preceding prophets in one form or another. As a verse addressed to the Prophet Muhammad proclaims, *Naught has been said unto thee save that which has been said unto the messengers before thee* (41:43; see also 26:192–96; 87:18–19, cited above).

This line of prophecy does not begin with Abraham as in the Bible; rather, according to the Quran it is said to begin with Adam, the first of all prophets and the first with whom God made a covenant: *And We indeed made a pact with Adam aforetime, but he forgot. And We found no resoluteness in him* (20:115). Hence the cyclical drama of receiving, forgetting, breaking, and renewing the covenant, which is a central theme of the Bible, begins in the Quran with the first human being. The whole of the human drama is in fact encapsulated in the life of Adam himself.

The Quran thus gives a different account of Adam's fall than does the Bible. Here Adam is not tempted through Eve; rather, Adam and Eve are both tempted by Satan, and both are responsible for the fall from the paradisal Garden (7:19–22). Because of their transgression, the progeny of Adam and Eve are banished to the earth: *Then Satan made them stumble therefrom, and expelled them from that wherein they were, and We said, "Get you [all] down, each of you an enemy to the other. On the earth a dwelling place and enjoyment shall be yours, for a time"* (2:36; cf. 7:24). This descent, each *an enemy to the other,* represents the consequence of forgetting and breaking the covenant. But unlike in the Biblical account, in the Quran Adam and Eve repent for

14. Aḥmad 9.24 (no. 22719). "Messenger" and "Prophet" are sometimes used interchangeably, but many consider each to have specific technical meaning. A prophet (*nabī*) is said to differ from a messenger (*rasūl*) in that a messenger brings a new religion (*dīn*), whereas a prophet only reaffirms a previous revealed religion and reestablishes its proper observance or, as in the case of John the Baptist, heralds the coming of a messenger. A messenger thus fulfills all the functions of a prophet and is a prophet, but a prophet does not necessarily perform all the functions of a messenger and is not a messenger.

15. The Gospels implicitly and the Letters explicitly present the new covenant through the blood of Jesus as a return to the universal covenant of Abraham that is for both Jew and Gentile. But the Letter to the Hebrews goes so far as to argue that the former covenant has been rendered "weak and ineffectual" (7:18–19), such that "Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant" (7:22). Jesus is thus believed to replace the levitical priesthood, because "he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises" (8:6).

their sin: *They said, "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou dost not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers"* (7:23). Then God relents and renews the covenant by offering words of revelation:

> *Then Adam received words from his Lord, and He relented unto him. Indeed, He is the Relenting, the Merciful. We said, "Get down from it, all of you. If Guidance should come to you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve."* (2:37–38)

These words received by Adam mark the beginning of the cycle of revelation, for before falling from grace Adam and Eve were in no need of words to remind them of the pretemporal covenant. But having forgotten, human beings are in need of periodic revelations to remind them of their true nature and help them return to it.

## *The Primordial Norm*

Seen in this light, the underlying substance of the human condition is the Adamic nature before the fall, a nature by virtue of which one is ever aware of the pretemporal covenant with God. In the Quran this nature is referred to as the *fiṭrah,* the primordial norm. It is to bring human beings back to this primordial norm, this inherent equilibrium, that all religions are fashioned. But over time, human beings lose sight of this reality and read their prejudices and predilections into religion.[16] Religions then come to be regarded as absolute in and of themselves rather than as paths to the Absolute. In reference to such devolution the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "Every child is born according to the *fiṭrah.* Then the parents make the child a Christian, a Jew, or a Zoroastrian."[17]

This does not mean that all previous religions are deviant in principle. Rather, it implies that insofar as religions that have decayed or been corrupted by human beings are concerned,[18] they no longer serve to bring about the basic equilibrium through submission that all prophets have practiced and taught. According to Muslim belief, all people continue to be born into the *fiṭrah* and, when not corrupted, each faith provides the means by which one can live in accord with this fundamental human disposition and thus renew and maintain the pretemporal, primordial covenant.[19] Accordingly, the Quran enjoins:

16. See, e.g., 2:75, 78–79, 85, 146; 3:78, 187; 5:13, 41, 68; 45:16–17.

17. Al-Bukhārī 23.79 (nos. 1373–74), 65.[30].2 (no. 4822); Muslim 47.6 (nos. 6926, 6929, 6932).

18. Such corruption is said to occur through distortion (*taḥrīf*) of scripture (2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41), forgetting *a part of that whereof they were reminded* (5:13; cf. 23:110), and intentionally concealing the truth (2:146, 159, 174; 3:71), among other vices.

19. The notion of the covenant as presented in the Quran could in principle be applied also to non-Abrahamic religions. Such an allusion is found in 4:163–65, cited above. But as such religions are not mentioned directly in the Quran, they are beyond the scope of this essay.

> *Set thy face to religion as a* ḥanīf, *in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind—there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not—turning unto Him. And reverence Him and perform the prayer; and be not among the idolaters.* (30:30–31)

Here the word *ḥanīf* refers to a pure believer who is fully devoted to God in His Oneness and is thus unswayed by the false constructions of belief of those around him.[20] To be a *ḥanīf* is thus to be a pure monotheist, to have pure unswerving faith and hence to live in conformity with the primordial norm according to which all human beings have been created. One cannot change this underlying nature, because *there is no altering the creation of God.* To accept this truth and live in accord with one's fundamental primordial nature is thus considered to be the foundation and substance of true worship.

Reminding human beings that blind adherence to a particular religious form is not the ultimate goal of religious practice, the Quran says, *The most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you* (49:13). Such nobility, reverence, piety, and devotion are expressed in the quality of submission attributed to the prophet Abraham: *And who is better in religion than one who submits his face to God, and is virtuous, and follows the creed of Abraham, as a* ḥanīf? (4:125).[21] The Quran thus enjoins, *Set thy face toward the religion as a* ḥanīf, *and be thou not among the idolaters* (10:105; cf. 22:31, 30:30), and chastises all who fail to adhere to the way of Abraham: *And who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul? We chose him in the world and in the Hereafter he shall be among the righteous* (2:130).

Abraham was not chosen because he followed a particular creed and practice, but because he submitted himself entirely to God: *When his Lord said to him, "Submit!" he said, "I submit to the Lord of the worlds"* (2:131). In this way, the fundamental reality of submission cannot be confined to any single form; rather, universal, nonsectarian submission is the sine qua non for observing God's covenant and preexists the religion that takes the name "submission"—*islām*. For both Muslims and non-Muslims today, *islām* is taken as a reference to the reified religion of those who follow Muhammad. But its original Quranic usage refers to the submission of all human beings to God and the attitude of submission that is believed to be inherent in true faith. This universal, presectarian submission is presented throughout the Quran as the quintessence of all religions. In many different verses, the prophets Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac,

20. The possible origins of the word *ḥanīf* in other Semitic languages have led to numerous speculations. François de Blois provides a useful summary of various perspectives in "*Naṣrānī* and *Ḥanīf*: Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65:1 (2002): 1–30, esp 17–30. See also Sulayaman Bashear, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition* (Jerusalem, 2004), chap. 14; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London, New York, 2010), 75–87.

21. Cf. 2:135; 3:67, 95; 6:79, 161; 16:120, 123.

Ishmael, and Joseph all refer to themselves or are referred to as submitters (*muslims*) or pray to God to make them true submitters.[22]

Each prophet observes the universal submission to which the story of Abraham alludes, but he simultaneously brings a specific form of submission with particular laws and rites. Though relative in and of themselves, the forms contain and convey something of the Absolute. Thus, as a reassertion of the pretemporal covenant, each form partakes of the same substance, but as a form it excludes others, for it is the nature of form to exclude other forms. Although most religious authorities deny other religious forms in order to safeguard the sanctity of one form, the Quran opposes the tendency to make one single form of submission—one way of observing the covenant—absolute in and of itself. In this way it safeguards both the Immutable Absolute, which each religion seeks to convey, and the Transcendent Infinite, to which the multiplicity of revelation bears witness. Therefore, the Quran criticizes those who claim Abraham and other prophets for themselves exclusively:

> *Or say you that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Say, "Do you know better, or does God?" And who does greater wrong than one who conceals a testimony he has from God? God is not heedless of what you do.* (2:140)

Rather than being described as a Jew or Christian, Abraham is again portrayed as a *ḥanīf:*

> *O People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham, as neither the Torah nor the Gospel was sent down until after him? Do you not understand? Behold! You are the very same who dispute concerning that of which you have knowledge; so why do you dispute concerning that of which you have no knowledge? God knows, and you know not.* Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but rather was a *ḥanīf,* a submitter (muslim), *and he was not one of the idolaters.* (3:65–67, emphasis added)

At first blush, such verses may appear to reject Judaism and Christianity in favor of Islam, but these and many similar verses can also be read as an affirmation of all forms of submission—that is, of all revealed religions. The Quran never declares that the covenant as observed by previous religious communities has been abrogated or rendered obsolete.[23] Rather, it reaffirms the covenant of those who came before, en-

22. For a fuller account of the many Quranic passages in which other prophets and their followers are referred to as "submitters," see Joseph Lumbard, "Prophets and Messengers of God," in *Voices of Islam,* ed. Vincent Cornell (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 1:101–22.

23. Jewish scholarship recognizes that Abraham did not practice the central rites of Judaism, which were revealed on Mt. Sinai, and was not technically a Jew. The term "Judaism" originates as a designation for the tribe that descended from Jacob's fourth son, Judah. The religion that we now know as Judaism (*Yahadut*) was first given that name in 2 Maccabees 2:21 and 8:1, written seventeen hundred years after Abraham. The term "Jews" (*Yahudim*) appears before this, in Esther 8:17, which is still over a millennium after the period in which Abraham is believed to have lived.

joins all people to follow the way that precedes sectarian associations—the way of Abraham: *Say, "God has spoken true. So follow the creed of Abraham, a* ḥanīf, *and he was not of the idolaters"* (3:95)—and warns believers not to differentiate between God's prophets: *He has prescribed for you as religion that which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed unto thee, and that which We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, that you uphold religion and not become divided therein* (42:13).

## *The Jewish Covenant in the Quran*

From a Quranic perspective, nothing could be greater than the fundamental difference between those who observe the covenant with God and those who break it. This essential demarcation is outlined in the following passage:

> *Is one who knows that what has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord is the truth like one who is blind? Only those who possess intellect reflect, who fulfill the pact with God and break not the covenant, who join what God has commanded be joined, fear their Lord, and dread an evil reckoning, and who are patient, seeking the Face of their Lord, perform the prayer, and spend from that which We have provided them, secretly and openly, and repel evil with good. For them there shall be the reward of the Abode—Gardens of Eden that they shall enter along with those who were righteous from among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny; and angels shall enter upon them from every gate. "Peace be upon you because you were patient." How excellent is the Ultimate Abode! And for those who break God's pact after accepting His covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, it is they who shall have the curse, and theirs shall be the evil abode.* (13:19–25)

According to this passage all religious communities are to be judged by the extent to which they have been able to persist in observing the covenant with God.

Many instances of the word "covenant" in the Quran thus refer to the specific covenant made with the Children of Israel:

> *And We raised the Mount over them,*[24] *at [the making of] their covenant, and We said to them, "Enter the gate, prostrating," and We said to them, "Do not transgress the Sabbath." And We made with them a solemn covenant.* (4:154)

> *God had made a covenant with the Children of Israel, and We raised among them twelve chieftains. And God said, "I am with you!" Surely, if you perform the prayer, and give the alms and believe in My messengers and support them, and lend unto God a goodly loan, I shall surely absolve you of your evil deeds, and shall*

24. A reference to Mt. Sinai, referred to elsewhere in the Quran as *Ṭūr Sīnīn* (95:2).

*cause you to enter Gardens watered by flowing streams. But whosoever among you disbelieves thereafter, surely he has strayed from the right way.* (5:12)

Like many passages of the Bible, verses such as these call for a return to the covenant that God has made with His "chosen people" and promise that if they keep the covenant, God will keep the covenant: *O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill My covenant, and I shall fulfill your covenant* (2:40). Yet such verses also serve as a warning of what will befall those who do not observe the covenant, for *there has been no community but that a warner has passed among them* (35:24). Approximately one-third of the Quran is in fact a retelling of the challenges faced by previous prophets when they tried to deliver God's message.[25] Moses' epic struggle with Pharaoh and with his own people is the most featured narrative, appearing in at least ten passages and alluded to in many others.[26]

The basic outline of Moses' life in the Quran is the same as that of the Bible, with minor variations that reflect other aspects of his prophetic mission.[27] As in the Bible, this mission begins at the age of forty, when he encounters the burning bush and he and his brother, Aaron, are ordered:

*"Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled! Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear." They said, "Our Lord! Truly we fear that he will deal hastily with us, or that he will transgress." He said, "Fear not! Truly I am with ye twain; I hear and I see. So come unto him and say, 'Truly we are two messengers of your Lord. So send forth with us the Children of Israel and punish them not.'"* (20:43–47)

This initial warning is followed by many afflictions until Pharaoh releases the Israelites, who are acknowledged as the "chosen people" whom God has favored over others (2:47, 122; 45:16). On their journey to the promised land, Moses is called to Mt. Sinai, where he stays for forty days; he returns to find that the people have taken to worshipping the golden calf, thus forsaking all that had been ordained and breaking the covenant with God. Unlike in the Biblical account, however, in the Quran Aaron is not blamed for this transgression. Instead, it is a man referred to as "the Samaritan" (*al-Sāmirī*) who tells the people, *This is your god and the god of Moses, though he has forgotten* (20:88). Moses becomes infuriated and casts down the tablets given to him by God (7:150); he then returns to the mountain and receives a new set of tablets.

25. For comparison of the Quranic and Biblical stories of the prophets, see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002).

26. Moses narratives appear in 2:49–61; 5:20–26; 7:103–55; 10:75–93; 11:96–99; 14:5–6; 17:101–4; 20:9–97; 23:45–49; 25:35–36; 26:10–66; 28:3–46; 40:23–45; 43:46–56; 44:17–31; 51:38–40; 54:41–42; 73:15–16; 79:15–25.

27. For an examination of the story of Moses in the Quran, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

Upon reaching the promised land, the Israelites again disobey Moses because they fear its inhabitants:

> *"O my people! Enter the Holy Land, which God has prescribed for you, and do not turn back, or you shall become losers." They said, "O Moses! In this land are a domineering people. We shall not enter it till they leave it. But if they leave it, we shall enter." Two men whom God had blessed among those who feared [Him] said, "Enter in upon them by the gate, for once you have entered it, you will be victors. And trust in God, if you are believers." They said, "O Moses! We shall never enter it, so long as they remain therein. So go forth, thou and thy Lord, and fight! We shall sit here."* (5:21–24)

For their intransigence the Israelites are banished from entering the promised land for forty years: *Then verily it shall be forbidden them for forty years, while they shall wander on the earth. So grieve not for the iniquitous people* (5:26).

Unlike in the Bible, the fate of Moses after this event is never made known in the Quran. The Israelites are, however, referred to in several verses that illustrate God's continuing efforts to guide them. Such Quranic accounts reflect the Biblical lament: "They have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (Isaiah 24:5), but also that

> He is mindful of His covenant forever, of the word that He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that He made with Abraham, and His sworn Promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant. (Psalm 105:8–10)

## *The Christian Covenant in the Quran*

The Quranic passages cited above reflect those passages from the Bible that speak of the covenant that has been made with previous prophets. Other passages add Jesus and Muhammad to the list of those with whom God has made a covenant: *And [remember] when We made with the prophets their covenant, and with thee, and with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary; We made with them a solemn covenant* (33:7). This confirms, as do the Letters of the New Testament, that the new covenant sealed through Jesus' pact with God is a continuation and universalization of the covenant that had previously been sealed through the pact with Moses and the Children of Israel.

Jesus is referred to in the Quran as *a messenger of God* and as God's *Word* (3:45; 4:171), who is aided by the Holy Spirit (2:87, 253; 5:110). Although he is regarded as the Messiah (*al-Masīḥ*), he is not referred to as the "Son of God" or as "God incarnate."[28]

28. See, e.g., 3:45; 4:157, 171–72; 5:17, 72, 75; 9:30–31.

Belief in the incarnation of God in Jesus is in fact repudiated in two Quranic verses: *They indeed have disbelieved who say, "God is the Messiah, son of Mary"* (5:17, 72). The Quran emphasizes that Jesus was not God, but a servant and messenger of God: *The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God* (4:172); *The Messiah, son of Mary, was naught but a messenger—messengers have passed away before him. And his mother was truthful. Both of them ate food* (5:75).

Despite this emphasis upon his human nature, Jesus is recognized as holding an exalted position in relation to other prophets: *Those are the messengers. We have favored some above others. Among them are those to whom God spoke, and some He raised up in ranks. And We gave Jesus son of Mary clear proofs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit* (2:253). The best example of Jesus' particular distinction among the prophets is the miracle of the virgin birth, to which the Quran attests:

> *And remember Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place. And she veiled herself from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. She said, "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if you are reverent!" He said, "I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy." She said, "How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me; nor have I been unchaste?" He said, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for Me.'" And [it is thus] that We might make him a sign unto mankind, and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter decreed.'"* (19:16–21; see also 3:45–47)[29]

The Prophet Muhammad is said to have confirmed that of all human beings, only Jesus and the Virgin Mary were born without the stain of sin: "There is none born among the offspring of Adam, but that Satan touches it. A child, therefore, cries loudly at the time of its birth because of the touch of Satan, except for Mary and her child."[30]

Not only was the birth of Jesus a miracle, but other passages bear witness to a creative life-giving power possessed by Jesus that was not granted to any other prophet:

> *Truly I have brought you a sign from your Lord. I will create for you out of clay the shape of a bird. Then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird by God's leave. And I will heal the blind and the leper and give life to the dead by God's leave. And I will inform you about what you eat and what you store*

29. This is similar to the account of the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke, according to which Mary shows fear and asks the Archangel Gabriel: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (1:34), to which Gabriel responds, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37).

30. Al-Bukhārī 60.47 (no. 3468), 65.[3].2 (no. 4590). Another account of this saying reads: "No child is born but that he is pricked by Satan and begins to weep because of the pricking of Satan, except for the son of Mary and his mother" (Muslim 44.40 [no. 6282]). A third version states: "Satan touches every son of Adam on the day when his mother gives birth to him, except for Mary and her son" (Muslim 44.40 [no. 6284]).

> *up in your houses. Truly in that is a sign for you, if you are believers.* (3:49; see also 5:110)

Despite these affirmations of Jesus' Divinely given powers, the concept of the Trinity is criticized in the Quran: *And say not "Three." Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one God; Glory be to Him* (4:171). Another verse is more severe, condemning those who claim that God is one of three: *They certainly disbelieve, those who say, "Truly God is the third of three," while there is no god save one God. If they refrain not from what they say, a painful punishment will befall those among them who disbelieved* (5:73). This, however, is not a direct condemnation of Christian theology, for trinitarian theology does not make God one of three, but rather speaks of the triune God, Who is both one and three in a manner that transcends human understanding.[31] Viewed in this light, 5:73 does not oppose the various forms of orthodox trinitarian doctrines that have prevailed for most of Christian history. Rather, it appears to oppose crude misunderstandings of it that would lead one to believe that there are three gods instead of one. That the Quranic discussion of the Trinity is addressed to misunderstandings of Christian doctrine is made clear in 5:116–17:

> *And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?'" he said, "Glory be to Thee! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right. Had I said it, Thou wouldst surely have known it. Thou knowest that which is in my self and I know not that which is in Thy Self. Truly it is Thou Who knowest best the things unseen. I said naught to them save that which Thou commanded me: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'"*

Although there are many correspondences between the stories of Jesus in the Quran and the Gospels, most of the divergences can be understood and even resolved by contextualizing them within the different theological environments in which they arise. It is, however, almost impossible to reconcile the greatest divergence, that between the different accounts of Jesus' death. Christians maintain that Jesus took on the sins of all humanity and was crucified for their salvation, but the Quran states:

> *And for their saying, "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God"—though* they did not slay him, nor did they crucify him, but it appeared

31. That the Oneness of God is fundamental to traditional Christianity is clear from the beginning of the Nicene Creed: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." As the third-century church father Tertullian writes: "Father and Son and Spirit are three, however, not in status but in rank, not in substance but in form, not in power but in appearance; they are, however, of one substance and of one status and of one power, because God is one, from whom these ranks and forms and appearances are designated in name as Father and Son and Holy Spirit" (*Adversus Praxean,* chap. 2; cited in Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed* [New York: Doubleday, 2004], 121).

> so unto them. *Those who differ concerning him are in doubt thereof. They have no knowledge of it, but follow only conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But God raised him up unto Himself, and God is Mighty, Wise.* (4:157–58, emphasis added)

Most Muslim scholars throughout the centuries up to this day have viewed these verses as a straightforward denial of the crucifixion. They maintain that Jesus was assumed directly into Heaven and that another was crucified in his place. In the exegetical tradition, it is usually suggested that the one who betrayed Jesus was made to appear like him and then made to suffer on the cross. Other exegetes maintain that Jesus was nailed to the cross, but that he only lost consciousness and was then taken down and placed in the tomb.[32] There is, however, no direct support for any of these interpretations in the Quran itself or in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. One of the most prominent Muslim exegetes, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), even states that all of these interpretations "are mutually contradictory and incompatible."[33] The crucifixion is thus one aspect of Jesus' mission regarding which Muslims and Christians may not be able to find common ground. Nonetheless, both agree that *God raised him up unto Himself* (4:158), and that those who follow Jesus are favored by God over those who do not, as God said, *O Jesus, I shall take thee and raise thee unto Me, and purify thee of those who disbelieved, and place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved, until the Day of Resurrection* (3:55).

The fundamental difference between the Islamic and Christian understandings of Jesus is that Islam follows the Quran in always seeking to reaffirm the transcendence of the Divine by focusing upon Jesus' humanity, whereas traditional Christian theology presupposes his divinity, while confirming his humanity. This derives from the different nature of each religious tradition. Islam focuses upon the Absolute, Who is one in and of Himself, beyond all else, while Christianity emphasizes the manifestation of the Absolute in Jesus.

These different emphases are reflected in the different religious, historical, and sociological circumstances under which Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad appeared. Jesus came to a mostly Jewish community that was already well versed in the teachings of Abrahamic monotheism and alert to the dangers of idolatry. The Prophet Muhammad arose within a community still under the influence of polytheism and idol worship. The community to which Jesus preached was accused of forgetting the true meaning and purpose of scripture and focusing upon the minutiae of the law

32. For an examination of the treatment of Jesus and Christianity in the exegetical tradition, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Quranic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981); and Mahmoud Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God: A Study of the Terms *Ibn* and *Walad* in the Qurʾān and *Tafsīr* Tradition," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters,* ed. Yvonne Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1995).

33. Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* 32 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1422/2001), 4:260.

instead of the spirit. The community to which the Prophet Muhammad preached was accused of forgetting completely that there was even such a thing as revelation.

Each message thus emphasized different aspects of the Divine Word, while implicitly comprising the whole. The message of the New Testament focuses upon the Presence of the Divine in the person of Jesus. The message that the Prophet Muhammad delivered focuses upon the perennial truth of the Divine Word in the Quran and in all previous revelations. It thus relegates all prophets to a secondary function in relation to the Divine Word Itself through which all scriptures are revealed.

The idea that each revelation is determined by God for the human group destined to receive it is mentioned in 14:4: *We have sent no messenger, save in the language of his people, that he might make clear unto them.* From this perspective, each revelation necessarily contains in principle the whole of God's Wisdom, for it is the Divine Word as such.[34] But each revelation also emphasizes different aspects of that Word in accordance with the needs of the human collectivity to which it is sent. Jesus is thus seen as the Word of God Itself (4:171), though he is still a messenger.

Unlike the Gospels and the Letters, the Quran does not declare that the covenant through Jesus supplants the covenant with Abraham or the one with the Children of Israel. The Quran does, however, apply to Christians the Biblical and New Testament condemnations of those who break God's covenant: *And with those who say, "We are Christians," We made a covenant. Then they forgot a part of that whereof they were reminded* (5:14). In this way, the Quran presents itself as part of the unbroken chain of Abrahamic scriptures in which God renews the covenant, only to have it broken by human beings and forgotten time and again. Then, through mercy and love, He relents unto humanity, providing another reminder of the eternal covenant and a new means for observing it. The Quranic covenant is thus a continuation of sacred history presented as both a reaffirmation of the one pretemporal covenant and an extension of the covenant(s) that God made through the Torah and the Gospels. As the Quran states:

> *Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs. They fight in the way of God, slaying and being slain. [It is] a promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is truer to His pact than God? So rejoice in the bargain which you have made. That indeed is the great triumph.* (9:111)

The Quran does not reaffirm the covenant because previous religions are deemed invalid, but because those who followed them have forgotten part of their religion:

> *Then for their breaking of their covenant, We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of the word, and have forgotten a part of that whereof they were reminded. Thou wilt not cease to discover their treachery,*

34. For further elaboration of the manner in which the Quran can be seen as presenting all revelations as deriving from a single source, see 85:21–22c (also see 3:7; 13:39; 43:4).

> *from all save a few of them. So pardon them, and forbear. Truly God loves the virtuous.* (5:13)

The Quranic account does not provide the details of the covenant, as found in the Hebrew scriptures and the Gospels. It focuses instead upon the principle of the covenant and how previous communities have *forgotten a part of that whereof they were reminded.* Indeed, this tendency to neglect a portion of what God has revealed is the drama of religion played out in all of the Abrahamic scriptures. As with the Hebrew prophets, the criticisms the Quran makes of previous religious communities are made with a view to restoring the covenant with individual human beings and with humanity at large. Therefore, the Quran never condemns other revealed religions as such.

When speaking of the deviations committed by previous communities, it even reminds us that a few remain who continue to practice with reverence and piety. It thus promises: *As for those who cling to the Book and perform the prayer—surely We neglect not the reward of the workers of righteousness* (7:170). Nonetheless, *Those who break God's pact after accepting His covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, it is they who are the losers* (2:27). Thus the Quran implores: *Sell not the pact of God for a paltry price. Surely that which is with God is better for you, if you but knew* (16:95). Taking this a step further, the Quran even proposes that the reward of the righteous who hold fast to the Book of God is not limited to Muslims alone:

> *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.*[35] (2:62)

## *Betraying the Covenant*

Exchanging or selling God's covenant, verses, or guidance for a small a price is criticized in several Quranic passages. It connotes a profound lack of discernment that leads one to seek the vain pleasures of this world over and above the joys of the world to come:

> *Those who sell God's pact and their oaths for a paltry price, they shall have no share in the Hereafter and God will not speak to them; nor will He look at them on the Day of Resurrection; nor will He purify them. And theirs shall be a painful punishment.* (3:77)

Selling the covenant for a small price is thus akin to breaking the covenant and is among the chief transgressions said to have been committed by previous religious communities. The Quran maintains that this is the process that many among all peoples

35. See n. 8.

have followed and even implies that many of those to whom the Quran is presented will also confront it:

> *We did indeed send down to you clear signs, and only the iniquitous disbelieve in them. Is it not that, whenever they make a covenant, a group of them cast it aside? Indeed, most of them do not believe. And when there came to them a messenger from God, confirming that which is with them, a group of those who have been given the Book cast the Book of God behind their backs, as if they know not.* (2:99–101)

Such verses indicate that although the outer dictates of the religion may remain, the principles and spiritual guidance they convey may be forgotten. People of different faiths will then fight about the forms, because they have forgotten their inner meanings. But the Quran maintains that a few will, nonetheless, remain truly faithful:

> *And [remember] when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel, "Worship none but God; be virtuous toward parents, kinsfolk, orphans, and the indigent; and speak to people in a goodly way; and perform the prayer and give the alms." Then you turned away,* save a few of you, *swerving aside.* (2:83, emphasis added)

## *The New Form of the One Covenant*

Having established the continuation of the covenant through the history of prophecy, even though it was repeatedly broken and forgotten, the Quran then speaks of the covenant God has made with the followers of Muhammad. As one of the last verses to be revealed states: *And remember God's Blessing upon you, and His covenant by which He bound you, when you said, "We hear and we obey." And reverence God. Surely God knows what lies within breasts* (5:7). Reminiscent of Quranic verses addressed to the Children of Israel, this verse follows an explanation of the manner in which Muslims are to purify themselves for prayer. This alludes to the fact that the specific form of prayer revealed through Muhammad is the means by which Muslims are to observe the covenant, as did Jews through the Temple sacrifice and as did Christians through the sacraments.

The basic practices of Islam, the "five pillars" as they are known—testifying to the Oneness of God, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage—can thus be seen as means by which human beings return to their primordial nature, the *fiṭrah,* where they are ever cognizant of the covenant with God. When observed with sincerity, the rites of Islam, like those of Judaism and Christianity, serve to reintegrate and reorient the dispersed elements of one's human nature. The rhythm of life thus comes to be fashioned upon the norms that God has ordained for humanity, rather than upon the aberrations that human beings have created for themselves. One is then

able to live a life based upon what one has been reminded of through revelation, rather than forgetting a portion of what all humanity has been reminded of and thus forsaking the covenant.

As particular modes of observance, every religion embodies the fullness of the primordial covenant, the religion of the *fiṭrah,* which was the religion of Abraham—true devotion and universal submission (*islām*). But as the covenant is pretemporal, it is in essence not of this world and therefore cannot be confined to one particular manifestation—to one single religion. For this reason, the Quran emphasizes the eternal principles and fundamental practices that transcend the particularity of each covenant in order to reaffirm what it maintains to be the pure essence of all covenants—full submission to God.

# QURANIC ETHICS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SOCIETY

Maria Massi Dakake

Islamic ethical norms and the Islamic view of human rights and social justice are topics deeply misunderstood in the contemporary world. This is due, first, to the fact that discussions of these issues are scattered throughout the Quran, and a full understanding of the Quranic perspective can only be gained by considering the various Quranic statements on this topic as a whole and in relation to one another. Second, the Quran dictates clear rules and laws concerning certain social issues, but it establishes only ethical guidelines and principles of a more general nature regarding others. The impact, or at least the ideal impact, of these more general ethical principles on the character and functioning of Islamic society is often overlooked. Third, Quranic social norms are sometimes assumed to be adequately reflected in the current laws, customs, and practices found in widely differing Islamic countries; this is not always the case, and such an assumption sometimes tends to obscure the perspective of the Quran in its purest form on these issues. Finally and most important, Islamic ethics and social norms are often judged in relation to modern Western notions of ethics and human rights, which in recent centuries have been dominated philosophically by secular and individualistic perspectives and have come, in the last century, to be seen in the West as synonymous with "universal" ethical norms or "universal" standards of human rights. Although Islamic ethical norms have much in common with those of Christianity and other traditional cultures, they also differ profoundly in certain key aspects from the secular formulation of these norms in the contemporary West.

## *General Quranic Principles Governing Islamic Social Ethics*

One can identify five interrelated principles governing Quranic social ethics: The first is the significance of the religious community, or *ummah*. The Quran envisions the *ummah* as a collective of individual believers and has nothing explicit to say about the governance of the community or who has the right to authority over it. Although the Quran enjoins believers to obey *those in authority* among them (4:59), it never specifies the criteria for such authority or the mechanisms by which such an authority

should be chosen and exercise power.[1] These matters are discussed to some extent in the *Ḥadīth* literature. The Quran does, however, encourage believers to determine their affairs by consultation among themselves (42:38) and even directs the Prophet Muhammad to consult with his followers in certain matters (*shāwirhum fi'l-amr;* 3:159). Thus, the Quranic conception of the *ummah* is primarily that of a collective of believing individuals who have moral obligations to the community as a whole and to each of its members as well as to themselves. The good of the whole and the good of the individual are not seen as competing interests that need to be opposed to each other, but as mutually reinforcing concerns. The Quran explicitly states that all believing men and women are *protectors* (*awliyā'*) *of one another* (9:71) and thus bear substantial moral responsibility toward fellow believers. Importantly, according to 9:71, both men and women share in this moral responsibility toward fellow believers and the *ummah.*

Each individual has the duty to uphold the moral standards of the community, and the community has the collective responsibility to enforce these standards. Ideally, the moral health of individuals contributes to the moral health of society, while the moral integrity of society encourages and provides fertile ground for the proper moral and spiritual development of each of its members. This principle can be derived from the Quran's charge to both individuals and the collective community that they enjoin right and forbid wrong (3:104, 110; 9:71). It is also apparent in the harsh punishments the Quran ordains for crimes considered to be particularly damaging to the spiritual integrity of the community as a whole, such as theft, which undermines respect for property and disregards Divinely ordained means of establishing economic justice (see 5:38), and flagrant sexual offenses that are openly witnessed and thereby undermine the sanctity of the marital bond and the family (see 4:15–16, 25; 24:2–3). That public and corporal punishments are ordained not for private "sins," but for crimes that represent serious violations of community trust and integrity indicates the graver threat that such public crimes are considered to pose to the moral and physical well-being of the community as a whole.

The second important principle of Quranic social ethics is justice. Concern for the just treatment of all members of society and even other creatures—with an emphasis on justice toward those often disadvantaged in society, such as women, orphans, and slaves—is a recurrent theme of Quranic social and ethical statements. The administration of justice in the earthly realm rests largely upon truthful human testimony, which is the duty of each believer before God. The Quran enjoins believers:

> *O you who believe! Be steadfast maintainers of justice, witnesses for God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kinsfolk, and whether it be someone*

1. It should be noted that the tradition of Twelver Shiite commentary on the Quran asserts that the verse quoted here, as well as numerous others, should be understood specifically as references to the twelve Shiite Imams—that is, to the hereditary line of spiritual and political authority after the Prophet, which includes his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his descendants.

> *rich or poor, for God is nearer unto both. So follow not your caprice, that you may act justly. If you distort or turn away, truly God is Aware of whatsoever you do.* (4:135)

The need for truthful testimony must override all personal concerns, including those for oneself and one's family, something that seems to stand in contradiction to the right of individuals in the United States, for example, to refuse to testify against themselves or their spouses to avoid self-incrimination. In the Quran, the administration of justice in society outweighs the right to self-protection. Both concealing testimony (2:283) and bearing false witness are considered serious sins, and the Quran specifies the harsh punishment of eighty lashes for all false or unsubstantiated accusations of sexual misconduct made against women in particular (24:4–5). In establishing this strong sanction, the Quran is concerned with several matters: (1) avoiding malicious and thoughtless slander that creates suspicion and weakens family and social trust; (2) limiting frivolous and/or disturbing public accusations by allowing only those that are supported by substantial evidence; and (3) protecting those members of society, namely women, who might be most unjustly vulnerable to such slander.[2]

Administering justice and upholding moral standards are fundamental obligations for the community, but so too is the maintenance of social harmony and peaceful relations among its members—the third important principle of Islamic social ethics. The Quranic concern with maintaining harmonious relations within the community and settling disputes as quickly and amicably as possible can be seen in a number of Quranic prescriptions. For example, married couples who are unable to resolve their disputes are encouraged to involve their respective family members in the attempt to reconcile their differences and avoid divorce (4:35); a man wishing to divorce his wife should attempt reconciliation twice, with periods of separation in between, before finalizing the divorce (2:226–29); and should a divorce occur, the couple is encouraged to separate with mutual respect and without hostility (2:231).

Similarly, the Quran recommends that when a dispute over some matter arises between believers, the community should attempt to reconcile the two parties. If the dispute devolves into violence, the community is urged to repel the aggressive party through force, but only until that party concedes, at which point efforts at reconciliation are to begin anew (49:9). Elsewhere the Quran encourages those entitled to compensation for injury or loss to forgo the payments,[3] in the interest of avoiding

2. On this same subject, it is also worth noting that although a husband may bring unsubstantiated accusations of infidelity against his wife without penalty, his word carries no more weight than her own, such that if he insists she is guilty and she insists upon her innocence, the matter is considered to be without resolution on the human plane, and ultimate justice is left to God (24:6–9).

3. For example, the families of homicide victims are entitled to monetary compensation for their losses, but are encouraged to forgo the payment in forgiveness or charity (4:92; 5:45); and although women divorced before their marriages have been consummated are entitled to a portion of the dowry promised them, the Quran states that to forgo this is *nearer to reverence* (2:237).

bitterness and resentment among various parties of believers and encouraging good and amicable relations, even in difficult situations. The importance of maintaining social harmony is reflected in Quranic passages that enjoin believers to *repel evil by that which is better* (23:96) as well as to resist engaging in ignorant or vain conversation and to respond to it merely with the greeting of *Peace* (25:63).

The fourth principle that undergirds Quranic social ethics is its notion of essential human equality before God and His laws, meaning that all human beings have the same opportunity to realize their moral and spiritual potential. The Quran is quite clear that those distinctions often given so much weight in human society—race, gender, wealth, social class—are meaningless with regard to a person's spiritual worth and that it is only the latter that God takes into account. Some human beings will inevitably actualize more of their spiritual and intellectual potential than others, and the Quran states that those who have made substantial sacrifices for their faith (4:95; 9:20) as well as those who have achieved high levels of religious devotion or knowledge (39:9; 9:109) enjoy a higher standing than those who have not. But the Quran makes it clear that outward or superficial human differences, such as those of race or ethnicity, are the result of Divine Providence (49:13) and not a basis of nobility or superiority. All strictly religious responsibilities and opportunities—such as the possibility of achieving spiritual excellence or attaining Paradise—are identical across social boundaries and for both men and women; one passage goes to great lengths to emphasize this latter point:

> *For submitting men and submitting women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, men who fast and women who fast, men who guard their private parts and women who guard [their private parts], men who remember God often and women who remember [God often], God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.* (33:35)

Differences in social or economic standing are also meaningless from the religious point of view in God's Judgment, and the Quran is careful to enunciate the duty believers have toward all human life. The Quran chastises the Prophet Muhammad himself for being so concerned about persuading the rich and powerful Makkans of the truth of his message that he disregarded a poor, old blind man seeking his guidance (80:1–12). Orphans, who held relatively low status in pre-Islamic Makkan society, are presented in the Quran as individuals with rights that must be protected, and the Quran stresses the duty Muslims have toward the care and proper treatment of orphans. It is one's status as a believer and as a person of piety that alone determines true worth. For example, the Quran enjoins Muslim men who cannot afford to take a free, believing woman as a wife to take a believing slave woman instead, insisting that the latter is a far better choice than a free woman who is a disbeliever. Moreover,

should a man take a believing slave woman as a wife, he must marry her according to all the rights and obligations incumbent upon marriage to any free woman, including seeking the permission of her family and giving her her *proper bridewealth,* since she is a believer like himself (4:25).

The fifth principle of Islamic social ethics is the balancing of rights and responsibilities. Contemporary Western thought assumes the rights of all individuals to be identical and is primarily concerned with establishing and defending individual rights without an equal or corresponding concern for individual responsibilities; the Quranic perspective takes both into consideration. In Islam, the fulfillment of individual responsibilities can be said to precede and determine individual rights, insofar as rights and responsibilities are ideally proportionate to one another and, moreover, responsibilities come before rights. For example, the Quran stipulates, as mentioned above, that truthful witness is the responsibility of each believer toward the community and before God. Should an individual fail to live up to this responsibility by giving false testimony, he or she forfeits the right to offer testimony in the future (24:4–5).[4] Although everyone is equal before God insofar as they are held to the same moral and spiritual standards according to the Quran, differences in the fulfillment of individual responsibilities as well as differences in the nature of individual responsibilities as determined by social and economic position, age, and gender affect the nature and extent of one's rights in society.

The clearest example of this principle is in the case of marital rights and duties. Although men and women are spiritually equal before God, they do not bear identical social responsibilities or enjoy identical rights in marriage. Since the Quran and Islamic Law assert that a man is solely financially liable for his wife, children, and indeed his extended family, he is considered to bear a greater share of responsibility in the marriage and family affairs generally. Thus his rights over his family and his wife are understood to be proportionally greater than those his wife enjoys over him, although they are in no way absolute. Rather, the Quran makes it clear that women have rights over their husbands as their husbands do over them, but that the rights of the husband are *a degree over* them (2:228). Since the wife's duties are considered to be less burdensome—being legally limited to providing sexual relations for the husband, although it is also understood that she will also care for any children born to the couple, and some schools of law also include managing the home among her responsibilities—her rights, for example, to divorce, are proportionally less extensive, but never denied altogether.

4. An additional example of this principle is the case of the criminal punishments ordained for slaves. Although the Quran establishes a stiff penalty for sexual immorality that is identical for men and women, this penalty is diminished in the case of slaves, who receive only half the punishment normally meted out to free persons (4:25). Therefore, slaves, who enjoy fewer rights and privileges in their social lives, are considered correspondingly less "responsible" for their criminal activity.

Although the rights and responsibilities of men and women are not quantitatively equal, they are considered to be complementary. Thus there are some things both husbands and wives can expect or demand from one another—fidelity, intimacy, children, and the preservation of one another's honor, for example—but they each also enjoy certain unilateral rights in relation to the other. The wife has the religious and legal right to demand of her husband adequate financial support for herself and her children—a right he does not have in relation to her, even if her own wealth exceeds his own; the husband may obtain a unilateral divorce without cause (although this is legally discouraged)[5]—a right that she does not enjoy in relation to him.[6]

## *The Family*

The family constitutes the basis of social life in Islam, as it does in most traditional cultures. The basic social rights and obligations of individuals are defined according to their roles and positions within the family. Although Muslims are enjoined to care for and protect all members of the believing community to the extent they are able, they owe a special and primary duty to members of their family. Charitable donations, for example, should go first to one's family members and then to other needy persons in society.[7] Within the family, both parents enjoy special and equal rights to kindness and respect from their children. The duty to care for one's parents and to treat them well is repeated in multiple places throughout the Quran. In several instances, kindness toward parents is presented as a duty second in importance only to loyalty and obedience to God.[8] One passage, for example, states:

> *Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but Him, and be virtuous to parents. Whether one or both of them reaches old age, say not to them "Uff!" nor chide them, but speak unto them a noble word. Lower unto them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, "My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small."* (17:23–24)

The proper attitude toward parents, then, is gentleness, respect, humility, and mercy. It should also be noted that although Islamic society, like most traditional societies,

5. Divorce in Islamic Law is considered *makrūh,* that is, discouraged or reprehensible, although not legally forbidden.

6. Women do have a limited right to divorce in Islamic Law, which stipulates that a man who becomes incapable of fulfilling or fails to fulfill his marital responsibilities can be sued for divorce by his wife in an Islamic court of law. According to the Quran, a woman may also return part of her dowry as a means of seeking her husband's consent to a mutual divorce.

7. Several Quranic verses provide a list of those who are particularly entitled to charity, with relatives and family members always placed first; see 2:215; 4:36; 17:26; 30:38.

8. See 2:83; 4:36; 6:151; 17:23.

envisions male leadership in family and society as normative (though not absolute),[9] the Quran never privileges fathers over mothers with regard to the respect and devotion due them from their children. For example, in 4:11, the Quran explicitly awards an equal share of inheritance to the mother and the father of a deceased[10]—which is an exception to the general rule whereby men inherit twice as much as women of equal standing (e.g., sons inherit twice as much as daughters, brothers twice as much as sisters, etc.). The two-to-one ratio in these latter cases is considered justified from the Islamic point of view by the fact that men bear extensive financial responsibilities toward their wives, children, and female family members (daughters, sisters, etc.) that they must meet with these additional assets. But in the case of parents, the Quran stipulates the significant responsibilities both mothers and fathers bear toward their children (2:233), and they are accordingly awarded an equal share of the inheritance from them. In fact, although kindness and respect are the proper attitude toward both parents equally, the debt one owes to one's mother is sometimes singled out for particular emphasis:

> *And We have enjoined man to be virtuous unto his parents. His mother carried him in travail and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning is thirty months, such that when he reaches maturity and reaches forty years he says, "My Lord inspire me to give thanks for Thy Blessing with which Thou hast blessed me and hast blessed my parents, and that I may work righteousness such that it pleases Thee; and make righteous my progeny for me. Truly I turn in repentance unto Thee, and truly I am among those who submit."* (46:15)[11]

However, the duty to obey one's parents is not absolute. One has no duty to obey disbelieving parents who command or attempt to influence their children toward disbelief (29:8; 31:15), and some verses warn against taking disbelieving relatives as protectors (9:23) or even seeking forgiveness for them, for which the prophet Abraham's total dissociation from his idolatrous father is given as an example (9:113–14). Elsewhere, however, a certain degree of cordiality toward even idolatrous parents is

9. Nothing in the Quran explicitly prohibits women taking active or leadership roles in society. Moreover, it is not uncommon for women to hold positions of considerable, if informal, influence within their own families and, furthermore, numerous women have achieved positions of religious, social, or political influence throughout Islamic history. The Prophet's first wife, Khadījah, may be cited as an example of a woman who possessed her own wealth and ran her own business. She was also the first person to hear the message revealed to Muhammad, the first to accept it, and one of Muhammad's most important supporters during the early years of his prophecy.

10. However, as the nearest of kin, the father could often claim whatever remained of his child's estate after all explicitly stipulated shares had been distributed, thus potentially inheriting more than the mother; see 4:11–12c.

11. For a similar emphasis on maternal sacrifice and the duty it enjoins upon children, see 31:14. These verses apply to both men and women with respect to their parents; the duties of kindness, loyalty, and care are incumbent upon both sons and daughters.

recommended; the Quran instructs believers to *consort with them in the world in a kindly manner* (31:15).

The Quran also speaks of the responsibility that both parents have toward their children. Islamic Law permits the practice of family planning when it is a mutual decision between husband and wife, but the Quran asserts that both fathers and mothers must be open to accepting the children that result from their union. The Quran asserts repeatedly that parents do not possess the right of life or death over their children—something that was apparently assumed in pre-Islamic Arabian contexts. Parents are told not to kill their children *for fear of poverty* for God will provide (6:151; 17:31) and are warned that doing so constitutes a grave sin (17:31). Although female infanticide was reportedly widespread in pre-Islamic Makkah and in Arabia generally, the Quran asserts the inalienable rights of even the smallest of children when it reports that on the Last Day, *the female infant buried alive is asked for what sin she was slain* (81:8–9). No human life is meaningless or allowed to be obliterated; no unjust taking of human life, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will go without account. The Quran emphasizes the responsibility that parents have toward their children and discourages seeing them as *property* about which they may boast (57:20).[12] It, moreover, asserts the separate but equivalent burden both parents share for the care of their children:

> *And let mothers nurse their children two full years, for such as desire to complete the suckling. It falls on the father to provide for them and clothe them honorably. No soul is tasked beyond its capacity. Let no mother be harmed on account of her child, nor father on account of his child. And the like shall fall upon the heir. If the couple desire to wean, by their mutual consent and consultation, there is no blame upon them. And if you wish to have your children wet-nursed, there is no blame upon you if you pay honorably that which you give. And reverence God, and know that God sees whatsoever you do.* (2:233)

Perhaps because they share the responsibility of providing for their children, the Quran here enjoins mutual consultation between husband and wife regarding the care and feeding of their offspring. However, we should note that the duty to one's children, like the duty to one's parents, does not outweigh spiritual obligations and does not entail the right to religious compulsion. The Quran suggests that parents faced with disbelieving children have little option but to pray for God's intervention in the matter and to continue to urge their children to believe in God and His Promise (46:17). Even Noah, in the Quranic account, was unable to save his disbelieving son

12. Numerous passages of the Quran chastise those who see great wealth and numerous children as a sign of nobility and maintain that such things come as a free gift from God to the deserving and the undeserving alike, but that these worldly assets cannot avail them on the Day of Judgment or render them impervious to Divine Justice. See 9:55, 69, 85; 18:46; 23:55–56; 34:35–37; 58:17; 63:9; 64:15.

or compel him onto the ark; he had to watch helplessly as he drowned with the others (11:42–45).

## *Marriage*

Since the family is the foundation of Islamic society, marriage is the foundation of family life. In Islam, marriage is considered the appropriate and natural state for adult men and women, and intentional and voluntary celibacy is not endorsed as a desirable spiritual or social practice (24:32), even if it is not explicitly forbidden. Indeed, the goal of many Quranic provisions regarding marriage often appears to be ensuring the greatest number of marriage opportunities for both Muslim men and Muslim women. For example, the Quranic provision for polygamy (4:3) is often viewed as a means of ensuring that it is possible for all women to marry, even in social situations where the number of women exceeds that of men. This would have been especially important in earlier times, when women were largely dependent upon men for their protection and material provision, and when the number of marriageable men was regularly reduced due to the dangers of warfare and itinerant mercantile activity. Moreover, the Quran does not forbid or in any way discourage remarriage for men and women after divorce or the death of a spouse, thereby affirming the desirability of the marital state whenever possible and increasing the marriage prospects for both genders.

Marriage is considered the desirable state for all adult believers, because it serves as a reflection of the duality and complementarity inherent in all of the created universe. The Quran states that God created all things in pairs (16:72; 43:12; 51:49) and that for each being God has made a "mate" or "spouse" (*zawj*)[13]—only God is One. In 16:72, marriage and children are said to be among the "good things" God has bestowed on humanity. Elsewhere reference is made to spouses as a source of comfort and rest for one another (7:189; 25:74), and in 30:21 affection and mercy are ordained between married couples. In a beautiful passage, the Quran suggests that husband and wife should serve as mutual protectors and comforters of one another when it says to men of their wives, *They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them* (2:187). In addition to the symbolic nature of the marital union and the psychological and physical comforts it ideally provides, the institution of marriage is also a foundational element of the Islamic social order and serves the good of the community as a whole. As such, marriage is a matter of public and not only private concern, and, from the point of view of the Quran and Islamic Law, its legal basis takes the form of a social contract between the man and the woman that entails the complementary, but not quantitatively equal or identical rights and responsibilities discussed previously.

13. Numerous statements about the creation of various beings in pairs can be found in the Quran. See 13:3; 20:53; 31:10; 36:36; 42:11; 53:45; 55:52; 78:8.

As noted above, the Quran endorses what today might be called a "patriarchal" social order, at least insofar as it affirms the normative nature of male authority over the family and especially the marital unit.[14] Although such a characterization needs to be qualified, since men certainly do not enjoy absolute, complete, or unconditional rights in relation to their wives or children, a Quranic basis for male authority in the family is the passage:

> *Men are the upholders and maintainers of women by virtue of that in which God has favored some of them above others and by virtue of their spending from their wealth. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [their husbands'] absence what God has guarded. As for those from whom you fear discord and animosity, admonish them, then leave them in their beds, then strike them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Truly God is Exalted, Great.* (4:34)

This verse has been one of the most controversial verses for contemporary non-Muslim thinkers—and a particularly difficult one for some modern Muslims. It appears to endorse a man's authority over his wife and to establish his right to her obedience—ideas incompatible with modern Western notions of gender equality. Perhaps most controversially, the verse grants men the right, in certain circumstances, to physically discipline their wives, which is considered by many today to be an unacceptable violation of a woman's human rights and dignity. Although many contemporary Muslim thinkers have attempted to reinterpret this verse in ways more acceptable to modern conceptions of women's rights, the fact remains that the verse is clearly at odds with contemporary Western views of appropriate spousal relations in marriage. That being said, it is worth stepping back to take a careful look at the verse and consider its full implications, for doing so sheds much light on other aspects of Quranic social ethics and the underlying principles involved in Islamic marriage.

In the first line, this passage establishes a man's right to authority on the basis of his financial support of his wife. In other words, his position in the family is conditioned upon the fulfillment of his unique financial responsibility in the marriage, in keeping with the principle of balancing social rights and responsibilities. In fact, one contemporary Muslim expert on Islamic Law has posed the question of where the balance of

14. The Muslim scholar Asma Barlas has argued that the Quran can be read as an "anti-patriarchal" scripture in that it sought to undo the patriarchy already existent in pre-Islamic Arabia and elsewhere. See *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2002), esp. chap. 4. She makes a number of important and substantial points about the limitations to traditional "patriarchal" rights of fathers and husbands in the Quran. However, the conclusion that the Quran is "anti-patriarchal" as such is hard to reconcile with the Quran's fairly explicit endorsement of male leadership—even if not absolute authority—over the marital unit in 4:34.

domestic authority lies in cases where a husband is not the sole provider in the family,[15] a question brought to the fore by considering the principle of balancing rights and responsibilities in light of modern realities.

In considering the second line of the passage, which discusses the wife's obedience, we should note that it describes righteous women as *devoutly obedient* (*qānitāt*), rather than unconditionally obedient, and that it enjoins wives to guard in their husband's absence *what God has guarded.* This suggests that the wife's duty of obedience and loyalty is something for which she is responsible before God; it must be done with religious and spiritual principles in mind and is not an unthinking and slavish obedience to her husband. It is clear in the Quran that, just as children are not obligated to obey their parents when they bid them to religious error, so too are wives not obligated to render obedience to their husbands that would contradict obedience to God. By way of Quranic example, we might cite the case of the wife of Pharaoh, who, though married to one of religious history's most evil figures, nevertheless takes in the infant Moses, thwarting her husband's intention to kill him (28:8–9), and in doing so becomes, according to a well-known *ḥadīth,* one of the greatest spiritual women of all time.[16]

Finally, with regard to the third line of the verse, a woman who shows profound discord and animosity (*nushūz*) toward her husband may be sanctioned by her husband in three ascending degrees: he may verbally correct her; he may refuse her his company; and, finally, he may strike her. As offensive as this may seem to Western ears, in light of the West's criminalization of all physical forms of domestic violence, the Quran's intentions in this assertion should be fully examined. In addressing this issue, the Quran is reflecting the historical realities of human society by assuming the proclivity of men (in particular) to use physical force in response to anger and seeking to limit and reduce its manifestation as much as possible, even while legitimating it in certain circumstances. According to this Quranic passage, a man facing the disloyalty of his wife must restrain his anger and follow a procedure for changing her behavior through means other than physical force. Only if these means are unsuccessful is the Quran understood to grant him the warrant to strike her.

One must also consider the kind of "striking" that is intended here. Many see striking one's wife in any form or degree as unacceptable, but it is important to remember

15. Azizah al-Hibri, "An Introduction to Muslim Women's Rights," in *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America,* ed. Gisela Webb (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2000), esp. 63–64. In her discussion of this issue, al-Hibri invokes the Islamic legal principle of *ʿillah* (reason, or juridical rationale). According to this principle, if the Quran gives a particular ruling based conditionally upon a certain set of circumstances (in the case of 4:34, a husband's authority seems to be explicitly based upon his providing materially for his wife), then when those circumstances fail to obtain in a particular context, the ruling is void in that particular context (see 63–64).

16. Al-Bukhārī 60.35 (no. 3447), 60.49 (no. 3470), 62.33 (no. 3815), 70.25 (no. 5473); Muslim 45.12 (no. 6425).

that Islamic Law, following the clear dictates of the Prophet, forbids a husband to strike his wife in the face or with any degree of force that would "leave a mark," let alone leave her truly injured. Such behavior constitutes a woman's grounds for legal divorce from her husband and may in some cases entitle her to restitution. We can say, then, that the "striking" permitted here is not impulsive hitting in response to anger, nor is it a "beating" or any form of injurious action against the wife. Even the earliest traditional Islamic commentators read this passage as a limit rather than a license, unanimously stating that this striking must be done without violence or intensity and without leaving any kind of mark.[17] Furthermore, some contemporary Muslim scholars and authorities have argued that the Arabic word usually translated "hit" or "strike" should be interpreted differently and that it perhaps means simply to go away from one's wife.[18]

If the Quran lays out what some would identify as a "patriarchal" model for marriage, it also takes significant steps—almost unheard of in its time—to alleviate some of patriarchy's common abuses and to ameliorate the position of women in the family and society. For example, although Islam allowed polygamy, already a widespread practice in pre-Islamic Arabia and the ancient world in general, it imposed new limits on its exercise. In the first place, it is worth noting that the one passage of the Quran that endorses polygamy does so explicitly as a means of alleviating the potential abuse of orphan girls:

> *Give orphans their property, and exchange not the bad for the good, nor consume their property with your own. Truly that would be a great sin. If you fear that you will not deal fairly with the orphans,*[19] *then marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, or four; but if you fear that you will not deal justly, then only one, or those whom your right hands possess.*[20] *Thus it is more likely that you will not commit injustice.* (4:2–3)

It is clear that the Quran's explicit and primary concern here is not the gratification of male desires or providing a solution other than divorce for men already married to an incapacitated or infertile wife (reasons cited elsewhere as practical justifications for polygamy), but rather the just treatment of orphan women and girls in particular. Even after citing this reason, the passage goes on to state that, should a man feel he may be "unable to deal justly" with more than one wife, he should remain monogamous, for

17. See Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl al-ᶜAṭṭār, 30 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 5:96–98.

18. For an overview of the opinions of some contemporary Muslim scholars on this issue, see Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence in the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law, and the Muslim Discourse on Gender* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 188–202.

19. Although the gender of the orphans is not explicit in the text, the context makes it clear that the Quran is speaking about orphan girls.

20. "What the right hand possesses" is a common Arabic phrase meaning either slaves or captives.

that is "more likely to prevent" injustice. It is thus the principles of justice and concern for the weaker members of society (here, orphan girls) that are explicitly cited in this verse as the rationale for the Quranic endorsement of polygamy. Both the limit of four placed upon the number of wives a man could marry and the injunction to treat them equally (a principle that became actionable under Islamic Law) represent important restrictions and conditions placed upon the practice as it had previously been known.

Perhaps the most revolutionary social principle introduced by the Quran was the notion of women's right to property—that is, their right, upon legal maturity, to own and to dispose of property independently of either their husbands or their male relatives. The Quran establishes women's right to property through the institutions of both marital dowry and inheritance.[21] The Quran specifies in numerous places that a man must pay his wife a mandatory bridal gift upon the contraction of their marriage and that this must be a *free gift* that cannot be alienated from her against her will (4:4); nor can it be taken from her after a divorce or after she has been widowed, except in cases where she has criminally violated her marital obligations through adultery (4:19). The passage continues:

> *If you desire to take one wife in place of another, even if you have given to one of them a great sum, take back nothing from it. Would you take it by way of calumny and manifest sin? And how can you take it back, when you have lain with one another and they have made with you a solemn covenant?* (4:20–21)

Even in cases where a marriage is called off before a contract has been established, the Quran enjoins men to provide something for the women they had intended to marry (2:236). The dowry therefore functions in the Quranic context quite differently than it does in other religious cultures, such as the Hindu and the medieval Christian, in which it was the woman's family who had to pay a dowry to the groom on behalf of their daughter. Some have dismissed the Islamic institution of the dowry as a "bride price," with the demeaning suggestion that women themselves are "purchased," but it is clear that the dowry was meant to function as an important economic protection for a woman in the event of either widowhood or divorce—circumstances to which and in which women were more vulnerable than men. Not only might the dowry, if large enough, provide the woman with an independent source of wealth—the Quran indicates that she may leverage this wealth as a means of securing a divorce from her husband, should he be otherwise unwilling to grant her one (2:229; 4:128).

The second fundamental way in which the Quran establishes a woman's right to property is through the inheritance laws set out clearly in *Sūrah* 4 of the Quran. The idea that women necessarily inherit from their deceased relatives, along with

21. Islamic Law establishes that a woman's right to property extends beyond dowry and inheritance to all of her personal property—including that acquired through earnings from her own labor or business enterprise, even if the Quran does not address these issues directly.

men—even if they inherit half the share of male relatives who enjoy an equal degree of relationship to the deceased—was radical. One passage of the Quran suggests that in the pre-Islamic Arabian context, women were themselves sometimes "inherited," rather than being heirs themselves (4:19). If this were so, it would be similar to "levirate" marriage practiced historically in other tribal or clan-based cultures, including that of the ancient Israelites, whereby a woman's brother-in-law would "inherit" the wife of his deceased brother as a means of retaining the woman, her reproductive capacity, and perhaps also her wealth, within her deceased husband's extended family.[22] The Quran, however, forbids explicitly the practice of "inheriting women against their will" and makes it unlawful for a man or for the heirs of a deceased man to hinder his wife from remarrying after she is divorced or widowed in an effort to prevent the wealth she possesses through dowry or inheritance from becoming separated from her husband's extended family (4:19).[23]

In all of the Quranic stipulations about family and marital relations, it is clear that the Quran is concerned about upholding the traditionally hierarchical, but reciprocal, relationships of rights and responsibilities between parents and children and between husbands and wives, but also prohibiting unjust abuses of those relationships of authority and attempting to curtail the hardships that those relationships sometimes entail—especially for those most vulnerable, such as women and young children. Although it lays upon men both greater responsibilities and greater rights in certain aspects of family life, the Quran does not permit either the absolute control of a father over his child or that of a husband over his wife, as earlier, pre-Islamic forms of patriarchy found in Arabia and many other cultures had done, and insists repeatedly that relations between family members must be carried out with the utmost respect and concern for all members.

## *Economic Justice*

When we move outside the family unit to examine the Quranic teachings on social relations among the *ummah* at large, we see that chief among its ethical concerns is the principle of economic justice. The Quran does not mandate economic equality or the forced division of wealth equally among all—the existence of rich and poor within society is presented as a matter of Divine Providence (16:71), and the respect for individual property and mercantile activity is found throughout the Quran—but it does ordain economic justice. The Quran is concerned that all members of society be provided for and granted justice regardless of their socioeconomic status, that there

22. The Hebrew Bible mentions levirate marriage as an obligation upon the deceased's brother only in the case where the deceased has no male issue; see Leviticus 18:16; 20:21; Deuteronomy 25:56. Later Talmudic tradition, however, looked unfavorably on this practice and revised the Torah prescription in this matter.

23. This is one meaning of 4:19; the other is that husbands should not harass their wives in an effort to get them to relinquish part of their dowry or property to them. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān,* 4:408–10.

be a distribution of wealth throughout society via various religious taxes and forms of charity, and that the wealth that is obtained in varying degrees by individuals be earned through legitimate and fair rather than predatory or exploitative means.

The provision for the poorer and weaker members of society is one of the central themes of the earliest verses of the Quran—the verses that Muhammad received in Makkah. In these verses, caring for orphans, widows, and the needy is established as a religious obligation for which all Muslims are responsible before God; the neglect of this obligation is considered a prideful sin that will have harsh consequences on the Day of Judgment.[24] Numerous Quranic verses establish the *zakāh,* or alms, as a mandatory form of charity incumbent on each believer as one of the pillars of religious practice—in fact, it is second only to prayer as one of the most important ritual acts Muslims must perform.[25]

The word *zakāh* comes from a root in Arabic that means both "to purify" and "to increase." Islamic Law considers the payment of *zakāh* to "purify" one's wealth as a whole, thereby rendering the balance legitimate for the expenditure and enjoyment of its owner. In addition to the mandatory *zakāh,* voluntary charity in a variety of forms is continuously enjoined in the Quran, which repeatedly encourages believers to spend in the way of God the good things they have been given (see, e.g., 2:265; 3:134).[26] It is not simply the act of charity, but also the intention and attitude toward charity that determines its spiritual merit. Believers are encouraged to give for the sake of God, rather than *to be seen of men* (2:265; 4:38; 76:8–10), and to give of the good things that they hold dear (3:92). The Quran criticizes those who give begrudgingly or regard their charitable donations as *a loss* (9:98; see also 9:53–54).

Orphans are a matter of particular concern for the Quran, and caring for orphans is presented as an important mode of charity. The Quran instructs believers to make use of their own wealth to provide for the orphans in their care, while holding in trust and not pilfering whatever inheritance the orphaned children may possess.[27] Furthermore, the Quran stipulates that Muhammad's (and, later, the Islamic government's) share of all gains acquired in warfare should go in part to providing for the needy

24. See, e.g., 69:33–37; 74:43–47; 76:8–10; 89:17–20; 107:1–7.

25. See 2:43, 110, 277; 4:77, 162; 5:55; 9:5, 11, 18, 71; 22:41, 78; 24:56; 27:3; 31:4; 33:33; 73:20; 98:5. This is also enjoined for the Jews as an obligation second only to prayer (see 2:83; 5:12) and for Abraham's sons (21:73). Other Quranic passages do not mention the *zakāh* specifically, but enjoin believers to "spend of what God has given them" as an obligation second to prayer; see 2:3; 8:3; 13:22; 14:31; 22:35.

26. Voluntary charity as an attitude and practice can be witnessed throughout the Islamic world and is particularly in evidence during the sacred month of Ramadan and during the ʿĪd festivals that follow both the fast of Ramadan (*ʿīd al-fiṭr*) and the *ḥajj,* or pilgrimage (*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*).

27. The Quran recommends caring for orphans out of one's own wealth, if possible, leaving the orphan's own wealth untouched, and turning it over to the orphan upon legal maturity. However, in cases where those caring for an orphan do not have the means to support him or her out of their own wealth, they may take a reasonable and just amount from the orphan's own wealth for that purpose. See 4:2–6; 6:152; 17:34.

members of society (8:41)—thereby making provision for the poor an obligation upon the Islamic state as an institution as well as upon each individual believer.

The Quran is also insistent upon the virtuous management and use of wealth. As in so many things, believers are instructed to handle their wealth with moderation, neither hoarding it greedily and anxiously, nor squandering it with prodigality.[28] Wealth spent wisely and virtuously for charity and the good of others is described as bringing one true "profit"[29] in this world and the next; it is the *commerce that will never perish* (35:29) and a source of spiritual growth (92:17–21).[30]

In addition to the "spiritual investment" of wealth in the form of charity, the Quran also endorses the use of wealth in worldly commerce, but insists repeatedly on the maintenance of fair trade practices. Muslim merchants are instructed to be scrupulous in their "weights and measurements" (26:181–83; 55:7–9; 83:1–3), so that no injustice is done to any buyer or seller, and to write down and enlist witnesses to all financial contracts and agreements (2:282–83) in order to prevent both fraudulent activity and bad relations between business associates. Believers are warned against consuming the wealth of others "wrongfully" or using wealth for fraudulent purposes (4:29),[31] such as bribery (2:188).

Perhaps most important, the Quran forbids the practice of usury,[32] that is, the predatory taking of interest by individuals on loans without risk of loss, which in effect makes the wealthy members of society wealthier on account of their wealth and the poor poorer on account of their poverty. The Quran rejects out of hand those who would argue that usury is a legitimate means of acquiring wealth (2:275–76). It is charitable spending (*zakāh*), not usury, that brings true profit (30:38–39). Muslims are encouraged to lend their money freely to those in need, granting them ample time to repay the debt or else forgiving it as a means of charity (2:278–80). By prohibiting predatory economic practices, especially usury, the Quran ensures that although rich and poor will always exist in society, the economic divide between the two never becomes excessive and unbreachable. At the same time, the mandatory alms it ordains and the voluntary charity it strongly encourages are meant to ensure that wealth circulates within the community and that no one is left without some provision.

The Quran also provides for the redistribution of wealth through the regulation of inheritance and provides detailed and explicit instructions about the proper dis-

28. See 3:180; 4:37; 17:26–30; 25:67; 90:6–7; 104:1–4.

29. The description of charity as a form of deriving "profit" from one's wealth was an image that would have been especially salient for the Arabs of Makkah who made their living through the profitable investment of wealth.

30. The Arabic word used here is *tazakkā*, which is from the same root as *zakāh*, or mandatory charity, and which means both "to purify" and "to grow or increase."

31. According to traditional commentators, 4:29 represented a prohibition against any wrongful or vain consumption or acquisition of wealth through gambling, usury, or other legally forbidden activities.

32. See 2:275–76, 278–80; 3:130. The Quran also mentions that the Jews were likewise forbidden usury; see 4:161.

posal of wealth upon death. As noted above, the Quran mandates that both men and women related to the deceased be included among the heirs, and that the amounts received be both proportional to their relationship to the deceased and proportionally equal among those enjoying an equal degree of kinship. Parents, spouses, children, and in some cases siblings all receive a stipulated share, and Muslims may not favor in matters of inheritance any particular relative, child, or sibling over others (4:11–12). Aside from preventing potentially bitter disputes among heirs, the system of inheritance laid out in the Quran also serves the function of dividing an individual's amassed wealth—which in some cases might be considerable—into many smaller shares, thereby preventing the excessive accumulation of wealth in a few hands over many generations,[33] a frequent result of the alternate system of primogeniture.

From a spiritual rather than a purely social perspective, the fact that a deceased Muslim's wealth must be disposed of according to Divine mandate, rather than only according to the will of the deceased,[34] reinforces the notion that all wealth belongs to God, as emphasized in 47:38: *God is the Rich, and you are the poor.* By submitting one's wealth to Divinely mandated laws of inheritance, one acknowledges, in effect, that God merely "takes back" the wealth He has granted an individual in life and redistributes it according to His Will—for as the Quran states in multiple places, all possession (*mulk*) belongs ultimately to God,[35] and so to Him all things rightfully return (57:5).

## *Proper Social Behavior*

As a community of believers, the *ummah* is enjoined by the Quran to engage in and promote a range of behaviors designed to reflect and facilitate the moral and spiritual integrity of its members as well as the harmony of the community as a whole. We have already mentioned the Quranic instruction to "enjoin right and forbid wrong" and the Quranic exhortation to respectful behavior and peacemaking among the believers. There are, moreover, other general behaviors ordained or encouraged by the Quran that should be mentioned as contributing to these larger goals.

### MODESTY

One stipulation concerns modesty of behavior and dress. As noted above, the integrity of family life and the sanctity of marriage are essential to the Quranic conception of the believing and righteous society. Sexual relations and even sexual temptation

33. Islamic Law developed the institution of the *waqf,* or donation of one's entire estate or parts thereof for the establishment of a charitable foundation. In some cases a portion of the proceeds from the foundation were given to family members, but such a foundation, by definition, had to serve a larger public service, and *waqf*s were frequently used to establish schools, hospitals, and other public facilities.

34. The Quranic laws of inheritance allow for certain voluntary bequests of property prior to the division of the inheritance among relatives. Islamic Law typically limits the amount of wealth individuals may bequeath of their own will to one-third of the entire estate.

35. See, e.g., 2:107; 3:189; 5:17–18, 120; 22:56; 24:42; 67:1.

outside the boundaries of legitimate marriage or domestic arrangements are considered destabilizing to society and dangerous to the morality of individuals. For this reason, the Quran requires modest behavior and dress for both men and women in their encounters with those outside their immediate family, although the requirements for women are more detailed and extensive:

> *Tell the believing men to lower their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely God is Aware of whatsoever they do. And tell the believing women to lower their eyes and to guard their private parts, and to not display their adornment except that which is visible thereof. And let them draw their kerchiefs over their breasts, and not display their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of desire, or children who are innocent of the private areas of women. Nor let them stamp their feet such that the ornaments they conceal become known.* (24:30–31)

Both men and women are told to *lower their eyes* to avoid breaching the modesty of others, on the one hand, and to *guard their private parts* to preserve their own modesty, on the other.[36] Although the requirements of modesty for women involve more explicit restrictions, the description of female modesty provided here is broad enough to have permitted a variety of interpretations of appropriate female dress in different geographical and climatic regions and cultural zones as well as over time. In another passage, believing women are told to *draw their cloaks over themselves. Thus is it likelier that they will be known and not be disturbed* (33:59). Here the particular concern of the Quran in commanding modest dress for women is their own protection, comfort, and freedom from unwanted male attention.[37] At the same time, adornment within the confines of modesty is not prohibited for Muslims and is indeed presented as one of the blessings of God to humanity (7:26). Yet the Quran reminds its readers that the metaphorical garment of pious behavior is the best adornment and that in dress, as in all things (25:67), they should be neither overly ascetic nor excessive and wasteful (7:31–32).

### TEMPERANCE

As is well known, the Quran also bans the consumption of alcoholic beverages and gambling from Islamic social life. Although an early verse of the Quran extols the drink

36. In other places, guarding one's private parts is considered a sign of faithfulness among both men and women (see 23:5; 70:29).

37. It should be noted that the Quran prescribes stricter forms of veiling and seclusion for the wives of the Prophet, explicitly because of their unique status. See 33:32–33, 53.

made from *the date palm and the vine* as a *goodly provision* from God (16:67), the Quran gradually, over the course of its revelation, eliminated the drinking of wine (and Muslims understand this to mean all intoxicating substances) from the lives of believers. Muslims are advised that they must not engage in prayer while they are intoxicated (4:43)—an injunction that would by itself significantly limit alcohol consumption, considering that prayer is performed five times a day. A later verse (2:219) states that although both wine and gambling may bring people some benefits, *their sin is greater than their benefit.* Finally, both the drinking of wine and gambling are identified as *a means of defilement of Satan's doing* designed to *sow enmity and hatred* among the believers and to *turn* them *away from the remembrance of God, and from prayer* (5:90–91); so they must be avoided completely. Thus the final and absolute prohibition on drinking and gambling is enjoined for the dual purpose of maintaining harmony within the community and promoting the spiritual development of individual believers.[38]

## ETIQUETTE OF SPEECH AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

As a final point, we should note that although direct Quranic mandates concerning social and family life, economic practices, dress, and other issues often receive the most attention, the Quran has influenced basic conceptions of ethics and social behavior in ways that are more subtle, but certainly just as profound, if not more so. If one visits an Islamic country, one may be struck by the frequency with which the Name of God and an articulated recognition of His Presence can be heard—not only in mosques and religious gatherings, but in the marketplace, on the street, in informal social gatherings, and in everyday language. Quranic phrases such as *al-ḥamdu li'Llāh* ("Thanks be to God"), *mā shā'a'Llāh* ("As God has willed"), and *in shā'a'Llāh* ("If God wills")—which acknowledge God's Volition in past, present, and future occurrences, respectively—are heard repeatedly in every form of social interaction. The Quran praises those who, upon learning of a death or disaster, say, *innā li'Llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rāji'ūn* (*Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return*, 2:156); this formula, which provides both comfort and spiritual awareness in the face of life's most painful circumstances, is widely used throughout all segments of Islamic society. The frequent and sometimes casual repetition of these phrases in Islamic society may seem merely conventional in some cases, but they nonetheless reflect a collective sense of God's constant Presence—not just in prayer, but in everyday settings.

38. Although each of these verses appears to assign a different legal status to the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the verse revealed latest in Muhammad's prophetic career is considered to abrogate the legal rulings or implications of the earlier verses (although not the Divine status of those verses themselves). The recognition and identification of abrogating and abrogated verses became one of the most important procedures used by Muslim legal scholars to derive Islamic Law from the Quran. Muslim legal scholars have traditionally understood the different verses concerning alcohol consumption to represent a process of progressive limitation through which the Quran was able to "wean" the fledgling Islamic community gradually from alcoholic beverages entirely.

In addition to recognizing God's Presence and Volition in daily life, Muslims are also encouraged to speak and behave in ways that acknowledge the spiritual and human dignity of others. For example, the greeting *Peace be upon you* (6:54) is recommended among believers, and they are told that whenever they are offered a greeting, they should *respond with a greeting that is better* (4:86)—that is, one that expresses even more respect or goodwill than the one they had been given.[39] They are instructed in multiple places not only to guard their own privacy, but to respect that of others (2:189; 24:27–29, 58–59; 33:53), to behave humbly (25:63; 31:17–19; 58:11), to speak softly and with modesty (31:19), to abstain from all vain talk (23:3; 25:72), and to avoid, specifically, defamation, insult, suspicion, gossip, and "secret" talk with ill intent (49:11–12; 58:9–10). All of these behaviors described above fall into a category Muslims usually refer to as *adab* (proper comportment and manners in relation to others). They constitute an essential part of Islamic social ethics and can be summarized in the general notion that Muslims are required to preserve both their own honor and dignity and those of fellow believers and in fact others in general.

## *Conclusion*

As we have aimed to demonstrate, all social ethics, rights, and responsibilities mandated or recommended in the Quran can be related to the five general principles laid out at the beginning of this essay: the significance of the religious community, the concern for justice, the maintenance of social harmony, human equality before God, and the balancing of rights and responsibilities. Although many Westerners may disagree with either these founding principles or their application in specific Quranic injunctions, it is important to understand Islamic social ethics in the context of the Quran's own spiritual perspective and with an appreciation for the larger spiritual and moral goals that are the Quran's primary concern. In the Quran, and therefore in Islamic ethics generally, society does not exist merely to serve the individual or as a necessary evil needed to provide for human survival in a harsh and dangerous world. Rather, Islamic society is viewed as a "community of believers" who not only aid and support one another in spiritual growth, but who should also reflect and remind the believers of the paradisal community of saved souls described in the Quran—a community near to God, among which one hears only greetings of peace and gentle conversation (19:62), and where the delights and comforts of the paradisal Garden are enjoyed with a constant awareness of their spiritual source.

39. For example, if Muslims offer fellow Muslims the greeting "Peace be upon you," it is not uncommon that they would be offered in reply the lengthier greeting "And upon you be peace, and the mercy and blessing of God!"

# CONQUEST AND CONVERSION, WAR AND PEACE IN THE QURAN

Caner K. Dagli

Beginning with the persecution of the early Muslim community by the idolatrous Quraysh, leading to exile in Abyssinia for some Muslims and followed by the emigration (*hijrah*) of many Muslims along with the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah, the subsequent military encounters with the Quraysh and their allies, and the final conquest of Arabia, the Prophet Muhammad encountered circumstances demanding that, in addition to his function as teacher and guide, he fulfill the role of military commander and head of state. From almost the very beginning of the Prophet's career, Muslims had to come to terms with the question of the use of force, whether they were its victims or its agents, and as a comprehensive legal tradition, Islamic Law could not have remained silent on the question of war and peace.

When discussing this subject, the use of the term *jihād* deserves special attention from the outset, as it has become deformed and misunderstood in much contemporary discourse. Linguistically *jihād* means "struggle," "striving," or "exertion," though it is commonly and incorrectly translated "holy war" (a term originating in the Western tradition in the context of intra-Christian conflicts); in Arabic "holy war" would be equivalent to the term *al-ḥarb al-muqaddasah,* which does not exist in classical Arabic. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, *jihād* means any struggle "in the way of God," that is, in order to obey His Commands or accomplish His Will, which includes but is not limited to the just use of force.

Even though in the Quran and *Ḥadīth jihād* is an idea comprising both the spiritual and the material, the inward and outward domains (often referred to as the "Greater Jihād" and the "Lesser Jihād," respectively), in works of Islamic Law the word *jihād* as a technical term came to be understood as a reference to the taking up of arms "in the way of God," though governed by strict rules that have counterparts in the Western concept of "just war." That is to say, there is a distinction to be made between the word *jihād* as it is used in the Quran and the same term in the later legal tradition, much the same way the word *fiqh* and its cognates in the Quran refer to "understanding" in a general sense, but as technical terms came to refer later to

law and jurisprudence. It is thus not infrequent that a chapter in a classical text on the virtues of taking up arms in the way of God will have the word *jihād* as part of its title, but *jihād* is also frequently used in Sufi texts to refer to the struggle in the spiritual life against one's lower desires.

Like many important terms, *jihād* is equivocal; that is, its connotations can change depending on context: a *jihād* against one's persecutors is not the same as a *jihād* against one's passions. In fact, *jihād* has entered common English usage in a way almost indistinguishable from the word "crusade," a term of purely Western origin with a similarly diverse history and a similar capacity to be misunderstood and misapplied. Muslims in an Islamic context could have used the word *jihād* and expected their audience to understand its constituent elements, whether these were the laws governing fighting an external threat or the spiritual techniques used to purify the soul and bring it closer to God. However, the simple use of *jihād* as a way of describing what Muslims believe about conquest, conversion, and violence is worse than meaningless in an intellectual and cultural environment in which specifics regarding such questions need to be spelled out with the utmost precision and care, rather than masked under catchall terms that are useful only in a context where their meaning is well known and generally agreed upon.

To understand the Quran's use of *jihād,* it is necessary to recall that for many years, during the period in which the Prophet preached in his hometown of Makkah, Muslims were forbidden to respond with force to the persecution, suppression, embargoes, and even deaths that they endured. Yet even during this period Muslims were commanded by the Quran to "strive" (*jihād*): *So obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them by means of it with a great striving* (25:52); *Then indeed thy Lord, for those who emigrated after being oppressed, then strove and were patient, surely thy Lord thereafter is Forgiving, Merciful* (16:110). The Prophet himself also taught the virtues of nonviolent forms of struggle, saying, "The best struggle (*jihād*) is to speak the truth before a tyrannical ruler."[1] To a group returning from a battle he said, "You have returned from the lesser struggle (*jihād*) to the greater struggle,"[2] which most Muslims have understood to mean returning from physical fighting to resume struggling to gain perfection on the spiritual path. He also said, "Shall I tell you of your best deed, the most pleasing to your King, the loftiest in your ranks, better than the giving of gold and silver, and better than meeting your enemy in battle, beheading him whilst he beheads you? The remembrance of God."[3]

1. Al-Nasāʾī 40.37 (no. 4226); Ibn Mājah 37.20 (no. 4148). See also Abū Dāwūd 38.17 (no. 4346); al-Tirmidhī 29.13 (no. 2329).

2. Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-zuhd al-kabīr,* ed. ʿĀmir Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1996), 165 (no. 373); al-Bayhaqī says, however, that the *isnād* is weak.

3. Al-Tirmidhī 44.6 (no. 3704); Ibn Mājah 34.53 (no. 3922); Mālik 15.7 (no. 496).

## *The Use of Force*

After the emigration from Makkah to Madinah, Muslims were given permission to engage in battle against those who threatened the nascent Islamic community, and most jurists consider the first verses allowing the taking up of arms to be the following:

> *Truly God defends those who believe. Truly God loves not any ungrateful traitor. Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged—and truly God is able to help them—who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, "Our Lord is God." Were it not for God's repelling people, some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein God's Name is mentioned much, would have been destroyed. And God will surely help those who help Him—truly God is Strong, Mighty—who, were We to establish them upon the earth, would perform the prayer, give the alms, and enjoin right and forbid wrong. And unto God is the end of all affairs.* (22:38–41)

Three points are of special significance in connection with this passage. First, the purpose of force (*repelling some by means of others*) is ultimately the maintenance of religion (the remembrance of *God's Name* in houses of worship). Second, this protection is not limited to Muslims, but extends to churches, synagogues, and monasteries, meaning that God acts to preserve authentic religion as such. Third, the use of force by Muslims is framed as a defensive action in response to wrongs committed offensively against them.

Among the key Quranic verses pertaining to war and physical conflict are 2:190–94, 216–17, 244, 256; 3:116–56; 4:75; 5:13; 8:5, 38–39, 61; 9:1–15, 29, 111; 10:109; 22:39–40, 52; 42:40; 47:4; 60:8–9, though there are others. These verses merit careful reading in full and in their proper context, and readers are encouraged to explore the commentary in this volume on these passages. They outline the conditions under which Muslims may engage in battle and the reasons for which they are allowed to fight: because they *have been wronged* and *expelled from their homes* (22:39–40); because they have been persecuted, which is seen as *graver than slaying,* and threatened in order to make them *renounce* their *religion* (2:217). Under these conditions, they are commanded to fight and even kill their enemies, and yet *if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers* (2:193) and *what is past will be forgiven them* (8:38). Moreover, it is important to remember that the relevant passages regarding the use of force are not limited to those that describe fighting or contain specific commands and prohibitions regarding war and conflict. The moral landscape of the Quran is unambiguously against religious persecution and military aggression and in favor of justice and forgiveness as well as restraint, and one cannot consider the rules and justifications for the use of force without consideration of the Quran's general view of other religions and its overall social teachings.

## *Coercion in Matters of Religion*

In order to understand whether and how the use of force can be applied in religious matters, one can begin by examining verses that outline the scope of the Prophet's mission, such as 42:48: *And if they turn away, We sent thee not as a keeper over them. Naught is incumbent upon thee, save the proclamation.* Similar verses include 88:21–23; 13:40; and 5:92. Some of these passages are Madinan, which means that they were revealed after permission was given to the Muslim community by God to struggle with and confront the enemy through force of arms when necessary. Another such verse is, *There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error* (2:256). This verse was directed at Muslims who wanted to convert their children from Judaism or Christianity to Islam or, according to another interpretation, at those who sought pardon for their children who continued to live among a Jewish tribe that was exiled for planning to assassinate the Prophet. According to the first interpretation, one cannot be coerced into becoming a Muslim, and according to the second, one cannot be coerced into remaining non-Muslim, meaning that those children of Muslims who chose to remain with the enemies of Muslims did so of their own free will.

These passages are in a seeming tension with a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet stating, "I have been commanded to fight the people until they bear witness that there is no god but God and Muhammad is God's Messenger, perform the prayer, and pay the alms. When they have done this, their blood and property are safe from me, except by the right of Islam and their reckoning with God."[4] This *ḥadīth* raises questions regarding those to whom the word "people" in the *ḥadīth* refers, why they are to be fought, and whether it means that Islam should be spread by force.

The vast majority of the scholars of Quranic exegesis and Islamic Law have always held that the command to preach peacefully and to never coerce anyone in their choice of religion—a message found throughout the Quran—was never changed and continued to hold sway through the end of the Prophet's life and after and still holds true today. For the majority of traditional scholars, the maximum possible scope for "the people" in the aforementioned *ḥadīth* is limited to those with whom the Prophet was engaged in conflict at the time, meaning that "the people" does not refer to all people everywhere but was limited strictly to the pagan Arabs who had been his unrelenting enemies and persecutors. Also, the verb "to fight" (*qātala*) in Arabic implies that one is in mutual contention with someone, not in a mode of aggression.

Questions also arise in connection with the so-called Sword Verse, 9:5: *When the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer and give the alms, then let them go their way. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful.* The following verse reads: *And if any of the idolaters seek asylum with*

4. Al-Bukhārī 2.17 (no. 25); Muslim 2.10 (no. 138).

*thee, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of God. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who know not* (9:6). This second verse commands Muslims to receive idolaters if they seek asylum, to preach the truth to them, and then to let them go safely. It sets no condition that they repent and accept Islam. Some have posited, without much support in the principles of exegesis, that the second verse is abrogated by the first, meaning that the legally binding nature of 9:5 overturns that of 9:6. However, a straightforward reading shows that becoming Muslims is not a condition for the asylum seekers' safe return. Rather, these two verses present not one, but *two* possibilities for non-Muslims to escape armed conflict with the Muslim community: the first is to accept Islam, as mentioned in the first verse, and the second is to seek asylum with Muslims, as mentioned in the second verse. Moreover, as mentioned in connection with some of the verses cited earlier, this passage was interpreted traditionally as pertaining only to Arabia and not to the whole world.

The invocation of "abrogation" as it concerns passages relating to the use of force is a persistent issue in Quranic commentary. Some jurists tend to uphold the opinion that verses permissive of conflict "abrogate" or cancel the binding force of those verses that discourage or limit it, in extreme cases (as in 9:5) holding that a verse abrogates the one immediately following it in the text. Because of the consequential nature of verses related to the use of force, it is worth remembering that in almost all cases abrogation is a contested matter. Most jurists accept that abrogation exists in the Quran, but there is a wide range of opinion as to its scope and application (see 2:106c).

## *Treaties and Treaty Peoples*

Treaties are an important dimension of Islamic Law as they pertain to war and peace. From the time he took political power in Madinah until his death, the Prophet entered into treaties with several tribes on the Arabian Peninsula, among them Jewish tribes such as Banū Qurayẓah and also the polytheistic Quraysh. Among the key verses dealing with treaties are 8:56–61 and 9:7–16, beginning with 9:7: *If they remain true to you, remain true to them. Truly God loves the reverent.* Observing established treaties with non-Muslim polytheists meant that the Muslim community was willing, and indeed commanded, to live in a state of peace with its neighbors regardless of their religion. When Muslims were commanded to fight those who broke their treaties, the reason inviting retaliation was the resulting threat to the Islamic community and not the identity of the treaty breakers.

Moreover, the Quran does not allow Muslims to wage war on those who pose no threat at all: *Had God willed, He could have given them authority over you, and then surely they would have fought you. So if they withdraw from you, and do not fight you, and offer peace, God allows you no way against them* (4:90); and, *If they incline toward peace, incline thou toward it, and trust in God* (8:61). In some cases, such as the surprise attack at Khaybar and the campaigns of Mu'tah and Tabūk, the Prophet and

his Companions set out in an offensive posture, attacking first. However, these were not instances of aggression, but what modern international law might call preemptive (not "preventive") self-defense. In the case of Khaybar, the Prophet was taking action against a tribe that was secretly plotting to attack the Muslims. In the case of Mu'tah, an emissary of the Prophet was killed by tribes to the north who were under the protection of the Byzantines, and in the campaign of Tabūk the Muslims took to the field based on information that the Byzantines were planning attacks of their own.

Indeed, the Arabic saying, "When the Byzantines are not campaigned against, they campaign," describes the state of much of the world before the UN Charter, the Nuremberg Principles, and the Geneva Conventions, and in many cases after these agreements as well. Maintaining security was often a matter of active defense to maintain boundaries, and in the absence of an explicit treaty one group could not expect to be left alone if it left others to prepare to attack. Borders were not established facts of international agreement, but rather were usually determined by how much territory one group could effectively defend. Conquest as such was not seen as an international crime (indeed, there was no such concept in premodern history), and until the last century war was seen as a legitimate instrument of national policy.

In their wake Muslim armies left large portions of the lands they conquered predominantly non-Muslim for decades or even centuries, as we see in the cases of Syria and Persia, since the expansion of Islamic rule did not require the expansion of the Muslim population. Indeed, on occasion Christians fought alongside Muslims during the early conquests, and Jews fought alongside Muslims in Andalusia. Moreover, most of the Islamic world was never conquered at all, but became Muslim through the example of saintly figures, preaching, or simple contact with pious Muslim merchants. Had Muslims desired to convert populations by force or expel them, the Christian and Jewish communities that have historically lived in the Islamic world and continue to do so until the present day would not exist. A better example of "religious" conquest would be the Christian conquest of southern Spain in 1492, after which not a single active mosque or Muslim community was allowed to exist in Spain until the latter part of the fourteenth/twentieth century.

In Islamic Law, the People of the Book (usually Jews and Christians, but in practice also Zoroastrians, Hindus, and others) who live under the political rule of Muslims are called *ahl al-dhimmah,* literally "people of treaty." Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which a given people may be considered *dhimmī*s, or "treaty people." In one case, *dhimmī*s live among the Muslim population and share the same streets, markets, and neighborhoods. In the second case, *dhimmī*s live in a separate area and run most of their own affairs. Naturally there are variations that lie between these two categories, but these are the two general types. Crucial to understanding these arrangements is the fact that a treaty people were not just a religious community, but constituted a political and legal unit in relation to the Muslim community.

In the first case, *dhimmī*s live under the laws and within the framework provided by the Islamic state, but with complete autonomy with regard to their religious and

cultural matters such as education and family law. The protected people are not required to contribute to the military protection of the state, but are subject instead to an "indemnity," or a tax specific to them, most commonly known as the *jizyah,* but it has other names as well (*dhimmīs* do not pay the Islamic alms, or *zakāh,* which is required of Muslims). This common arrangement lasted in many parts of the Islamic world, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, until the fourteenth/twentieth century. Historically other rules were imposed on the treaty peoples, such as a prohibition against missionary activity and limits on the construction of new houses of worship.

In the second case, the *dhimmī* state agrees to exist in peace with the Islamic state and not help or support any enemy of Islam. Examples of this include the Prophet's arrangement with the people of Bahrain, who were Zoroastrians, and with the Christians of Najran. Under such an arrangement, the people remain completely autonomous and run their own affairs. They remain under the protection of the Islamic state, with no responsibility to provide active protection in return. The Islamic state has no right to any of their wealth or property except for the *jizyah,* or "indemnity." These kinds of agreements were commonplace during the early conquests and even later in Islamic history.

The verse that institutes the *jizyah* is 9:29: *Fight those who believe not in God and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and who follow not the Religion of Truth among those who were given the Book, till they pay the* jizyah *with a willing hand, being humbled.* The phrase *being humbled* (*wa-hum ṣāghirūn*), which can also mean "in a state of humility or lowness," has been interpreted and applied in more than one way; some take it to mean simply "as the minor or subject party," and others restrict the reference to those from whom Muslims had experienced prior hostility and enmity. Indeed, some commentators note that this verse does not seem to describe all People of the Book, though most jurists have interpreted it to apply to the People of the Book generally when they enter into a treaty relationship with a Muslim state. In Islamic history some rulers have enforced a kind of humiliation to accompany the paying of the *jizyah* by the *dhimmī* communities, but in doing so they have generally gone against the most established Islamic precedent and legal opinion. Neither the Prophet nor the early Caliphs humiliated *dhimmīs* during the payment of the *jizyah;* sometimes they allowed it to be called "charity" and always required that it be collected with gentleness.

Modern observers looking at the institutions of *dhimmah* and *jizyah* often interpret them through the prism of familiar concepts of citizenship and civil society, but since a religious community in Islamic Law delineated historically a political community as well (as it did in the Ottoman Empire, for example), the historical virtues and abuses of such institutions are more properly judged according to an idea of multiple religio-political communities occupying the same geographic space. Although *dhimmīs* paid an indemnity (*jizyah*), they were not required to serve in the armed forces, and although there were limits placed on their ability to expand and preach to those outside their communities, they were granted significant autonomy to run

their own affairs. The rules on the treatment of Jews and Christians (which extended in practice to other religions as well) are often seen as placing a limit on some of their rights, but it should be recalled that, in establishing a maximum, Islamic Law also established a minimum. Whatever transactional limitations the treaty peoples experienced, embracing Islam under threat of force was rare in Islamic history and has no warrant in the Quran with the exception of the pagan Arabs of the Prophet's time, who, in the view of most jurists, were not given the option of becoming a treaty people.

## *The Conduct of War*

Islamic Law, basing itself on the Quran and *Ḥadīth,* devotes considerable attention to the conduct of war. Its principles are based upon such texts as 2:190: *And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Truly God loves not the transgressors;* and a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet said, "Do not kill weak old men, small children, or women."[5] The canonical books of *Ḥadīth* record that when the Prophet dispatched his armies, he would command them to fight in the way of God, but not to act brutally, kill children, women, or old men, mutilate the dead, or mutilate animals. Many similar injunctions were given by the early Caliphs and were expanded upon in the formation of classical Islamic Law. Beyond the sparing of non-combatants, Muslims were explicitly ordered not to cut down fruit-bearing trees, kill animals except for the purposes of sustenance, harm monks and hermits, or go beyond certain bounds even in the case of combatants (mutilation, etc.). These commands, which also extend to the rights of animals and plants and the protection of the natural environment, are part of a binding law, not merely a theory of just war. Muslims are just as obliged to obey these prohibitions, in all conditions, as they are to refrain from wine and adultery.

## *Limits of Conquest*

Having surveyed questions regarding the legitimate use of force and its bearing on religious identity, we might consider the question of whether the Quran sanctions the use of force by Muslims against non-Muslims who pose no active, imminent, or even likely threat with the goal of asserting sovereignty over them. That is to say, does the Quran enjoin Muslims to attempt to gain political control over non-Muslims even while allowing them to remain non-Muslim as *ahl al-dhimmah,* or "people of treaty," and does it do so for no other reason than that they are non-Muslim? As described above, the Quran always frames the use of force in terms of moral principles, whether it be a response to expulsion, religious persecution, or threat of attack, not to mention

5. Abū Dāwūd 15.90 (no. 2616), Mālik 21.3 (no. 971). Similar *aḥādīth* are recorded in Muslim, al-Nasāʾī, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah.

basic self-defense. Why, then, did Muslims take control of territory beyond the Arabian Peninsula? Why should Muslims have set out to conquer more lands at all? A straightforward argument could be made in support of fighting to conquer Makkah, the town from which the Muslims had been forced to emigrate, and one could also justify the taking of the territory of other tribes who had previously allied with the Quraysh and consistently displayed hostility toward the Muslim community. But did the early Muslim community have the moral authority to conquer the remainder of Arabia? Byzantium? Persia?

The decades after the death of the Prophet were a tumultuous time, and on questions related to war and politics it is difficult to speak of a consensus in the Muslim community. However, there was an explicit sense among at least some in the early community that, when they fought, they were fighting not for hegemony and conquest for their own sake or to make the world's population Muslim, but for the survival of the religion itself. During one of the early civil wars, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, the son of the second Caliph, was asked why he was not fighting, and he said, "Son of my brother, Islam is built upon five things: belief in God and His Messenger, the five prayers, the fast of Ramadan, giving the alms, and performing the *ḥajj*." His interlocutor then quoted to him 49:9: *If two parties among the believers fall to fighting, make peace between them. And if one of them aggresses against the other, fight those who aggress until they return to God's Command. And if they return, make peace between them with justice and act equitably. Truly God loves the just.* ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar responded, "We did that during the time of the Prophet, when Islam was trifling, when a man would be tried regarding his religion, and they would either kill him or torture him. But then Islam became great, and there was no trial (*fitnah*)."

Though uttered in a specific context, this statement conditions the use of force on the prospect of the survival of the religion and the threat of extreme religious persecution to the point of forced conversion. The precariousness of the Muslims' situation in the early days is alluded to in such verses as 8:26: *And remember when you were few, deemed weak in the land, fearing that the people would snatch you away. Then He sheltered you, and strengthened you with His help, and provided you with good things, that haply you may give thanks.* The Quran also tells the believers not to be concerned about the fact that their enemies are *free to come and go in the land* (3:196; 40:4), while they are weak and live in a state of fear, because the final fate for disbelievers is Hell.

One could argue that to the Companions it was not at all obvious that Islam *as a religion* could survive if they did not take an active role in establishing a political, military, and cultural environment robust and resilient enough to protect it; in those early times the first generation pushed the borders of the Islamic political entity for fear that the spiritual message of Islam would not last long in the world if they did not do so. They did not live on an island. Despite the somewhat persistent notion that the Arabs lived in a land that was a backwater ignored by the civilizations around it,

Arabia, or at least the Ḥijāz, was very much connected to the rest of the ancient world, and the early Muslim community often felt the concrete threat of the Byzantines and Persians, through their Ghassanid and Lakhmid allies to the north, for example. (Recall the maxim mentioned earlier, "When the Byzantines are not campaigned against, they campaign.") In one incident a prominent opponent of the Prophet is recorded as having conspired with the Byzantines and as part of his plot built a mosque or place of prayer in Madinah known as the "mosque of harm," spoken of in 9:107: *And as for those who established a mosque for harm and disbelief, and to divide the believers, and to be an outpost for those who made war on God and His Messenger before, they will surely swear, "We desire only what is best." But God bears witness that truly they are liars.*

But does Islamic Law treat the entire world as hostile until conquered? The often invoked delineation between the "Abode of Islam" (*dār al-islām*) and the "Abode of War" (*dār al-ḥarb*), a terminology not found in the Quran or *Ḥadīth,* is a relic of a period of history when empires or kingdoms could go to war at any time in the absence of a treaty. This is precisely what "Abode of War" meant: an area that had not signed a treaty and hence was a potential aggressor. However, the Abode of War and the Abode of Islam, even in the context of this taxonomy in classical Islamic Law, were never a simple bifurcation, since there were also the "Abode of Treaty" or the "Abode of Safety" (*dār al-ṣulḥ* or *dār al-amn*), referring to lands with whom a treaty or pact existed, and other designations to describe the political status of a territory.

Although contemporary observers can and should judge the morality of the use of force by premodern caliphs, kings, and emperors, we cannot use in that judgment the standards under which most of us were born. In 1928 the Kellogg-Briand pact was the first major systematic attempt in an international context to renounce war as an instrument of national policy. Previously, what protected states against each other were military deterrence and treaties. Over the course of the fourteenth/twentieth century, the Nuremberg Principles, the Charter of the United Nations, and the Geneva Conventions laid the foundation for current international law, which, needless to say, is not always followed by nations in the world even today. These agreements constitute binding treaties between the signatories. They make military aggression between states illegal and, among other things, forbid the acquisition of territory by war, define war crimes during the conduct of war, and govern the treatment of prisoners, civilians, and combatants. In a certain sense the international system renders the default status of the entire world the Abode of Treaty.

Although it is true that some authorities throughout Islam's long history have interpreted the Islamic law of war as giving Muslims unqualified permission to conquer and expand into territory controlled by non-Muslims or in extreme cases to bring the entire world under their dominion, this has remained a minority view. The complex history of the first generation of Muslim conquest can be interpreted more plausibly as a stage in the history of Islam when the future existence of the religion was far from certain and when expansion meant survival.

Indeed, it is worth considering whether the Companions of the Prophet had any particular taste for conquest for its own sake. The Quran seems to suggest in 2:216 that they did not: *Fighting has been prescribed for you, though it is hateful to you. But it may be that you hate a thing though it be good for you, and it may be that you love a thing though it be evil for you.* Some commentators note the war-weariness of many Companions and their desire to return to a peaceful life in the homes from which they had been expelled, understanding the Quran to promise in 24:55 that fighting will come to an end: *God has promised those among you who believe and perform righteous deeds that He will surely make them vicegerents upon the earth, as He caused those before them to be vicegerents, and that He will establish for them their religion, which He has approved for them, and that He will surely change them from a state of fear to security.*

The foregoing remarks have been focused upon the first generation of Muslims, whose example Muslims consider normative, but even in that generation matters are complicated by the intra-Muslim conflict that began with the Wars of Repudiation (*riddah*), in which many tribes of Arabia tried to secede from central rule in Madinah, as well as by the later assassination of the third Caliph, ᶜUthmān, and the ensuing civil wars. If, for the sake of simplicity, we focus on the reigns of the first two Caliphs, Abū Bakr and ᶜUmar, we note that these were not men who employed force for the sake of glory in this world, but were humble and self-effaced. Abū Bakr walked out on foot with an army, to the embarrassment of a younger general. ᶜUmar famously walked into Jerusalem, because it was his servant's time to ride. Nor were they zealots whose asceticism was a mask for fanaticism. Abū Bakr set down strict rules for fighting. ᶜUmar, for all his legendary brusqueness, took control of Jerusalem with proverbial gallantry and chivalry. They were often quite ambivalent about their conquests and the exercise of power. For example, far from being delighted at acquiring the wealth of the Persians, ᶜUmar was quite dismayed at what it might do to the souls of his soldiers. Focusing on Abū Bakr and ᶜUmar is useful not because the motivations of the first two Caliphs were different from those of the third and fourth, but because it allows us to see the issue unclouded by the theological and political issues that arose after them as a consequence of the civil wars sparked initially by the assassination of ᶜUthmān.

Those who are fair-minded about Islamic history must be ready to acknowledge, at least in principle, that in particular historical situations the drive to expand Islamic rule was not completely justifiable according to the moral structure outlined in the Quran, but was at least partially the result of ordinary caprice, or *hawā*, to use Quranic terminology. It is true that throughout Islam's history large parts of the Islamic world became Muslim at the hands of saintly figures, but some territory was also conquered by tyrants and rulers who could be accurately described using the words of the queen of Sheba in 27:34: *Verily kings, when they enter a town, corrupt it, and make the most honorable of its people the most abased.* Such a mixed history is something the Islamic world has in common with every other major civilization. Accepting this view enables contemporary observers to interpret the actions of the early community based upon

the ethical principles laid out in the Quran and the *Ḥadīth* and provides a framework by which to judge properly whether to celebrate or condemn the conduct of later Muslims when they resorted to force or military action.

Finally, any impulse toward world domination and the imposition of unitary rule by one religion, Muslim or otherwise, over all people should surely be tempered by such unequivocal verses as 5:48:

> *And We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth, confirming the Book that came before it, and as a protector over it. So judge between them in accordance with that which God has sent down, and follow not their caprices away from the truth that has come unto thee. For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ.*

In more than one place the Quran assumes the existence of multiple religious communities and even describes the Muslim community's role in relation to them, addressing Muslims in 2:143: *Thus did We make you a middle community, that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you* (cf. 22:78). This verse and those that mention that God could have made humanity one community (e.g., 5:48) do not call upon Muslims to realize dominance or even to strive for the spread of Islam among all peoples. This principle was acknowledged by many jurists who described most or all of the verses in the Quran pertaining to the use of force as applying to those enemies whom the Muslims were facing during the time of the revelation, although they also provide guidelines for conduct in other situations to come later in history. Sometimes classical commentators dismissed openly the idea that the Quran intended for the world to be conquered by Islam, if only because such an event had not in fact taken place and the existence of such a stated or predicted goal in the Quran would thus have been theologically problematic.

## *Remembering the Tradition*

Though the Quran is the first source for Islamic Law, and hence for any law of war, it has always been understood in light of its overall teachings on right and wrong as well as the life and teachings of the Prophet (the *Sunnah*) and the scholarly tradition since then. Our contemporary situation has highlighted the importance of having recourse to the insights provided by the learned tradition of Muslim jurists and theologians as well as the danger of reading parts of the legal teachings of the Quran without regard for the whole law itself, although in some important cases Muslim jurists themselves have not always agreed on the application of the Quran to matters of war and some have arguably gone beyond what the plain sense of the text allows. Moreover, today

some extremist critics and proponents of Islam have often removed and continue to remove verses of the Quran from their context and have dismissed (through ignorance or misdirection) over a thousand years of legal doctrine and interpretation.

In regulating war, Islamic Law does not espouse belligerence, any more than regulating sexuality encourages licentiousness. Yet Islam's ideal of peace does not make it pacifist, and thus a proper understanding depends on avoiding the extremes of viewing Islam as an inherently warlike religion or of trying to portray it as a quietist one. Rather, its ideal is the establishment of harmony based on justice to the extent possible. The Islamic rules of war and peace have been followed throughout Islamic history with varying degrees of success, and in a minority of cases were openly violated, but anecdotal evidence of such cases should not distract from the Quranic sources and principles codified later in the legal tradition and followed in most instances in Islamic history.

Many Muslim jurists have conceived the fundamental objectives of Islamic Law to be the maintenance and protection of life, religion, mind, lineage or dignity, and property, and they view these five as indispensable rights that individuals need in order to live within a just society. As part of Islamic Law, the rules governing the use of force are directed toward those very same principles and are constrained by them. These principles prohibit Muslims from becoming brutal aggressors, without leaving them defenseless in the face of danger or attack, thus preserving and protecting these fundamental rights, and are predicated upon the striving for justice, the protection of innocents, and the acceptance of other religions. This is the least, and the most, that can be expected from any law when it comes to war.

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# DEATH, DYING, AND THE AFTERLIFE IN THE QURAN

Hamza Yusuf

In his magnum opus, *Revival of the Religious Sciences,* Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) begins the chapter on death with the following passage:

> Praise be to God, who with death did break the necks of tyrants, shattering with it the backs of Persia's kings, cutting short the aspirations of the Caesars, whose hearts were long averse to recalling death, until the true promise came to them and cast them into the pit. From the loftiest of palaces to the deepest of graves, they passed, and from the light of the cradle into the sepulcher's gloom. From dallying with maidens and boys into sustaining insects and worms, they passed; from reveling in food and drink into wallowing in the earth; from the friendliness of company into the forlornness of solitude; and from the soft couch into the woeful perdition. See if they had found any strength and protection from death, or taken against it a barrier and refuge. See *Dost thou perceive even one of them, or hear from them a murmur?* [19:98].[1]

From the earliest days of Islam, following the example of the Prophet, Muslims have made the remembrance of death a foundational spiritual practice. The impermanence of the world is a recurring theme in the Quran. Hardly a page can be found that does not contain references to the "fleeting life of this world" or "this world and the Hereafter" or a reminder of the day *that would make children gray-haired* (73:17). Without death, it is questionable whether we would have any need for religion at all. At a fundamental level, religion's greatest claim is making sense of the reality of death, which relentlessly impinges on our living consciousness.

One of the most singular aspects of the pre-Islamic Arabia in which the Quran was revealed is the fact that the Arabs of the day, notwithstanding a small number of Christian Arabs and an even smaller number of primordial monotheists known as *ḥanīf*s, did not believe in an Afterlife, although they followed their own form of

1. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Book XL of the Revival of the Religious Sciences,* trans. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1989), 1.

religion. Death was the end of the road for them, and "immortality" lay in the praises of poets, not in the reality of the Afterlife promised by the prophets. The Quran describes the pre-Islamic Arabs' nihilistic attitude toward life and death: *They say, "There is naught but our life in this world. We die and we live, and none destroys us save time." But they have no knowledge thereof. They do naught but conjecture* (45:24).

In the Quran, the Arabs' denial of the resurrection of the dead is addressed and refuted in several simple yet engaging metaphors. It declares repeatedly that all things in this world have been made in pairs, of which the duality of life and death is a central one, highlighted in sundry verses. Coupled with life and death is the other essential pairing of this world (*dunyā*) with the Afterlife (*ākhirah*), a pairing whose sign, the Quran declares, should be discerned alongside Heaven and earth, both of which are commonly repeated motifs in the scripture. Given that all things in this world are created in paired opposites, it would follow that this world also has its opposite, which is the next world. Furthermore, as this world is temporal, its opposite is logically speaking eternal.

Another important Quranic motif is the evolving process of life itself. Gray hairs, which begin to emerge at the spiritually significant age of forty, are referred to as a warner (*nadhīr*), exegetes say; they should cause those who have lived long enough to see them to be reminded of death. As for those who do not heed the warning, after death

> *They will cry out therein, "Our Lord! Remove us, that we may work righteousness other than that which we used to do." "Did We not give you long life, enough for whosoever would reflect to reflect therein? And the warner came unto you, so taste [the punishment]! And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers."* (35:37)

The imagery of gray hairs is borrowed by the poet Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Saᶜīd al-Būṣīrī (d. 695/1294) in his poem in praise of the Prophet, *The Cloak* (*al-Burdah*):

> *This self of mine that commands me to evil*
> *Has blindly ignored the warnings of gray hairs and the approach of old age.*
> *Nor has it prepared a banquet of beautiful deeds for this unexpected guest*
> *Who's alighted on my head, shamelessly refusing to leave.*
> *Had I known, I would have shown him no honor—*
> *I would have covered over his obvious secret with black dye![2]*

The importance of the age of forty, when the trajectory of life begins its descent toward death, is accentuated in the Prophet Muhammad's life. He began to receive the revelation of the Quran at the age of forty, a turning point from the old age of

2. Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Saᶜīd al-Būṣīrī, *The Burda of al-Būṣīrī: The Poem of the Cloak*, trans. Hamza Yusuf (Thaxted, UK: Sandala, 2002), 4, 6.

youth to the youth of old age. As the Prophet approached forty, he began meditating in the cave at Ḥirāʾ, and when he was forty, the Archangel Gabriel revealed himself to the Prophet for the first time. "Recite!" was the Archangel's command. In this initial revelation we are reminded, *Nay, truly man is rebellious in that he considers himself beyond need. Truly unto thy Lord is the return* (96:6–8). Human dependence on and need for God are central to the Quran's message, and they become most obvious when we meditate on our inability to ward off old age and death. Devout Muslims are encouraged to read every day *Sūrah* 56, entitled "The Event," one of the myriad Quranic names for the Day of Judgment. This *sūrah* provides a profound meditation on death, the categories of people in the Afterlife and their states, and reflections on the signs of the Resurrection that are evident in everyday events of this world. The *sūrah* challenges those who do not believe in the Resurrection: *Why, then, when it* (the person's last breath) *reaches the throat, while you are then looking on—and We are nearer to him than you, though you see not—why, then, if you are unconstrained, do you not return it, if you are truthful?* (56:83–87)

The Quranic theme of human beings' return to God includes the instruction to repent before death in order to avoid the calamities of an unrepentant life. The signs (*āyāt*) to be read come from the Lord, and among the greatest of them is death. A sign, however, signifies something that requires interpretation. It has no meaning in and of itself, but indicates meanings that transcend the sign itself. What is this sign from God that the Quran calls death? What is its meaning? Why does its aroma suffuse the entire Book? The Quran states: *They have taken gods apart from Him, who . . . have no power over death, or life, or resurrection* (25:3); *Say, "Then ward off death from yourselves, if you are truthful"* (3:168); and *Wheresoever you may be, death will overtake you, though you should be in towers raised high* (4:78). These and other verses remind us that we are powerless in the pervasive presence of death, which takes us back to our Lord and has the power even in this earthly life to awaken our higher senses to our real calling, which is to know and worship our Lord and to prepare for meeting Him on that day that is the only tomorrow that matters ultimately.

An unidentified voice from Pharaoh's inner circle summarizes this message when he warns Pharaoh and his council:

> *O my people! Follow me; I shall guide you unto the way of rectitude. O my people! The life of this world is but fleeting enjoyment, whereas the Hereafter is truly the Abode of Permanence. Whosoever commits an evil deed will not be requited, save with the like thereof; but whosoever, whether male or female, performs a righteous deed and is a believer shall enter the Garden wherein they will be provided for without reckoning.* (40:38–40)

This summary of the message of the Quran reminds us that worldly life is fleeting, but our decisions here will have either negative or positive repercussions in another world. Since that other world is a permanent one, wisdom counsels belief and good actions.

## *"Death" and Its Various Usages in the Quran*

A classic methodology employed by the great Quranic exegetes was to examine key Arabic words in the Quran, identifying themes and exploring the semantic webs of meanings embedded within them. The derivative nature of Arabic words facilitates this approach, as most can be reduced to three-letter roots from which the various possible meanings are derived. In addition to this method, traditional exegetes also explored the contextual meanings of terms as they shifted throughout the book.

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) clarifies the different usages of the term "death" in the Quran as follows:

> The types of death are consistent with the types of life. The first relates to the power of regeneration that exists in plants, animals, and human beings and is referred to in *Sūrat al-Rūm,* "The Byzantines": *He revives the earth after its death* (30:19). The second is the condition of being insensate and is intended in Mary's plea, *Would that I had died before this* (19:23). The third is the loss of the faculty of intelligence, which is the state of ignorance, reflected in the verse, *He who was dead, and to whom We give life, making for him a light by which to walk among mankind* (6:122). The fourth type is a state of depression where life becomes unbearable, as is meant in the verse, *Death shall come upon him from every side; yet he will not die* (14:17). The fifth is death that means sleep, as it is said in a proverb, "Sleep is the light death, and death is the heavy sleep." This meaning is indicated in the verses *He it is Who takes your souls by night* (6:60) and *God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those that die not during their sleep* (39:42).[3]

### REGENERATION AFTER DEATH

The first type of death has to do with growth and the power of regeneration after death. The Quran conveys the idea of life as growth and death as decay, decline, and desiccation. Many verses use the image of the dead earth brought back to life as an analogy for the Resurrection. In *Sūrah* 22, *al-Ḥajj,* two analogies for the Resurrection are given. The first is embryological, and the second is agricultural. The *surāh* begins with a reminder of the end of time and its inevitability as well as the tremendous terror of a day that will cause every pregnant woman to miscarry (22:2). Then follows a challenge:

> *O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that We may make clear for you. And We cause*

3. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt al-Qurʾān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1996), 781–82.

> *what We will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then We bring you forth as an infant, then that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind.* (22:5)

The human embryonic stages are highlighted in this verse, reminding us that we came from mere dust and are created out of lifeless matter. This fact itself should be proof that the Resurrection is possible, given that the One who created us once can surely do so again.

The second analogy the Quran provides was more accessible to the desert Arabs at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, for the dramatic and lifeless topography of the desert revealed to them sudden regeneration each year:

> *And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind. That is because God is the Truth, and because He gives life to the dead, and because He is Powerful over all things, and because the Hour is coming, in which there is no doubt, and because God will resurrect whosoever is in the graves.* (22:5–7)

### SENTIENT DEATH

The second type of death is the death of feeling or the empathic life of the human heart. Many verses in the Quran berate the hard-hearted, who exhibit no compassion, and refer to the disbelievers as unaware and unfeeling.[4] The Quran makes reference in several verses to the need for "spiritual growth" through purification (*tazkiyah*): *Indeed, he prospers who purifies it* (his soul). *And indeed he fails who obscures it* (91:9–10). This spiritual growth is along a path of states and stations that is mapped out in the Quran. Thus, death becomes a metaphor for the death of the lower soul and its possible restoration to life and growth in a more perfect state.

### INTELLECTUAL DEATH

The third type is the death of intelligence understood in its traditional sense.[5] The Quran categorizes some people as deaf, dumb, blind, and with hardened heart (the heart is the seat of intelligence)—in other words, intellectually insensate. In other verses, this state is likened to a type of death: *Is he who was dead, and to whom We give*

4. See 2:9, 12; 3:69; 6:26, 123; 7:95; 12:15, 107; 16:21, 26, 45; 23:56; 26:202; 27:18, 50, 65; 28:9, 11; 29:53; 39:25; 43:66.

5. Intelligence in the Quranic sense differs from the modern usage of the term. In the Quran, the meaning of "intelligence" is much closer to the medieval Christian meaning, which was the ability to perceive first principles, particularly metaphysical truths, which constitute the paramount realization of true intelligence.

*life, making for him a light by which to walk among mankind, like unto one who is in darkness from which he does not emerge?* (6:122). This morbidity of the spirit resulting from lack of guidance can be reversed through a type of spiritual resurrection as illustrated in 6:122. Yet another metaphor for the heart's revival with spiritual truths is that of rain, which gives life to the earth after a prolonged drought:

> *Has not the time come for those who believe that their hearts be humbled to the remembrance of God and the truth that has come down, and to be not like those who were given the Book aforetime? But the span of time was too long for them, such that their hearts hardened and many of them are iniquitous. Know that God revives the earth after its death. We have indeed made the signs clear for you, that haply you may understand.* (57:16–17)

Many *aḥādīth* also refer to the spiritual death of the heart that prevents it from functioning as the seat of intelligence, so that it requires spiritual therapy in order to be revived. Spiritual death is, however, also seen in a pristine light and associated with the gaining of a new spiritual life. The Prophet in fact recommended to his followers, "Die before you die."[6] The death in this recommendation is called death chosen by free will (*al-mawt al-ikhtiyārī*); it is contrasted with the forced death (*al-mawt al-ijbārī*) that all beings experience at the end of their earthly life and over which they have no control.

### DESPAIR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEATH

The fourth type of death takes the form of despair and psychological misery in which life is experienced as devoid of meaning and even pleasure. This state was well known in pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, as seen in the following verse by Ibn al-Raʿlāʾ:

> *The only real dead person is one who is depressed,*
> *Plagued with grief, without hope.*[7]

This fourth type of death also relates to the state of one who is in the Fire, who *neither dies therein nor lives* (87:13). The Quran warns that worldly preoccupation distracts us from the inevitability of death and results in spiritual sloth. This type of spiritual death is akin to the Catholic deadly sin of *acedia*. The Quran says:

> *O you who believe! Let neither your property nor your children divert you from the remembrance of God. And whosoever does so, it is they who are the losers. And spend of that which We have provided you before death comes upon one of you and he says, "My Lord, wouldst that Thou grant me reprieve until a term nigh, that I*

6. Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʾ wa-muzīl al-ilbās ʿamma ʾshtahara min al-ḥadīth ʿalā alsinat al-nās* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1933), 291.

7. Aḥmad al-Hāshimī, *al-Qawāʿid al-asāsiyyah li'l-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah* (Beirut: al-Maʿārif, 2000), 189.

*may give charity and be among the righteous!" Yet God will not grant any soul reprieve when its term has come. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do.* (63:9–11)

In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Those who make all of their aspirations of this world one aspiration [that of the next world], God will take care of all of their other aspirations."[8]

## DEATH AS SLEEP

Finally, the fifth type of death mentioned by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī is related to sleep. The Quran says: *He it is Who takes your souls by night. . . . Then by day He resurrects you* (6:60); and *God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those that die not during their sleep. He withholds those for whom He has decreed death, and sends forth the others till a term appointed* (39:42). One of the signs relating sleep to death in these verses is the inevitability of both; in both cases we are powerless to exercise our will. The "gentle tyrant" of sleep that overpowers us is like death. At night, sleep conquers even the most powerful, leaving them lifeless—a daily reminder of death's inevitable overpowering presence, to which all must succumb. Sleep is regarded as a little death, and death, when compared to the reality of earthly life, can be considered a great sleep.

Likewise, each awakening is a reminder of our inevitable resurrection. As the Prophet has said, "Man is asleep, and when he dies he awakens."[9] In sleep, we find ourselves in the world of dreams, often of expanded time and fantastic experiences, only to awake to the reality of our earthly lives. The Prophet's prayer upon waking was, "Praise be to the One who brought me back to life after causing me to die, and to God is the Resurrection."[10] And the Resurrection is experienced as an awakening for people in their graves: *And the trumpet will be blown. Then, behold, they will rush forth from their graves unto their Lord. They will say, "Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us from our place of sleep?" "This is that which the Compassionate did promise; and the message bearers spoke true"* (36:51–52).

Meditating upon sleep as a reminder of one's mortality and equating it with the sleeplike state we enter into when in the grave, which culminates in the awakening of the Resurrection, is a Prophetic practice to which many Muslims adhere to this day. The many types of reminders of death found in the Quran as outlined by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī are meant to motivate us to actively prepare, mentally and spiritually, for the attainment of a promised abode, for a life of unlimited grace and enjoyment, rather than the threatening abode of indescribable terror and pain.

8. Ibn Mājah 1.45 (no. 267), 38.2 (no. 4245).

9. On the provenance of this saying, see Mohammed Rustom, "Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination in Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī's Commentary on the *Ḥadīth* of Awakening," *Islam and Science* 5, no. 1 (2007): 10, 11.

10. Al-Bukhārī 80.7 (no. 6385), 80.8 (no. 6387), 80.16 (nos. 6397–98), 98.13 (nos. 7483–84); Muslim 49.17 (no. 7062).

## *After Death*

Human beings are created in stages, the Quran states, and continue their lives through a series of movements that lead inevitably to one of two abodes: the Garden or the Fire. Death, like birth, is but one in a series of stages leading to our final destination. The exit from this lower and temporal world occurs through death, which is the cessation of what we experience as biological life. The Quran states: *Every soul shall taste death, and you will indeed be paid your reward in full on the Day of Resurrection. And whosoever is distanced from the Fire and made to enter the Garden has certainly triumphed. And the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion* (3:185).

Several Quranic verses remind us that the next life is indeed the real life. For example, *The life of this world is naught but diversion and play. And surely the Abode of the Hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew* (29:64). Furthermore, disdain is expressed for those who prefer this life to the next, who seek the perishable over the permanent. The Quran views this preference for the temporary over the everlasting as a delusional state that will quickly dissolve into remorse as the reality of death overwhelms us upon its occurrence: *Vying for increase distracts you, till you visit the graves* (102:1–2). In addition, *You were indeed heedless of this* (the Afterlife). *Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing* (50:22; this verse refers to the awakening to which the Prophet referred in the *ḥadīth* cited above).

The Quran also indicates that immense spiritual unveilings occur at death. For those who have squandered their lives without the requisite preparation, there is great remorse. Everyone experiences a profound spiritual awakening upon death, but for the heedless in this world it results in nothing but remorse, which, then, is of no avail. Several verses indicate also that if such people were allowed to go back, they would return to a life of worldly pleasures.

ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's cousin and the fourth Caliph, is also associated with the Prophetic saying, "People are asleep, and when they die, they awaken."[11] This initial awakening occurs at the moment a person is visited by the Angel of Death, who is known as ᶜIzrāʾīl (Azrael). The Prophet explained that ᶜIzrāʾīl seizes all souls in another dimension of reality; this enables him to be in all the various appointed earthly times in his own celestial time, which is experienced here as the time of death of a particular person. The Quran states, *The angel of death, who has been entrusted with you, will take you* (*tawaffā*); *then unto your Lord shall you be returned* (32:11). The word used in this verse, *tawaffā,* is another word for "to cause to die"; the more common term is *yumīt,* from which the Divine Name *al-Mumīt* ("the Causer of Death") is derived. The root of the verb *tawaffā* is *wafā,* which means "to fulfill, to remain faithful, to repay a debt, to recompense." In this particular verse, *tawaffā* means "to receive

11. Aḥmad al-ᶜĀmirī al-Ghazzī, *al-Jidd al-ḥathīth fī bayān mā laysa bi-ḥadīth,* ed. Bakr ᶜAbd Allāh Abū Zayd (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāyah, AH 1412), 246 (no. 573).

or take to oneself," as in "God receives the soul of one who dies." In other words, God causes us to die and then receives us in order to recompense us for our actions on earth.

As the Quran explains, people experience the moment of their individual death differently in accordance with how they lived. For believers who have led good lives, the transition from life to death is one of ease and repose. The traditional Christian saying, "He who lives well dies well," has its exact Arabic equivalent: *man ʿāsha saʿīdan māta saʿīdan*. According to Islamic teachings, at the moment of death, angels address the believers, *Fear not, nor grieve, and rejoice in the Garden that you have been promised* (41:30). As for the disbelievers, the angels begin pouncing on them. The Quran states, *And if only thou couldst see when the angels take those who disbelieve, striking their faces and their backs, and [saying], "Taste the punishment of the burning!"* (8:50; cf. 6:93).

The wrongdoers will plead to be given a second chance, as the Quran says, *till, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord! Return me, that haply I may work righteousness with regard to that which I left." Nay, but these are [mere] words that he speaks. And behind them is a barrier till the Day they are resurrected* (23:99–100).

## *The Intermediate State Between Death and Resurrection (*Barzakh*)*

The period after death until the Day of Judgment is known as the *barzakh,* or intermediate state, although, according to some scholars, in Islamic eschatology it could also refer to a state similar to the Christian concept of purgatory. The *barzakh* involves the experience of waking up completely as if from a deep sleep. During this period, a spiritual awakening occurs with an experience of heightened consciousness. Immense remorse for the squandered opportunity is experienced at this stage by those who did not make the necessary preparation. The duration of the *barzakh* is not known. The Quran states that it will seem like it was a day or *an hour of a day* (46:35). The deceased's experience of time is radically altered. As the Quran says, *And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty will swear that they had tarried naught but an hour; thus were they perverted. And those who have been given knowledge and belief will say, "Indeed, you tarried in God's Book until the Day of Resurrection; and this is the Day of Resurrection! But you knew not* (30:55–56).

The righteous will find the *barzakh* a pleasant experience: a sense of relief will set in as they grow aware of release from the trials of the previous world and the prospect of the delights of the next. According to others, the *barzakh* is the state in which those who must be purified further find themselves and where they remain until they are fully purified and made worthy of entering Paradise.

The waiting period in the *barzakh* is akin to what is taught in Catholicism concerning limbo, as those needing further purification during this time can benefit from the prayers said and deeds done by the living in their name. This of course does not preclude praying for the dead whom one considers to be not in the *barzakh,* but in Paradise. Actions that Muslims have traditionally performed for the dead include:

praying and seeking forgiveness;[12] making a pilgrimage on their behalf;[13] giving charity on their behalf;[14] and reciting the Quran and gifting their own reward.[15]

Although some dispute the merit and efficacy of these practices, Abu'l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), like many others, argues that when a difference of opinion occurs concerning the Mercy of God, one should side with the vastness of God's Mercy; hence, he sees no real debate regarding the merit of these actions. The Quran says, *And those who came after them say, "Our Lord! Forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith, and place no rancor in our hearts toward those who believe"* (59:10). The angels also ask forgiveness for the righteous, while they are alive as well as after they die: *The angels hymn the praise of their Lord and seek forgiveness for those on earth* (42:5). Funeral prayers are also considered a source of intercession by the living for the dead. The great polymath Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278) says in his *Remembrances* (*al-Adhkār*), "It is encouraged for the visitor of a graveyard to recite the Quran, remember God, and pray for the people in the graves, as well as for the rest of the dead, and for all the Muslims."[16]

This period in the grave is the first of the "stages of the Afterlife" (*manāzil al-ākhirah*). The Prophet is reported to have said, "The grave is the first of the stages of the next life. If one passes through it safely, then what follows is easier than it. However, if one fails at this first stage, what follows is more severe than it."[17] The Quran states: *And he has set forth for Us a parable and forgotten his own creation, saying, "Who revives these bones, decayed as they are?" Say, "He will revive them Who brought them forth the first time, and He knows every creation"* (36:78–79).

## *The Questioning in the Grave* (Su'āl al-Qabr)

The initial phase of the *barzakh* is the questioning in the grave. After the deceased is laid to rest in the grave and the burial is complete, two angels, Munkar and Nakīr, visit the deceased and ask that person a series of questions. Some *aḥādīth* indicate that those who lay the deceased to rest in the grave should recite the proper answers to the deceased; this is known as *talqīn* and is often practiced in Muslim burials. The basis of the angels' questioning is explained in the Quran: *God makes firm those who believe with firm speech in the life of this world and in the Hereafter* (14:27). Exegetes say that

12. Scholars agree that praying and seeking forgiveness for the dead is permissible and even recommended.

13. The merit of making a pilgrimage on behalf of the dead is disputed by some scholars, but accepted by nearly all Muslims as valid with its proofs.

14. Some scholars dispute the merit of giving charity on behalf of the dead.

15. Some scholars dispute the merit of reciting the Quran and gifting the reward, although they are widely practiced.

16. Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *al-Adhkār,* ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Arnāʾūṭ (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994), 168 (no. 487).

17. Al-Tirmidhī 32.5 (no. 2478), Ibn Mājah 38.32 (no. 4408), Aḥmad 1.3 (no. 461).

the *firm speech* (*qawl thābit*) refers to the correct responses the deceased provides to the angels' questions.

Those with the correct responses to the questioning in the grave are protected from the terror of the *barzakh* (*faza$^{c}$ al-barzakh*), which precedes the *greatest terror* (*al-faza$^{c}$ al-akbar*), which is mentioned in 21:103: *The greatest terror shall not grieve them, and the angels shall receive them. "This is your Day, which you were promised."* Each person is asked the questions appropriate to his or her respective community. The Prophet's community includes those who believed in him and his message as well as those who were called to believe in him. The following *ḥadīth* describes what happens to the deceased upon burial:

> Surely when a servant is placed in his grave and his friends depart, even as he hears their sandals striking the earth, two angels appear and sit him up and then ask him, "What do you say about this man?" meaning Muhammad. As for the believer, he says, "I testify that he is the servant of God and His messenger." It is said, "Look at your place in Hell; it has been changed to a place in Paradise," and he looks upon both. Then his grave is made an expanse of seventy cubits, and it is filled with green foliage until the Day of Resurrection. As for the disbeliever, or the hypocrite, he is asked what he said about this man [Muhammad], and he will reply, "I do not know. I simply said what the people said." The angels say, "You do not know! Nor did you follow." And they begin to pound him with iron hammers between his ears, and he screams a scream heard by everyone around except spirits and human beings. His grave becomes so constricted that his ribs burst.[18]

## *The End of Time*

The end of time is also known as *al-sā$^{c}$ah,* which is perhaps best glossed as "the Moment" or "the Hour." Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says three "last hours" occur: the moment of one's death, which is called the lesser hour (*al-sā$^{c}$ah al-ṣughrā*); the end of a generation, which occurs when an entire generation of people die (e.g., the generation of World War I); and the actual Hour when this world is terminated and the eschaton is initiated. This period is preceded by signs, one of which is the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, who said, "I was sent in the presence of the Final Hour."[19] The Quran states, *Do they await aught but that the Hour should come upon them suddenly? Yet its portents have already come. Then when it has come upon them, what will their remembrance do for them?* (47:18). Many verses warn of this apocalyptic apotheosis.[20]

18. Al-Bukhārī 23.67 (no. 1351), 23.86 (no. 1389); Muslim 54.18 (no. 7395).
19. Al-Tirmidhī 29.39 (no. 2374).
20. See 7:187; 12:107; 21:40; 29:53; 43:66.

The signs of the end of the world are numerous and extensively described in the *Ḥadīth* and to a lesser extent in the Quran. Among them are the splitting of the moon (54:1), which Muslims believe to be a miracle performed by the Prophet when challenged by the Quraysh; a clear smoke (*dukhān*) that arises over people (see 44:10–11c); and a beast who emerges from the earth (27:82), although al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī does not consider it necessarily an animal. The period preceding the greater signs is one of immense disequilibrium, widespread corruption and oppression, and the inversion of the natural order. The Prophet also predicted that Arabs would vie with one another in constructing tall buildings and that some of Makkah's mountains would be removed and the height of its buildings would surpass that of the surrounding mountains; religion would wane and commerce would wax; materialism would be rampant and human life considered of little value, with rioting and bloodshed to such a degree that "the killer will not know why he is killing, and the one killed why he is being killed."[21] Religion would continue to decline until it was almost entirely forgotten.

The trumpet blast initiating the Resurrection occurs once the earth is filled with atheists, and no one remains who utters the Name of God. What the Quran calls the *Great Calamity* (79:34) kills those remaining and arouses the dead from their graves. Then the Resurrection begins: *And the trumpet will be blown, whereupon whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth will swoon, save those whom God wills. Then it will be blown again, and, behold, they will be standing, beholding* (39:68). With the first blast, the general destruction occurs, and with the second, the bodily resurrection takes place, in which human beings are re-created with immortal bodies. The trumpet blast causes a shock so great that those already in the *barzakh* lose consciousness, and immediate death occurs for those remaining on earth.

Accompanying the first blast are several apocalyptic signs, such as the destruction of mountains (20:105–8; 69:13–14; 70:9), great earthquakes that cause the oceans to boil over,[22] and events mentioned in this terrifying description:

> *O mankind! Reverence your Lord. Truly the quaking of the Hour is a tremendous thing. On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman will deliver her burden, and you will see mankind drunk, though drunk they will not be. Rather, the Punishment of God is severe.* (22:1–2; see also 36:48–50)

The influential commentator Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) says, "The first blast is that of the terror (*faza*ʿ). While people are in their marketplaces buying and selling, God commands the angel Isrāfīl, or Seraphiel, to blast the trumpet, which

21. Muslim 55.18 (nos. 7487–88).

22. See 19:90; 27:87; 56:4–6; 73:14; 89:21; 99:1–5.

is heard throughout the earth. Humanity is then led to an earthly gathering place (*maḥshar*), followed by the swoon (*ṣaᶜq*), whereby they all perish."[23]

The heavens and the earth are weighted down with the presence of the Hour (7:187), when the entire universe is rolled back into its initial "singularity": *The whole earth shall be but a handful to Him on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be enfolded in His right Hand* (39:67). After an undefined period of time, at a second blast, people are raised out of their graves in an awakening akin to waking up from sleep and are compelled toward the great plain of gathering for the next phase, Judgment: *A day when the trumpet is blown and you come forth in throngs, and the sky is opened as if it were gates* (78:18–19). The blasts can symbolize the "destruction of forms by pure sound or transcendence, or again, the separation of forms and their contents."[24] Many verses deal with these events, which follow the sequence of a blast (*nafkh;* see 18:99; 20:102–4), the initial awaking from the grave (*baᶜth* and *nushūr*),[25] and finally the Gathering (*ḥashr*).[26] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) says, "Each nation will gather behind its respective prophet," *on the Day We shall call every people by their leader* (17:71).[27]

## *The Resurrection (*Baᶜth *and* Nashr*)*

Because the Arabs denied the resurrection of the dead, the Quran contains several verses highlighting its reasonableness and inevitability. The embryological and ecological "proofs" that were mentioned earlier can be found throughout the Quran. *Sūrah*s 22 and 51 in particular draw attention to dead earth revived by rain as a clear sign for the resurrection of the dead. Other examples from the Quran include: *So observe the vestiges of God's Mercy, how He revives the earth after its death. Truly that is the Reviver of the dead, and He is Powerful over all things* (30:50); *And God is He Who sends the winds, then they cause clouds to rise. Then We drive them to a land that is dead, and thereby revive the earth after its death. Thus shall be the Resurrection!* (35:9).

As further proof of the Resurrection, the Quran cites how easy it is for God to accomplish any creative act, as in 17:51: *Then they will say, "Who will bring us back?" Say, "He Who originated you the first time"* (see also 2:148; 36:78–79; 56:47–50). *Sūrah* 56, *al-Wāqiᶜah,* provides a litany of examples of God's Power in order to establish God's Ability to resurrect the dead. The Quran also responds to the atheists and naturalists who deny the Resurrection by declaring that they are only following their conjecture: the disbelievers say, *There is naught but our first death, and we shall not be resurrected*

23. Ismāᶜīl ibn ᶜUmar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ᶜaẓīm,* ed. Sāmī ibn Muḥammad al-Salāmah, 8 vols. (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1999), 6:581 (on 36:48–54).

24. Cyril Glassé, *Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam,* rev. ed. (London: Stacey International, 2001), 483.

25. See 6:38; 11:7; 22:7, 66; 64:7.

26. See 3:158; 4:172; 5:96; 6:22, 38, 51; 15:25; 18:47.

27. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 8:304 (on 78:17–30).

(44:35). In this same vein, 64:7 states: *Those who disbelieve claim that they will not be resurrected. Say, "Yea! By my Lord! Surely you shall be resurrected. Then you shall be informed of that which you did; and that is easy for God."* Having created human beings the first time, God should surely find it, by our own reckoning, as easy to do the second time: *He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back, and that is most easy for Him. Unto Him belongs the loftiest description in the heavens and on the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise* (30:27).

*Sūrah* 50, *Qāf,* deals mostly with eschatological realities:

> *And listen on the Day when the caller calls from near at hand, on the Day when they hear the Cry of Truth; that is the Day of coming forth. . . . That Day the earth is split asunder from about them—as they hasten forth. That is a gathering easy for Us. We know best that which they say. Thine is not to compel them. So remind, by means of the Quran, those who fear My Threat.* (50:41–42, 44–45)

In another *sūrah,* human beings are described as locusts: *So turn away from them* (the disbelievers) *on the Day wherein the caller will call unto a terrible thing. With their eyes humbled they emerge from the graves as if they were scattered locusts, scrambling toward the caller. The disbelievers say, "This is a calamitous day."* (54:6–8)[28]

Several verses describe this day as extremely difficult for the disbelievers (see, e.g., 74:8–10). Those who had denied it have immense regret, pleading for a second chance. Those who were expecting it are described as having no fear or grief. At this stage, there is *no kinship between them* (23:101), and on that Day *a man will flee from his brother, and his mother and his father, and his spouse and his children* (80:34–36).

According to the Prophet, the Resurrection occurs on Friday; thus Muslims are encouraged to prepare every Friday for this event with extra acts of devotion, and religious scholars recommend that the Friday sermon be peppered with reminders of death and the Resurrection. The Prophet stated that the animal kingdom is particularly sensitive to the coming of the eschaton, and in fact we see that animals display agitation just prior to any natural disaster, such as an earthquake. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) writes:

> Once resurrected from their graves, all of humanity is not in one situation; nor will everyone stand together. They differ just as they differed in the worldly abode. There are five stations: the first is the Resurrection itself; the second is the movement and gathering for Judgment; the third is the Reckoning; the fourth is the movement to the place of recompense; and finally, the fifth is taking up residence in one of the two final abodes.[29]

28. See also 30:41; 36:51–54; 76:18; 82:4–5; 101:3.

29. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Tadhkirah bi-aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhirah,* ed. al-Ṣādiq ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm (Riyadh: Maktabat Dār al-Manāhij, AH 1425), 528.

The "return" (*maʿād*) refers to the restoration of humanity's place in the Divine Presence that preceded earthly existence. The Quran describes the pretemporal covenant in these terms:

> *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yea, we bear witness"—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Truly of this we were heedless."* (7:172)

If a true messenger delivers the "reminder" to a community or, as in the case of the Prophet Muhammad, to all of humanity, the covenantal bond, both primordial and binding, should be enough to jar the preexistent memory of the original covenant that all of Adam's progeny made with God.

## *The Gathering* (al-Ḥashr)

The next stage of the Afterlife following the Resurrection is known as the Gathering. All the souls are driven without personal volition to what is known as the Plain of the Gathering (*arḍ al-maḥshar*), which differs from the places of earthly gathering at the end of time. For atheists, this event is humiliating: *We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces—blind, dumb, and deaf* (17:97). For the righteous, it will be preceded by angels comforting them and reminding them that this is what they were promised. All the souls will find themselves directed to this vast gathering place and assembled with their kindred spirits, the good with the good and the bad with the bad, on that Day.

Once on the Plain of the Gathering, great fear and trepidation will grip most people. The Prophet has said that people will be up to their necks in sweat. The period of waiting here is described as unbearable; for many it is experienced as eons of time. Righteous Muslims will be able to drink from the cistern of the Prophet, and other prophets will have cisterns for their righteous followers. Because of different narrations, some scholars argue this will take place before people are called to cross a traverse (*ṣirāṭ*) into Paradise, and some say it will come after it. Still others argue that two cisterns, both called *al-Kawthar,* exist, one before the Gathering and the other after the traverse. The one who drinks from it will never suffer thirst. In his commentary "The Radiant Pearl" (*al-Kharīdah al-bahiyyah*), Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Dardīr (d. 1201/1786) states:

> The cistern of the Prophet has reached the level of factual reports given the number of traditions. In the two sound collections (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*) of *ḥadīth* [al-Bukhārī and Muslim] the Prophet said, "My cistern is the length and breadth of a month's journey. Its angles are equidistant. Its water is whiter than

milk. Its odor is that of musk. Its cups are more numerous than the stars. Whoever drinks from it will never thirst."[30]

The Prophet said that he will know his people from the glow of their lustrations that were performed for their prayers in this world.[31] In other words, the Prophet's eye can discern what people have done in this world, and those who have been righteous will get to drink from the Prophet's cistern.

At this point, the next phase ensues, that of the Great Intercession.

## *The Great Intercession* (al-Shafāᶜah al-Kubrā *or* al-Maqām al-Maḥmūd)

The Prophet Muhammad was given by God the highest station, known as "the praiseworthy station," alluded to in the verse *It may be that thy Lord will resurrect thee in a praiseworthy station* (17:79). This exalted station is reserved for him for the Day of Judgment, when all of humanity is gathered, naked, desolate, and filled with awe before the Divine Majesty. The Prophet said that, at this point, human beings will seek out Adam, the father of humanity, to intercede on their behalf. He will excuse himself and send them to Noah, who will also decline and send them on to another prophet. This process will continue with the other prophets, each of whom will excuse himself from interceding on their behalf. Finally, humanity will arrive at the last messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, who will accept the task and proceed to intercede with God on behalf of humanity. The prolonged period of waiting will end with his intercession, and the proceedings of the Reckoning will begin. This event occurs, if reckoned in earthly time, after an immense amount of time elapses, described as akin to *fifty thousand years* (70:4).

## *The Day of Reckoning* (Yawm al-Ḥisāb)

The Day of Reckoning, or Day of Judgment, is mentioned in the opening *sūrah* of the Quran: *Master of the Day of Judgment* (1:4).[32] The Quran refers to the Day of Judgment by several names. The most common of these is the *Day of Resurrection,* or more literally "the Day of Standing" (*yawm al-qiyāmah*). For example, the Quran says, *Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part? And what is the*

30. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Dardīr, *Sharḥ al-Kharīdah al-bahiyyah fī ᶜilm al-tawḥīd,* ed. ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn ᶜAbd al-Hādī Shannār (Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2004), 136. Muslim 44.9 (no. 6111).

31. Al-Bukhārī 4.3 (no. 136), Muslim 3.12 (nos. 602–4). *Wuḍūʾ* is usually translated "ablutions"; a closer gloss, however, is "lustrations," defined as "ritual washings before rites." The root of both words, *wuḍūʾ* and "lustrations," is "to shine brilliantly."

32. According to Imam Nāfiᶜ's variant this is "King of the Day of Judgment." Nāfiᶜ ibn ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Nuᶜaym al-Laythī (d. 169/785), one of the seven canonical Quran readers, is the source of the Warsh transmission.

*recompense of those who do so but disgrace in the life of this world? And on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most terrible punishment* (2:85).

Other names used to describe this day include the *Day of Division* (37:21; 44:40; 77:13–14, 38; 78:17), the *Day of Regret* (19:39), the *Day of Victory* (32:29), the *Day of coming forth* (50:42), the *Day of Mutual Calling* (40:32), the *Day of the Meeting* (40:15), the *Day of the Imminent Event* (40:18), as well as a *calamitous day* (76:10), a *weighty day* (76:27), a *tremendous day* (19:37), a *Day in which there is no doubt* (3:25), a *day wherein there shall be neither bargaining nor befriending* (14:31), a *Day of Reckoning* (38:16, 26, 53; 40:27; cf. 14:41); the *Day of the Moment Known* (15:38; 38:81); and the *Day of the Threat* (50:20). It is also called the *Last Day* (twenty-six places).

The Quran and *Ḥadīth* describe this time of reckoning as a terrible scene of suffering due to the sins of individuals, and these descriptions are likely to have indirectly inspired Dante's visions of the Inferno. In fact, Islamic eschatology and the Ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the Prophet served as a source of inspiration for the whole of the *Divine Comedy*.[33] According to traditional Islamic sources, arrogant people are resurrected no larger than ants and are stepped on by other people.[34] Those who earn interest and lenders of usurious loans are resurrected as if they were mad; the Quran says, *Those who devour usury shall not rise except as he whom Satan has deranged by his touch rises. That is because they say, "Buying and selling are simply like usury," though God has permitted buying and selling and forbidden usury* (2:275).

Those who refused to pay alms (*zakāh*) or were miserly when asked by those in need have the weight of their wealth tied around their necks on the Day of Judgment: *And let not those who are miserly with what God has given them from His Bounty suppose that it is good for them; rather, it is evil for them. On the Day of Resurrection they will be collared by that with which they were miserly* (3:180). Embezzlers and hoarders of public wealth are weighted down with what they stole, breaking their backs (6:31). The Quran says, *And whosoever defrauds will bring what he obtained by fraud on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul shall be paid what it has earned in full, and they shall not be wronged* (3:161). The Prophet also said that an unjust bigamist who failed to treat his wives with complete equality will come on the Day of Judgment with one-half of his body paralyzed.[35]

Some are raised up blind and ask, *"My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, when I used to see?" He will say, "Thus it is. Our signs came unto you, but you forgot them. Even so, this Day shall you be forgotten!"* (20:125–26). The inner eye's blindness here is manifested as the outer eye's blindness there: *Whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way* (17:72). Sinners will be driven

33. See Miguel Asín Palacios's remarkable work on Dante's Islamic sources, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. Harold Sunderland (London: Murray, 1926). See also Enrico Cerulli, *Il "Libro della scala" e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina commedia* (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 1949).

34. Al-Tirmidhī 33.47 (no. 2680); Aḥmad iii (no. 6788); ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī, *Musnad*, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad al-Dārānī, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār al-Saqqā, 1996), 1:508 (no. 609).

35. Abū Dāwūd 12.39 (no. 2135); al-Nasāʾī 37.2 (no. 3959); al-Tirmidhī 7.41 (no. 1171).

to the place of gathering *upon their faces* (54:48). When the Prophet was asked, "How will they walk on their faces?" he replied, "The One who made them walk on their feet here will make them walk on their faces there."[36]

In contrast, on that day, those who had performed righteous deeds will find much relief as a result of those deeds, even if those deeds were minute. For example, a just ruler as well as a person who wept alone at night in awe of the Divine are among those granted special shade. The Quran and *Ḥadīth* also mention certain deeds that lighten the load on that day: *And hasten unto forgiveness from your Lord, and for a garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth—prepared for the reverent, who spend in ease and hardship, and curb their rage, and pardon others—and God loves the virtuous* (3:133–34). Conscientious people free slaves, build places of worship, call others to prayer, and perform other good deeds. The Quran pronounces this truth in these terms: *So whosoever does a mote's weight of good shall see it. And whosoever does a mote's weight of evil shall see it* (99:7–8).

### THE AMASSING OF HUMANITY FOR THE INSPECTION OF DEEDS (*AL-ʿARḌ*)

At this stage, human beings are presented before their Lord in ranks, and a profound unveiling occurs that enables them to be cognizant of their Lord, though scholars emphasize that this type of witnessing is not within the created dimensions of time and space. It is at this point that God reveals Himself to humanity and declares to those who rejected the Resurrection that this is indeed the Day that His prophets had promised would arrive:

> *On the Day . . . they shall be arrayed before thy Lord in ranks. "Indeed, you have come unto Us as We created you the first time. Nay, but you claimed that We would never appoint a tryst for you." And the Book will be set down. Then thou wilt see the guilty fearful of what is in it. And they will say, "Oh, woe unto us! What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, small or great, save that it has taken account thereof." And they find present [therein] whatsoever they did. And thy Lord wrongs no one.* (18:47–49)

Elaborating upon this event, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿUmar al-Awzāʿī (d. 157/774) stated that people would see their lives displayed before them moment by moment.[37]

### THE RECKONING

The next phase involves the actual accounting of deeds and a personal defense of one's life. The first chapter of the Quran begins, *Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment* (1:2–4). The second

36. Al-Bukhārī 65.[25].1 (no. 4807), 81.45 (no. 6602); Muslim 53.12 (no. 7265).

37. Jalāl al-Dīn Abi'l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī al-Baghdādī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ghad al-Jadīd, 2013), 4:173.

verse declares God's lordship, and the fourth, according to the Andalusian exegete Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (d. 741/1340), summarizes the entire eschaton in describing God as *Master* (or Sovereign) *of the Day of Judgment.* The Arabic word for "judgment" or "reckoning" in this context is *dīn,* which usually means "religion" and is related to the word for "debt." The Day of *dīn* can thus be understood as the day when debts fall due. Many verses in the Quran reiterate the accounting that is constantly taking place during our life by God through the angels who record all of our deeds. However, it is not only the angels carrying out this recording. The Quran states that our own body parts and organs are recording our actions and will testify for or against us: *On the day their tongues, their hands, and their feet bear witness against them as to that which they used to do* (24:24); *On that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn* (36:65); *And they will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will reply, "God, Who makes all things speak, made us speak. He created you the first time, and unto Him shall you be returned"* (41:21).

Even the rocks, trees, and animals will have their day in court on that day. Many *aḥādīth* also indicate that the recording of deeds is a constant process. The Quran says that on that Day people will exclaim, *What a book this is! It leaves out nothing, neither small or great* (18:49). *Sūrah* 36, *Yā Sīn,* recited daily by countless Muslims and especially for the dying and the dead, serves as a cogent meditation on death and contains this reminder:

> *Thou only warnest whomsoever follows the Reminder and fears the Compassionate unseen. So give such a one glad tidings of forgiveness and a generous reward. Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in a clear registry.* (36:11–12)

Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī writes that *that which they have sent forth* refers to the actions that will greet people in the Afterlife and *that which they have left behind* refers to the good deeds that carry on after their death, such as knowledge or perpetual charity. The *registry* refers to either what the Quran terms the *Preserved Tablet* (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ;* 85:22) or the scrolls of our deeds also mentioned in several verses (see 17:14; 80:10, 13–16).

The Last Day is mentioned in the Quran as the Day on which some faces *shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord,* and some faces shall be *scowling, knowing that a spine-crushing calamity will befall them* (75:22–25). Due to the terror of the day, people will initially abandon one another and be concerned only with their own reckoning:

> *On a day when the sky is as molten lead, and the mountains are as carded wool, and no loyal friend shall ask about a loyal friend, [though] they will be made to see them. The guilty would wish to ransom himself from the punishment of that*

*Day at the price of his children, his spouse and his brother, his kin who had sheltered him, and all who are on the earth, that it might save him.* (70:8–14)

Actions will be accounted for in a great courtroom setting with God as Judge, with witnesses, and with sentencing and pleas for clemency by the prophets, saints, and martyrs. Even the earth will testify against those who wronged her:

*When the earth is shaken with her shaking, and the earth yields up her burdens, and man says, "What ails her?" That Day she shall convey her chronicles; for thy Lord inspired her. That Day mankind shall issue forth upon diverse paths to witness their deeds. So whosoever does a mote's weight of good shall see it. And whosoever does a mote's weight of evil shall see it.* (99:1–8)

The *sūrah* about the Day of Judgment entitled "The Undeniable Reality" (*al-Ḥāqqah*) says: *On that Day the Event shall befall, the sky shall be rent asunder; for that Day it shall be frail. And the angels shall be at its sides; that Day eight shall carry the Throne of your Lord above them. That Day you shall be exposed; no secret of yours shall be hidden* (69:15–18). This refers to the Reckoning, which is the stage before the determination of humanity's final abode in either Paradise or Hell. This stage involves a thorough questioning that differs from the first questioning in the grave and involves all aspects of one's entire life. A well-known *ḥadīth* details the five central questions asked: "The progeny of Adam will not move along on the Day of Judgment until asked about five things: regarding his life and how he spent it; regarding his youth and how he exhausted it; regarding his wealth and how he earned it; regarding that for which he used his wealth; and regarding his knowledge and whether he acted upon it."[38]

The Quran also states that individuals are only asked about their own deeds and are neither accountable for others' nor questioned as members of a collective body, such as a nation or community: *That is a community that has passed away. Theirs is what they earned and yours is what you earned, and you will not be questioned about that which they used to do* (2:134), since *none shall bear the burden of another* (6:164; 17:15). However, some people bear responsibility for those who are in their trust, such as children and dependents, and rulers have a responsibility for those they rule, since the Quran enjoins, *O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones* (66:6). In this vein, the Prophet said, "God will ask every entrusted person about his trust, whether he guarded it or neglected it. A man will even be asked about the members of his household."[39]

The greatest trust, however, is a person's heart and the inroads into it, which include his or her thoughts and actions. The Quran declares people's responsibility for their hearing, sight, and heart: *And pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge. Truly*

38. Al-Tirmidhī 33.1 (nos. 2601–2).
39. Related by Ibn Ḥibbān.

*hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account* (17:36). Guarding the eyes is enjoined in the Quran as *purer for them* (24:30; see also 33:53). The goal is to maintain the purity of the heart through struggle and vigilance, so that the soul is divested of sins and can arrive on the Day of Judgment in a prepared state, since it is *the Day when neither wealth nor children avail, save for him who comes to God with a sound heart* (26:88–89).

The tribulations of the world will manifest themselves as great benefits on that day, as they will become sources of freeing people from their sins. Commenting on the *ḥadīth,* "Surely God will try the believer, but God only gives him tribulation due to his great worth to God," ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) writes:

> Tribulation has great benefits and Divine Wisdom, some of which only reveal themselves in the Afterlife. Others are discernible here, such as recognizing Lordly might, seeking refuge in our servitude to God, and realizing that none can escape the Divine Decree, that destiny will not be thwarted. The reason is that God has decreed that Paradise is proscribed for anyone who has foulness in his heart. Such a person can only enter Paradise after God purifies him and removes traces of filth because Paradise is the abode of the pure, as in 39:73 when the believers are told, "You are now pure; so enter Paradise for eternity."[40]

The Prophet has said that people are first taken to account for their acts of devotion, first and foremost ritual prayer. Then they are taken to account for their conduct with and toward others, and in this category the enormities of bloodshed and murder are dealt with first. Despite the seemingly anthropomorphic nature of Quranic descriptions of God on the Day of Judgment, the vast majority of Muslim exegetes and theologians maintain that these are not descriptions that can be understood literally, but rather should be understood as being without modality. Commenting on the line from the widely accepted statement of Islamic creed *al-Kharīdah al-bahiyyah,* "Required is faith in the Reckoning, the Gathering, and reward and punishment," al-Dardīr writes:

> This means that God will stand His servants at the place of gathering (*maḥshar*) to see their actions, words, deeds, and belief in complete detail. This means that God will speak to them in His eternal Words, with neither letter nor sound. He will remove their veil so that they hear it; it is also possible that it will be with a speech that He creates to indicate to them His eternal, uncreated Speech; it could also mean that the angels speak on God's behalf, or both.[41]

40. ʿAbd al-Raʾūf ibn Tāj al-ʿĀrifīn al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr: sharḥ al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr,* 6 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1356/1937), 2:260.

41. Al-Dardīr, *Sharḥ al-Kharīdah al-bahiyyah,* 127.

## THE LESSER INTERCESSIONS

The second group of intercessions (*shafāʿāt*) occurs after the Reckoning. The Prophet said, "My intercession on the Day of Judgment is for the people who committed enormities from my community."[42] The Quran states: *They intercede not, save for one with whom He is content. They are wary, for fear of Him* (21:28); *They have no power of intercession, save the one who has made a pact with the Compassionate* (19:87; see also 20:109); *And intercession will benefit none with Him, save whomsoever He gives leave* (34:23). Some Islamic schools have rejected this intercession based upon other verses that apparently disallow it, such as 2:48, *And be mindful of a day when no soul will avail another soul in any way, and no intercession shall be accepted from it, nor ransom taken from it; nor shall they be helped.* Most exegetes, however, interpret this verse to mean that intercession will not be accepted before permission is given, during the Reckoning itself (see 2:48c; 2:255c).

Once people are condemned for their actions, the prophets are the first to intercede on behalf of their respective communities; then the righteous saints (*ṣiddīqūn*) intercede, then the martyrs, then those who were guardians of the Quran through memory and observance of its guidelines, and finally the righteous among the believers. The Prophet intercedes on behalf of his entire community after his great intercession for all of humanity. The Prophet also intercedes on behalf of those condemned, even among the disbelievers, in order that their punishment might be less severe. Finally, he intercedes on behalf of those who committed major sins, asking that they be removed from the Hellfire. The possibility of forgiveness is infinite. The Quran states: *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will* (4:48). Even this declaration applies only to idolatry practiced after a people have received a revelation and the prohibition of idolatry has been made clear: *So do not set up equals unto God, knowingly* (2:22).

## RECEIVING THE SCROLL OF DEEDS (*TAṬĀYUR AL-ṢUḤUF*)

After the Reckoning, the receiving of the scroll of deeds occurs and individuals are each given their own book. The books, which contain all human actions, each in an individual scroll, are described as "flying" in a flurry of apparent chaos, until each arrives at its appointed person. The believers receive theirs in their right hand and rejoice, while the hypocrites and disbelievers are given theirs in the left hand from behind their backs (see 69:19–37; 84:6–12). The Quran also refers to the book of deeds as *a book inscribed* (*kitāb marqūm;* 83:9) in which all of one's beliefs, intentions, words, and deeds are recorded, as in 21:94: *And whosoever performs righteous deeds and is a*

42. Al-Tirmidhī (*ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb*), 33.11 (nos. 2622–23); Abū Dāwūd 41.23 (no. 4741); Muḥammad ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Iḥsān fī taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ ibn Ḥibbān,* comp. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Balbān al-Fārisī, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ, 18 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1988), 14:386–87 (nos. 6467–68). Ibn Ḥajar specified the following meaning of this *ḥadīth:* "He did not restrict this to those who repented." Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, AH 1379), 11:428 (*kitāb al-riqāq,* ch. 51).

*believer, there shall be no ingratitude for his endeavor, and surely We shall write [it] down for him.* The Prophet said, however, that only good intentions are counted in the book; bad intentions upon which one does not act or that do not reach the level of assertion (*ʿazīmah*) are not recorded.

People will be gathered for review of their records as communities with their distinctive teachings (but the Reckoning and Judgment fall due upon people as individuals): *And thou wilt see every community upon its knees. Every community is called to its book: "Today you will be recompensed for that which you used to do"* (45:28). The Quran asserts that several groups are saved if they believed and performed righteous deeds: *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve* (2:62; cf. 5:69).[43]

The Andalusian sage Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) writes about the verse *Be mindful of a trial that will not befall only those among you who do wrong; and know that God is severe in retribution* (8:25) as follows:

> What punishment is greater than the one that afflicts the deserving and the undeserving, the oppressor and the oppressed, the innocent and the guilty? But such is the nature of the limits of this world, because it is a mixed abode. Its natural evil does not discriminate. But the next life differs entirely, because it is the abode of discrimination. Hence, the punishments are meted out only to those deserving.[44]

The Quran deems a "tribulation" (*fitnah*) that occurs in this world as natural rather than as a punishment, since it befalls both the deserving and the undeserving; however, in the next world, only those deserving of punishment receive it. Hence, the books in which our actions are recorded are done in an entirely discriminatory fashion: no one is wronged or falls victim to the apparently whimsical vicissitudes of natural or general evil that is the lot of this world.

People will be called to read their records and forced to acknowledge that what has been recorded is true: *Read your book! On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you* (17:14). One of the ninety-nine Names of God is "the Veiler of Wrongs" (*al-Sātir*). In a beautiful *ḥadīth,* the Prophet says of the Day of Judgment:

> God will draw near his believing servant and place him in a private chamber and veil him from others. He will then ask him to acknowledge his sins, showing each one to him saying, "Do you remember this? Do you acknowledge this?

43. Here *the Sabeans* may refer to Eastern traditions, which would include Buddhism. See Hamza Yusuf, "Buddha in the Qurʾān?," in Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground Between Islam and Buddhism* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2010).

44. Muḥyi 'l-Dīn ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah,* 4 vols. (Būlāq: n.p., 1911; repr. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 2:160.

> Do you recall this?" until He forces him to acknowledge them, and the man believes that he will perish from them. God then says, "Just as I veiled them for you in that life, I forgive you for them today." Then he is given the book containing only his good deeds.[45]

This is known as the "easy reckoning" in the Quran: *As for one who is given his book in his right hand, he will be reckoned with an easy reckoning* (84:7–8).

### THE WEIGHING ON THE SCALES (*AL-MĪZĀN*)

Once the records of the deeds are distributed among the resurrected, the weighing of actions on the scales takes place: *We shall set the just scales for the Day of Resurrection, and no soul shall be wronged in aught. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it. And We suffice as Reckoner* (21:47; see also 7:8; 23:102–3; 101:6–11). Scholars have differed as to the nature of the scales. Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī (d. 1434/2013) says:

> We must, as the scholars have argued, withhold judgment as to what types of scales are used, their nature and quality. Is it one scale for all of humanity, or several? Such questions have no definitive answer. We believe in the scales as we have been informed by the Majestic and Exalted without tasking our intellects or imaginations with interpretations or metaphorical readings of the verses.[46]

This interpretation has been the dominant position of traditional schools of theology throughout Islamic history. However, there are verses that describe the weighing of actions, and it is the good deeds that have greater weight, being ten times to seven hundred times heavier than evil deeds. And according to the Prophet, "The weightiest of things in the scales on the Day of Judgment are exalted and beautiful character and morality."[47] Nonetheless, the burden of unabsolved sins is felt by those who were heedless of the Reckoning: *Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with God till, when the Hour comes upon them suddenly, they say, "Alas for us, that we neglected it!" They will bear their burdens upon their backs. Behold! Evil is that which they bear!* (6:31). ʿĀʾishah, the Prophet's wife, said:

> I asked the Prophet if people would remember their families on the Day of Judgment, and he replied that they would not think of anyone during three stages of that day: at the scales, until they knew whether their deeds were light or weighty; at the distribution of the records, until they knew if they received

45. Sayyid Muḥammad Sādātī al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḥwāl al-ākhirah min nuṣūṣ al-Kitāb wa'l-Sunnah* (Riyadh: Dār al-Faḍīlah, 2003), 95–96.

46. Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Kubra 'l-yaqīniyyāt al-kawniyyah: wujūd al-khāliq wa waẓīfat al-makhlūq* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1969), 351.

47. Al-Tirmidhī 23,62 (no. 2133).

> them with their right or left hand; and at the traverse, when Hell is before them, until they pass over it.[48]

The Prophet said that people will have recourse on the Day of Judgment to right the wrongs that were perpetrated against them. Even the animals that were abused by their owners or mistreated by other animals will take retribution. Those who slandered others will have their account of good deeds transferred to the accounts of the victims of their slander. The Prophet once said:

> "Do you know who the bankrupt one is?" The Companions replied, "For us, he is the one without gold or silver." To this, the Prophet responded, "Rather, he is the one who comes on the Day of Judgment with many good deeds but because he had slandered so and so and struck so and so, his deeds are taken from him and given to those he wronged until he has none left for himself."[49]

The settling of scores involves everyone, whether believer or disbeliever. Any part of the earth that was wronged, even a river that was polluted, will testify against the perpetrators of the crimes. The Prophet stated, "Take care of this earth, for she is your mother,"[50] and "No one wrongs her except that he is shackled with seven earths around his neck on the Day of Judgment."[51] These scores will be settled during the Judgment, but another set of scores among the believers is settled before entering Paradise.

Once the records are given, people's fates are determined as the judgment is given in each individual case.

## *The Cistern* (al-Ḥawḍ)

After the Judgment, the multitudes proceed on to the traverse or bridge, but before that event, the believers are given a final thirst-quenching drink, after which they will never thirst again. Differences of opinion abound about the Prophet's cistern. As mentioned, other prophets have cisterns for their communities to relieve them from the thirst of the Day of Judgment, but the Prophet Muhammad was given a special cistern to quench the multitudes from his community. A *sūrah* of the Quran entitled *al-Kawthar* ("Abundant Good") states: *Truly We have bestowed abundant good upon thee. So pray to thy Lord and sacrifice. Truly thine enemy shall be the one without posterity* (108:1–3). Regarding *al-Kawthar,* the Prophet said:

48. Abū Dāwūd 41.28 (no. 4757); Aḥmad 10 (no. 25335); al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿala'l-Ṣaḥīḥayn,* ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1990), 4:622 (no. 8722).

49. Muslim 46.15 (no. 6744), al-Tirmidhī 33.2 (no. 2603), Aḥmad v (nos. 8144, 8530, 8964).

50. Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr,* ed. Ḥamdī ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī, 25 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.), 5:65 (no. 4596).

51. Al-Bukhārī 59.2 (no. 3234), Muslim 23.30 (nos. 4217–21).

> It is a river in Paradise my Lord has promised me and it has abundant goodness. It is also a cistern that my community will alight upon on the Day of Judgment. Its cups are the number of stars; but some are kept away, and I will say, "My Lord, he is of my community," and it will be said to me, "Thou dost not know what he did after thee."[52]

The last point refers to apostasy and heresy.

The cistern is found before the testing of the believers and is an indication that the cistern is both before the traverse and fed by the river al-Kawthar and then again appears after the traverse in Paradise. Al-Būṭī writes:

> It is clear that the cistern and al-Kawthar are one and the same. Their source is in Paradise. So what flows from it is called al-Kawthar, and what has collected from it outside of Paradise is called the cistern. The believers, who had not changed their faith or innovated anything before they enter Paradise, alight upon it, and the Messenger of God greets them at the cistern. Moreover, the traditions about the cistern are so numerous they have reached the level of factual, multiply transmitted proof.[53]

## *The Traverse or Bridge* (al-Ṣirāṭ)

The final stage of the Day of Judgment is crossing the traverse or bridge. Once the books have been assigned and deeds weighed on the scales, each individual's fate is made known. What remains is the movement to one's final abode and the possibility of intercession. People move toward what the Prophet described as "a darkened plane" as they approach the traverse, which is described in the *Ḥadīth* as a bridge that spans the ground of gathering (*arḍ al-maḥshar*) and Paradise, while crossing over one of the valleys of Hell.

The traverse is mentioned only in a few Quranic verses, such as 36:65–66: *On that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn. And had We willed, We would have blotted out their eyes. Then they would race to the path* (the traverse), *yet how would they see?* Other verses are understood as allusions to it (e.g., 19:66–73; 36:63). The discussion is, however, much clearer in the *Ḥadīth,* where it is said that it is "finer than a hair and sharper than a sword,"[54] and people cross it like lightning, the wind, birds flying, or camels trotting, "until finally a man comes who is unable to walk but can barely crawl. On each side of the traverse are suspended metal hooks [in another narration, 'only God knows the vastness of their dimensions'] that are programmed to snatch people

52. Muslim 5.14 (no. 921), al-Nasāʾī 11.21 (no. 912), Aḥmad vii (no. 12178).
53. Al-Būṭī, *Kubra 'l-yaqīniyyāt al-kawniyyah,* 307–8.
54. Muslim 2.83 (no. 473), Aḥmad 10 (no. 25432).

from the traverse. Some will be wounded by them, but pass safely nonetheless. Others are thrown by them violently into the Hellfire."[55]

Some exegetes argue that the disbelievers are sent directly from the scales to Hell and that only the believers and hypocrites cross the traverse. The hypocrites are included among the believers at this stage; they see a clear light emanating from the true believers that enables them to find their way to the traverse:

> *On the Day when the hypocrites, men and women, will say to those who believe, "Wait for us that we may borrow from your light," it will be said, "Turn back and seek a light!" Thereupon a wall with a gate will be set down between them, the inner side of which contains mercy, and on the outer side of which lies punishment. They will call unto them, "Were we not with you?" They reply, "Indeed! But you tempted yourselves, bided your time, and doubted; and false hopes deluded you till the Command of God came, and the Deluder deluded you concerning God. So this day no ransom shall be taken from you, or from those who disbelieved." Your refuge shall be the Fire; it shall be your master. What an evil journey's end!* (57:13–15)

Several traditions relate that after the dispersal of peoples' books of deeds, the hypocrites and believers move from the place of judgment to a dark plane. At this point, the light of the believers' actions reveals itself; the greater the good deeds, the greater the light. The hypocrites see this light and move toward the believers, begging to borrow from their light. The angels tell them to find their own light. Regarding this matter, the Prophet stated:

> God will call humanity by their mothers' last names on the Day of Judgment in order to veil [anyone who may have been illegitimate]. At the traverse, God will give each believer a light and each hypocrite a light, but when they are on the traverse, the light will be taken from the hypocrites, and they will say [to the believers], "Wait for us and give us your light." The believers will say, "O God, complete our light," and no one will remember any other.[56]

The Companion ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ stated that the wall that descends as a barrier between the believers and the hypocrites is the Eastern wall of the al-Aqṣā Mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount. The Golden Gate and the Door of Mercy are located on this wall. It was at this place that the Prophet saw Hell on his nocturnal Ascension (*al-miʿrāj*).[57] Some scholars believe that the barrier on the Day

55. Al-Bukhārī, chap. 52 (no. 6573).

56. Related by al-Ṭabarānī, in Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-qadīr,* 6 vols. (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, AH 1414), 5:205–6 (on 57:12–15).

57. A sound *ḥadīth* in al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ʿala'l-Ṣaḥīḥayn,* 4:643 (no. 8776) and al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-qadīr,* 5:206 (on 57:16).

of Judgment is literally the Eastern wall, while others say it is a re-creation or an archetype that the wall in this world reflects.

This stage of the Day of Judgment is reserved for believers from all of the respective prophetic traditions. Those who rejected the truth will not cross the traverse, but instead follow their false gods into the abyss of Hell. The idols and human beings taken as gods will lead their followers into Hell, as is said of Pharaoh in 11:98: *He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them to the Fire. Evil indeed is the watering place to which they are led!* Some exegetes, however, argue that everyone, including the disbelievers, will cross the traverse, a disagreement based upon differing interpretations of *there is not one of you, but that he will approach it* (19:71).

## *The Arched Bridge into Paradise* (al-Qanṭarah)

Reaching the other side of the traverse, believers will come to an arched bridge separating Hell from Paradise. Before the believers can cross this bridge, they must first resolve conflicts and grudges and ask forgiveness from those they have wronged. Lesser intercessions are also made at this stage for those who did not make it across the traverse. The righteous, martyrs, and those who lived by the Quran are permitted to intercede for the less fortunate. The prophets will intercede for their respective communities and finally God Himself removes those whom He pleases from the Hellfire. The next stage is the Afterlife of eternal bliss or damnation.

## *Hell and Its Torments*

The Quran is replete with descriptions of the terror of the Afterlife and the torments of Hell. Unlike the Torah or even the New Testament, which contain comparatively little detail about the Afterlife, the Quran provides vivid images of the horrors that await ingrates and deniers, as in 32:20–21: *And as for those who are iniquitous, their refuge is the Fire. Whenever they desire to go forth therefrom, they are returned unto it, and it is said unto them, "Taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny." And We make them taste the lesser punishment before the greater punishment, that they might turn back* (cf. 22:22),

Hell is reflected in the hellish experiences we endure in this world. The temporary torments of this world are reminders of the permanent ones awaiting the unrepentant among us in the next world. The purpose of these reminders is to engender a profound sense of vigilance in this life. The unrelenting evils are warded off with *taqwā,* often translated "piety," "duty," "reverence," or "conscientiousness," whose cultivation is a central moral theme in the Quran. Its root meaning is "to ward off evil," and as employed in the Quran it also indicates fear, respect, and reverence for God. The first injunction in the Quran is, *O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who created you, and those who were before you, that haply you may be reverent* (2:21), that is, people of *taqwā.*

In the Quranic ethos, fear of Hell is to be cultivated in conjunction with hope for Paradise. The conscious awareness of God's possible punishment engenders in this world an awe that can help one to live a morally scrupulous life. But the Quran describes human beings as weak by nature (4:28). This weakness leads to sin, and sin without repentance leads to Hell. Thus, another major theme of the Quran is repentance before death. The Quran hints that, if people simply followed the inclinations of their carnal soul (*al-nafs*) and refused to submit to God and His Law, Hell would be their natural destiny.

The Prophet stated, "Guard yourselves against the Fire, even with the charity of half a date, and if you do not find even that, then with good words."[58] The concept that the Inferno is the natural destination of those who do not accept Divine Guidance is rooted in the Quranic understanding of freedom of choice. Human beings are free to choose, but embedded in the Arabic word for choice is "goodness." *Ikhtiyār* means "choice," but also it literally means "to choose good." To relinquish conscious choice is to capitulate to the instinctive tendencies of the bestial or lower self. Alluding to this fact, the Prophet said, "Hell is surrounded by desirous things and Paradise by things that are disliked."[59]

Fallen people, cut off from their original and primordial nature, or *fiṭrah,* will naturally gravitate toward what is harmful, but by exercising choice correctly, they incline to do good and thus pave a path to Paradise. Hence, to exercise freedom by choosing what God has willed for His creatures is to choose Paradise. However, those who reject this choice are seen as ingrates who refuse God's greatest gift, free will—the ability to choose God freely as opposed to relinquishing that choice and turning one's back on God. As stated in 2:256: *There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error;* and in 18:29: *So whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve.*

In other words, if left to our own devices we simply follow the road to Hell, but we must choose to turn back through repentance. The Arabic word for "repentance" is *tawbah,* which literally means "to turn around." The prophets are those who have been placed upon our path as warners. They call to us and exclaim: "Stop! Turn around. You are heading the wrong way." They also give good news concerning the road that leads to God. For many who failed to "turn around" in this world, purgatory and even Hell will be places of purification. This choice to return freely to God by acting as His vicegerents and caretakers in this worldly abode is related to the sacred trust (*amānah*) that even the mountains refused to bear (see 59:21c).

The experience of Hell is neither one of life, which is essentially enjoyable, nor one of death, which is desirably avoidable in this life yet yearned for in Hell; thus one

58. Al-Bukhārī 24.9 (no. 1434), 61.26 (no. 3637), 78.34 (no. 6092), 81.49 (no. 6620), 81.51 (no. 6643), 98.36 (no. 7605); Muslim 13.21 (nos. 2395–97).

59. Al-Bukhārī 81.28 (no. 6566), Muslim 54.1 (no. 7308).

*neither dies therein nor lives* (87:13; cf. 20:74). The "physical" sufferings of Hell are the exteriorization of the inner reality of all who deny the blessings of existence by denying the Creator and Sustainer of those blessings. Thus the Quran repeatedly asks, *So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?* (55:13–77 passim)

### THE PORTALS OF HELL

Like Paradise, Hell is described as having portals or gates: *And verily Hell shall be their tryst, all together. Seven gates it has, and for each gate is appointed a separate portion of them* (15:43–44). The Prophet stated, "Surely Hell has seven gates. One of them is reserved for those who draw a sword against my community."[60]

### THE NAMES OF HELL

Hell is called by many names in the Quran. The most common is simply "the Fire" (*al-nār*), which occurs over a hundred times. The next most common names are *Hell* (*jahannam*) and the *Hellfire* (*al-jaḥīm*), occurring seventy-seven and twenty-six times, respectively. Alongside these two terms, five other names are prominent: the blaze (*saqar*), the flame (*laẓā*), the furnace (*al-ḥuṭamah*), the roasting fire (*al-saʿīr*), and the abyss (*al-hāwiyah*). According to al-Ghazzālī, the seven portals and seven names represent the seven sinful members of the body through which people are led to the fire: the tongue, eyes, ears, hands, feet, stomach, and private parts.[61]

### THE SINS OF HELL

Of all the sins, those of the tongue are the most damning. The Prophet replied to a man's question about whether people would be taken to account for their words, "Does anything cast people into Hell on their faces other than the harvest of their tongues?"[62] The Quran promises Hell for several specific offenses if those sins were not forgiven through the seeking of repentance: breaking God's covenant (2:83–85), usury and economic exploitation (2:275–76), murder (4:29–30), embezzling the wealth of orphans (4:10), military desertion from a Muslim army (8:15–16), and hoarding wealth (104:2). But of all the sins mentioned, the one unpardonable sin is that of idolatry once knowledge of God's Unity has been made clear: *So do not set up equals unto God, knowingly* (2:22); and *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him* (4:48). However, the meaning of idolatry is far from simply "worshipping idols." The sin that is unpardonable is denying God's Reality, which is essentialized in His absolute Unity and Power. Nothing besides God has ultimate power. He alone is uniquely independent. All else is utterly dependent upon God, and to assert otherwise is to fall into idolatry.

60. Al-Tirmidhī 43.16 (no. 3414), Aḥmad ii (no. 5793).

61. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, n.d.), 4:531 (*rubʿ al-munjiyāt, k. al-murāqabah wa'l-muḥāsabah, al-qawl fī ṣifat jahannam wa-ahwālihā wa-ankālihā*).

62. Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *an-Nawawī's Forty Hadith*, trans. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), no. 29.

For the mystics, the great idol is the carnal self (*al-nafs*), which claims to exist independently of the Divine. There is also the idolatry of making "the service greater than God," which occurs in self-absolutizing religion when people arrogate to themselves the mind of God and force their misguided conclusions on others as if they were gods with the right to choose, for example, who lives and who dies. It is human beings who create idols, and what they manufacture is an unpardonable sin in Islam: *Do you worship that which you carve, while God created you and that which you make?* (37:95). The qualities of self-absolutizing idolaters are enumerated throughout the Quran as the qualities that lead to Hell: puffed-up pride (*istikbār*), derision (*istihzāʾ*), denial (*kufr*), ingratitude (*kufrān*), cruelty (*qaswah*), zealotry (*ḥamiyyah*), ignorant impudence (*jahl*), vaingloriousness (*fakhr*), wantonness (*baṭar*), and envy (*ḥasad*). The Prophet said, "Shall I not tell you the qualities of the people of Hell? The people of Hell are every arrogant, pride-filled, rude, and cruel tyrant."[63]

### THE COMPANIONS OF HELL

The Quran uses the idiom *inhabitants of the Fire* to identify two groups that are mentioned and a third that exegetes say is implied. The first group comprises the angels assigned as the caretakers (*khazanah*) of Hell.[64] The second category refers to the disbelievers who are destined for Hell: *But those who disbelieve and deny Our signs, it is they who are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein* (2:39). Exegetes explain that the third category comprises believers who have committed sins, but are redeemed through God's Forgiveness and Grace or are granted that honor of redemption through the intercession of one of the prophets or righteous servants.

### FOOD AND CLOTHING IN HELL

The descriptions of Hell in the Quran are blood-curdling. The inhabitants drink boiling water and pus.[65] They eat thorny plants and a bitter desert fruit known as *zaqqūm,* mentioned three times in the Quran (37:62; 44:43–46; 56:52–53). Because the people of Hell have some knowledge of the states of those in Paradise, a dimension of mental anguish is heaped onto their physical suffering. Hell's denizens beg for food and drink from the people of Paradise, but the only response is God's decision to punish them (37:50–57).

### THE PERPETUITY OF HELL

During the early period of Islam, scholars differed about the duration of Hell. The majority of them argued that Hell is perpetual and an actualized state that never ends. But some groups argued otherwise, citing verses that hinted at an end to Hell's torment and arguing that this was more consistent with God's saying, "My Mercy exceeds

63. Al-Bukhārī 65.[68].1 (no. 4967), 78.61 (no. 6140), 83.9 (no. 6738); Muslim 54.14 (nos. 7366–68).
64. See 39:71; 40:49; 67:8; 74:31.
65. See 6:70; 10:4; 14:16–17; 37:67; 47:15; 56:54.

My Wrath."[66] Thus the scholars fell into three camps. The first believed that although Hell did not end, its punishments and torments did. Their proof for this was the verse: *Truly Hell lies in ambush, a place unto which the rebellious return, to tarry therein for ages* (78:21–23). This was the opinion of Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), and Ibn ᶜArabī; a similar opinion that the majority of Hell's denizens are ultimately released also appears to have been held by al-Ghazzālī, as is evident in his *Fayṣal al-tafriqah* (*Decisive Criterion*). The second camp comprised the annihilationists, who argued that Hell is extinguished entirely. Finally, the last group comprised the majority of scholars, who adhered to the notion of perpetual punishment understood literally.

Ibn ᶜAbbās and others among the first community and Companions of the Prophet, however, relate statements that, nonetheless, indicate the vast Mercy of God in the Afterlife, such as, "Surely a day will come over Hell when it will be like a field of corn that has dried up after flourishing for a while."[67] Stronger still is the following sound *ḥadīth,* "Then God will say, 'The angels, the prophets, and the faithful have all in their turn interceded for the sinners, and now there remains none to intercede for them except the most Merciful of those who show mercy.' So, God will then remove a handful of people from the Fire who never worked any good."[68] The Quran also states: *As for those who are wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein there shall be for them groaning and wailing, abiding therein for so long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills. Surely thy Lord does whatsoever He desires* (11:106–7). The following verse then describes Paradise: *And as for those who are felicitous, they shall be in the Garden, abiding therein for so long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills—a gift unfailing* (11:108).

## WOMEN AND THE HELLFIRE

A common misconception among some Muslims is that the majority of the inhabitants of Hell are women. This arises from an often quoted *ḥadīth,* "I looked into Hell and saw that the majority of its inhabitants were women."[69] But another *ḥadīth,* almost universally ignored, states, "I entered Paradise and found that the majority of its inhabitants were women."[70] Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) says, "No contradiction exists."[71] For instance, we could consider the former to refer

66. Al-Bukhārī 59.1 (no. 3230), Muslim 51.4 (no. 7145).

67. Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muᶜjam al-kabīr,* 8:247 (no. 7969); ᶜAlī ibn ᶜAbd al-Malik al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-ᶜummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa'l-afᶜāl,* ed. Bakrī Ḥusaynī, 16 vols. (Beirut: Muᵓassasat al-Risālah, 1981), 14:526 (no. 39505).

68. Muslim 2.83 (no. 472).

69. Al-Bukhārī 59.8 (no. 3277), 67.89 (no. 5253), 81.16 (no. 6526), 81.51 (no. 6626).

70. Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasanah fī bayān kathīr min al-aḥādīth al-mushtahirah ᶜala'l-alsinah,* 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ᶜArabī, 1985), 1:343 (no. 483).

71. Al-Sakhāwī, al-*Maqāṣid al-ḥasanah,* 1:343 (no. 483).

to its initial inhabitants and the latter to Paradise once people have been purified and prepared for it. It should also be noted that historically women have comprised the majority of the world's population.

## *Paradise: Its People and Its Blessings*

Ibn ᶜAbbās, the cousin of the Prophet and one of the first great exegetes of the Quran, stated, "There is nothing in Paradise related to this world except the names."[72] In a *ḥadīth* whose authenticity is widely attested, the Prophet said, "God says, 'I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and what never occurred to the heart of anyone,' or recite if you like, *No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it as a recompense for that which they used to do* [32:17]".[73] Despite the unknowable nature of the Afterlife, ample descriptions are given throughout the Quran that both delight and terrify, but are clearly meant only to approximate our understanding of the ineffable. When asked, "Of what is Paradise made?" the Prophet replied, using a symbolic language, "Bricks of gold and bricks of silver. Its floor is of pure musk. The stones of Paradise are pearls and rubies. Its earth is saffron. The one who enters it is blessed, never experiences suffering, dwells therein eternally, and knows no death. Clothes do not wear out, and youth never fades."[74]

The essence of Paradise is mercy, which Islamic spirituality identifies with an inner dimension more apparent in the female nature. In this context it should be recalled that the Arabic word for "womb" is *raḥim,* which is cognate with and shares the triliteral root of the word for "mercy," which is *raḥmah.* Such realities must be taken into consideration in imagining the spiritual role of women and their presence as natural inhabitants of Paradise in the form of houris.

As for the structure of Paradise, it is said in traditions that its gates are eight in number. The Prophet stated, "None of you performs lustrations before prayer, does it well, and then says, 'I testify that there is but one God and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger' except that all eight gates of Paradise are opened for him, and he may enter from any one he so chooses."[75] The Prophet also said, "I will come to the gate of the Garden on the Day of Judgment and request that it be opened. The one charged with it will say, 'And who are you?' I will reply, 'Muhammad.' He will then say, 'I was commanded not to open it for anyone before you.' "[76]

The people of Paradise are ranked in degrees. *Sūrah* 56, *al-Wāqiᶜah,* marks them as *the companions of the right* and *the foremost,* while *the companions of the left* mentioned

72. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* 1:205 (on 2:25).

73. Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Riyāḍ al-ṣāliḥīn,* ed. Yūsuf al-Ḥājj Aḥmad (Damascus: Maktabat al-ᶜIlm al-Ḥadīth, 2002), p. 549, no. 1881 (*b. bayān mā aᶜadda ʾLlāh li'l-muʾminīn fi'l-jannah,* no. 3).

74. Al-Tirmidhī 34.2 (no. 2717); Aḥmad v (nos. 8158, 9875).

75. Muslim 3.6 (no. 576).

76. Muslim 2.87 (no. 507).

in this *sūrah* are those who are deprived of the paradisal state. *The foremost* are described as

> *the ones brought nigh, in Gardens of bliss—many from those of old, and few from those of later times—upon embroidered couches, reclining upon them, facing one another. Immortal youths wait upon them with goblets, ewers, and a cup from a flowing spring, wherefrom they suffer neither headache nor stupefaction, and with fruits as they choose, and the meat of birds as they desire, and [there shall be] wide-eyed maidens, the likeness of concealed pearls, as a recompense for that which they used to do.* (56:11–24)

As for those on the right, they are the ones who are given their books in their right hands. The same *sūrah* describes them as *the companions of the right:*

> *And the companions of the right; what of the companions of the right? Among thornless lote trees, clustered plantains, and extended shade, gushing water, and abundant fruit, neither out of reach, nor forbidden, and [upon] raised beds. Truly We brought them into being as a [new] creation, then made for them virgins, amorous peers, for the companions of the right—many from those of old, and many from those of later times.* (56:27–40)

As they enter paradisal Gardens, the believers are greeted by angels who say, *Enter . . . in peace, secure . . . as brothers, upon couches, facing one another* (15:46–47). It is also said that the people of Paradise *hear no idle talk therein, nor incitement to sin, save that "Peace! Peace!" is uttered* (56:25–26), and that *when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein]"* (39:73; cf. 13:22–24).

The age of the people of Paradise is said to be thirty years, considered the prime of life in Arabia. The Prophet stated, "Whoever dies in this world, either young or old, will be restored to the age of thirty in Paradise and will never increase in age; likewise for the denizens of Hell."[77] Echoing Biblical descriptions, the Quran describes the Garden as having rivers of milk, wine, and honey (47:15). Its inhabitants also enjoy what is described as a camphor drink and one of ginger as well (76:5). In addition, wells spring forth when one desires to drink (76:6). Though, according to most authorities, animals of this world will be turned to dust on the Day of Judgment, those that were beloved pets of the righteous in this life will also appear in Paradise to accompany their owners. There are other animals in Paradise as well. In a sound tradition, the Prophet described the horses of Paradise, and a man asked, "Will there be camels?" The Prophet replied, "In Paradise is whatever pleases you and delights your eye."[78] The food of Paradise is described as delicious fruits, such as grapes, pomegranates, bananas, and dates; aromatic herbs; drinks; and various meats, especially the meats of

77. Al-Tirmidhī 34.23 (no. 2761).
78. Al-Tirmidhī 34.11 (no. 2739); Aḥmad 9.79 (no. 23448).

fowl. The body, apparently, will also have a type of metabolism, as it did in this life. The Prophet explained that the inhabitants of Paradise neither urinate nor defecate; instead they perspire a perfumed musk scent.

The descriptions of the sensual delights of Paradise in the Quran and the *Ḥadīth* have historically caused many non-Muslims much consternation. And although *no soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it as a recompense for that which they used to do* (32:17), the descriptions seem to indicate that the delights of this world shall have their counterparts in kind, however different in degree, in the next life. The delights of Paradise are "likened" to the delights of this lower world, however, "because of the interconnection between all possible states of experience; they are 'unlike' them because of the incommensurability between different dimensions or levels of reality."[79] Earthly delights are in fact reflections of paradisal ones.

The wide-eyed maidens, or houris, of Paradise, as mentioned in several verses,[80] are described as *untouched* (55:56) and *buxom* (78:33). They are pure companions for the righteous. Some exegetes argue that the houris are the spouses from this world who are purified and whose virginity is restored. Others maintain that they are uniquely created for Paradise. They represent loving-kindness (*ʿarub*) and are of the same age (38:52; 78:33). Their power is in their purity, and the consummation of that loving-kindness is union in Divine proximity. Ibn ʿArabī writes:

> In relation to [the Prophet, women] are as the Universal Nature is to God in which He revealed the forms of the cosmos by directing toward it the Divine Will and Command, which, at the level of elemental forms, is symbolized by copulation. . . . Whoever loves a woman in this way loves with Divine Love, while he whose love for them is limited to natural lust lacks true knowledge of that desire.[81]

The joys of Paradise are archetypes of the joys we experience in the earthly realm, including food, drink, and lovemaking. The joy of sexual union can even be seen as a symbol and earthly manifestation of spiritual union. Al-Ghazzālī states:

> Man has been made subject to sexual desire for two beneficial reasons. The first of these is that by knowing its delight he is able to draw an analogy which suggests to him what the delight of the Afterlife must be like, for the delight of the sexual act, were it to last, would be the greatest pleasure of the body, just as the pain of a burn is the body's greatest agony.[82]

79. Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 232.

80. See 37:48; 44:54; 55:20; 56:22.

81. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Bezels of Wisdom,* trans. R. W. J. Austin (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 275–76, with slight modification in translation.

82. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *On Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires,* trans. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 165.

According to the Quran, *Therein they shall have whatsoever they will; and with Us there is more* (50:35). The "more" mentioned in this verse is the beatific vision. The highest and greatest blessing of Paradise is the vision of the Divine, which scholars of Islam have argued occurs with an eternal, nonspatial, and ineffable eye. In his creed, Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 324/935) writes, "The beatific vision is a reality for the people of Paradise without enclosure or modality, just as the Book of God pronounces, *Faces that Day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord* [75:22–23]. Its explanation is as God knows it to be and as He intended."[83]

Although the Quran suggests in several verses that people enter Paradise as a result of their actions in this world (see, e.g., 32:17), in reality it is ultimately by the Grace of God. Deeds are necessary, but not sufficient. The Prophet said, "None of you will be saved by his actions." His Companions asked, "Not even you, O Messenger of God!" He replied, "Not even me, unless God envelops me in His Mercy."[84] Nonetheless, the place of individuals in Paradise and their experience of the Afterlife is, without contradiction, also of course based upon what they have done and thought in this life. The Quran says:

> *Those who believe and perform righteous deeds shall be made to enter Gardens with rivers running below, abiding therein by the Leave of their Lord. Their greeting therein shall be, "Peace!" Hast thou not considered how God sets forth a parable? A good word is as a good tree: its roots firm and its branches in the sky. It brings forth fruit in every season, by the Leave of its Lord. And God sets forth parables for mankind, that haply they may remember.* (14:23–25)

This parable immediately follows a description of Paradise for those who were righteous on earth. The parable is of the tree of belief. The actions that strengthen it are firmly rooted in this world. However, its branches and fruits are celestial and are obtained in the next world. The seeds of otherworldly fruits must be planted in this world, but are harvested in the next.

The Prophet said, "Let none of you wish for death due to some harm that has afflicted him. However, if he should feel compelled to do so, then, let him at least say, 'O God, give me life as long as life is better for me; but grant me death, should death be better for me.'"[85] Although the time of death is not to be hastened, those longing for the Divine welcome its inevitable arrival. The Prophet also said, "Death is the great gift of the believer."[86] Ibn ʿArabī comments on this second *ḥadīth,* stating:

83. *The Creed of Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī,* trans. Hamza Yusuf (Berkeley, CA: Zaytuna Institute, 2007), 56.

84. Al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭībī, *Sharḥ al-Ṭībī ʿalā Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ,* ed. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ʿAlī Samak (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2001), 5:138.

85. Al-Bukhārī, chap. 19 (no. 5671).

86. Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʾ wa-muzīl al-ilbās ʿamma ʾshtahara min al-aḥādīth ʿalā alsinat al-nās,* ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2000), 2:348 (no. 2663).

> Today, death is a great gift to a believer. His bier is a comforting transport because it takes him from this world to a place without trial or tribulation. He is neither a loser nor is he cheated. Whoever hopes for centuries here should be reminded that there you have a meeting with the Divine, and an imperishable cosmos. If a believer knew what really came after death, he would say with every breath, "O my Lord, take me now, take me now."[87]

The Quran is, from one point of view, a reflection on the impermanence of life and a reminder of a coming eternity that knows no death. The Prophet stated:

> On the Day of Resurrection, death will be brought forward in the shape of a piebald ram. Then a caller will declare, "O people of Paradise!" Thereupon they will stretch their necks and look carefully. The caller will say, "Do you know this?" They will respond, "Yes, this is death." All of them will see it. Then it will be announced again, "O people of Hell!" They will stretch their necks and look carefully. The caller will say, "Do you know this?" They will say, "Yes, this is death." All of them will see it. Then it will be slaughtered, and the caller will say, "O people of Paradise! Eternity for you and no death; O people of Hell! Eternity for you and no death." Then the Prophet recited, *And warn them of the Day of Regret, when the matter will have been decreed, while they are in a state of heedlessness and believe not* (19:39).[88]

87. Al-ʿAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʾ*.
88. Al-Bukhārī 65.[19].1 (no. 4777); Muslim 54.14 (no. 7360).

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# *Appendix A*

# *ḤADĪTH* CITATIONS

The following appendix provides supplementary information on the *aḥādīth* cited, paraphrased, or referred to in the commentary. In many, though not all, cases these *ḥadīth* reports are to be found in the works of the traditional commentators (e.g., al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr), upon which the present commentary is largely based. Also included in this appendix are some reports comprising sayings of prominent Companions of the Prophet and other early figures that are narrated in *ḥadīth* collections.

The collection and classification of *aḥādīth* according to the reliability of their chain of transmission (*isnād*) in reporting the words and actions of the Prophet is a major discipline in Islamic studies. The *ḥadīth* collectors devised numerous categories, including those *aḥādīth* that were so widely corroborated (*mutawātir*) as to be without doubt the words or actions of the Prophet, those that were almost certainly falsely attributed to him, and the large range of possibilities in between. It is beyond the scope of this appendix to provide a comprehensive treatment in this respect, although those cases in which scholars have considered a purported saying of the Prophet to be very unreliable or to have been misattributed have been noted.

Moreover, the forensic enterprise of ranking *aḥādīth* was itself separate from the question of how such texts would then be used as authoritative sources in law, theology, spirituality, history, and commentary. It should be noted that most traditional authors did not limit themselves to the strongest and most reliable *aḥādīth* in their works, but made use of a wide range of *aḥādīth,* using different conventions in different

areas of study. This is especially true in *tafsīr* (Quranic commentary), where the aim was to provide a basis for meditating on the multiple levels of meaning embedded in specific verses. In general, even the greatest scholars of Quranic commentary evinced a comparative leniency with regard to the relative soundness of the *aḥādīth* they cited, though there is considerable variation in the methods and standards employed from one work and author to another, depending on many factors.

As people of great erudition, the authors of major Quranic commentaries had at their disposal dozens of *ḥadīth* compilations that collectively comprised hundreds of thousands of entries, far beyond the famous collections, such as al-Bukhārī's, that are household names in the Islamic world. Often these commentators (and learned traditional authors in general) quote a less well known variant or version of a *ḥadīth,* use only a portion of a *ḥadīth,* or combine more than one *ḥadīth* into a single comment. We have not parsed out all aspects of how these texts have been quoted, a task that would have required a separate volume. Rather, our goal is to provide the origins of these *aḥādīth* (a process in Islamic intellectual culture called *takhrīj,* or "extraction") for students and scholars who are interested in the original sources of these crucial texts.

We have also not attempted to document all sources for a particular *ḥadīth* and have limited ourselves to citing a sampling of sources, giving priority to the most authoritative. In most cases where a specific report is found in the collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, we deemed it unnecessary to cite additional sources. For *aḥādīth* found in only one of the above named collections or in neither of them, at least three sources are cited, although there are some instances of exceptionally obscure *aḥādīth.* In a few cases, the report in question is cited only in the *tafsīr* literature and the earliest such citation(s) is indicated.

The number of the commentary in which the *ḥadīth* or saying appears is in red, followed by an identifying excerpt or short description and the work(s) in which the text (or part of it) can be found. A bibliography of the sources appears at the end of this appendix. Editorial notes about the citations appear in parentheses. *Aḥādīth* very similar to or very closely related to the *ḥadīth* in question appear within brackets.

The # symbol designates the serial number of the *ḥadīth* in the edition of the work listed in the accompanying bibliography; in cases where there is no serial numbering, the page number or the volume and page number are provided.

1:Introduction The Prophet declares *al-Fātiḥah* to be the greatest *sūrah:* Bukhārī, #4474; Abū Dāwūd, #1458; Ibn Mājah, #3785; Mālik, #231.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I have divided the prayer . . .": Muslim, #395; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #7958, #7959; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, #2767, #2678; {Mālik, #245}.

"By Him in Whose Hand lies my soul, in neither the Torah . . .": Tirmidhī, #2875, #3125; Nasāʾī, #914; Ḥākim, #3078; Ibn Khuzaymah, #500, #501.

"Satan was frightened four times . . .": Majlisī, *Biḥār,* 89:237; {Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4788}.

1:1c "I have prayed behind the Prophet, Abū Bakr . . .": (not all verbatim) Bukhārī, #743; Muslim, #399; Nasā'ī, #907; Ibn Mājah, #815; Mālik, #227; Ibn Khuzaymah, #495.

"Among you I perform the prayer that is closest . . .": Nasā'ī, #905; Ḥākim, #852; Ibn Khuzaymah, #499.

The revelation of the *basmalah* enabled the Prophet to separate one *sūrah* from the next: Abū Dāwūd, #788; Ḥākim, #848; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #2377.

"Any important matter not begun with the Name of God . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #8712; {more common, with "Praise be to God": Ibn Mājah, #1894; Abū Dāwūd, #4840; Ibn Ḥibbān, #1, #2; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #10255}.

1:2c "When you say *Praise be to God* . . .": (obscure *ḥadīth* with very weak *isnād*) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Muttaqī, #6453.

"There is no way to enumerate the praise due to Thee . . .": Muslim, #486; Tirmidhī, #3493; Abū Dāwūd, #879; Ibn Mājah, #1179.

1:4c "On the Day of Judgment, God will grasp the earth . . .": (not verbatim, some partial) Bukhārī, #7412, #4812; Muslim, #2788, #2787; Abū Dāwūd, #4732; Abū Ya'lā, #5558.

"Who is the most intelligent . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4259; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4671.

"Bring yourself to account . . .": (a much-cited saying of 'Umar) Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsū'ah,* #9874; Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyah,* 1:52; {Tirmidhī, #2459}.

1:6c "God has set forth a parable . . .": Ḥākim, #245; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17634; Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* #2024; {abridged: Tirmidhī, #2859; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17636}.

Descriptions of the bridge over Hellfire: (not verbatim) Bukhārī, #6574, #7439; Muslim, #183; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #360; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11081, #11127; Abū Ya'lā, #1253, #6663; Ibn Ḥajar, #4545.

1:7c The interpretation of *those who incur wrath* and *those who are astray:* Tirmidhī, #2953, #2954; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6246; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #3813; Ṭayālisī, #1135.

"When the prayer leader says . . ." Bukhārī, #4475; Muslim, #410; Mālik, #252, #253.

2:Introduction "Everything has a zenith . . ." Tirmidhī, #2878; {Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #2158, #2161}.

"Truly Satan leaves a house when . . .": Muslim, #780; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #10735; Tirmidhī, #2877; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #2162.

"Learn *al-Baqarah* . . .": Dārimī, #3419; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22950, #22157; {Muslim, #804}.

2:22c "O Messenger of God, what is the greatest sin . . .": Bukhārī, #6001; Muslim, #86.

2:31c "Truly God created Adam from a handful . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4693; Tirmidhī, #2955; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6181; {Ḥākim, #3096}.

2:67–71c "Had they taken the nearest cow . . .": Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Haythamī, *Kashf,* #2188.

2:72–73c "O Messenger of God, how does God revive . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #16196, #16194; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* 19:208.

2:74c "I know a stone in Makkah . . .": Muslim, #2277; Dārimī, #20; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #1961.

"This is a mountain . . .": Bukhārī, #2889, #4803; Muslim, #1365; Mālik, #1854.

The story of the weeping date-palm stump, Bukhārī, #2095; {Tirmidhī, #3627; Ibn Mājah, #1414; Nasā'ī, #1396}.

2:78c "We are an *ummī* people . . .": Bukhārī, #1913; Muslim, #1080; Abū Dāwūd, #2319.

2:83c "Paradise is at the feet of mothers": Nasā'ī, #3104; Ibn Mājah, #2781; Ḥākim, #2558.

2:87c "You will follow the ways . . .": Bukhārī, #3456; Muslim, #2669; Tirmidhī, #2641.

2:93c "Trials and temptations come upon hearts . . .": Muslim, #144; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23280, #23440.

2:94–95c "Let none of you long for death . . .": Bukhārī, #6351; Muslim, #2680; Tirmidhī, #971.

2:98c "Whoever is an enemy of God's friend . . .": Bukhārī, #6502; Ibn Ḥibbān, #347; {Ibn Mājah, #3989}.

2:106c "It is one of those that has been abrogated . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4637; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #13141.

2:108c "That Muslim commits the greatest crime . . .": Bukhārī, #7289; Muslim, #2358.

"Those who came before you were ruined . . .": Bukhārī, #7288; Muslim, #1337; Nasā'ī, #2619.

2:109c "Let there be no envy except . . .": Bukhārī, #1409, #7141; Muslim, #816; Tirmidhī, #1936.

2:125c "This is the station of Abraham . . .": (not verbatim, partial) Bukhārī, #402, #4916; Tirmidhī, #2959, #2960; Ibn Ḥanbal, #160.

2:126c "This land was made inviolable by God . . .": Bukhārī, #112, #1349, #1587; Muslim, #1353, #1355.

2:143c *Middle* means "just": Bukhārī, #3339, #4487; Tirmidhī, #2961; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11068.

"The best of things is their middlemost": (weak or incomplete *isnād*) Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #6102; ʿAjlūnī, #1247; {"the best of works": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #3604}.

"God will cause to enter the Garden . . .": Bukhārī, #1368, #2643; Nasā'ī, #1934; Ibn Ḥanbal, #204, #139.

"You are God's witnesses over mankind": (not verbatim) Bukhārī, #1367; Muslim, #949; Tirmidhī, #1058.

2:145c "Whoever prays our prayer . . .": Bukhārī, #391; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #1669; {Nasā'ī, #4997}.

2:152c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I am as my servant deems Me . . .": Bukhārī, #7405; Muslim, #2675; Tirmidhī, #3603; Ibn Mājah, #3822.

2:154c "The spirits of the witnesses . . .": Tirmidhī, #3011; Ibn Mājah, #1449, #2801; Abū Dāwūd, #2520.

2:155c "Patience comes at the first blow": Bukhārī, #1283, #1302; Muslim, #926; Tirmidhī, #988.

2:158c "Go to and fro . . .": Ḥākim, #7022; Ibn Ḥanbal, #27367, #27368.

2:165c "You will be with those whom you love": Bukhārī, #6168, #6169, #6170; Muslim, #2640, #2641.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Those who loved each other in My Glory . . .": Tirmidhī, #2390; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22080; Ḥākim, #8365.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Where are those who loved one another . . .": Muslim, #2566; Mālik, #2004; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7231, #7455.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My Love is realized for . . .": (not all verbatim) Ḥākim, #7393, #7394, #7395; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22080, #22002; Mālik, #2007.

2:168c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I created My servants as *ḥanīf*s . . .": Muslim, #2865; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17484; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2954.

"Make wholesome what you eat . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #6495.

2:172–73c "God is good . . .": Muslim, #1015; Tirmidhī, #2989; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8348.

2:177c The *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, the five principal articles of Islamic faith: Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

2:178c "The blood of all Muslims is equal": Abū Dāwūd, #2751; Ibn Mājah, #2683; Nasā'ī, #4734.

2:180c "Let there be no bequests for heirs": Abū Dāwūd, #2870; Tirmidhī, #2120; Nasā'ī, #3641.

"One-third, and . . .": Bukhārī, #5354; Muslim, #1628; Tirmidhī, #2116.

2:182c "Injustice in the matter of bequests . . .": (verbatim but incomplete *isnād*) Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #12587; (with *iḍrār* instead of *janaf*) Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #12586; Dīnawarī, #3460.

"He who spends or gives charity . . .": Nasā'ī, #3614; Bazzār, #4093; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #7834.

2:184c The Prophet orders Muslims to fast on ʿĀshūrā' in Madinah: Bukhārī, #3942, #3943, #2004, #2005; Muslim, #1130, #1131.

2:185c "When Ramadan comes . . .": Bukhārī, #3277; Muslim, #1079; Mālik, #855.

"Make things easy . . .": Bukhārī, #69, #6125; Muslim, #1734.

2:186c "You are calling One . . .": Bukhārī, #6610; Muslim, #2704.

"Calling upon God is a form of worship": Tirmidhī, #3372; Abū Dāwūd, #1479; Ibn Mājah, #328.

2:188c "I am only a man . . .": Bukhārī, #2458, #7185; Muslim, #1713; Mālik, #2877.

2:197c "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, there is no deed . . .": (verbatim, but *mursal*) Ibn Abī ʿUrūbah, #7; {Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 10:401; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7511}.

2:201c "Our Lord, give us good . . .": Bukhārī, #4522, #6389; Muslim, #2690; Abū Dāwūd, #1519.

2:212c "Abū Dharr, look around . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #21396, #21493; Ibn Ḥibbān, #681; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #5862.

2:217c "I did not command you to fight . . .": Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #17989; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #77.

2:222c "Your menses are not in your hands": Muslim, #297, #298; Ibn Mājah, #632; Nasāʾī, #384; Tirmidhī, #134.

2:223c "A single orifice": (without repetition) Tirmidhī, #2979; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #14105; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #8035; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4166.

2:250–51c "God repels the punishment . . .": (not found in *aḥādīth* with *isnād*) Thaʿlabī, *Tafsīr,* 2:224.

2:255c The Prophet told his Companions to recite *Āyat al-Kursī* before sleeping: Bukhārī, #2311, #3275, #5010; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2170.

*Āyat al-Kursī* as the greatest verse of the Quran: Muslim, #810; Abū Dāwūd, #1460; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2172.

*Āyat al-Kursī* as "a fourth of the Quran": Bazzār, #6247; Ibn Ḥanbal, #13309; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2285.

2:260c "We have more right to doubt . . .": Bukhārī, #3372, #4537; Muslim, #151.

2:261c "God makes the good deed . . .": Bukhārī, #7492, #7538; Muslim, #1151; Ibn Ḥanbal, #4256, #9363.

"On the Day of Judgment you shall have . . .": Muslim, #1892; Nasāʾī, #3187; Ḥākim, #2504.

2:264–65c "When a person gives a lawfully earned date . . .": Bukhārī, #1410; Muslim, #1014; Tirmidhī, #661.

2:267c "None of you believes until . . .": Bukhārī, #13; Muslim, #45; Ibn Mājah, #66.

"Truly God distributes your provisions . . .": (variants) Ibn Ḥanbal, #3282; Ḥākim, #94, #95, #7381.

"Do not feed others with . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #24736, #24917, #25110.

2:268c "Satan has an inspiration . . .": Tirmidhī, #2988; Ibn Ḥibbān, #997; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #10985.

2:269c "Let there be envy in only . . .": Bukhārī, #1409, #7141; Muslim, #816; Tirmidhī, #1936.

2:271c "Charity puts out sin . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4210; Bazzār, #6212; Abū Yaʿlā, #3656.

"When you perform an evil deed . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #21487; Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥah,* #1373; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 4:217.

2:272c The anecdote about a man who gives charity to an adulterer: Bukhārī, #1421; Muslim, #1022; Nasāʾī, #2523.

2:273c "The indigent person . . .": Bukhārī, #1476, #4539; Muslim, #1039; Abū Dāwūd, #1631, #1632; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7539, #8187.

"Fear the *firāsah* of the believer . . .": Tirmidhī, #3127; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7497; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 6:118.

2:275–81c "*Ribā* in pre-Islamic times . . .": (a statement, not a *ḥadīth*) Mālik, #2670.

"Gold for gold . . .": Muslim, #1584, #1587; Nasāʾī, #4565; {Bukhārī, #2177, #2176; Ibn Mājah, #2255}.

Exchanging different quality dates for one another is *ribā:* (same principle, but no mention of Bilāl) Bukhārī, #4247, #7351; Muslim, #1594; Nasāʾī, #4553; Mālik, #2516.

2:275c "Lo! All *ribā* from pre-Islamic times is forgiven . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #3334; Tirmidhī, #3087; Ibn Mājah, #3055; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #10465.

2:277c "The ultimate result . . .": Ibn Mājah, #2279; Ḥākim, #2347; Ibn Ḥanbal, #3754, #4026.

2:280–81c "Whosoever grants a delay . . .": Ibn Mājah, #2418; Ḥākim, #2280; Abū Yaʿlā, #251; {Muslim, #1563, #3006}.

2:282c "Whosoever contracts a forward sale . . .": Bukhārī, #2240; Muslim, #1604; Abū Dāwūd, #3463; Ibn Mājah, #2280.

2:284c "Whosoever intends a good deed . . .": Bukhārī, #6491; Muslim, #131.

2:285–86c "Whosoever recites these two verses . . .": Bukhārī, #5009; Muslim, #807, #808; Tirmidhī, #2881.

"I was given the two verses . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #21564, #21344; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4145.

During his Night Journey and Ascension the Prophet was given three things: Muslim, #173; Tirmidhī, #3276; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 5:474; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32230.

"Truly God has absolved my community . . .": Ibn Mājah, #2045; Ḥākim, #2860; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7219; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #15096.

God responds affirmatively to the supplications in this verse when recited in prayer: Muslim, #125; Ibn Ḥibbān, #139; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9344.

3:8c Making faith firmly rooted: Ibn Ḥanbal, #26576.

3:10c Quran reciters and teachers who consider themselves superior: Ibn al-Mubārak, #425; Bazzār, #283.

3:21c "The best struggle is to speak . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #18830; Abū Dāwūd, #4344.

"The Children of Israel killed . . .": Bazzār, #1285.

3:27c The story of a Companion in debt: Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* vol. 20, #323, #332; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 5:204.

3:31c "Idolatry is more hidden than . . .": Ḥākim, #8017; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 8:368; {Haythamī, *Kashf,* #3566}.

3:42c The best or most perfect of all women: Ibn Ḥanbal, #2668, #2957; {mention of only the first two: Bukhārī, #3432; Muslim, #2430}.

3:55c The Prophets are brethren, Jesus will be known: Ibn Ḥanbal, #9270.

3:68c Every prophet has guardians: Tirmidhī, #2995; Ibn Ḥanbal, #3800.

3:75–76c The consequences of not fulfilling trusts: Ibn Mājah, #4054.

*Aḥādīth* concerning returning trusts to their owners: Ibn Ḥanbal, #15424; Abū Dāwūd, #3534; Tirmidhī, #1264; Abū Dāwūd, #3535.

3:92c "None of you believes until he loves . . .": Bukhārī, #13; Muslim, #45.

3:96c The merit of prayer at the Kaʿbah: Bukhārī, #1190; Muslim, #1394; Ibn Mājah, #1406; Ibn Ḥanbal, #15271.

3:97c The inviolability of Makkah: Bukhārī, #1587; Muslim, #1353.

3:103c The Quran is "a rope extended . . .": Tirmidhī, #3788; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11104.

3:104c Changing a wrong with hand, tongue, and heart: Muslim, #49.

"Consult your heart, piety brings peace": Ibn Ḥanbal, #18001, #18006.

3:113c "No people from among any of the religions . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #3760; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #10209.

3:118c Each prophet has two groups of intimates: Bukhārī, #7198; Nasāʾī, #4202.

3:134c Curbing anger results in reward: Abū Dāwūd, #4778; {Abū Dāwūd, #4777; Ibn Ḥanbal, #15637}.

True strength is the ability to suppress anger: Bukhārī, #6114; Muslim, #2609.

3:137c "Whosoever establishes a good wont . . .": Muslim, #1017; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19202.

3:145c Deeds are according to intentions: Bukhārī, #1; Muslim, #1907.

3:154c After the Battle of Uḥud, some Companions fell asleep: Bukhārī, #4562.

3:159c "You all know more about the affairs of this world . . .": Muslim, #2363; {Ibn Mājah, #2471; Ibn Ḥibbān, #22; Bazzār, #6992}.

3:161c An alms collector was sent and accepted a gift: Muslim, #1832; Bukhārī, #7174; {Abū Dāwūd, #2944}.

3:169–71c "The grave is a Garden . . .": Tirmidhī, #2460.

"The grave is the first station of the Hereafter": Tirmidhī, #2308; Ibn Mājah, #4267; Ibn Ḥanbal, #454.

"Whosoever among you has died . . .": (considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth*) Daylamī, #1121; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 6:267–68.

3:181–82c The blameworthiness of approving of sins: Abū Dāwūd, #4345.

3:185c "The area covered by a whip in the Garden . . .": Tirmidhī, #3292; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4717.

3:187c "Whosoever conceals knowledge . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #10487; Ibn Mājah, #264.

3:190c The Prophet weeps at the recitation of this verse: Ibn Ḥibbān, #620.

3:191c "One hour of reflection is better . . .": (considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth*) {"better than a night's vigil": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab ,* 1:262, #117; Muttaqī, #5711}.

3:200c "One day of *ribāṭ* in the way of God . . .": Bukhārī, #2892; Muslim, #1881; Tirmidhī, #1664.

Three modes of *ribāṭ:* Muslim, #251; Ibn Ḥibbān, #1039; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7729.

"You have returned from the lesser *jihād* . . .": (much-cited adage, but weak *ḥadīth*) Bayhaqī, *Zuhd,* #373; ʿAjlūnī, #1362; Muttaqī, #11779; Khaṭīb, 15:685, #7297.

4:1c Eve's creation from Adam's rib: Bukhārī, #3331, #5186; Muslim, #1468.

"The Compassionate created from the womb . . .": Bukhārī, #5988; Muslim, #2555.

4:10c The punishment for those who wrongly consume orphans' property: Ibn Ḥibbān, #5566; Abū Yaʿlā, #7440.

4:15c The punishment for adulterers: Muslim, #1690; Abū Dāwūd, #4415; Tirmidhī, #1434; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22666.

4:17–18c "The door of repentance is open until . . .": (not verbatim) Muslim, #2759, #2703; Ibn Ḥanbal, #10419.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I will not prevent the repentance . . .": (not verbatim) Tirmidhī, #3537; Ibn Mājah, #4253; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11244; Abū Yaʿlā, #1399; Ḥākim, #7753; Ibn Ḥibbān, #628.

4:21c "Be reverent with regard to women . . .": Muslim, #1218; Abū Dāwūd, #1905.

4:23c The number of sucklings required to establish milk relations: Muslim, #1452; Tirmidhī, #1150.

4:31c The identification of four major sins: Bukhārī, #6675, #6870; Tirmidhī, #3021; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6884.

4:32c "Ask God for His Bounty . . .": Tirmidhī, #3571.

4:34c The Prophet wished to allow retaliation against a husband who struck his wife: Ibn al-Mundhir, *Tafsīr,* #1701; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #5246; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #172, #173.

Striking a wife, but without leaving a mark: Tirmidhī, #1163.

The rights a wife is owed from her husband: Abū Dāwūd, #2142; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #9151; Ibn Mājah, #1850.

4:40c God settles all disputes on the Day of Judgment: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #5335.

"God will remove from Hellfire . . .": Muslim, #183.

4:41c "I am a witness over them . . .": Bukhārī, #4582, #5050; Muslim, #800.

4:43c God made dust purifying for Muslims: Bukhārī, #335; Muslim, #521.

4:54c "Envy consumes good deeds . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4903; Ibn Mājah, #4210; Abū Yaʿlā, #3656; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #27005.

"I have not seen any oppressor . . .": (considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth*) Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #6211.

4:57c "There is a tree in the Garden . . .": Bukhārī, #4881, #3252; Muslim, #2826, #2827.

4:59c "Whoever obeys me has obeyed God . . .": Bukhārī, #2957, #7137; Muslim, #1835, #1841.

The incident in which ʿAmmār grants unauthorized amnesty: Ibn Ḥanbal, #16814; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7081; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3830, #3835; Ḥākim, #5734, #5737, #5742.

4:69–70c "You shall be with those you love": Bukhārī, #6168, #6169, #6170; Muslim, #2640, #2641.

4:71c "Tether your camel . . .": Tirmidhī, #2517; Ibn Ḥibbān, #731; Haythamī, *Zawāʾid,* #18097, #18187.

4:82c The Prophet admonishes those who argue about the Quran: Muslim, #2666; Ibn Mājah, #85; Tirmidhī, #2133; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6702, #6668.

4:86c "Peace is among the Names of God . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #10391; Bazzār, #1771.

Spreading greetings of peace is among the acts leading to Paradise: Tirmidhī, #2485; Ibn Mājah, #1334, #3251; Ḥākim, #7254; Ibn Ḥibbān, #508.

4:86c "By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, you will not enter . . .": Muslim, #54; Tirmidhī, #2688; Ibn Mājah, #68; Abū Dāwūd, #5193.

4:92c "The killing of a believer . . .": Nasāʾī, #3986; Ibn Mājah, #2619; Tirmidhī, #1395.

4:93c The dire fate of any who intentionally kill a believer: Ibn Mājah, #2620; Abū Yaʿlā, #5900; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #15865.

The punishment of the killer in this world . . .: Bukhārī, #6873, #3893; Muslim, #1709.

4:96c "There are a hundred degrees in Paradise . . .": Bukhārī, #2790; #8423; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4611.

4:97c Religious emigrants share a special bond with Abraham and the Prophet: (weak, *mursal ḥadīth*) Dānī, #163; {Jesus and the Prophet: Ibn ʿAsākir, #52620}.

4:114c "The speech of the Children of Adam . . .": Tirmidhī, #2412; Ibn Mājah, #3974; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #511, #4603.

4:125c The *ḥadīth* of Gabriel: Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

4:128c Divorce is the most odious of all lawful things: Abū Dāwūd, #2178; Ibn Mājah, #2018.

4:129c "O God, this is my division . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #2134.

"Whosoever has two wives . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #2133; Tirmidhī, #1141; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7936.

4:134c The reasons for emigration: Bukhārī, #1; Muslim, #1907.

4:136c The *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, required Muslim beliefs: Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

5:3c Killing an animal without piercing it: Muslim, #5081.

"For whomever I am his master . . .": Tirmidhī, #3713; Ibn Mājah, #116; Ḥākim, #4642; Ibn Ḥanbal, #950, #22945; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #8145; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32608.

5:6c "Whosoever performs ablution . . .": Muslim, #245; Bazzār, #433; Ibn Ḥanbal, #476.

"Purity is half of faith": Tirmidhī, #3519; Dārimī, #654; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #3297.

5:27–32c "Verily God gives you the example of the two sons of Adam . . .": (weak, *mursal ḥadīth*) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Albānī, *Ḍaʿīfah,* #3097.

5:35c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* The best means of approach to God: Bukhārī, #6502; Ibn Ḥibbān, #347; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20980; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7833.

5:38–39c The Prophet would apply the penalty for theft even to his own daughter: Bukhārī, #3475; Muslim, #1688.

5:41c Two Jewish adulterers are brought to the Prophet for judgment: Bukhārī, #6819, #4556; Muslim, #1699; Abū Dāwūd, #4452.

5:54c "Tomorrow I shall give the standard . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #22993; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #8402; {Bukhārī, #3009, #3701, #3702; Muslim, #2404, #2405, #2460; Tirmidhī, #3798}.

5:58c The inspiration for the call to prayer: Abū Dāwūd, #499; Tirmidhī, #189; Ibn Mājah, #706; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16478.

The need for public announcement of prayer times: Bukhārī, #604; Muslim, #377.

5:79c "The best striving . . .": Nasāʾī, #4209; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18830; Abū Dāwūd, #4344.

5:82–83c "Recite the Quran and weep . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4196, #1337; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1891, #1960.

5:90–91c "Wine is that which clouds the intellect": Bukhārī, #4619, #5581, #5588; Muslim, #3032.

5:93c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My servant brings nothing that . . .": Bukhārī, #6502.

5:95c Prohibitions also apply to Madinah, because of its sacred character: Bukhārī, #1867, #3179; Muslim, #1366.

5:98c "Were the fear of a believer weighed . . .": (considered an adage, not a *ḥadīth*) Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #993, #994, #995; ʿAjlūnī, #2131.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My Mercy . . .": Bukhārī, #7553, #7554; Muslim, #2751.

5:100c "Mankind is like a hundred camels . . .": Bukhārī, #6498; Muslim, #2987.

5:101–2c "Keep silent regarding . . .": Muslim, #1337; Nasāʾī, #2619; Ibn Ḥanbal, #10607; Ibn Ḥibbān, #3704.

God dislikes "too much questioning": Bukhārī, #2408, #5975; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18147.

5:106c "Whosoever would swear an oath . . .": Bukhārī, #2679, #6108; Muslim, #1646.

5:111c Faith consists of "knowledge in the heart . . .": Ibn Mājah, #65; Albānī, *Ḍaʿīf al-Jāmiʿ,* #2309; Daylamī, #371; {Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #16; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #6254, #8580}.

5:117–18c The Prophet is granted intercession for his followers who are innocent of *shirk:* Ibn Ḥanbal, #21328; Bazzār, #4061; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32302.

6:12–13c "When God decreed the created realm . . .": Bukhārī, #3194, #7422; Muslim, #2751.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My Mercy . . .": Bukhārī, #7553, #7554; Muslim, #2751.

"O God, I seek refuge in Thy Contentment . . .": Muslim, #486; Abū Dāwūd, #1427; Tirmidhī, #3566; Ibn Ḥanbal, #751.

6:14c "Praise be to God *Who feeds* . . .": Ibn Ḥibbān, #5219; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #10060; Ḥākim, #2055; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsūʿah,* #5110.

6:15c "I have the best knowledge of God . . .": Bukhārī, #6101, #7301; Muslim, #2356.

6:32c "The world is the prison of the believer . . .": Muslim, #2956; Ibn Mājah, #4113; Tirmidhī, #2324.

6:42–44c "When you see that God has given . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #17311; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #9272; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #4540.

6:54c "Do you know the right of God . . .": Bukhārī, #2856, #6500; Muslim, #30.

6:59c "The keys of the Unseen are five . . .": Bukhārī, #4697; Ibn Ḥanbal, #5133.

"I have been given the keys of eloquent speech . . .": Bukhārī, #7273; Muslim, #523.

6:65c "My community will divide into seventy-two . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4597; Tirmidhī, #2641; Ibn Mājah, #3993.

"If the sword . . .": Muslim, #2889; Abū Dāwūd, #4252; Tirmidhī, #2202; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17115, #22395.

Differences among the Muslim community are a mercy: (a much-cited adage, but not considered a sound *ḥadīth*) ᶜAjlūnī, #153; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīf al-Jāmiᶜ*, #230.

6:74c "God transferred me from pure loins . . .": (not verbatim) Bayhaqī, *Kubrā*, #14076; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 1:174; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīf al-Jāmiᶜ*, #1320; Abū al-Nuᶜaym, *Dalāʾil*, #14, #15; Qasṭalānī, 1:45–46.

6:92c "Whosoever leaves off prayer . . .": Tirmidhī, #2621, #2622; Ibn Ḥanbal, #14979; Muslim, #82.

6:103c "Verily you will see your Lord . . .": Bukhārī, #554, #7434; Muslim, #633.

6:110c "The heart of the believer . . .": Muslim, #2654; Ibn Ḥibbān, #902; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6569.

"O Turner of hearts and sights . . .": Tirmidhī, #2140, {Ibn Ḥanbal, #12107, #24603; #26519}.

6:125c Expansion of the breast as "a light that God . . .": Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, #974; Ibn al-Mubārak, #300; {Ḥākim, #7944; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #35317, #35318}.

6:151–52c "Deeds are according to intentions": Bukhārī, #1; Muslim, #1907.

6:158c The sun rising from the West: Bukhārī, #4635, #4636; Muslim, #157.

6:159c The Jews divided into seventy-one sects: Abū Dāwūd, #4596; Tirmidhī, #2640; Ibn Mājah, #3992.

6:162–63c The Prophet was a prophet "while Adam was still between water and clay": Tirmidhī, #3609; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6404; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr*, #12571; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #16623, #20596, #23212; ᶜAjlūnī, #2007}.

The Prophet recited these two verses and v. 79 before night prayer: Muslim, #771; Abū Dāwūd, #760; Tirmidhī, #3422; Dārimī, #1273; Ibn Ḥibbān, #1771, #1773.

7:6–7c "There is not one of you . . .": Bukhārī, #6539; Muslim, #1016.

7:8–9c "Nothing is heavier in the balance . . .": Tirmidhī, #2002; Abū Dāwūd, #4799; Ibn Ḥanbal, #27517.

Belief in the One God and Muhammad's prophethood outweighs a vast record of sin: (not verbatim) Tirmidhī, #2639; Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥah*, #1776.

7:29c People will be resurrected "barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised": Bukhārī, #3349, #4740; Muslim, #2860.

7:55c The Prophet criticizes excessive supplication: Bukhārī, *Adab*, #639; Ibn Mājah, #2846; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1483, #25019.

7:56c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "When God decreed the created realm . . .": Bukhārī, #3194, #7422; Muslim, #2751.

7:157c The Prophet was described in the Torah: Bukhārī, #2125, #4838; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6622.

7:175–76c "Whoever increases in knowledge . . .": Daylamī, #6298; Albānī, *Ḍaʿīf al-Jāmiʿ*; ʿAjlūnī, #2402, #5393; Ghazzālī, 1:59.

7:179c God decrees the destiny of every unborn child: Bukhārī, #7454; Muslim, #2643.

7:180c God has ninety-nine Beautiful Names: Bukhārī, #6410, #7393; Muslim, #2677.

7:181c "Verily among my community is a group . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #2483; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19851; {Muslim, #1037; 1920; Abū Yaʿlā, #2078}.

7:187c "The one who is questioned . . .": Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

7:199c "Be easy; do not be difficult": Bukhārī, #2125; Muslim, #1734; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12333.

7:205c "When My servant remembers Me in himself . . .": Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 5:1647, #8738; {Bukhārī, #7405; Muslim, #2675; Ibn Mājah, #3822; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7422}.

"All that is on the earth is accursed . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4112; Tirmidhī, #2322.

8:1c One trait by which the Prophet was distinguished was the ability to take spoils of war: Bukhārī, #335; Muslim, #521.

8:17–18c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I will be his hearing . . .": Bukhārī, #6502; Ibn Ḥibbān, #347; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20980; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7833.

8:25c The parable of ship passengers: Bukhārī, #2493; Tirmidhī, #2173.

8:38c "Submission (*islām*) cuts off . . .": Muslim, #121; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17827, #17813.

8:46c "I was helped by the east wind . . .": Bukhārī, #1035; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6421; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2013.

8:74c "There is no migration . . .": Bukhārī, #2825; Muslim, #1353.

9:12c Abū Bakr is outraged but refuses to execute: Abū Dāwūd 4363; Ibn Ḥanbal, #54.

9:31c Christian worship of religious authorities: Tirmidhī, #3095; {Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20350}.

9:36–37c The restitution of the twelve-month year and four sacred months: Bukhārī, #4662; Muslim, #1679; Ibn Ḥanbal, #20386.

9:40c "O Abū Bakr, what dost thou think of two . . .": Bukhārī, #3653; Muslim, #2381.

9:58c "Woe unto you! Who shall be just . . .": Bukhārī, #2123; Muslim, #1064.

9:60c "Teach them that God has prescribed charity . . .": Bukhārī, #1395; Muslim, #19.

Charity given to a man buried under debt: Muslim, #1556; Abū Dāwūd, #3469; Tirmidhī, #655.

9:69c "You will follow the wonts of those . . .": Bukhārī, #3456; Muslim, #2669; (following in the footsteps of Byzantines and Persians) Abū Yaʿlā, #6292.

9:77c The four signs of the hypocrite: Bukhārī, #34; Muslim, #58.

9:82c "If you knew what I knew . . .": Tirmidhī, #2313; Ibn Mājah, #4191.

"Weep, and if you . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4196, #1337; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1891, #1960.

9:91c "Religion is *naṣīḥah*": Muslim, #55; Abū Dāwūd, #4944; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19640.

9:111c The stipulations and promised reward of the second pledge of ᶜAqabah: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 435; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* {Ibn Ḥanbal, #17078, #14456}.

10:7–8c "He who loves to meet God . . .": Bukhārī, #6508; Muslim, #2686.

10:26–27c The inhabitants of Paradise will look upon God: Ibn Mājah, #187; Tirmidhī, #3105; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18941; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7441; {Muslim, #181; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18935}.

10:62–64c "When they are seen, God is remembered": Ibn Mājah, #4119; Bukhārī, *Adab,* #323; Ibn Ḥanbal, #27599, #17998; Bazzār, #2719.

11:Introduction "Hūd and her sisters . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* 17:286–87; Ibn Saᶜd, 1:375; {Tirmidhī, #3297}.

11:9–10c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I am as My servant thinks of Me . . .": (not verbatim) Bukhārī, #7505; Muslim, #2675; Tirmidhī, #2388; Ibn Ḥibbān, #639; Muttaqī, #5855.

11:11c "Patience is the key to success": (considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth*) Daylamī, #3660; {Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #9524}.

11:15–16c "Verily actions are judged . . .": Bukhārī, #1; Muslim, #1907.

11:114–15c "Verily from prayer to prayer . . .": (not verbatim) Muslim, #233; Tirmidhī, #214; Abū Yaᶜlā, #6486; Ibn Mājah, #1086; Ibn Ḥibbān, #1733; Ibn Ḥanbal, #10285, #8715.

"Follow up an evil deed . . .": Tirmidhī, #1987; Dārimī, #2791; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21354: Ibn Ḥibbān, #524.

"For everything there is a polish . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #519; Muttaqī, #1777, #1848; {considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth:* Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #520}.

12:7c "Beware of envy . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4903; Ibn Mājah, #4210; Abū Yaᶜlā, #3656; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #27005.

12:42c "God have mercy on Joseph . . .": Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #11635; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Zuhd,* pp. 103–4.

12:91–92c "O party of the Quraysh . . .": (not verbatim) Ibn Saᶜd, 2:131–32; Wāqidī, 2:835–36; Abū ᶜUbayd, 1:200, #322; {without mention of the verse: Ibn Hishām, 2:412}.

13:7c "I am the warner . . .": Ḥākim, #4709; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* 13:443; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīfah,* #4899.

13:28c "The world and all that is in it . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4112; Tirmidhī, #2322.

"Let thy tongue be always moist . . .": Tirmidhī, #3375; Ibn Mājah, #3793; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #1474, #2289; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17680.

"Shall I tell you about the best of all deeds . . .": Ibn Mājah, #3790; Tirmidhī, #3377; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21702.

"For everything there is a polish . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #519; Muttaqī, #1777, #1848; {Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #520}.

"The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me . . .": (oft-cited, but without sound basis in *isnād*) ᶜAjlūnī, #2256; Ghazzālī, 3:15; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīfah,* #5103.

14:5–6c "Faith consists of two halves . . .": Daylamī, #378; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #9264; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīfah,* #625.

14:24–25c The believer is likened to a date-palm tree: Bukhārī, #61, #72, #2209, #6144; Muslim, #2811.

14:32–33c "The heart of the believer . . .": {variant regarded as fabricated: ʿAjlūnī, #1886}.

14:34c God will grant one's legitimate requests in one of several ways: Ibn Ḥanbal, #11133; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1089, #1090; Tabrīzī, #2259; Abū Yaʿlā, #1019.

15:6c "Verily God has sent down . . .": (cited with no *isnād* or indication of source) Rāzī, *Tafsīr.*

15:34–35c "Pride is My mantle and Greatness My garment . . .": (not verbatim) Muslim, #2620; Abū Dāwūd, #4090; Ibn Mājah, #4173, #4175; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7382; Ibn Ḥibbān, #5672.

15:49–50c If the children of Adam did not sin . . .: Muslim, #2748, #2749; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8082.

"O God, Thou art Forgiving . . .": (not verbatim) Tirmidhī, #3513; Ibn Mājah, #3850; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #10708; Ibn Ḥanbal, #25384; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #3702.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Verily My Mercy . . .": Bukhārī, #7553, #7554; Muslim, #2751.

15:85–86c Coming of the Hour symbolized by the distance between two fingers: Tirmidhī, #2213; (not verbatim) Ibn Ḥanbal, #18770.

"The one questioned . . .": Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

15:87c The *Fātiḥah* is unique among scriptures: Tirmidhī, #3125; Ibn Ḥibbān, #775; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21094, #21095; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #6407.

15:90–93c God questions the Makkan idolaters: Tirmidhī, #3126; Bukhārī, *al-Taʾrīkh al-Kabīr,* 2:86, #1778; 8:133, #2463.

16:25c "Whoever calls to error . . .": Ibn Mājah, #205; (similar but not verbatim) Muslim, #1017, #2674; Abū Dāwūd, #4609; Tirmidhī, #2673; Ibn Mājah, #206; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9160.

16:58–59c Whoever has daughters . . .: Bukhārī, #1418, #5995; Muslim, #2629.

16:68–69c The Prophet instructs a man to feed his ailing brother honey: Bukhārī, #5684, #5716; Muslim, #2217.

"Honey is the cure . . .": Ibn Mājah, #3452; Ḥākim, #7512, #7514; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #30520.

The Prophet forbade his followers to kill bees: Ibn Ḥanbal, #3242; Ibn Ḥibbān, #5646.

16:71c The feeding and clothing of slaves: Bukhārī, #6050; Muslim, #1661.

16:77c "I and the Last Hour . . .": Bukhārī, #6503; Muslim, #2950.

16:90c "Worshipping God as if you saw Him": Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

"Loving for one's brother . . .": Bukhārī, #13; Muslim, #45.

17:1c "The canonical prayer is the ascension of the believers": (considered an adage, not a *ḥadīth,* except in some Shiite sources) Majlisī, *Biḥār,* 82:303.

The Archangel Gabriel rouses the Prophet for the Night Journey and Ascension: Bukhārī, #3207, #3393, #3430; Muslim, #164; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7415; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17833.

17:18–19c "Deeds are only according to intentions": Bukhārī, #1; Muslim, #1907.

17:24c "The Contentment of God . . .": Tirmidhī, #1899; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #7446.

17:49–51c On the Day of Resurrection death will be brought forth as a ram and slaughtered: Bukhārī, #4730; Muslim, #2849.

"I and the Hour . . .": Bukhārī, #6503; Muslim, #2950.

17:78c The *recitation at dawn is ever witnessed* by the angels: Bukhārī, #648, #4717; Muslim, #649; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7185.

17:82c "Whosoever does not seek a cure . . .": (considered a weak or fabricated *ḥadīth*) Muttaqī, #28106; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīfah,* #152–53; {ᶜAjlūnī, #2403}.

18:10c "O God, make virtuous . . .": Ibn Ḥibbān, #949; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #1196; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17628.

18:18c "Man is asleep . . .": (considered an adage, not an attributable *ḥadīth*) ᶜAjlūnī, #2795; Suyūṭī, *Durar,* #427; Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīfah,* #102.

18:28c "Praise be to God, Who did not let me die before . . .": Abū Yaᶜlā, #1151; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #10012; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #299; {without direct mention of the verse: Abū Dāwūd, #3666}.

18:30c The *ḥadīth* of Gabriel: Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9, #10.

18:39–41c "There is no strength . . ." is among the "treasures of the Garden": Bukhārī, #6610; Muslim, #2704.

18:60c People are to refer to a slave as "young man" or "young woman": Bukhārī, #2552; Muslim, #2249; Abū Dāwūd, #4975.

18:65c The *servant* is identified as Khiḍr: Bukhārī, #4725, #4726; Muslim, #2380.

18:80–81c "God does not decree anything for a believer . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #12906; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #12160; Abū Yaᶜlā, #4019; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #9951}.

18:82c "We judge according to the outward . . .": (wording not found in standard *Ḥadīth* collections) {Bukhārī, #2641, #2458, #6967; Muslim, #1713; ᶜAjlūnī, #585}.

18:94c Eschatological events: Bukhārī, #3346, #7121, #7135; Muslim, #2937; #2880; Ibn Mājah, #4079; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6830; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11731.

18:110c Believers are warned to be wary of "minor *shirk*": Ibn Ḥanbal, #23630, #23631.

19:4–6c Prophets do not have heirs to their wealth: Bukhārī, #3130.

"Whosoever is content with God's Decree . . .": (not verbatim) Tirmidhī, #2151; Abū Yaᶜlā, #701; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1444.

19:39c After the Day of Judgment, God will bring forth death as a ram and slaughter it: Bukhārī, #4730; Muslim, #2849.

19:53c The Prophet says to ᶜAlī, "Your position in relation to me . . .": Bukhārī, #4416; Muslim, #2404; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #8141; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1583, #11272.

19:56–57c The Prophet reports encountering Idrīs in the fourth heaven: Bukhārī, #3207; Muslim, #164; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7415; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17833, #17835.

19:58c "Recite the Quran and weep . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4196, #1337; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #1891, #1960.

19:64c "What prevents you from visiting us . . .": Bukhārī, #3217, #3218, #4731, #7455; Tirmidhī, #3158; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2044; #3365.

19:71–72c Muslim veterans of Badr and Ḥudaybiyah will not enter the Fire: Ibn Mājah, #4281; Abū Yaʿlā, #7044; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* v. 23, #358, #363; Ibn Ḥanbal, #26440.

19:96c When God loves a servant, He calls out to the Archangel Gabriel: Bukhārī, #7485; Muslim, #2637.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Verily My servant does not cease to draw nigh unto Me . . .": Bukhārī, #6502; Ibn Ḥibbān, #347; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20980; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7833.

20:Introduction *Sūrah* 20 is one of three *sūrahs* in which God's Supreme Name is to be found: Ibn Mājah, #3856; Ḥākim, #1913, #1918; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7758, #7925.

20:6c "When you ask, ask only of God . . .": Tirmidhī, #2516; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2669; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #195.

20:29–35c The Prophet said to ʿAlī, "You are to me as Aaron was to Moses . . .": Bukhārī, #4416; Muslim, #2404; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #8141; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1583, #11272.

20:102–4c "People are asleep . . .": (considered an adage, not a *ḥadīth*) ʿAjlūnī, #2795; Suyūṭī, *Durar,* #427; Albānī, *Ḍaʿīfah,* #102.

20:114c "If a day comes upon me . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #6636; Ibn ʿAdī, 2:79.

20:115c "Adam forgot . . .": Tirmidhī, #3076, #3078, #3368; Ḥākim, #4191; Abū Yaʿlā, #6377, #6580.

21:44c "God does not take away knowledge . . .": Bukhārī, #100; Muslim, #2673.

21:62–63c "Abraham lied only concerning three things . . .": Bukhārī, #3357, #3358; Muslim, #2371; Tirmidhī, #3166.

21:79c If judges exercise their judgment . . .: Bukhārī, #7352; Muslim, #1716.

21:104c "O people! You will surely be resurrected . . .": Bukhārī, #6526; Muslim, #2860; {Nasāʾī, #2082}.

22:5–6c Human beings develop in their mother's belly and then receive their destiny with regard to four things: Bukhārī, #2643; Muslim, #2643.

22:11c Islam melts away impurities: Suyūṭī, *Durr,* 10:428–29; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 501.

22:19c A disputation between the Garden and the Fire: Bukhārī, #4850; Muslim, #2847.

22:29c The Kaʿbah is called "the Free House": Tirmidhī, #3170; Bazzār, #2215; Ḥākim, #3522.

22:32c "Reverence is here . . .": Muslim, #2564; Tirmidhī, #1927.

22:38c "A flag will be hoisted . . .": Bukhārī, #6178; Muslim, #1735; Ibn Ḥanbal, #5192.

22:46c "In the body there is a lump of flesh . . .": Bukhārī, #52; Muslim, #1599.

22:78c "We have returned from the lesser striving . . .": (considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth,* by some) Bayhaqī, *Zuhd,* #373; ʿAjlūnī, #1362; Muttaqī, #11779; Khaṭīb, 15:685, #7297.

"The best of your religion is that which is easiest . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #15936; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* vol. 20, #704; {Bukhārī, #39; Muslim, #2816}.

"When I command you to do a thing . . .": Bukhārī, #7288; Muslim, #1337; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7501.

23:2c "How many a worshipper stands to pray . . .": (not verbatim) Dārimī, #2762; {Ibn Mājah, #1690; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #13413; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8856; Ḥākim, #1572; Ibn Ḥibbān, #3481}.

"The servant has of his prayer . . .": (cited without *isnād*) Ghazzālī (see ʿIrāqī, *Takhrīj Aḥādīth al-Iḥyāʾ, #423*); {Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 7:61}.

23:10–11c "When you ask God for something . . .": Bukhārī, #7423, #2790.

23:60–61c ʿĀʾishah's question: Ibn Mājah, #4198; Ibn Ḥanbal, #25705.

24:2c The stoning of adulterers: (examples) Abū Dāwūd, #4426; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #7173; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2874, #10988; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12304; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4438.

24:12c "In their togetherness and compassion . . .": Bukhārī, #6011; Muslim, #2586; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18373.

24:16c "A Muslim is he from whose tongue . . .": Bukhārī, #10, #6484; Muslim, #40.

24:19c "Do not insult the servants of God . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #22402; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #19776}.

24:28c "If one of you asks permission three times . . .": Bukhārī, #6245; Muslim, #2153.

The Prophet's severe rebuke of a man for peeking: Bukhārī, #6901; Muslim, #2156; ("If a man peeks at you . . .") Ibn Ḥanbal, #9525; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6002.

24:30c "Let not a glance . . .": Tirmidhī, #2777; Abū Dāwūd, #2149; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22974; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #1369; Dārimī, #2709; Ibn Ḥibbān, #5570}.

"Give the road its rights": Bukhārī, #6229, #6465; Muslim, #2121.

24:31c What women are obliged to cover before strangers: Abū Dāwūd, #4104.

Veiled women appearing "as if crows were on their heads": Abū Dāwūd, #4101.

24:33c "There are three who have a right with God to be helped . . .": Tirmidhī, #1655; Ibn Mājah, #2518; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9631.

24:35c "I saw Light": Muslim, #178; Tirmidhī, #3282; Ibn Ḥibbān, #59.

"O God! Praise be to Thee . . .": Muslim, #769; Abū Dāwūd, #771; Tirmidhī, #3418; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2710.

24:62c "When one of you comes upon a gathering . . .": Tirmidhī, #2706; Abū Dāwūd, #5208; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7142.

25:12c The Fire that will come upon disbelievers has a neck, two eyes, two ears, a tongue . . .: Tirmidhī, #2574; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8430; {Ibn Abī Shaybah, #35140}.

25:62c "God . . . extends His Hand by night . . .": Muslim, #2759; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19529, #19619.

25:63c "When you come to the prayer . . .": Muslim, #602; Tirmidhī, #329; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7250; {Bukhārī, #908}.

25:70c Abū Hurayrah is rebuked for his harsh reply to a female adulterer: Suyūṭī, *Durr,* 11:219–20; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #15443.

26:87c Abraham sees his father in a wretched state on Day of Resurrection: Bukhārī, #3350; Ḥākim, #2995.

26:218–20c "Straighten your rows . . .": Bukhārī, #718, #725; Muslim, #434; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #8255; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6338}.

26:227c "Versify against them . . .": Bukhārī, #3213, #4123; Muslim, #2486; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #18650}.

Ibn Rawāḥah recites verses against the Makkan idolaters: Tirmidhī, #2847.

27:8c "God sleeps not . . .": Muslim, #179; Ibn Mājah, #196; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19530, #19587.

27:18–19c "An ant bit a prophet . . .": Bukhārī, #3019; Muslim, #2241; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9229.

27:27–28c "None love excuses more than God . . .": Bukhārī, #7416; Muslim, #1499.

27:39c The Prophet overpowers an *ʿifrīt:* Bukhārī, #461, #3423; Muslim, #541; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7969.

27:62c "Be mindful of the supplication of the oppressed . . .": Bukhārī, #2448; Muslim, #19; Abū Dāwūd, #1584; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2071.

27:82c "There are three things that . . .": Muslim, #158; Tirmidhī, #3072; Abū Yaʿlā, #6170; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #38592.

27:89–90c "*Lā ilāha illa 'Llāh* is the best of good things": Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 4:217–18; {Tirmidhī, #1987; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21403}.

28:9c Had Pharaoh agreed with his wife, he would have been guided to faith: {Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11263}.

28:88c "The truest words spoken by a poet . . .": Bukhārī, #3841, #6147; Muslim, #2256.

29:3c "No fatigue . . .": Bukhārī, #5642; Muslim, #2573; Tirmidhī, #966; Ibn Ḥanbal, #3618.

29:8c "To attribute partners unto God . . .": Bukhārī, #6273; Muslim, #87; {among three or four major sins: Bukhārī, #2654; Bukhārī, #6675, #6870; Tirmidhī, #3021; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6884}.

Conversion of Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and his pagan mother's reaction: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* pp. 546–47; {Muslim, #1747; Tirmidhī, #2079, #3189, Abū Dāwūd, #2740; Abū Yaʿlā, #782, #735}.

29:45c "He whose prayer . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11025; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2992; (a saying of Ibn Masʿūd) Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2994.

"If one of you had a river at his door . . .": Bukhārī, #528; Muslim 668; Tirmidhī, #2868; {Mālik, #578}.

"The world is accursed . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4112; Tirmidhī, #2322; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4072.

29:46c "Do not confirm the People of the Book . . .": Bukhārī, #4485, #7362; Abū Dāwūd, #3644; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6257.

29:51c "There is no prophet who was not given miracles . . .": Bukhārī, #4981, #7274; Muslim, #152.

29:58–59c "In the Garden there are rooms . . .": Tirmidhī, #1984; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1338; Abū Yaʿlā, #437; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #3089.

29:60c "Were you to trust in God as He merits . . .": Tirmidhī, #2344; Ibn Mājah, #4164; Ibn Ḥanbal, #205; Ibn Ḥibbān, #730.

30:20c "God created Adam from . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4693; Tirmidhī, #2955; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6181; {Ḥākim, #3096}.

30:21c "The believer whose faith is most complete . . .": Tirmidhī, #1162; Ḥākim, #173; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4176; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #7981.

30:28c The idolaters' pilgrimage chant: Muslim: #1185; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #7910; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12348.

30:30c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Verily I created My servants . . .": Muslim, #2865; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17484; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2954.

30:47c "No Muslim defends the honor of his brother . . .": {not verbatim, without explicit mention of the verse: Tirmidhī, #1931; Ibn Ḥanbal, #27536, #27543; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsūʿah,* #8396, #8407}.

31:13–14c The greatest of major sins: Bukhārī, #6273; Muslim, #87; {among three or four major sins: Bukhārī, #2654; Bukhārī, #6675, #6870; Tirmidhī, #3021; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6884}.

31:19c "Is there anything that drags people . . .": Tirmidhī, #2616; Ibn Mājah, #3973; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11394; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22016.

31:22c The interpretation of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām's dream: Bukhārī, #7014; Muslim, #2484.

31:27c The Prophet's discussion with some Jews in Madinah concerning knowledge: Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Hishām, 1:308; {Tirmidhī, #3140; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2309}.

31:34c "The keys of the Unseen are five . . .": Bukhārī, #1039, #4697, #7379; Muslim, #10; Ibn Ḥanbal, #4766, #5133; {similar text found in the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel: Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #10}.

32:Introduction The Prophet's practice of reading *Sūrah* 32 before sleeping: Tirmidhī, #2892; Ḥākim, #3602; Dārimī, #3454.

The Prophet's practice of reciting *Sūrah* 32 during morning prayer on Fridays: Bukhārī, #891; Muslim, #879, #880; Tirmidhī, #520.

32:7c "Verily God has enjoined making beautiful . . .": Muslim, #1955; Tirmidhī, #1409; Abū Dāwūd, #2815.

32:14c "The intelligent person is one . . .": Tirmidhī, #2459; Ibn Mājah, #4260; Ḥākim, #7720.

"The most frequent in remembering death . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4259; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4671.

32:15c "The closest that a servant can be to his Lord . . .": Muslim, #482; Abū Dāwūd, #875; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9461.

32:17c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I have prepared for My righteous servants . . .": Bukhārī, #3244, #4779; Muslim, #2824; Tirmidhī, #3292.

The Prophet's spiritual counsel to Muʿādh ibn Jabal: (not verbatim) Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ,* 3:452–53; Ḥākim, #3605; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22133, #22016; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #3078, #3079; {Tirmidhī, #2616}.

33:Introduction "Love God for how He nourishes you . . .": Tirmidhī, #3789; Ḥākim, #4779; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #2639.

33:1c Leaders of the Quraysh come to Madinah seeking compromise with the Prophet: (report without *isnād*) Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 561; Thaʿlabī, *Tafsīr.*

33:5c The rectification of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah's name: Bukhārī, #4782; Muslim, #2425; Tirmidhī, #3209.

"God exonerates my community . . .": Ibn Mājah, #2045; Ḥākim, #2860; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7219; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #15096.

33:6c "None of you truly believes until . . .": Bukhārī, #14, #15; Muslim, #44.

The Prophet's sermon at Ghadīr Khumm: Ḥākim, #4640; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11104; {Tirmidhī, #3788; Muslim, #2408; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19265}.

The Prophet's affirmation of the elevated status of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: Bazzār, #786; (not verbatim, partial) Ibn Mājah, #116; Tirmidhī, #3713; Ḥākim, #4640, #4641, #4642; Ibn Ḥanbal, #950, #22945; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3052.

The Prophet says to ʿAlī, "You are to me as Aaron to Moses . . .": Bukhārī, #3706, #4416; Muslim, #2404; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #8141; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1583, #11272.

33:7c "I was the first prophet to be created . . .": Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #17594; {Ibn Abī Shaybah, #35345; Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* #2662}.

"While Adam was between spirit and body": Tirmidhī, #3609; Ḥākim, #4268; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16623; #20956, #23212.

"Truly I was with God, the Seal of Prophets . . .": Ḥākim, #4234; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6404; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17150, #17163.

33:10c "Say 'O God, cover our weaknesses . . .'": Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Ḥanbal, #10996; Haythamī, *Kashf,* #3119.

33:21c "He was the most generous of people . . .": Tirmidhī, #3638; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32340; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 1:269–70.

33:23c The heroic martyrdom of Anas ibn al-Naḍr during the Battle of Uḥud: Bukhārī, #2805; Muslim, #1903; Tirmidhī, #3200, #3201.

33:25c "Now we will attack them . . .": Bukhārī, #4110; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18308, #27206; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #6484.

33:26–27c Saʿd ibn Muʿādh's judgment upon the Banū Qurayẓah: Bukhārī, #3043, #6262; Muslim, #1768; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11170.

33:28–29c The Prophet offers his wives the choice to divorce or remain married: Bukhārī, #4785: #4786; Muslim, #1475; Tirmidhī, #3204.

33:33c The *Ḥadīth* of the Cloak, in which the Prophet prays for the purification of his closest family members: Tirmidhī, #3205; #3787; Ḥākim, #3615; Ibn Ḥanbal, #26508; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2281.

"Heed God with regard to the members of my family . . .": Muslim, #2408; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19265; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #5028; Dārimī, #3359.

"Faith will never enter a person's heart . . .": Tirmidhī, #3758; Ibn Mājah, #140; Ḥākim, #7039; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32738.

"The likeness of the people of my household . . .": Ḥākim, #3370, #4783; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #5536; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil,* #1402.

33:35c Asmāʾ bint ʿUmays complains about the lack of mention of women in the Quran: (report without complete *isnād*) Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 569; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* 33:35.

Umm ʿUmārah al-Anṣāriyyah complains about the lack of mention of women in the Quran: Tirmidhī, #3211; {concerns Umm Salamah: Ibn Ḥanbal, #26575; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11340; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* 23:293–94, 298–99}.

33:37c The Prophet tells Zayd to keep Zaynab bint Jaḥsh: Bukhārī, #4787, #4720; Tirmidhī, #3212; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12511.

The Prophet is rebuked for fearing the people more than God: Muslim, #177; Tirmidhī, #3207, #3208.

Zaynab's boast: Bukhārī, #4791, #7420; Tirmidhī, #3213.

33:40c "No prophethood shall remain after me . . .": Bukhārī, #6990; Abū Dāwūd, #5017; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23795; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3051; {Mālik, #2011}.

"Messengerhood and prophethood have ceased . . .": Tirmidhī, #2272; Abū Yaʿlā, #3947; Ibn Ḥanbal, #13824; Maqdisī, 7:206, #2645.

"My likeness among the prophets . . .": Bukhārī, #3534, #3535; Muslim, #2287, #2288; Tirmidhī, #3613.

"I have been favored above the prophets in six things . . .": Muslim, #523; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9337; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2313.

33:41c "Let thy tongue be . . .": Tirmidhī, #3375; Ibn Mājah, #3793; Ḥākim, #1784; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17680, #17698.

"Remember God much . . .": Ḥākim, #1891; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11653, #11674; Abū Yaʿlā, #1376.

"Which of those who strive . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #15614; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* v.20, #407.

33:46–47c "My son, had you seen him . . .": Tirmidhī, *Shamāʾil,* #123; Baghawī, *Anwār,* #462. {Tirmidhī, #3648; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6309}.

"He was dignified and awe-inspiring . . .": Tirmidhī, *Shamāʾil,* #8; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* v. 22, #414; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1362.

"On the day when the Messenger of God entered Madinah . . .": Tirmidhī, #3618; Ibn Mājah, #1631; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6634; Ibn Ḥanbal, #13830, #13312.

33:53c "When the Messenger of God married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh . . .": Bukhārī, #4791, #5166; Muslim, #1428; Tirmidhī, #3218.

"When one of you invites his brother . . .": Muslim, #1429; Abū Dāwūd, #3738; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6337.

33:56c "We know how to give thee greetings . . .": Bukhārī, #3370, #6357; Muslim, #405, #406; Tirmidhī, #3220.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "No member of thy community invokes blessings upon thee . . .": Nasāʾī, #1283; Ḥākim, #3632; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16361, #16363; Ibn Ḥibbān, #915.

"The miser is one who . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #1736; Ḥākim, #2067; Ibn Ḥibbān, #909; Abū Yaʿlā, #6676.

"When one makes supplication . . .": Tirmidhī, #3477; Abū Dāwūd, #1481; Ḥākim, #991; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23937.

"A supplication is suspended between Heaven and earth . . .": Tirmidhī, #486; {Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1475; Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥah,* #2035}.

"I went out with the Prophet through the environs of Makkah . . .": Tirmidhī, #3626; Ḥākim, #4297; Dārimī, #21.

33:69c Moses' modesty was not due to a physical defect: Bukhārī, #3404, #4799; Muslim, #339; Tirmidhī, #3221.

34:Introduction "O Messenger of God, what is Sheba . . .": Tirmidhī, #3222; Abū Dāwūd, #3988; Abū Yaʿlā, #6852; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #2898}.

35:1c The Angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet with six hundred wings: Bukhārī, #4857; Muslim, #174; Tirmidhī, #3227.

35:2c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My Mercy . . .": Bukhārī, #7553, #7554; Muslim, #2751.

"I cannot put mercy in your heart . . .": Bukhārī, #5998; Muslim, #2317; Ibn Mājah, #3665.

35:28c "The one among you who has the most knowledge of God . . .": (similar *ḥadīth*) Bukhārī #6168.

"Whosoever sets upon a path to seek knowledge . . .": Tirmidhī, #2682; Abū Dāwūd, #3641; Ibn Mājah, #223.

35:32c "The people of knowledge . . .": Tirmidhī, #2682; Abū Dāwūd, #3641; Ibn Mājah, #223.

"The Quran is a proof . . .": Muslim, #223; Tirmidhī, #3517; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22902, #22908; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3423.

35:34c "As for one who wrongs himself . . .": Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Ḥanbal, #21697; #21727; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsūʿah,* #1958.

35:35c "None will enter Paradise by virtue of good deeds . . .": Bukhārī, #5673; Muslim, #2816.

36:Introduction "Everything has a heart . . .": Dārimī, #3459; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2233; {Tirmidhī, #2887}.

"Recite *Yā Sīn* over your dead": Abū Dāwūd, #3121; Ibn Mājah, #1448; Ḥākim, #2127(a).

"Verily in the Quran there is a *sūrah* . . .": {Ibn al-Ḍurays, #216; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2237}.

"Whosoever recites *Yā Sīn* at night . . .": Dārimī, #3460; Abū Yaʿlā, #6224; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2236.

"Whosoever recites *Yā Sīn* when he awakens . . .": Dārimī, #3462; ʿAjlūnī, #3413.

36:7c "The Quran is a proof . . .": Muslim, #223; Tirmidhī, #3517; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22902, #22908: Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3423.

36:12c "Your footprints are recorded . . .": Tirmidhī, #3226; Ḥākim, #3661; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2630.

"When the son of Adam dies, all his deeds . . .": Muslim, #1631; Tirmidhī, #1376; Abū Dāwūd, #2880.

36:57c "I was shown the Garden . . .": Bukhārī, #748, #1052; Muslim, #907; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2832; #2853.

36:58c "While the people of the Garden . . .": Ibn Mājah, #184; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsūʿah,* #5594; Dīnawarī, #1828.

36:65c "Do you know at what I am laughing . . .": Muslim, #2969; Ibn Ḥibbān, #8358; Abū Yaʿlā, #3977.

36:74c "The most frightening thing . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4205; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7145; {Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #6411}.

36:78–79c "Do you think that God can revive . . .": Ḥākim, #3663; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* 3:519–20; {ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr,* #2498}.

37:6–10c God asks the Prophet about what the Highest Assembly disputed: Tirmidhī, #3235; Bazzār, #4172; {Dārimī, #2195; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #938}.

37:88–89c "Abraham did not lie . . .": Bukhārī, #3358; Muslim, #2371.

37:143–44c "Seek to know God in times of ease . . .": Tirmidhī, #2516; Ḥākim, #6383; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2803; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11243.

37:181–82c "If you send peace upon me . . .": Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr;* Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Abū Nuʿaym, *Akhbār,* 1:149, 2:311.

The Prophet often recited vv. 180–82 at the end of his prayers: Ibn ʿAsākir, 71:274; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #3111; {Abū Yaʿlā, #1118}.

"Whosoever desires that the greatest measure of reward . . .": Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr;* {Abū Dāwūd, #982}.

38:5–7c "O my uncle! I only want from them . . .": Ḥākim, #3674; Ibn Ḥanbal, #3419; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11372; {Tirmidhī, #3232}.

38:17c "The prayer most loved by God . . .": Bukhārī, #1131; Muslim, #1159.

38:42c "When the Prophet Job was taking a bath . . .": Bukhārī, #3391; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8159; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6229.

38:50c "Heaven has eight gates": Bukhārī, #3257; Dārimī, #2860; Abū Yaʿlā, #5012.

"Whosoever was among the people of prayer . . .": Bukhārī, #3666; Muslim, #1027.

38:69–70c "My Lord came to me at night . . .": Tirmidhī, #3234; Dārimī, #2195; Abū Yaʿlā, #2608.

"O God! I ask Thee that I may perform . . .": Tirmidhī, #3235; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22109; Bazzār, #2668; Ḥākim, #3678}.

39:Introduction The Prophet would not sleep until . . .: Tirmidhī, #2920, #3405; Ibn Ḥanbal, #24388.

39:7c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "O My servants! If the first of you . . .": Muslim, #2577; Tirmidhī, #2495; Ibn Mājah, #4257.

39:9c "These two are not joined together . . .": Tirmidhī, #983; Ibn Mājah, #4261.

"The virtue of the pious scholar . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #3641; Ibn Ḥibbān, #88; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #1697.

39:20c "For those who speak kindly . . .": Tirmidhī, #1984; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1338; Abū Yaᶜlā, #437; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #3089.

"The people of the Garden . . .": Bukhārī, #6556; Muslim, #2831; Tirmidhī, #2556.

39:22c "When light enters the heart . . .": Bayhaqī, *Zuhd,* #974; Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd,* #300; {Ḥākim, #7944; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #35317, #35318}.

39:29c "Whosoever makes his aspirations . . .": Ibn Mājah, #257, #4106; Ḥākim, #3715; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #9857.

"One for whom the world is his aspiration . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4105; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #9855; {Tirmidhī, #2465; Bazzār, #6704}.

39:30–31c "Yes. They will indeed return to you . . .": Tirmidhī, #3236; Ḥākim, #3040; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1405, #1434.

39:42c "Sleep is the brother of death . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #4416; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #8816; Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmiᶜ,* #6808.

"In Thy Name, my Lord, I lay down my body . . .": Bukhārī, #6320; Muslim, #2714.

39:53c "I would not wish . . .": Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr.*

"If you did not sin . . .": Muslim, #2748; Tirmidhī, #3539; {Ḥākim, #7704}.

39:67c "O Muhammad! God will put the heavens . . .": Bukhārī, #4811, #7414; Muslim, #2786.

39:68c "Then God will send down a rain . . .": Bukhārī, #4935, #4814; Muslim, #2955.

39:69–70c They will gather "barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised, engulfed by their sweat . . .": ("sweat to their ear lobes") Ḥākim, #3956; {without mention of sweat: Bukhārī, #3349, #4740; Muslim, #2860}.

39:73c The Garden has eight doors: Bukhārī, #3257, #3435; Muslim, #27; {Tirmidhī, #55; Ibn Mājah, #470}.

"I will be the first to enter Paradise": Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4160; {Muslim, #196; #197; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6481; Abū Yaᶜlā, #3964}.

A group "appearing like the moon on the night when it is full . . .": Bukhārī, #3245; Muslim, #2834; Tirmidhī, #2537.

This group is reported to number seventy thousand or seven hundred thousand: Bukhārī, #6472, #6554; Muslim, #219, #220.

40:3c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My Mercy . . .": Muslim, #2751; Abū Yaᶜlā, #6281; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7299.

40:13c "Be mindful of the insight of the believer . . .": Tirmidhī, #3127; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7497; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 6:118.

40:14c "There is no god but God, alone . . .": Muslim, #594; Abū Dāwūd, #1506; Nasāʾī, #1339.

40:17c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "O My servants! I have forbidden injustice . . .": Muslim, #2577; Bazzār, #4053; Bukhārī, *Adab,* #490; {Ḥākim, #7687}.

40:35c "In the body there is a lump of flesh . . .": Bukhārī, #52; Muslim, #1599.

40:39c "What have I and the world to do with . . .": Ḥākim, #7939; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2744, #3709; Tirmidhī, #2377; Ibn Mājah, #4109.

40:60c "Supplication is worship": Tirmidhī, #3372; Abū Dāwūd, #1479; Ibn Mājah, #328.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "For one whose remembrance of Me . . .": Tirmidhī, #2926; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #567, #3786; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #29761.

41:10c "God created the earth on Sunday and Monday . . .": Ḥākim, #3740; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr;* Bayhaqī, *Asmāʾ,* pp. 335–36; {Muslim, #2789}.

41:15–16c "I have been helped by the east wind . . .": Bukhārī, #1035, #3205; Muslim, #900.

41:20–21c "Then he will say, 'My Lord, didst Thou not promise . . .": Muslim, #2969; Ibn Ḥibbān, #8358; Abū Yaʿlā, #3977.

41:22–23c "God is in accord with the thought . . .": Muslim, #2675; Tirmidhī, #3603; Ibn Mājah, #3822.

41:30c "Some people have said it . . .": Tirmidhī, #3250; Abū Yaʿlā, #3495; Bazzār, #6885.

41:34c "Let there be no harming . . .": Ibn Mājah, #2340; Mālik, #2860; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22778.

"Keep relations with those who . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #17334, #17452; Ibn ʿAdī, 5:165.

41:47c "The one questioned about it . . .": Bukhārī, #50, #4777; Muslim, #8; Tirmidhī, #2610; Abū Dāwūd, #4695.

42:7c The Prophet says to Makkah, "By God! Thou art the best land of God . . .": Tirmidhī, #3924; Ibn Mājah, #3108; {Ḥākim, #4329}.

42:13c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "If my servant draws nearer to Me by a span . . .": Muslim, #2687: Ibn Mājah, #3821; {Bukhārī 7405}.

42:17c "You will be with those whom you love": Bukhārī, #6168, #6169, #6170; Muslim, #2640, #2641.

42:20c "Whosoever among them performs . . .": Ḥākim, #7976; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21220; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #6833.

42:23c Ibn ʿAbbās says, "There was not a single house of the Quraysh . . .": Bukhārī, #3497, #4818; Tirmidhī, #3251.

42:25c "God rejoices more emphatically over the repentance . . .": Muslim, #2748; Ibn Ḥibbān, #618; {Bukhārī, #6309; Tirmidhī, #2498}.

42:27c "If the son of Adam had a valley of gold . . .": Bukhārī, #6439; Muslim, #1048; Tirmidhī, #2337.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Among My believing servants . . .": Muttaqī, #1160; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsūᶜah,* #1990; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12719; Ibn ᶜAsākir, 7:96.

42:30–31c "No believer is afflicted with fatigue . . .": Bukhārī, #5642; Muslim, #2573; Tirmidhī, #966; Ibn Ḥanbal, #3618.

42:37c "A strong person is not one . . .": Bukhārī, #6114; Muslim, #2609.

"Anger comes from the Devil . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4784; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #7938; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17985.

42:38c "If your leaders are the best of you . . .": Tirmidhī, #2266; Dānī, #303.

42:41–42c "When two people insult one another . . .": Muslim, #2587; Tirmidhī, #1981; Abū Dāwūd, #4894.

43:37c "There is none among you but . . .": Muslim, #2814; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2593; {Nasāᵓī, #3960}.

43:55c "When you see that God gives . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #17311; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #9268; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #4540.

43:61c "One of the signs of the Hour . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4311; {ᶜAbd al-Razzāq, #20834}.

44:Introduction "Whosoever recites *al-Dukhān* . . .": Tirmidhī, #2888; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #2246.

44:37c "I know not whether Tubbaᶜ was a prophet": Ḥākim, #104; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #18556.

44:43–44c "If but one drop of *Zaqqūm* were to fall . . .": Tirmidhī, #2585, Ibn Mājah, #4325; Ḥākim, #3743.

44:56c "Do you think this woman would allow . . .": Muslim, #2753; Bukhārī, #5999; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #6729.

45:13c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "O Son of Adam! I created the things . . .": (obscure report without basis in *isnād*).

45:14c The tale of the chief hypocrite ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy: Bukhārī, #2691; Muslim, #1799; Abū Yaᶜlā, #4083; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12607, #13292.

"Muhammad's Lord is in need . . .": Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* pp. 603–4; {with significant variation: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* #4589; Ṭaḥāwī, #1830}.

45:23c "The intelligent person is one who . . .": Tirmidhī, #2459; Ibn Mājah, #4260; Ḥākim, #7720.

45:24c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "The son of Adam vexes Me . . .": Bukhārī, #4826, #7491; Muslim, #2246; Abū Dāwūd, #5274.

45:28–29c "The Quran is a proof . . .": Muslim, #223; Tirmidhī, #3517; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22902, #22908; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3423.

46:9c "The prophets are half brothers . . .": Bukhārī, #3443; Muslim, #2365.

46:10c Saᶜd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ says, "I have never heard the Prophet . . .": Bukhārī, #3812; {Muslim, #2483}.

46:15c "Your mother": Bukhārī, #5971; Muslim, #2548.

"Whosoever is unkind to our young . . .": Tirmidhī, #1921; Abū Dāwūd, #4943; Abū Yaʿlā, #4242.

46:24–25c The Prophet's prayer when a storm approached: Bukhārī, #3206; Muslim, #899.

47:2c Embracing Islam "wipes out all previous sins": Muslim, #121; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17827, #17813; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #18190.

47:6c "When the believers have been saved . . .": Bukhārī, #2440; Ḥākim, #3407; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7434.

47:13c The Prophet says to Makkah, "By God, thou art the most beloved land . . .": Tirmidhī, #3924; Ibn Mājah, #3108; {Ḥākim, #4329}.

47:15c "I was raised to the *lote tree of the boundary* . . .": Bukhārī, #3887; Muslim, #164.

47:18c "I was sent like this in relation to the Hour . . .": Bukhārī, #6503; Muslim, #2950.

47:22c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "God created creatures . . .": Bukhārī, #5987; Muslim, #2554.

47:24c The Companions' method of learning the Quran: Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ḥākim, #2099; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1801; {Ibn Abī Shaybah, #30427; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23482}.

"The best of you is one . . .": Bukhārī, #5027; Tirmidhī, #2907; Abū Dāwūd, #1452.

48:Introduction ʿUmar's anxious guilt and the Prophet's joy at the revelation of *Sūrah* 48: Bukhārī, #4833, #5012; Tirmidhī, #3262; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11499; Ibn Ḥanbal, #209.

The Prophet recited *Sūrah* 48 on the day of the conquest of Makkah: Bukhārī, #4835; Muslim, #794; Ibn Ḥanbal, #20542.

48:2–3c "Should I not be a thankful servant?": Bukhārī, #4836; Muslim, #2819.

48:5c The Companions say, "Congratulations, O Messenger of God . . .": Bukhārī, #4172; Tirmidhī, #3263; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12226.

48:18–19c *The victory* is thought to refer to the Pledge of Good Pleasure at Ḥudaybiyah: Bukhārī, #4150; #Ibn Ḥibbān, #4801.

"None of the companions of the tree . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4653; Tirmidhī, #3860; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11444; Ibn Ḥanbal, #14778; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4802.

48:24c The attempted surprise attack on the Muslims at Ḥudaybiyah: Ḥākim, #3773; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16800; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11447.

48:25c Umm Salamah counsels the Prophet to sacrifice his animal: Bukhārī, #2731, #2732; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #37837; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #10076; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh,* 2:637.

48:27c ʿUmar questions the Prophet about the unfulfilled promise of performing the *ʿumrah:* Bukhārī, #2731, #2732; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18928; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4872.

48:29c "God is not merciful to one who . . .": Bukhārī, #7376; Muslim, #2319.

"The merciful are shown mercy . . .": Tirmidhī, #1924; Abū Dāwūd, #4941; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6494.

"Whose prayer is much at night . . .": Ibn Mājah, #1333; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2830.

49:1c "None of you truly believes until . . .": Bukhārī, #15; Muslim, #44; Ibn Mājah, #67; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12814, #13911.

49:2c Abū Bakr and ᶜUmar argue loudly in presence of Prophet: Bukhārī, #4745, #4847, #7302; Tirmidhī, #3266; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11514; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16106, #16133.

49:4c The report about Aqraᶜ ibn Ḥābis: Tirmidhī, #3267; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #878; Ibn Ḥanbal, #15991, #27203.

49:5c Seeking permission to enter a house: Bukhārī, #6245; Muslim, #2153.

49:6–8c The context of the revelation involving Walīd and the Banū Muṣṭaliq: Ibn Ḥanbal, #18459; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #17975; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* 23:201, #960.

"My life is a great good for you . . .": Albānī, *Ḍaᶜīf al-Jāmiᶜ,* #2746; {Bazzār, #1925; Ibn Saᶜd, 2:174; Ḥayṯamī, *Bughyah,* #953}.

49:9c "Help your brother whether . . .": Bukhārī, #6952; #2443; Tirmidhī, #2255; Ibn Ḥibbān, #5167; Abū Yaᶜlā, #3838; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11949, #13079.

This verse was revealed regarding an incident involving ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy: Bukhārī, #2691; Muslim, #1799; Abū Yaᶜlā, #4083; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12607, #13292.

"Cursing a Muslim is a sin . . .": Bukhārī, #48; Muslim, #64.

49:10c "The believers are like a single structure . . .": Bukhārī, #2446; Muslim, #2585; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19625.

"None of you truly believes until . . .": Bukhārī, #13; Muslim, #45; Tirmidhī, #2515.

"God helps His servant as long as . . .": Muslim, #2699; Tirmidhī, #1425; Abū Dāwūd, #4946; Ibn Mājah, #225.

The seven types of people to be granted Paradise: Bukhārī, #660, #1423; Muslim, #1031; Tirmidhī, #2391.

"Whosoever possesses these three qualities . . .": Bukhārī, #16, #6941; Muslim, #43; Tirmidhī, #2624.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "God will ask on the Day of Judgment . . .": Muslim, #2566; Dārimī, #2757; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #8577; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7231, #8455.

49:11c "Unless people cease boasting . . .": Tirmidhī, #3955; Ibn Ḥanbal, #10781; {Abū Dāwūd, #5116; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8736, #8792}.

The Prophet changed people's names: Bukhārī, #6190; Abū Dāwūd, #4956; Ibn Ḥibbān, #5822; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23673.

49:12c "Beware of conjecture . . .": Bukhārī, #5144, #6724; Muslim, #2563; Tirmidhī, #1988; Abū Dāwūd, #4917.

"A leader will corrupt his people . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4889; Ḥākim, #8217; Ibn Abī ᶜĀṣim, #1073.

Those who eavesdrop "will have molten copper . . .": Bukhārī, #7042; Abū Dāwūd, #5003; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11637; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1866, #3383.

"O gathering of those who submit with their tongues . . .": Tirmidhī, #2032; Abū Dāwūd, #4880; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19776.

"Whosoever covers the faults of a . . .": (not verbatim, partial) Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #7244; Ḥākim, #8239; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7427; Ibn Ḥibbān, #534; {Bukhārī, #2442; Muslim, #2580, #2699; Tirmidhī, #1426}.

49:13c "God does not look at your bodies . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #10637; Bayhaqī, *Asmāʾ,* p. 442; {Muslim, #2564; Ibn Mājah, #4143; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3456}.

"There is in man a clump of flesh . . .": Bukhārī, #52; Muslim, #1599; Abū Dāwūd, #3330; Ibn Mājah, #3984; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18374.

49:14c "Modesty produces naught but good": Bukhārī, #6117; Muslim, #37; Abū Dāwūd, #4796.

"If a servant submits . . .": Nasāʾī, #4998; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #24, #25.

50:Introduction The Prophet recited *Sūrah* 50 during the Friday sermon: Muslim, #872; Abū Dāwūd, #1100; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #1732.

The Prophet read *Sūrah*s 50 and 54 during the two feast-day prayers: Muslim, #891; Tirmidhī, #534; Abū Dāwūd, #1154; Ibn Mājah, #1282.

The Prophet often recited *Sūrah* 50 during the morning prayer: Muslim, #458; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #1938; Ibn Ḥibbān, #1816.

50:29–30c "As for the Fire, it will not be filled . . .": Bukhārī, #4850; Muslim, #2846; Tirmidhī, #2561; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #7693.

50:39c "You will see your Lord . . .": Bukhārī, #554, #4851; Muslim, #633; Tirmidhī, #2551; Abū Dāwūd, #4729.

50:40c *After prostrations* is taken as a command to glorify God after each prayer: Bukhārī, #4852.

Ibn ʿAbbās says, "*The receding of the stars* . . .": Tirmidhī, #3275; Ḥākim, #1119; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #7458.

51:18c "Every night during the last third of the night . . .": Bukhārī, #1145, #6321, #7494; Muslim, #758; Tirmidhī, #3498; Abū Dāwūd, #4733; Ibn Mājah, #1366.

51:50c "O God! I seek refuge in Thy Contentment . . .": Muslim, #486; Tirmidhī, #3566; Abū Dāwūd, #879.

51:56c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "O Son of Adam! Dedicate yourself . . .": Tirmidhī, #2466; Ibn Mājah, #4107; Ibn Ḥibbān, #393; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #9856.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I was a hidden treasure . . .": (a much-cited saying in Sufi literature, but with no sound basis in *isnād*) {ʿAjlūnī, #2016}.

52:4c "I was taken to *the house inhabited* . . .": Bukhārī, #3207; Muslim, #164; Nasāʾī, #448; Ibn Ḥibbān, #48.

52:12c "Whosoever can guarantee me that . . .": Bukhārī, #6474; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #16671; Abū Yaʿlā, #1855; {Tirmidhī, #2408, #2409}.

"The fornication of the tongue . . .": Bukhārī, #6243; Muslim, #2657.

"Restrain this . . .": Tirmidhī, #2616; Ibn Mājah, #3973; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11394; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22016.

52:21c "God elevates the ranks of the believers' progeny . . .": Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 4:302; Ḥākim, #3801; Ṭaḥāwī, #1075; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12248.

52:48c "No fatigue . . .": Bukhārī, #5641, #5642; Muslim, #2573; Tirmidhī, #966; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2905.

52:49c Ibn ᶜAbbās says, "*The receding of the stars* . . .": Tirmidhī, #3275; Ḥākim, #1119; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #7458.

"The two cycles of the supererogatory morning prayer . . .": Muslim, #725; Tirmidhī, #416; Nasāᵓī, #1759.

53:8c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My servant draws nigh unto Me . . .": Bukhārī, #6502; Ibn Ḥibbān, #347; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20980; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7833.

53:11c "He is a light . . .": Muslim, #178; Tirmidhī, #3282; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #8300.

"The light of my vision was placed . . .": (obscure *ḥadīth* with weak *isnād*) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr.*

"His veil is light . . .": Muslim, #179; Ibn Mājah, #195; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19587, #19632.

53:19–20c The account of the Satanic Verses: Bazzār, #5096; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #8316, #12450; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* pp. 504–5, pp. 505–6, #309; Ibn Saᶜd, 1:174–75; Ṭabarī, *Taᵓrīkh,* 2:337–40.

53:28c "Beware of conjecture . . .": Bukhārī, #5144, #6724; Muslim, #2563; Tirmidhī, #1988; Abū Dāwūd, #4917.

53:32c "Verily, God has decreed for the son of Adam . . .": Bukhārī, #6243, #6612; Muslim, #2657.

"Woe to you! You have cut off the neck . . .": Bukhārī, #6061; Muslim, #3000.

53:38c "Whosoever establishes a sinful custom . . .": Muslim, #1017; Tirmidhī, #2675; Ibn Mājah, #203, #207; Nasāᵓī, #2554.

53:39c "When a person dies . . .": Muslim, #1631; Tirmidhī, #1376; Abū Dāwūd, #2880.

53:60c "If you knew what I know . . .": Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 630, #393; {Bukhārī, #4621, #6631; Muslim, #2359, #901; Tirmidhī, #2313; Ibn Mājah, #4191}.

"The Fire will not reach a man . . .": Tirmidhī, #1633, #2311; Ibn Mājah, #2774; Ibn Ḥanbal, #10560.

One of seven categories of people said to be "shaded by God . . .": Bukhārī, #660; Muslim, #1031; Tirmidhī, #2391.

54:Introduction The Prophet performs the miracle of splitting the moon for skeptical Makkan pagans: (blended report based on multiple *aḥādīth*) {Bukhārī, #3636–38, #3868–70, #4864; Muslim, #2800–2803; Tirmidhī, #3285; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16750; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11642.

Travelers bring confirmation of the splitting of the moon: Bayhaqī, *Dalāᵓil,* 2:266–67; Ṭayālisī, #293.

54:1c "I was sent like this in relation to the Hour . . .": Bukhārī, #4936, #5301, #6503; Muslim, #2950, #2951; Tirmidhī, #2214; Ibn Mājah, #45.

54:17c "The best among you are those who . . .": Bukhārī, #5027; Tirmidhī, #2907; Abū Dāwūd, #1452.

"If the Quran is enclosed by skin . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #2444; Abū Yaᶜlā, #1745; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #5901; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17365.

54:45–46c The Prophet recited these verses at the Battle of Badr: Bukhārī, #4875, #2915.

54:47–49c The Prophet's dispute with idolaters over God's "measuring out": Muslim, #2656; Tirmidhī, #3290.

54:48c "Are people thrown into Hell . . .": Tirmidhī, #2616; Ibn Mājah, #3973; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #11394; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22016.

54:49c "No servant of God truly believes until . . .": Tirmidhī, #2144; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #1955; {Ibn Mājah, #77; Abū Dāwūd, #4699; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6985, #21589; #27490; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11243; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #211}.

"Every community has its Magians . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4692; Ibn Ḥanbal, #5584; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20870.

55:Introduction "For everything there is a bride . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2265; Tabrīzī, #2180.

55:3c "The word 'womb' derives its name . . .": Bukhārī, #5988; Muslim, #2554; {Abū Dāwūd, #1694; Tirmidhī, #1907}.

55:8–9c "The heavens and the earth are founded upon justice": (words reportedly spoken by Jews of Khaybar, not the Prophet) Abū Dāwūd, #3410; Ibn Mājah, #1820.

55:13c "Why do I see you silent . . .": Tirmidhī, #3291; Bazzār, #5853; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2264, #4103.

55:29c "Among God's tasks is to forgive sin . . .": Ibn Mājah, #202; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #3140; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1066, #1067.

55:48c "Two golden Gardens for *the foremost* . . .": Bayhaqī, *Baʿth,* #219; Dīnawarī, #1415; {Ibn Abī Shaybah, #35821; Ḥākim, #3829}.

55:58c "If a woman among the women . . .": Bukhārī, #2796; Ibn Ḥanbal, #13780; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7398; {Ibn Abī Shaybah, #34982, #34981; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12436; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #5512}.

55:60c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Is the reward of one whom I have blessed . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #425; Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ,* 4:227; {Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, #930}.

Goodness is "to worship God as if you see Him . . .": Bukhārī, #50; Muslim, #9; Tirmidhī, #2610; Abū Dāwūd, #4695.

55:78c "Persist in invoking . . .": Tirmidhī, #3525; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17596; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #7669, #11499.

"O God, Thou art Peace . . .": Muslim, #591, #592; Tirmidhī, #298; Abū Dāwūd, #1512; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #1261.

56:Introduction "Whosoever recites *al-Wāqiʿah* . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2267, #2268; Ibn ʿAsākir, 33:187–88.

56:8–9c "We went over the nearest heaven . . .": Bukhārī, #349; Muslim, #163.

56:11–14c "You live at a time when . . .": Tirmidhī, #2267; Ṭabarānī, *Ṣaghīr,* 2:137–38; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 7:316; Muttaqī, #38630.

"The best generation is mine . . .": (examples, many variants) Bukhārī, #3651, #6428; Muslim, #2533; Tirmidhī, #2302; Abū Dāwūd, #4657.

"A group among my community . . .": Bukhārī, #3641; Muslim, #1920; Tirmidhī, #2229; {Bukhārī, #7469; Muslim, #1037, #1924}.

Various signs of the Final Hour: Tirmidhī, #3508; Abū Dāwūd, #4341; Ibn Mājah, #4014.

56:17c "The servants of heaven . . .": (considered a saying, not a *ḥadīth*) ᶜAbd al-Razzāq, #20079; Bazzār, #4516; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2045.

56:20–21c The birds of Paradise: (not verbatim) {Tirmidhī, #2542; Ibn Ḥanbal, #13311, #13306; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32468}.

56:22–24c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I have prepared for My righteous servants . . .": Bukhārī, #3244, #4779; Muslim, #2824; Tirmidhī, #3292.

56:30c "In the Garden there is a tree . . .": Bukhārī, #4881, #3252; Muslim, #2826–28; Tirmidhī, #2524.

56:36–37c "They are those who in this world . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* 23:367–68, #870; {Tirmidhī, #3296}.

56:63–67c "Let none of you say . . .": Ibn Ḥibbān, #5723; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #8024; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #11752.

56:71–73c "This fire of yours . . .": Bukhārī, #3265; Muslim, #2843; Tirmidhī, #2589.

56:82c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Some of My servants arose as believers in Me . . .": Bukhārī, #846, #1038; Muslim, #71; Abū Dāwūd, #3906; Nasāᵓī, #1525.

57:Introduction "Within the Glorifiers there is a verse . . .": Tirmidhī, #2921, #3406; Abū Dāwūd, #5057; Nasāᵓī, *Kubrā,* #10481, #10482.

57:3c "God was and there was nothing . . .": Bukhārī, #3191; Nasāᵓī, *Kubrā,* #11176; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #17702.

"O God, Lord of the seven heavens . . .": Muslim, #2713; Tirmidhī, #3400, #3481; Ibn Mājah, #3831.

57:10c "If one of you were to spend . . .": Muslim, #2540; Bukhārī, #3673; Abū Dāwūd, #4658.

Gabriel inquires about Abū Bakr's impoverished condition: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 641, #403; Abū Nuᶜaym, *Ḥilyah,* 7:105; Ibn ᶜAsākir, 30:71.

"One who is strong in belief . . .": Muslim, #2664; Ibn Mājah, #79; Nasāᵓī, *Kubrā,* #10382.

57:13c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* God tells the angels to bring from the Fire those to whom God wishes to show mercy: Bukhārī, #7437, #6573; Muslim, #182; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7717.

57:16c "I seek refuge in God from a heart . . .": Tirmidhī, #3482; Abū Dāwūd, #1548; Nasāᵓī, #5467; Ibn Mājah, #250.

"The first thing to be removed . . .": (not verbatim, partial) Ibn Ḥanbal, #23990; Nasāᵓī, *Kubrā,* #5879; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7183; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4572.

Ibn Masᶜūd says, "There were but four years . . .": Muslim, #3027; Ibn Mājah, #4192; Nasāᵓī, *Kubrā,* #11504; Ḥākim, #3744.

57:17c "The difference between one who remembers God and . . .": Bukhārī, #6407; Muslim, #779.

57:22c "No illness or fatigue . . .": Bukhārī, #5641; Muslim, #2573; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #6537.

57:23c "How remarkable is the situation of the believer . . .": Muslim, #2999; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2896; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #3849; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #4169.

57:26c "The upright will depart one after another . . .": Bukhārī, #6434, #4156; Dārimī, #2761; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2677.

57:27c "Every Prophet has a form of monasticism . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #13807; Abū Yaʿlā, #4204; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #3923; {Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #7708}.

"Giving up the world does not mean . . .": Tirmidhī, #2340; Ibn Mājah, #4100; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #7954.

57:28c People of the Book who believe in the Prophet receive double reward: Bukhārī, #97, #3011, #5083; Muslim, #154; Tirmidhī, #1116.

Descriptions of the bridge over Hell: (not verbatim) Bukhārī, #6574, #7439; Muslim, #183; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #360; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11081, #11127; Abū Yaʿlā, #1253, #6663; Ibn Ḥajar, #4545.

57:29c "The parable of you and the Jews and Christians . . .": Bukhārī, #2269, #558; Tirmidhī, #2871; Bazzār, #5819; Ibn Ḥanbal, #4508.

58:1–2c Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah is repudiated by her husband, *Ḥākim*: #3848; Ibn Ḥanbal, #27319; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4279; Ibn Mājah, #2063.

"You are now forbidden to him . . .": Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Shabbah, 2:12–13.

58:3–4c The atonement of the offending husband of Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah: Abū Dāwūd, #2214; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #15284; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #27319}.

58:8c ʿĀʾishah responds angrily to a Jewish malediction upon the Prophet: Bukhārī, #6030; Muslim, #2165; Ibn Ḥanbal, #25924.

"God does not like indecency . . .": Muslim, #2165; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #8677; Ibn Ḥanbal, #25924.

58:9–10c "The speech of the Children of Adam always . . .": Tirmidhī, #2412; Ibn Mājah, #3974; Ḥākim, #3950; Abū Yaʿlā, #7132; Muttaqī, #7865.

58:11c "God ceases not to aid the servant so long as . . .": Tirmidhī, #1930; Abū Dāwūd, #4946; Ibn Mājah, #225.

*Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I am as My servant thinks of Me . . .": Bukhārī, #7405; Muslim, #2675; Tirmidhī, #3603; Ibn Mājah, #3822.

"The superiority of one who has knowledge . . .": Tirmidhī, #2682; Abū Dāwūd, #3641; Ibn Mājah, #223.

58:12–13c ʿAlī says, "There is one verse in the Book of God . . .": Ḥākim, #3851; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #32661.

58:14–18c "A man will come to you . . .": Ḥākim, #3852; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12307; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2407.

58:19c "The likeness of one who remembers his Lord . . .": Bukhārī, #6407; {Muslim, #779; Ibn Ḥibbān, #854}.

58:22c "Whosoever has submitted . . .": Muslim, #1054; Tirmidhī, #2348; Ibn Mājah, #4138.

59:Introduction "Within the Glorifiers there is a verse that . . .": Tirmidhī, #2921, #3406; Abū Dāwūd, #5057; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #10481, #10482.

59:5c The ramifications of the felling of the date palms of the Banū al-Naḍīr: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 657; {Tirmidhī, #3303; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #11510; Abū Ya'lā, #2189; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #587; Ibn Hishām, 1:191; Wāqidī, 1:373}.

59:7c "When I order you to do something . . .": Muslim, #1337; Ibn Mājah, #2; {Bukhārī, #7288; Ibn Ḥibbān, #18}.

59:9c "Truly the dwellers of the heavens are amazed . . .": Bukhārī, #3798; #4889; {Muslim, #2054; Tirmidhī, #3304}.

"Abstain from the world, and God will love you . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4102; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #5972; Ḥākim, #7954; Muttaqī, #8577.

"Your worst enemy . . .": Bayhaqī, *Zuhd,* #343; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3445; Kharā'iṭī, #32; Daylamī, #5289.

"Be on your guard against committing oppression . . .": Muslim, #2578; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #11519; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20450.

59:18c The Prophet, moved by the poverty of some Muslims, appeals for charity: Muslim, #1017; Ibn Ḥibbān, #3308; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19174.

59:19c "He who knows himself . . .": (oft-cited saying without sound basis in *isnād*) 'Ajlūnī, #2532; Majlisī, *Biḥār,* 14:415 (accepted in many Shiite sources).

59:21c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "My heavens and My earth embrace Me not . . .": (oft-cited *ḥadīth qudsī* with no basis in *isnād*) Albānī, *Ḍa'īfah,* #5103; 'Ajlūnī, #2256; Suyūṭī, *Durar,* p. 217, #361; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Zuhd,* p. 129, #421.

59:22–24c Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ says, "One who reads . . .": Ibn al-Ḍurays, p. 103, #227; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #2271; Dārimī, #3466.

59:23c Some Companions used to pray "Peace upon God," until the Prophet corrected them: Bukhārī, #6328, #7381; Muslim, #402; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #758; Abū Dāwūd, #968.

59:24c "God has ninety-nine Names . . .": Bukhārī, #7392, #2736, #6410; Muslim, #2677; Tirmidhī, #3506; Ibn Mājah, #3861.

"I implore Thee by every Name . . .": Ḥākim, #1929; Ibn Ḥanbal, #3712; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #29808.

60:1c Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah sends a letter to the Quraysh: Bukhārī, #3007, #3983, #4890; Muslim, #2494; Abū Dāwūd, #2650; Tirmidhī, #3305.

60:8c Asmā', the daughter of Abū Bakr, refuses to meet her idolatrous mother: Bukhārī, #5978, #2620; Muslim, #1003; Abū Dāwūd, #1668; Ibn Ḥanbal, #16111; Ḥākim, #3861.

60:12c This verse comprises the elements of the oath of Islam that the Prophet would take from women: Bukhārī, #4891, #4895; Muslim, #884, #1866; Ibn Mājah, #2875; Ibn Ḥanbal, #26326; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4554.

The women's pledge includes not wailing for the dead: Bukhārī, #4894; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6850.

"Whosoever among you fulfills the pledge . . .": Bukhārī, #18, #3892, #7199; Muslim, #1709.

61:2–3c "Whosoever claims for himself . . .": Muslim, #61; {Ibn Mājah, #2319; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21465}.

61:4c "A Muslim believer is a mirror reflection . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #4918; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #16681; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2114; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #7239.

"The entire Muslim group . . .": Muslim, #2586; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19349, #18434; {Bukhārī, #6011; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18373, #18433}.

61:6c "I have several names . . .": Bukhārī, #3532, #4896; Muslim, #2354; Tirmidhī, #2840; Ibn Ḥibbān, #6313.

61:14c "Every prophet has his apostle . . .": Bukhārī, #7261, #3719; Muslim, #2415; Tirmidhī, #3545; Ibn Mājah, #122.

62:Introduction "The best day . . .": Bukhārī, #935; Muslim, #854; Tirmidhī, #488, #491; Abū Dāwūd, #1046; Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #2709.

"It is named 'The Gathering' because . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #23718; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #6092; {Muslim, #854}.

62:5c A warning of impending calamities when religious understanding is lost: Ibn Mājah, #4048; Tirmidhī, #2653; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17920.

"There will soon come upon the people . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #1763; Ibn ᶜAdī, 4:128.

62:6c "Whosoever desires to meet God . . .": Bukhārī, #6508; Muslim, #2684, #2685, #2686; Tirmidhī, #1066, #2309; Ibn Mājah, #4264.

62:9c "When you come to prayer . . .": Bukhārī, #635, #636, #908; Muslim, #602; Abū Dāwūd, #572, #573; Ibn Mājah, #775; Nasāʾī, #861.

62:11c Worshippers abandon the Prophet during Friday prayers when a caravan arrives: Bukhārī, #936, #2058, #4899; Muslim, #863; Tirmidhī, #3311.

63:1c The story of the chief hypocrite ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy and the revelation of vv. 1–8: Bukhārī, #4901; Muslim, #2772; Tirmidhī, #3312.

63:2c "The signs of the hypocrite are four . . .": Bukhārī, #34, #2459; Muslim, #58; Abū Dāwūd, #4688; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6768.

64:2c "People are born in various degrees . . .": Tirmidhī, #2191; Ibn Ḥanbal, #11143, #11587; Ṭayālisī, #2156.

"A person may act like the people of the Garden . . .": Muslim, #112; Bukhārī, #2898, #4202, #6607; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22813.

64:15c "Wretched is the slave of *dīnārs* . . .": Bukhārī, #2886, #2887; Ibn Mājah, #4136; Ibn Ḥibbān, #3218; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #21148.

65:Introduction "Verily, of that which is permitted . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #2177, #2178; Ibn Mājah, #2018; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #14894; Ḥākim, #2853.

65:1c The prohibition against divorcing a menstruating wife: Bukhārī, #5251, #5252; Muslim, #1471; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 681, #426.

65:3c "Fear God, and be patient!": Ḥākim, #3877; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 683, #427.

"Faith is to believe in God . . .": Muslim, #8; Tirmidhī, #2610; Abū Dāwūd, #4695; Ibn Mājah, #63; {Bukhārī, #50, #4777; Nasā'ī, #4991}.

65:4c Ubayy ibn Ka'b inquires about "women regarding whom nothing was mentioned . . .": Ḥākim, #3878; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #428; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #15379.

65:12c "Whosoever usurps a span of land unjustly . . .": Muslim, #1610, #1612; Bukhārī, #2452, #2453, #3195; Tirmidhī, #1418.

66:1c The story of the Prophet renouncing his rights to relations with Māriyah: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #429, #432; Sa'īd ibn Manṣūr, #2249; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12640; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #2316, #8764; {Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #11543}.

66:3c Ḥafṣah tells 'Ā'ishah of the incident with Māriyah: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #429, #432; Sa'īd ibn Manṣūr, #2249.

66:8c "O people! Repent unto your Lord . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #2754; {Ibn Mājah, #1081; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #5570; Abū Ya'lā, #1856}.

66:11c "The best among the women of the Garden . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #2957, #2668; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7010; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #8306; Abū Ya'lā, #2722.

"Verily in the Garden . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #5485/2, #8006; (several versions) Ibn 'Asākir, 70:118–19.

67:Introduction "*Tabāraka* is a shield . . .": (not verbatim) Tirmidhī, #2890; Ḥākim, #3896; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12801.

"Verily, there is a *sūrah* in the Quran . . . that will intercede . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #1400; Ibn Mājah, #3786; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #11548; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7975; {Tirmidhī, #2892}.

"There is a *sūrah* of the Quran . . . that will argue . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #3654; Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il,* 7:41; {Ḥākim, #2127}.

"I would love for it to be in the heart . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11616; Ḥākim, #2128; Ibn 'Asākir, 26:270.

67:2c "God has humbled the son of Adam . . .": (*ḥadīth mursal,* with incomplete *isnād*) Suyūṭī, *Durr,* 6:247; Māwardī, 6:50.

The human beings who suffer the greatest trials: Tirmidhī, #2398; Ibn Mājah, #4023; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2900, #2901; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1494, #1607.

"No fatigue . . .": Bukhārī, #5641, #5642; Muslim, #2573; Tirmidhī, #966; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2905.

"If God wants to do good to somebody . . .": Bukhārī, #5645; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7235; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2907; Nasā'ī, *Kubrā,* #7436.

"Deeds are only in accord . . .": Bukhārī, #1, #54, #6953; Muslim, #1907.

"The most wary of what God has forbidden . . .": Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr;* Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Dīnawarī, #262.

67:5c Qatādah says, "The creation of the stars . . .": (unnumbered saying) Bukhārī, 59:3 (*Kitāb bad' al-khalq, Bāb fi 'l-nujūm*).

67:6c "Whosoever comes to a fortune-teller . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #3904; Tirmidhī, #135; Ibn Mājah, #639; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9290, #9536.

67:10–11c "God will accept the repentance . . .": Tirmidhī, #3537; Ibn Mājah, #4253; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6160, #6408; Ibn Ḥibbān, #628; Abū Ya'lā, #5609.

67:12c One of seven categories of people to be "shaded by God . . .": Bukhārī, #659; Muslim, #1031; Tirmidhī, #2391.

67:13c "Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day . . .": Bukhārī, #6018, #6019, #6135; Muslim, #48; Tirmidhī, #2500; Abū Dāwūd, #5154; Ibn Mājah, #3672.

"For my community God passes over . . .": Bukhārī, #2528, #5269; Muslim, #127; Tirmidhī, #1183; Abū Dāwūd, #2209; Ibn Mājah, #2040.

67:19c "Were you to trust in God . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #205; Tirmidhī, #2344; Ibn Mājah, #4164; Ibn Ḥibbān, #730.

68:1c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "The first thing God created . . .": Tirmidhī, #2155, #3319; Abū Dāwūd, #4700; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22707.

"*Nūn* is a tablet of light": (obscure *ḥadīth* with incomplete *isnād, mursal gharīb*) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr.*

68:4c The Prophet's character was the Quran: Bukhārī, #994, #6310; Muslim, #746; Abū Dāwūd, #1342; Nasā'ī, #1601.

"O God, Thou hast beautified . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #3823, #24392; Ṭayālisī, #374; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #8542, #8543; Ibn Ḥibbān, #959.

"I was only sent . . .": Bazzār, #1973; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8952; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20782, *Shu'ab,* #7979.

"The best of you . . .": Bukhārī, #6029, #3559; Muslim, #2321; Tirmidhī, #1975; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8822, #10232, #10022; Ibn Ḥibbān, #91; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #20784.

"Reverence God wherever you may be . . .": Tirmidhī, #1987; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #8026; Dārimī, #2791; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #3779; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21354.

"What admits people most into Paradise . . .": Tirmidhī, #2004; Ibn Mājah, #4246; Ibn Ḥibbān, #476; Ḥākim, #8000.

"Nothing is placed on the scales . . .": Tirmidhī, #2003; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab,* #8003, #8004; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4210; {Abū Dāwūd, #4799; Ibn Ḥanbal, #27517}.

68:11c Those who spread calumny will not enter Paradise: Bukhārī, #6056, #218; Muslim, #105, #292; Tirmidhī, #2026, #70; Abū Dāwūd, #4871, #20.

68:20c "Avoid sins of disobedience . . .": Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr;* Suyūṭī, *Durr.*

68:42c "God will lay bare His Shank . . .": Bukhārī, #4919; Mujāhid, *Tafsīr,* pp. 669–70; {Muslim, #183}.

68:44c "God grants the wrongdoer respite . . .": Bukhārī, #4686; Muslim, #2583; Tirmidhī, #3110; Ibn Mājah, #4018.

68:51c The anecdote about a man with the evil eye: (not a *ḥadīth*) Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 694.

"Seek refuge in God . . .": Bukhārī, #5740, #5944; Muslim, #2187, #2188; Abū Dāwūd, #3879; {Tirmidhī 2061; Ibn Mājah, #3506}.

"If one of you sees something of his brother . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #15700; Abū Yaʿlā, #7195; Ḥākim, #7579.

69:12c The Prophet says to ʿAlī, "God has commanded me . . .": Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 695; Ibn ʿAsākir, 42:361.

"I asked my Lord . . .": (*ḥadīth* with incomplete *isnād*) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr;* Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr.*

69:17c "Today those carrying the throne are four . . .": (*ḥadīth* with incomplete *isnād*) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr.*

69:18c "The people are brought forth . . .": Tirmidhī, #2425; Ibn Mājah, #4277; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19715.

69:19–20c The most intelligent of believers are "the most frequent . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4259; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #4671.

69:22–23c "Verily I saw the Garden . . .": Bukhārī, #748, #1052; Muslim, #907; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2832; #2853.

69:50–51c "The Quran is a proof . . .": Muslim, #223; Tirmidhī, #3517; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22902, #22908; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #3423.

70:4c "He will lighten for the believer . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #11717; Ibn Ḥibbān, #7334; Abū Yaʿlā, #1390; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #356.

70:29–31c "Whosoever is able to guarantee . . .": Bukhārī, #6474; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #16671; Abū Yaʿlā, #1855; {Tirmidhī, #2408, #2409}.

The spread of illicit sexual intercourse . . .: Bukhārī, #6808; Muslim, #2671; Ibn Mājah, #4045; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12806.

70:32–33c "The signs of the hypocrite are three . . .": Bukhārī, #33, #6095; Muslim, #59; Tirmidhī, #2631; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8685.

70:34c "Establish the prayer and . . .": Ibn Mājah, #277; Dārimī, #655; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22378; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #7015.

"My comfort is in prayer": Nasāʾī, #3939, #3940; Ibn Ḥanbal, #12293, #12294, #13057; Abū Yaʿlā, #3530.

"The first thing for which one will be . . .": (not verbatim) Tirmidhī, #413; Abū Dāwūd, #864; Nasāʾī, #465; Ibn Mājah, #1425, #1426; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #4000.

70:42c "Let whosoever believes in God and in the Last Day . . .": Bukhārī, #6018, #6019, #6135; Muslim, #48; Tirmidhī, #2500; Abū Dāwūd, #5154; Ibn Mājah, #3672.

71:23c The gods mentioned here were . . .: Bukhārī, #4920.

72:Introduction *Al-Jinn* was revealed at a time when the jinn were distraught . . .: Bukhārī, #773, #4921; Muslim, #449; Tirmidhī, #3323.

72:8–9c "Some people asked the Messenger of God about the fortune-tellers . . .": Bukhārī, #6213, #7561; Muslim, #2228.

The anecdote about a shooting meteor: Tirmidhī, #3224; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1882; {Muslim, #2229; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1883}.

72:18c "The earth has been made . . .": Bukhārī, #335, #438; Muslim, #521, #522; Ibn Mājah, #567.

73:1–2c "Every night during the last third of the night . . .": Bukhārī, #1145, #6321, #7494; Muslim, #758; Tirmidhī, #3498; Abū Dāwūd, #4733; Ibn Mājah, #1366.

73:3–4c Umm Salamah reports the Prophet's manner of recitation: Abū Dāwūd, #4001; Ibn Ḥanbal, #26583; Bayhaqī, *Kubrā,* #4713; Ḥākim, #2969; {Abū Dāwūd, #1466; Tirmidhī, #2923}.

"Adorn the Quran with your voices": Abū Dāwūd, #1468; Ibn Mājah, #1342; Nasāʾī, #1015, #1016; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18494.

"Whosoever does not chant the Quran . . .": Bukhārī, #7527; Abū Dāwūd, #1469, #1471; Ibn Mājah, #1337; Ibn Ḥibbān, #120; Ibn Ḥanbal, #1476.

"Whosoever recites the Quran fluently . . .": Bukhārī, #4937; Muslim, #798; Abū Dāwūd, #1454; Ibn Mājah, #3779.

"Never does a group gather . . .": Muslim, #2699; Abū Dāwūd, #1455; Ibn Mājah, #225; Ibn Ḥanbal, #9274; Ibn Ḥibbān, #768.

"The believer who recites the Quran . . .": Bukhārī, #5020, #7560; Muslim, #797; Tirmidhī, #2865; Abū Dāwūd, #4829.

73:5c ʿĀʾishah reports that the Prophet would perspire when the revelation came upon him: Bukhārī, #2, #3215; Muslim, #2333; Tirmidhī, #3634; Nasāʾī, #934; Ibn Ḥanbal, #24309.

ʿĀʾishah says, "When the revelation came . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #24868; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 7:53; Ḥākim, #3922; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #27575}.

74:Introduction The Prophet's account of the first revelation: Bukhārī, #4926; Muslim, #161; Tirmidhī, #3325; Ibn Ḥibbān, #35.

74:4c "Whosoever performs ablution . . .": Muslim, #245; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2475; Ibn Ḥanbal, #476.

"When a person washes his face . . .": Muslim, #244; Tirmidhī, #2; {Muslim, #832; Ibn Mājah, #283; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8020; Ibn Ḥibbān, #1040}.

74:12–15c "If the son of Adam had . . .": Bukhārī, #6439; Muslim, #1048; Tirmidhī, #2337.

74:31c "Hell will be brought on that Day . . .": Muslim, #2842; Tirmidhī, #2573.

74:56c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "I am most worthy . . .": Ibn Mājah, #4299; Tirmidhī, #3328; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #12442}.

75:1–2c "There is no pious or profligate soul . . .": Tirmidhī, #2403; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 8:178.

75:3c The anecdote about ʿAdī ibn Rabīʿah: (not a proper *ḥadīth*) Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* p. 703.

75:13c "Whosoever establishes a beautiful custom . . .": Muslim, #1017; Tirmidhī, #2675; Ibn Mājah, #203, #207; Nasāʾī, #2554; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19202.

75:16–18c Ibn ʿAbbās's report of the change in the Prophet's manner of receiving revelation: Bukhārī, #5, #4927, #7524; Muslim, #448; Nasāʾī, #935; {Tirmidhī, #3329}.

75:22–23c "Truly, you all will see your Lord . . .": Bukhārī, #7435; Muslim, #633.

"Are you harmed by seeing . . .": Bukhārī, #4581, #7434; Muslim, #183; Abū Dāwūd, #4730; Ibn Mājah, #179.

"Truly, you will see your Lord just as you see . . .": Bukhārī, #554, #7435; Muslim, #633.

"When the people of the Garden . . .": Muslim, #181; Tirmidhī, #2552, #3105; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18935.

75:30c "Return My servants to the earth . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #3212, #4735; Ibn Mājah, #1549; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #18534; Ṭayālisī, #789}.

75:37–40c After the Prophet recited v. 40, he would say "Yea!": Abū Dāwūd, #884, #887; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7391.

76:Introduction The Prophet would often recite *Sūrah*s 32 and 76 during the early morning prayer: Muslim, #879; Abū Dāwūd, #1073; Tirmidhī, #520.

76:8c "The indigent is not one who . . .": Bukhārī, #1476, #4539; Muslim, #1039; Abū Dāwūd, #1631, #1632; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7539, #8187.

76:14c "Verily I saw the Garden . . .": Bukhārī, #748; Muslim, #907; Ibn Ḥibbān, #2832; #2853.

77:Introduction "While we were with the Messenger of God in a cave . . .": Bukhārī, #4931; Muslim, #2234; Abū Yaʿlā, #4970; Ibn Ḥanbal, #4069, #4357; Ibn Ḥibbān, #4970.

77:48–49c "There is no good in a religion . . .": Abū Dāwūd, #3026; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17913; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #8372; Ṭayālisī, #939.

78:18c The Prophet said that on the Day of Resurrection his community . . .: (variant, three *afwāj*) Nasāʾī, #2086; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21456; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #2224; Bazzār, #3891; (variant, three *aṣnāf* or three *ṭarāʾiq*) Bukhārī, #6522; Muslim, #2861; Nasāʾī, #2085; Tirmidhī, #3142.

78:23c "On the Day of Judgment, those who deserve . . .": Bukhārī, #22, #6560; Muslim, #184; Ibn Mājah, #4309; Ibn Ḥibbān, #222.

78:30c "This verse is the most severe . . .": Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Mawsūʿah,* 3:477; Abū Nuʿaym, *Akhbār,* 1:302.

79:37–39c "The love of the world . . .": (*ḥadīth mursal,* with incomplete *isnād*) Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #10019; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Zuhd,* #9; Muttaqī, #6114; {Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #9854}.

79:44c "Regarding that the one questioned . . .": Bukhārī, #50, #4777; Muslim, #8; Tirmidhī, #2610; Abū Dāwūd, #4695.

80:Introduction The Prophet's treatment of Ibn Umm Maktūm: Tirmidhī, #3331; Ibn Ḥibbān, #535.

80:15–16c "One who recites the Quran proficiently . . .": Bukhārī, #4937; Muslim, #798; Abū Dāwūd, #1454; Ibn Mājah, #3779.

80:20c "Work, for that for which each person was created . . .": Bukhārī, #4945, #4949; Muslim, #2647.

80:34–37c "People will be gathered barefoot, naked . . .": Bukhārī, #6527; Muslim, #2859; Tirmidhī, #3332.

81:Introduction "Whosoever wishes to look . . .": Tirmidhī, #3333; Ibn Ḥanbal, #4806; #5755.

81:1c "The sun and the moon . . .": Bukhārī, #3200.

81:7c "Every man will be joined . . .": (a saying of ᶜUmar, not a *ḥadīth*) Ḥākim, #3960; Ibn Abī Shaybah, #35495.

81:14c "There is none among you . . .": (not verbatim) Bukhārī, #6539; Muslim, #1016; Tirmidhī, #2415; Ibn Mājah, #185; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18246.

83:1–5c Five examples of divine retribution: Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #10992; Haythamī, *Zawāʾid,* 3:152–53, #4346.

83:6c "The people will be submerged in perspiration . . .": Muslim, #2864; Tirmidhī, #2431; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23813.

"People will stand in their perspiration . . .": Bukhārī, #4938; Muslim, #2862; Tirmidhī, #3336.

83:7–8c "*Sijjīn* is the lowest . . .": Daylamī, #3337.

83:14c "Verily, when the servant commits a sin . . .": Tirmidhī, #3334; Ibn Mājah, #4244; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7952.

"For everything there is a polish . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #519; Muttaqī, #1777, #1848; {Ibn Mājah, #3790; Tirmidhī, #3377; Ibn Ḥanbal, #21702}.

84:8c "Whosoever is reckoned . . .": Bukhārī, #103, #4939; Muslim, #2876; Tirmidhī, #3337.

84:13–14c "The world is the prison of the believer . . .": Muslim, #2956; Ibn Mājah, #4113; Tirmidhī, #2324.

84:19c Ibn ᶜAbbās says, "That concerns your Prophet": Ḥākim, #3972.

85:Introduction "Whosoever recites it, God will give reward . . .": Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ,* 4:457.

The Prophet would often recite *Sūrah*s 85 and 86 as part of the afternoon prayers: Muslim, #459; Tirmidhī, #307; Abū Dāwūd, #805; Nasāʾī, #978.

85:4–9c The tale of the evil king of Yemen: Muslim, #3005; Tirmidhī, #3340; Ibn Ḥanbal, #23931.

86:9c "Your secrets are your deeds . . .": Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ,* 4:466; {Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #2496}.

87:Introduction The Prophet recommended reciting *Sūrah*s 87 and 88 for the evening prayer: Muslim, #465; Ibn Mājah, #836.

The Prophet recited *Sūrah*s 87 and 88 on certain occasions: Muslim, #878; Abū Dāwūd, #1122; Tirmidhī, #533; Ibn Mājah, #1281.

The Prophet recommended reciting *Sūrah* 87 in prostration: Abū Dāwūd, #886, #869; Ibn Mājah, #890; Tirmidhī, #261.

87:1c Employing Quranic glorifications in bowing and prostrating: Abū Dāwūd, #869; Ibn Mājah, #887; Ibn Ḥanbal, #17414.

87:16–17c "The world is the prison of the believer . . .": Muslim, #2956; Ibn Mājah, #4113; Tirmidhī, #2324.

87:18–19c The number of revealed books: Ibn Ḥibbān, #361; Ibn ʿAsākir, 23:277–78 (#5063); Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 1:166.

88:6c "*Ḍarīʿ* is a thing in the Fire . . .": Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ,* 4:474.

89:15–16c *Ḥadīth qudsī:* "Truly I do not honor . . .": (not a *ḥadīth qudsī,* but rather a comment of the exegetist Qatādah) Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr.*

89:23–24c "Hellfire will be brought forth . . .": Muslim, #2842; Tirmidhī, #2573.

"There is no time wherein the son of Adam . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #508; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #8316.

90:2c "Truly God made Makkah sacred . . .": Bukhārī, #1349, #112; Muslim, #1353, #1355; Ibn Ḥanbal, #2353, #7242.

90:7c "The servant does not move forward . . .": Abū Yaʿlā, #7434; Tirmidhī, #2416, #2417; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #1647.

Shiite addition: Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ,* #9406, #2191.

90:10c "O people! There are only two highways . . .": Ibn ʿAdī, 3:356; Ibn Rāhawayh, #447; Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* #2379.

90:13c "Whosoever releases a believing slave . . .": Ibn Ḥanbal, #17358, #17326; Abū Yaʿlā, #1760; {Bukhārī, #2517; Muslim, #1509; Tirmidhī, #1541; Ibn Ḥanbal, #22113}.

90:17c "The merciful are those . . .": Tirmidhī, #1924; Abū Dāwūd, #4941; Ibn Ḥanbal, #6494.

91:8c "O Messenger of God! Do you consider . . .": Muslim, #2650; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19936.

"O God! Give my soul its reverence . . .": Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #11191; Quḍāʿī, #1481; {without mention of this *sūrah:* Muslim, #2722; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19308}.

91:11–14c The *most wretched* of previous generations . . .: Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil,* #953; {Ibn Ḥanbal, #18321; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #8485; Abū Yaʿlā, #569; ʿAbd ibn Ḥumayd, #92; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #173}.

92:5–10c "There is no one among you except that . . .": Bukhārī, #4945, #4949; Muslim, #2647; Abū Dāwūd, #4694; Tirmidhī, #2136; Ibn Ḥanbal, #621.

92:15–21c The anecdote of man who refuses to give a date-palm tree in return for one in Paradise: Wāqidī, 2:505–6; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* pp. 717–18, #441.

92:19–21c Bilāl's torture and manumission: Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* pp. 720–21, #444.

93:Introduction God sends down *Sūrah* 93 to reassure the Prophet after a long intermission in revelation: Bukhārī, #1125, #4950; Muslim, #1797.

The *sūrah* as a response to the idolaters' taunt: Muslim, #1797; Tirmidhī, #3345.

The *sūrah* as a response to Umm Jamīl's claim that the Prophet's "satan" had forsaken him: Bukhārī, #4950; Muslim, #1797.

93:4c The Prophet chooses being with God over life in this world: Bukhārī, #3904; Muslim, #2382; Ibn Hishām, 2:649.

93:5–8c Prophet asks God about the special boons given to other prophets: Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #12289; Ḥākim, #4002; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* #449.

93:8c "Wealth comes not from . . .": Muslim, #1051; Ibn Mājah, #4137; Tirmidhī, #2373; Ibn Ḥanbal, #7316.

93:9c The merits of those who take care of orphans: Ibn al-Mubārak, #654; {partial, supporting: Bukhārī, #5304, #6005; Muslim, #2983; Tirmidhī, #1918; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8881, #22820; Abū Dāwūd, #5150; Ibn Mājah, #3679}.

93:11c "Whosoever does not give thanks . . .": Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab,* #4419; Ibn Ḥanbal, #18449, #19350.

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98:4c Islam will divide into seventy-three sects: Tirmidhī, #2641; Ibn Mājah, #3992; Abū Dāwūd, #4596; Ibn Ḥanbal, #8396.

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"*Kawthar* is the good that God has bestowed upon His Messenger": Bukhārī, #4966, #6578.

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The Prophet recited *Sūrah* 109 in his supererogatory prayers: Bukhārī, #616, #1161; Muslim, #726; Ibn Mājah, #1150, #1166.

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110:3c Formulas of praise and glory recited during prayer: Bukhārī, #199; Muslim, #351, #350; Abū Dāwūd, #877; Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab,* #2299.

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111:3–4c Umm Jamīl's opposition to and ill treatment of the Prophet: Bukhārī, #4950; Muslim, #1797.

112:Introduction "Everything has a light . . .": Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* 32:176.

"The son of Adam tells a lie against Me . . .": Bukhārī, #3193, #4974, #4975; Nasāʾī, #2078.

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113:Introduction The story of a spell cast on the Prophet and its undoing by the recitation of *Sūrah*s 113 and 114: (no single *ḥadīth* contains all details of the story) {ʿAbd ibn Ḥumayd, #271; Ibn Ḥanbal, #19267; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr,* #5016; Nasāʾī, *Kubrā,* #3529}.

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113:3c "O ʿĀʾishah, seek refuge in God . . .": Tirmidhī, #3366; Ḥākim, #4047.

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*Appendix B*

# TIME LINE OF MAJOR EVENTS RELATED TO THE QURAN

| AD/AH | |
|---|---|
| 570 | Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd Allāh |
| 610 | Revelation of the first verses of the Quran |
| 613 | The Prophet's public preaching begins |
| 613 | Persians defeat the Byzantines in Damascus and Jerusalem |
| 615 | Refuge of some Muslims in Abyssinia |
| 617 | Embargo of Muslims by the Quraysh |
| 619 | The deaths of Abū Ṭālib and Khadījah ("Year of Sadness") |
| 620 | The Night Journey |
| 620 | First Pledge of ᶜAqabah |

| | |
|---|---|
| 621 | Second Pledge of ᶜAqabah |
| 622 | Battle of Issus, Byzantines defeat the Persians |
| 622/1 | Migration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah |
| 624/2 | Battle of Badr |
| 625/3 | Battle of Uḥud |
| 627/5 | Battle of the Trench (Battle of the Confederates) |
| 628/6 | Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah |
| 629/8 | Conquest of Makkah by Muslims |
| 630/8 | Battle of Ḥunayn, Battle of Ṭāʾif |
| 631/9 | Tabūk expedition |
| 632/10 | Farewell Pilgrimage |
| 632/11 | Death of the Prophet |
| 632/11 | Abū Bakr appoints Zayd ibn Thābit to compile the *Ṣuḥuf* (folios) of the Quran |
| 644/23 | ᶜUmar entrusts the *Ṣuḥuf* to Ḥafṣah |
| 646–51/25–30 | ᶜUthmān orders the compiling of the *Muṣḥaf* (codex) from the *Ṣuḥuf** |

*In the varying accounts, the exact year ranges between 25 and 30 AH.

# *Appendix C*

# BIOGRAPHIES OF COMMENTATORS

AF Abu'l-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ᶜAlī al-Rāzī (d. 525/1131)
*Rawḥ al-jinān wa rūḥ al-janān*

A Twelver Shiite commentator and student of the famous exegete al-Zamakhsharī, Abu'l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī composed his commentary in Persian, although he may have written another in Arabic that has not survived. The commentary gives a Persian translation of each Quranic verse or passage, followed by a discussion of various debates and issues surrounding its meaning.

Aj Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjībah (d. 1224/1809)
*al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd*

A twelfth/eighteenth-century Maghribī shaykh of the Darqāwiyyah-Shādhiliyyah Sufi order, Ibn ᶜAjībah produced a *tafsīr* that includes both exoteric and esoteric commentary. His esoteric commentary (*ishārah*) sometimes quotes earlier Sufi authorities, but it also contains a number of original mystical insights and analyses and is characterized by its consistent method of addressing the multiple levels of meaning in the Quran and its systematic use of Sufi technical vocabulary.

Āl Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854)
*Rūḥ al-maᶜānī fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ᶜaẓīm waʾl-sabᶜ al-mathānī*

A thirteenth/nineteenth-century scholar and scion of a prominent Baghdadi family claiming descent from the Prophet, al-Ālūsī was a *muftī* as well as an exegete. He encouraged a return to the Quran and *Ḥadīth* rather than reliance on established schools of Islamic theology and law.

Ās Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ᶜĀshūr (d. 1393/1973)
*al-Taḥrīr waʾl-tanwīr*

A Tunisian scholar of Islamic Law as well as an exegete, Ibn ᶜĀshūr is the author of *Maqāṣid al-sharīᶜah al-Islāmiyyah,* one of the most important recent works to examine the "aims" or "purposes" of the Law as a key to the proper interpretation and application of *Sharīᶜah* rulings.

Bḍ ᶜAbd Allāh ibn ᶜUmar ibn Muḥammad al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 685/1286)
*Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-taʾwīl*

An author of several works on various Islamic sciences, including philosophical theology (*kalām*), legal theory, and grammar, al-Bayḍāwī is best known for his Quranic commentary, which is heavily based on al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf.* Bayḍāwī adhered to the Shāfiᶜī school of law and served as judge (*qāḍī*) in Shiraz.

Bg Al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Farrāʾ al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122)
*Maᶜālim al-tanzīl*

Born and educated in a village near Herat in present-day Afghanistan, al-Baghawī was primarily a *Ḥadīth* scholar. He composed his Quranic commentary largely on the basis of *aḥādīth* from the Prophet Muhammad, and he is also the author of two *Ḥadīth* collections, *Sharḥ al-sunnah* and *Maṣābīḥ al-sunnah,* in which each section of the collection is prefaced by a reference to Quranic verses related to the topic of that section.

Bq Burhān al-Dīn Abu'l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm al-Biqāᶜī (d. ]885/1480)
*Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt waʾl-suwar*

A scholar of both law and exegesis, al-Biqāᶜī studied in Egypt before settling in Damascus. His *tafsīr* is distinctive for its careful attention to the

significance of the stylistic arrangement (*naẓm*) of the Quran, its use of Biblical materials, and its defense of the use of the Bible in *tafsīr*.

IA Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 543/1148)
*Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*

An Andalusian scholar and polymath, Ibn al-ᶜArabī (not to be confused with the celebrated Sufi writer Muḥyi'l-Dīn ibn ᶜArabī) wrote on various religious sciences and produced works on law, *Ḥadīth,* history, and Arabic grammar as well as Quranic commentary. He traveled widely, visiting Damascus, Egypt, and Baghdad, where he studied with the famous Sufi theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī.

IḤ Ismāᶜīl Ḥaqqī al-Burūsawī (d. 1137/1725)
*Rūḥ al-bayān*

A twelfth/eighteenth-century Ottoman Turkish scholar who resided in Istanbul and Bursa, al-Burūsawī (Bursevī in Turkish) was a Sufi shaykh in the prominent Turkish Sufi order, the Jalwatiyyah. His *tafsīr* contains both exoteric and esoteric commentary and is noteworthy for its use of the Persian poetic tradition.

IJ Abu'l-Faraj ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ᶜAlī ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200)
*Zād al-masīr fī ᶜilm al-tafsīr*

Born in 510/1126, Ibn al-Jawzī was a Ḥanbalī scholar and prolific author in the fields of law, *Ḥadīth,* biography, and history. A prominent preacher in Baghdad, for most of his life he enjoyed the official patronage of caliphs and viziers interested in promoting an exoteric Sunni perspective rather than Shiite and some Sufi views. When the political climate changed near the end of his life, he was imprisoned and exiled for a time, but eventually returned to Baghdad.

IK ᶜImād al-Dīn Abu'l-Fidāʾ Ismāᶜīl ibn ᶜUmar ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373)
*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ᶜaẓīm*

Born in Basra near the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century, Ibn Kathīr moved to Damascus at a young age and became one of the leading religious scholars in Syria at that time. He was heavily influenced by his Syrian contemporary Ibn Taymiyyah and taught Quranic sciences at the Umayyad mosque in Damascus. A *Ḥadīth* scholar as well as an exegete, he sought to

rely as fully as possible on the *Ḥadīth* and to reduce the influence of Biblical material and legends (*Isrāʾīliyyāt*) on Quranic interpretation. He is also the author of a major universal history entitled *al-Bidāyah waʾl-nihāyah.*

Iṣ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108)
*Mufradāt alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*

Born in Isfahan, al-Rāghib apparently remained in the city for the whole of his life and career. The *Mufradāt* is not set up as a standard *tafsīr;* instead, it discusses the semantic range and significance of various Quranic terms, arranged alphabetically by the Arabic root they are derived from, in their Quranic context(s). In addition to the *Mufradāt,* al-Rāghib reportedly composed other works on Quranic exegesis, although these survive only in fragments or as citations in later works. He is also the author of numerous works on literary, philosophical, and ethical themes.

Iṭ Abū Muḥammad ᶜAbd al-Ḥaqq ibn ᶜAṭiyyah al-Andalusī (d. 541/1147)
*al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-ᶜazīz*

An Andalusian exegete from Seville, Ibn ᶜAṭiyyah also served as a religious judge (*qāḍī*) in Granada. His commentary pays close attention to issues of Arabic grammar and pronunciation of the Quranic verses as well as to their content and meaning. Some reports give him a slightly later death date of 546/1152.

JJ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)
*Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī was a Cairene scholar of both law and exegesis. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī was his student, and one of the most prolific authors of all time in various Islamic sciences, including Islamic Law, *Ḥadīth,* and the Quranic sciences. Al-Suyūṭī taught Shāfiᶜī law and was a highly regarded *muftī* in Mamluk Egypt. In addition to completing the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn,* which was begun by his teacher al-Maḥallī, he is also the author of *al-Itqān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān,* an influential work treating various aspects of the Quranic sciences, and *al-Durr al-manthūr fīʾl-tafsīr biʾl-maʾthūr,* a Quranic commentary based exclusively on the sayings of the Prophet and the first generations of Muslims.

K ᶜAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1336)
*Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān al-karīm,* known by many as *Tafsīr Ibn ᶜArabī*

A third-generation student of the outstanding Andalusian mystic and metaphysician Ibn ᶜArabī, al-Kāshānī is the author of a number of important works in the field of philosophical Sufism. His Quranic commentary is rich with metaphysical and symbolic interpretations and clearly shows the influence of the school of Ibn ᶜArabī. The work was first published under the name of Ibn ᶜArabī and is commonly, but mistakenly, attributed to him.

Kā Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680)
*Tafsīr al-ṣāfī*

Born in Qumm, a center of Twelver Shiite tradition and learning, al-Kāshānī moved to the city of Isfahan, where he studied with the foremost Safavid-era philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā. Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī was an Akhbārī Shiite scholar whose work is characterized by a reliance on the transmitted traditions of the Twelver Shiite Imams as well as a mystical and gnostic Shiite approach to Quranic interpretation.

Kl Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (d. 741/1340)
*al-Tashīl li-ᶜulūm al-tanzīl*

An Andalusian man of letters and polymath, Ibn Juzayy was the author of several important works. In addition to his Quranic commentary, he also wrote a comparative legal work on the Sunni schools of Islamic Law entitled *al-Qawānīn al-fiqhiyyah* and a Sufi treatise called *Taṣfiyat al-qulūb.*

M Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)
*Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunnah*

A prominent theologian and founder of a major school of Sunni theology, al-Māturīdī took an approach to theological issues balanced between reason and scripture and adopted positions that often lay between Ashᶜarism (the other major school of Sunni theology) and Muᶜtazilism. He was born in Samarqand in modern-day Uzbekistan in the mid-third/ninth century. His Quranic commentary was reportedly compiled by his students.

MṢ Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640)
*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm*

The most prominent representative of the Safavid-era Shiite school of philosophy known as the School of Isfahan, Mullā Ṣadrā produced works that synthesized many of the earlier schools of Islamic philosophy, metaphysics, and mysticism. His philosophical works are profoundly rooted in the Quran, as evidenced in his frequent Quranic references and allusions. He also wrote many separate treatises on the Quran and its interpretation, assembled together and entitled *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm.*

Mu Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767)
*Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*

A transmitter of *Ḥadīth* and one of the earliest Quranic commentators whose work still survives, Ibn Sulaymān was originally from Balkh in present-day Afghanistan; he lived and taught in Baghdad and Basra, where he died. He is said to have held Zaydī and Murjiʾī views on matters of law and theology. His commentary reveals a particular interest in the narrative elements of the Quran concerning Biblical figures, and he frequently elaborates on these narratives using material he attributes to Jewish and Christian sources.

Mw ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058)
*al-Nukat waʾl-ʿuyūn fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

A Shāfiʿī jurist and prominent legal judge (*qāḍī*), al-Māwardī was born in Basra in 364/974, but lived most of his life in Baghdad, where he enjoyed the favor of Abbasid caliphs eager to revive Sunni ideals in a political environment dominated by the Shiite Buyid dynasty. In addition to his *tafsīr,* he is the author of many works, including an important book on Islamic politics and governance, *al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyyah.*

My Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. ca. 520/1126)
*Kashf al-asrār wa ʿuddat al-abrār*

Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī was a Persian Sufi exegete. His large *tafsīr,* written primarily in Persian, provides a literal Persian translation followed by an exoteric commentary and then an esoteric or mystical interpretation.

N ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310)
*Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl*

A Ḥanafī scholar of Islamic Law and theology as well as a Quranic exegete, al-Nasafī hailed from Soghdiana in Central Asia. He traveled throughout Iran and Iraq, residing for some time in Kerman in southeastern Iran and visiting Baghdad before dying in Khuzistan in southern Iran.

Ni Niẓām al-Dīn al-Naysābūrī (or al-Nīsābūrī; d. 728/1328)
*Tafsīr gharāʾib al-Qurʾān wa raghāʾib al-furqān*

A polymath from the city of Nayshapur in northeastern Iran, al-Naysābūrī was a scholar of theology, philosophy, and science—particularly astronomy—as well as a Quranic exegete. His *tafsīr,* which was deeply influenced by the commentary of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, reflects his concern with theology, Sufism, and philosophy. Al-Naysābūrī takes a distinctly mystical approach in his interpretation of the text, and he was one of the first to incorporate seriously the natural sciences into his commentary.

Q Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272)
*al-Jāmiᶜ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*

An Andalusian scholar who eventually settled in Egypt, al-Qurṭubī was a prominent Mālikī legal scholar, a scholar of *Ḥadīth,* and a Quranic commentator. As the title of his *tafsīr* suggests, the work pays particular attention to the implications of Quranic verses for matters of Islamic Law in relation to both jurisprudential theory (*uṣūl*) and specific legal rulings (*furūᶜ*), although it is not limited to these areas and should be considered one of the great encyclopedic commentaries. The *tafsīr* includes a good number of *aḥādīth* in its interpretation of verses and does not make extensive use of Biblical material or legendary reports.

Qm ᶜAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 328/939)
*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

Al-Qummī was a Twelver Shiite *Ḥadīth* scholar and scholar who flourished in the mid-fourth/tenth century. Originally from Kufa, he moved with his father, also a well-known Twelver Shiite scholar, to the Shiite scholarly center of Qumm in central Iran. Al-Qummī's *tafsīr* is the only

extant work attributed to him and presents distinctly Shiite interpretations of most of the verses it treats.

Qu Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072)
*Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*

Born in 376/986 in Nayshapur, al-Qushayrī was a Sufi commentator famous for his book about Sufism *al-Risālah* (*The Treatise*). He adhered to the Ashᶜarite school of theology and the Shāfiᶜī legal school prominent in Nayshapur during his lifetime. He was a disciple of the Sufi master Abū ᶜAlī al-Daqqāq and studied with ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, also the author of a major Sufi commentary. Like the works of other Sufi authors of his time, al-Qushayrī's commentary aims to present Sufi interpretations as complementing, rather than challenging, the exoteric Sunni Islamic perspective.

R Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210)
*al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* also known by the title *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*

Born in 543/1149 in Rayy (today a suburb of modern-day Tehran), al-Rāzī was a prolific author in the fields of philosophy and theology in addition to Quranic exegesis. His magnum opus is his encyclopedic commentary on the Quran. Al-Rāzī favored the Ashᶜarite school of theology, although he was critical of some of its positions, and spent much of his career debating the views of Muᶜtazilites. After some travels to Khurasan and Central Asia, he eventually settled in Herat in present-day Afghanistan. His extensive training in philosophy and theology is evident in his Quranic commentary. Al-Rāzī is noteworthy among medieval Quranic commentators both for his discussion of not only the language and content of the verses, but also their order and stylistic arrangement in the text, and for his lengthy treatment of theological and philosophical questions in the context of Quranic commentary.

Rb Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209)
*ᶜArā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*

A Sufi commentator and religious scholar from Shiraz, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī was known for his commentary on the ecstatic sayings of the Sufis, his treatment of Divine Love, and his vivid spiritual visions, which are chronicled in his spiritual autobiography entitled *Kashf al-asrār.* Al-Baqlī's

Quranic commentary is also rich with spiritual allusions and symbolic interpretations.

Sa Naṣr ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983)
*Baḥr al-ʿulūm*

Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandī, as he is most commonly known, was a prominent Ḥanafī jurist and author of works on ethics and asceticism whom some consider an important figure in the early development of the Māturīdī school of theology. His Quranic commentary was especially popular among the Ottomans, who translated it repeatedly into Turkish in the ninth/fifteenth century.

Sh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250–55/1834–39)
*Fatḥ al-qadīr*

Al-Shawkānī was a thirteenth/nineteenth-century religious scholar and legal authority in Ṣanʿāʾ, Yemen. Raised in a Zaydī Shiite family, he later embraced and championed Sunnism, arguing for a return to the original textual sources of Islam, the Quran, and the *Ḥadīth*.

ST Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896)
*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*

Born in 203/818 in Tustar in Khuzistan in southeastern Iran, al-Tustarī was a mystic and Sufi guide. His commentary, perhaps the earliest extant collection of Sufi exegesis, recognizes both an outward/exoteric and inward/esoteric meaning for Quranic verses, although the commentary was compiled from his teachings by his disciples and is not complete. Some of his commentary also survives in reports attributed to him in the commentary of the Sufi author ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī.

Su ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021)
*Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*

Born in 325/937 in Nishapur in northeastern Iran, al-Sulamī was initially trained by his Sufi father and later became a disciple of the Nayshapuri Sufi master Abu'l-Qāsim Ibrāhīm al-Naṣrabādhī. Al-Sulamī's *tafsīr* was influenced by, and also preserves, exegetical material attributed to earlier Sufis, including Sahl al-Tustarī. Sulamī's *tafsīr* was, in turn, an important

influence on al-Qushayrī's Sufi *tafsīr* a generation later. In addition to his *tafsīr,* al-Sulamī was the author of many Sufi treatises as well as an extensive Sufi biographical dictionary.

Sy Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)
*al-Durr al-manthūr fi 'l-tafsīr bi'l-maʾthūr*

For Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, see JJ, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn.*

Ṭ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)
*Jāmiᶜ al-bayān ᶜan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*

One of the most prolific Sunni authors of his time, al-Ṭabarī was born in 224–25/839 in Tabaristan in northern Iran. He traveled widely in his youth through Egypt and the Levant in search of learning and eventually settled in Baghdad, where he wrote the two works for which he is known: his encyclopedic Quranic commentary and his universal history, *al-Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk,* which begins with accounts of ancient prophets and legendary figures leading up to the founding of Islam and then chronicles Islamic history up to his own time. Al-Ṭabarī's comprehensive Quranic commentary is considered a culmination of the early genre and is perhaps the best classical example of *al-tafsīr bi'l-maʾthūr,* or commentary based on the collection of individual exegetical reports transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad's Companions and earlier generations of Muslim commentators. Al-Ṭabarī's work therefore preserves the religious views and opinions of many early Islamic scholars that would have otherwise been lost. Al-Ṭabarī is not merely a collector of reports, however, as his commentary also includes his own analysis and evaluation of the varying exegetical claims and readings he reports in his work.

Ṭb Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1401/1981)
*al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

A leading fourteenth/twentieth-century Shiite religious scholar, philosopher, and teacher in the Shiite seminary in Qumm, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was a master of the sciences of philosophy, law, ethics, and Quranic hermeneutics. His *tafsīr* is encyclopedic in scope, treating traditional exegetical questions and debates as well as historical and philosophical issues and themes.

Th Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035)
*al-Kashf wa'l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

A *Ḥadīth* scholar and preacher as well as an exegete, al-Thaʿlabī was a renowned and celebrated scholar of Nayshapur even in his own time. Among his students was the well-known Quranic commentator al-Wāḥidī. Al-Thaʿlabī's *tafsīr,* encyclopedic in scope, includes a wide variety of narrative, legendary, and literary materials in the discussions of Quranic passages, yet also pays attention to issues of grammar and recitation. In addition to his commentary, he is also the author of the well-known *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (*Stories of the Prophets*), which expands upon the Quranic accounts of the prophets.

Ṭs Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (or al-Ṭabarsī; d. 548/1153–54)
*Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

A Twelver Shiite Quranic commentator, al-Ṭabrisī was born and raised in Khurasan in northeastern Iran. His name is sometimes given as al-Ṭabarsī, although al-Ṭabrisī seems the more accurate pronunciation. He studied with students of the other great Twelver Shiite exegete Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, spending much time in the Shiite sacred city of Mashhad, where he is buried. Like most prominent Twelver Shiite scholars of his time, he embraced many of the views of the rationalist Muʿtazilite school. His commentary is methodically structured, beginning the treatment of each Quranic passage with a series of technical discussions concerning issues of grammar, philology, and proper pronunciation and then following those with an interpretation of the content of the verses drawn from both Sunni and Shiite traditions.

Ṭū Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067)
*al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*

Often referred to by his honorific title Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifah ("Leader of the Community"), al-Ṭūsī was the leading Twelver Shiite religious scholar in Baghdad during the late Buyid period. Born in Tus in Khurasan (northeastern Iran), al-Ṭūsī migrated to Baghdad at an early age in order to study with the leading Twelver Shiite religious scholars al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā. Al-Ṭūsī tempered the rationalism of these two scholars, incorporating a renewed recognition of the importance of the transmitted traditions of the Imams into a more balanced Shiite theology

and legal theory that championed the authority of the Twelver religious scholars and jurists in the absence of the Shiite Imams. This scholarly approach is reflected clearly in his extensive *tafsīr*. In addition to his Quranic commentary, al-Ṭūsī wrote many other theological, biographical, and bibliographical works as well as two of the four canonical collections of Twelver Shiite *aḥādīth: al-Istibṣār* and *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām.*

W Abu'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076)
*Asbāb nuzūl al-Qurʾān*

A prominent religious scholar born in Nayshapur in northeastern Iran, al-Wāḥidī studied with al-Thaᶜlabī, a prominent exegete and author of a comprehensive *tafsīr*. Al-Wāḥidī is the author of several exegetical works on the Quran. His *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qurʾān* is the earliest known example of a work devoted to presenting the circumstances in which particular Quranic verses or passages were revealed and the particular historical issues or problems to which they were responding. The *tafsīr* is not comprehensive, but only treats those verses for which the circumstances of revelation were known or transmitted.

Z Abu'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ᶜUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)
*al-Kashshāf ᶜan ghawāmiḍ ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa ᶜuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl*

Born in Khwarazm in Central Asia in 467/1065, al-Zamakhsharī, a scholar of Arabic grammar and philology as well as Quranic exegesis, wrote numerous works on Arabic language and literature (*adab*). Al-Zamakhsharī was a great exponent of the beauty and perfection of Arabic as a sacred language, and his commentary is famous for its analysis of the grammatical, philological, and rhetorical aspects of the Quranic text. Theologically, he held rationalist Muᶜtazilite views, which are also evident in his commentary.

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would mean that Abraham appears in chapter 12, verse 34 of the translation; in the commentary on chapter 56, verse 78; on pages xiv and 1589; and on map 5b.

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# Map 1: The Ancient World and Arabia

*with sites and peoples related to pre-Islamic prophets*




A The dam of Maʾrib was destroyed by an exceptional torrent (Sayl al-ʿArim)—perhaps in the third century AD—impelling many Yemeni tribes to migrate to other regions, including Syria and Madinah.

B The purported grave site of the Prophet Hūd.

C Maritime trade routes to India.

**Routes of incense and spice trade**

Overland caravan ····· Maritime

# Map 2: The Middle East in the Sixth Century AD

*until the birth of the Prophet Muhammad*




**A** For most of the sixth and early seventh centuries, Yathrib was ravaged by internal conflict between the pagan Arab clans of the oasis involving the main Jewish tribes in fluctuating alliances.

**B** In ca. 523, Ḥimyar King Dhū Nuwās, a convert to Judaism, persecuted the Christians of Najrān, casting those who refused to renounce their faith into fiery pits (al-Ukhdūd).

**C** In 525, outraged by the Ukhdūd incident, Abyssinia invaded Ḥimyar with Byzantine naval assistance and established a Christian Viceroy over it.

**D** In 570, the Abyssinian Viceroy Abrahah led an army with an elephant on an ill-fated attack on Makkah, aiming to destroy the Ka'bah after the desecration of his new cathedral in Ṣan'ā' by an Arab tribesman.

**E** In ca. 572 a Persian force sailed to Yemen and drove out the Abyssinians, reinstalling a Ḥimyarite prince as vassal king. In 597/98 the Persians established direct control.

**F** While taking part in a Makkan trade caravan, the young Muhammad was recognized by certain signs as a future prophet by the monk Baḥīrā near Bosra.

**Religious affiliation in Arabia**

† Significant Christian population

✡ Significant Jewish population

◇ Significant Zoroastrian population

○ Major pagan site

# Map 3: Developments in the Broader Region

*during the period of the Prophet's mission (610–632)*




**A** The Persian conquest of the fortified town of Daraa (Adhri'āt) is sometimes identified with the Byzantine defeat mentioned in the Quran (30:2–3), since it lay on a principal caravan route between Arabia and Syria. About nine years later, in 622, the Byzantines were victorious over the Sasanians at the battle of Issus near Antioch, fulfilling the Quranic prophecy.

**B** First Hijrah: A small group of Muslims fled to Christian Abyssinia from persecution in Makkah in 615; about a year later a larger group of Muslim refugees came. The Prophet encouraged them but did not join them. This group of emigrants rejoined the Prophet in Madinah in 628, not long after the signing of the peace treaty of Ḥudaybiyah and the final Byzantine victory over the Persians.

**C** The emigration *(hijrah)* of the Prophet and his companions from Makkah to Madinah occurred during the late summer of 622.

**D** Counterattacking Byzantines defeated Persians at Issus in 622.

**E** The Byzantine victory at Nineveh opened the way for ultimate triumph against the Sasanian Empire and the return of all conquered territories within two years.

⇨ Byzantine counterattack [date of major victory]

⇦ Persian Sasanian invasion and occupation (date of conquest)

▒ Byzantine territories occupied by Persians by 621

## Map 4: Regional Map of the Ḥijāz

*with tribes and major military campaigns outside of Madinah during the Prophet's lifetime*




- The tribes indicated in this map represent only a fraction of the tribes extant at the time, these being the main ones mentioned in the commentary. Their locations are approximate.
- In some cases place names associated with battles are rural locations, not built towns or permanent settlements.
- Battles in the immediate vicinity of Madinah are portrayed on map 7b.
- Dates in parentheses indicate when military action occurred.

# Map 5a: Makkah and the *Ḥajj* Stations

Traditional border point *(mīqāt)* for reentering sacred territory of Makkah in consecrated state for minor pilgrimage *('umrah)*. These are not the same as the *mīqāt* for *ḥajj*, which are farther away.

Ji'irānah *(mīqāt)*

3 *Ḥajj* Day Three (Tenth Dhu'l-Ḥijjah): movement to Minā; stone one pillar; make animal sacrifice; shave or trim hair (exit from *iḥrām*); make circumambulation of Ka'bah; return to Minā. The following two or three days are spent at Minā, performing the stoning ritual on all three pillars each day. The third day at Minā is optional.

Tan'īm *(mīqāt)*

*Jabal al-Nūr* (Ghār Ḥirā' cave)

1 *Ḥajj* Day One (Eighth Dhu'l-Ḥijjah): movement to Minā; spend night.

Ḥudaybiyah *(mīqāt)*

**Sacred Mosque** *(al-Masjid al-Ḥarām)*

*MINĀ*

*MUZDALIFAH* *(al-Mash'ar)*

Three ritual lapidation pillars *(jamarāt)* at Minā. Only one of them is stoned on day three, but all three are stoned on the following two or three days, each time with seven pebbles.

*Jabal Thawr* (cave where Prophet hid prior to Hijrah)

*'ARAFĀT*

Approximate boundaries of Makkah's sacred territory *(ḥaram)*, simplified.

2 *Ḥajj* Day Two (Ninth Dhu'l-Ḥijjah): movement to 'Arafāt; spend day in prayer and meditation until after sunset; then return movement to Muzdalifah to spend night.

10 mi

10 km

# Map 5b: *'Umrah* and the Sacred Mosque

**This map shows the state of the structure enclosing the Ka'bah circa 2005. At the time of the Prophet no such structure existed. It was built in various ways over the centuries, and it continues to be modified and expanded today.**

*Al-Marwah hillock*

The first and most important ritual of *'umrah* is circumambulation *(ṭawāf)*, comprising seven circuits around the Ka'bah, which begin and end at the Black Stone or an imaginary radius extending from it.

B The second major ritual of *'umrah*, called *sa'y*, entails seven brisk laps between the two hillocks beginning with Ṣafā and ending with Marwah.

The Station of Abraham *(maqām Ibrāhīm)*

Ka'bah

A

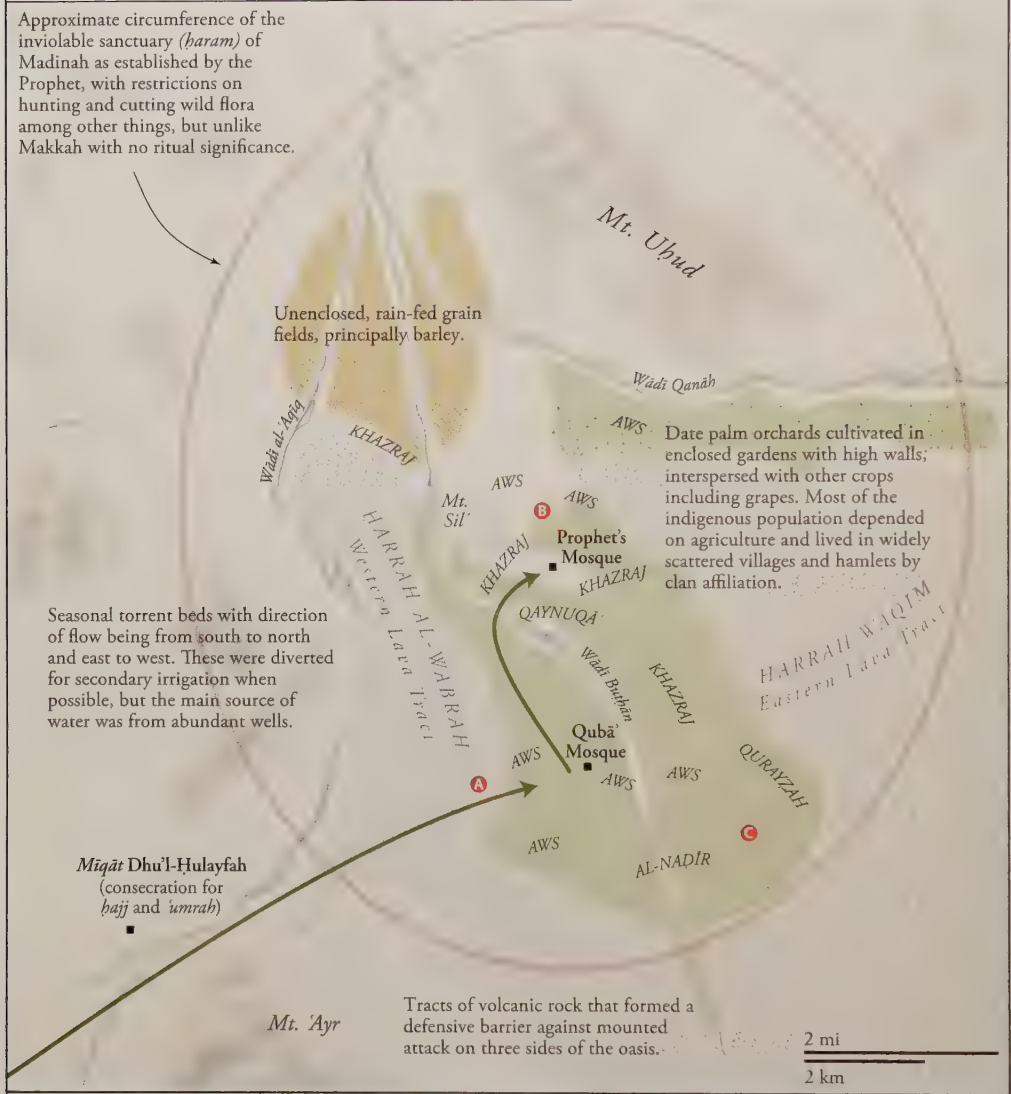
Well of Zamzam

The Black Stone *(al-ḥajar al-aswad)*, embedded in the eastern corner of the Ka'bah.

*Al-Ṣafā hillock*

# Map 6: Local Topographical Map of Madinah

*during the Prophet's lifetime*



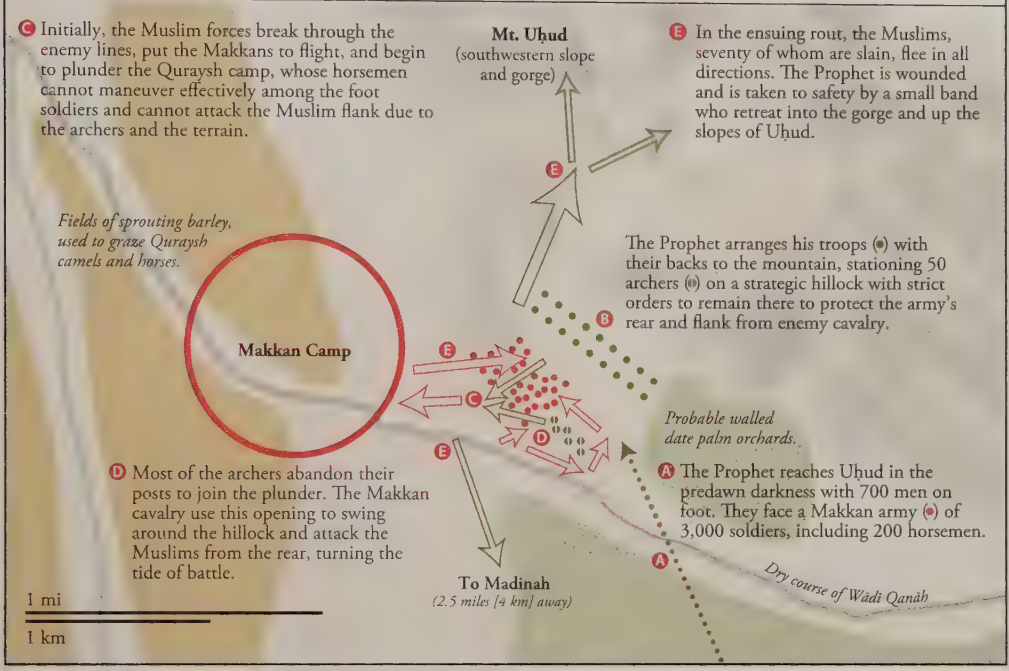

**A** Arrival route of the Prophet following the *hijrah* from Makkah, with stay at village of Qubāʾ before proceeding on to central Madinah.

**B** Approximate distribution of Aws and Khazraj, the two main tribes of indigenous Arabs (originally from Yemen), which are subdivided into dozens of clans not indicated. Rivalry and conflict between them was endemic before the arrival of the Prophet.

**C** Schematic localization of the three principal tribes of Jewish inhabitants, of whom al-Naḍīr and Qurayẓah were mainly date farmers, while the Qaynuqāʿ were smiths and traders. Conflict and rivalry were also intense between these tribes.

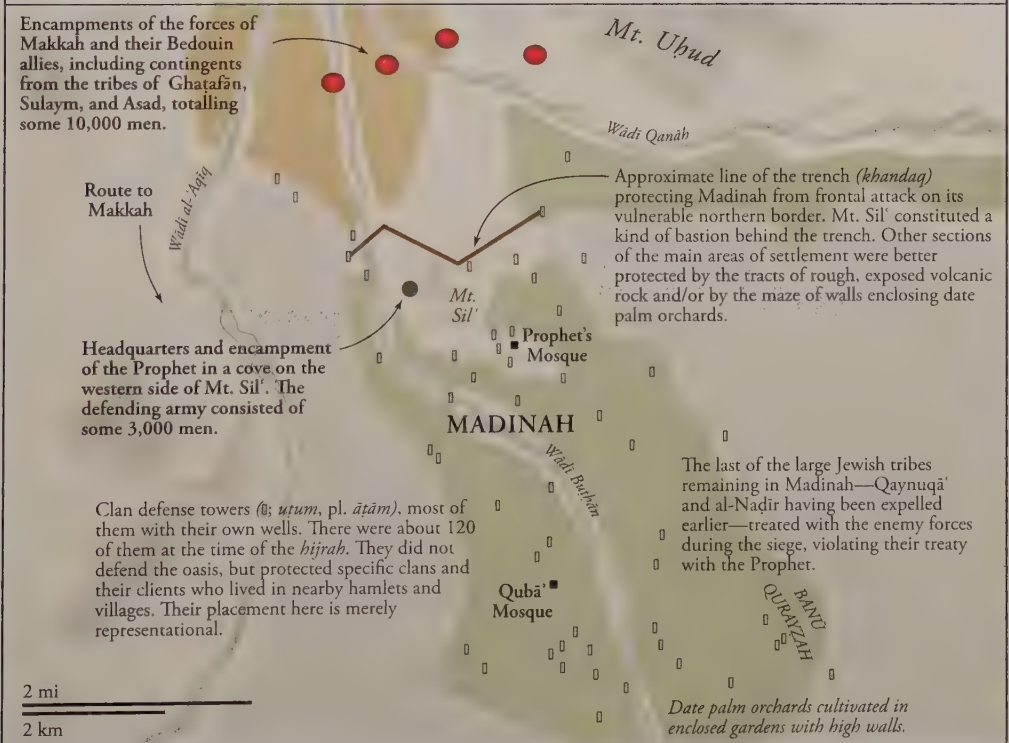
# Map 7a: Battle of Uḥud

*Shawwāl 3 / March 625*



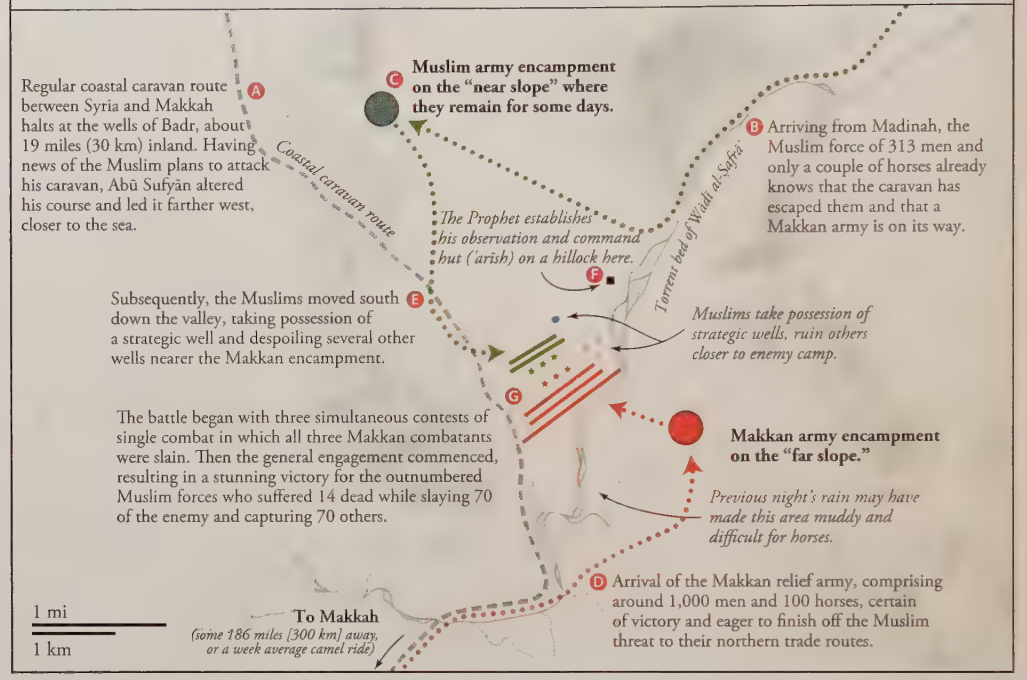

# Map 7b: Battle of the Trench

*Shawwāl 5 / May 627*



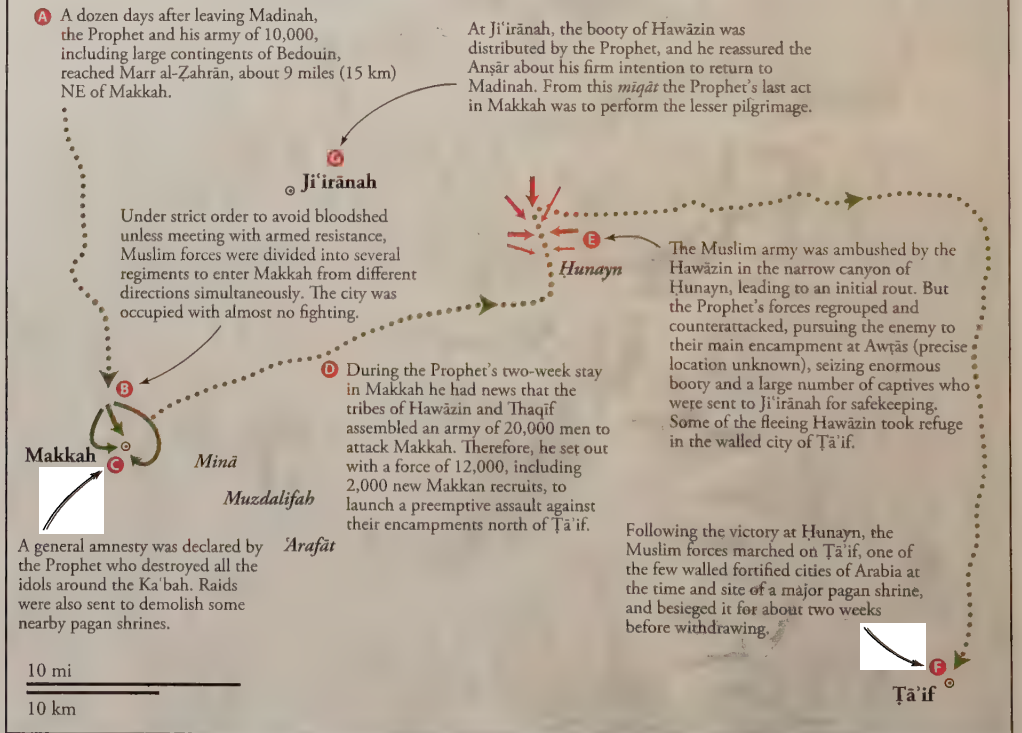
## Map 8a: Battle of Badr

*Ramadan 2 / March 624*




## Map 8b: Conquest of Makkah, Battle of Ḥunayn, and Siege of Ṭā'if

*Ramadan–Shawwāl 8 / January–February 630*



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